



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Don't be lazy

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How should our faith be? This is the Apostles' question and ours as well. The answer is: "a faith that is set within the framework of service" to God and to our neighbour. A humble, freely given and generous service which is always "complete". Only in this way is it possible to truly open oneself to the hope of the final encounter with Jesus. This was the Holy Father's reflection during Tuesday morning's Mass at Santa Marta.

Discussing the day's reading from the Gospel according to Luke (17:7-10), the Pope referred back to a passage from the previous day, in which the disciples request: "Lord increase our faith", to which Jesus responds: "If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this sycamine tree, 'Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea', and it would obey you". Francis explained that the Lord speaks of "a powerful faith", one strong enough "to work great wonders", but on one condition: that this be set "within the framework of service". It calls for complete service, such as that of the "servant who worked all day" and when he gets home "he must serve the Lord", prepare dinner for him, "and then relax".

It seems, the Pontiff remarked, "somewhat demanding, a bit hard": one might advise "this servant to go to the union to seek some counsel" on how to deal "with a master like this". But what's asked

for is “complete” service because it is the same that Jesus practised: “He led the way with this conduct of service; He is the servant; He presents himself as the servant, the one who came to serve and not to be served”.

When set on the “path of service”, faith “will work miracles”. On the contrary, however, “a Christian who receives the gift of faith in Baptism, but then does not take it forth on the path of service, becomes a Christian without strength, unfruitful, a Christian for himself, to serve himself, to benefit himself. Although this Christian may go to heaven, the Pope said, “what a sad life!”.

It happens, then, that “so many of the Lord’s great things” are “wasted” because, as “the Lord clearly stated: service is exclusive”, and one cannot serve two masters: God and wealth. In this regard the Pontiff recalled “at the time of the Prophet Elijah, the Israelites”, who wanted to follow both Yaweh and Baal. Elijah said to them: “you are limping on both legs! Things cannot go on like this!”. Because, Francis emphasized, “we need one Lord”.

Pope Francis then went into the details of everyday life and the difficulties that a Christian has in putting the word of the Gospel into practice. “We can distance ourselves from this conduct of service”, he said, mostly out of “laziness”: we become “comfortable, as did those five inattentive maidens who were waiting for their bridegroom but without having enough oil in their lamps”. Laziness renders “the heart lukewarm”. Thus, out of convenience we are led to seek justifications: “If this one comes, or if that one knocks at the door, tell them I’m not home, because they’re coming to ask a favour, and no, I don’t want...”. In other words, laziness “distances us from service and leads to convenience, to selfishness”. And, the Pope commented, “so many Christians” are like this: “they are good, they go to Mass”, but go “only so far” with regard to service. Yet, he underscored, “when I say service, I mean everything: service to God in adoration, in prayer, in praise”, service “to our neighbour” and “service to the end”. Jesus “is strong” about this and advises: “So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy servants’”. It is important that service be “freely given, without asking anything” in return.

The Pope continued to speak about another manner of moving away “from the conduct of service”, which is that of “taking control of situations”. This is what happened to the Apostles too, who moved the people away “so as not to disturb Jesus”, but in reality it was also for their own comfort: that is, “they took control of the Lord’s time, they took control of the Lord’s power: they wanted it for their little group”. Actually, “they took control of this conduct of service, turning it into a framework of power”. This is explained, said Francis, “when among themselves, they discussed who was the greatest”; and “it is understood when the mother of James and John went to ask the Lord that one of her sons be prime minister and the other the minister of the economy, with all the power in hand”. The same thing happens to Christians who “rather than servants” become “masters: masters of the faith, masters of the kingdom, masters of salvation. This happens, it is a temptation for all Christians”.

The Lord, however, speaks to us of serving “in humility”, as did “He who, being God, humbled himself, lowered himself, debased himself: to serve. It is service in hope, and this is the joy of Christian service”, which lives, as St Paul writes to Titus: “awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ”. The Lord will “knock at the door” and “will come to find us” in that moment, the Pope said, hoping: “Please, let Him find us in this conduct of service”.

Certainly, in life “we must really struggle against the temptations that seek to distance us” from this disposition, such as that of laziness, which “leads to convenience” and drives us to provide “incomplete service”; and the temptation to “take control of the situation”, which “leads to arrogance, to pride, to mis-treating people, to feeling important ‘because I’m a Christian, I have salvation’”. The Lord, the Pontiff concluded, “gives us these two great graces: humility in service, in order that we’re able to say: ‘we are unworthy servants’”, and “the hope in awaiting the appearing” of the Lord who “will come to find us”.