



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Where the light comes from

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In the widow who places her two coins in the temple treasury, we see the “image of the Church” who must be poor, humble and faithful. For his homily during Mass at Santa Marta on Monday morning, Pope Francis drew his reflection from the Gospel according to Luke, 21:1-4. He referenced the passage in which Jesus, “after long discussions” with the Sadducees and the disciples about the Pharisees and the scribes who, “pleased with having the first places, the first seats in the synagogue”, look up and “see the widow”. There is an immediate and distinct contrast between her and “the rich putting their gifts into the treasury of the Temple”. And the widow is actually “the strongest person here, in this passage”.

And twice, this passage says that the widow “is poor: two times. And that she is in poverty”. It’s as if the Lord wanted to highlight to the doctors of the law: “you have such a wealth of vanity, of appearance and even of arrogance. This one is poor. You, who devour the widows’ livelihoods”. In the Bible, however, “the orphan and the widow are the most marginalized figures” as are the lepers, and this is why “there are so many commandments to help, to take care of widows and orphans”. Jesus “looks at this this lonely woman, simply dressed”, who gives “all that she has to live on: two coins”. We also think of the widow of Zarephath, “who welcomed the Prophet Elijah and before dying gave all that she had: a handful of meal and a little oil...”.

The Pontiff recreated the scene of the Gospel narrative: “a poor woman in the midst of the powerful, in the midst of the doctors, the priests, the scribes... also in the midst of those rich men giving their offerings, a few even doing so to show off”. Jesus says: “This is the journey. This is the example. This is the path you must take. This one”. Like the “gesture of this woman who was all for God, like the widow Anna who welcomed Jesus in the Temple: all for God. Her hope was in the Lord alone”.

Francis stated that “the Lord highlighted the figure of the widow”. The Pontiff, in fact, is fond of seeing “in this woman, an image of the Church”. First, the “poor Church, for the Church needs to have no riches other than her Spouse”; then the “humble Church, as the widows were in that time, for in that time there was no pension, there was no social welfare... nothing”. In a certain sense the Church is “a widow somewhat, because she is waiting for her Bridegroom to return...”. Of course, “she has her Spouse in the Eucharist, in the Word of God, in the poor: but she is waiting for Him to return”.

What of “the figure of the Church can be seen in this woman”? Francis pointed to the fact that “she wasn’t important”, her name didn’t appear in the newspapers, “no one knew her. She had no degree... nothing. Nothing. She did not shine of her own light”. Likewise, the “great virtue of the Church” is not “shining of her own light”, but rather reflecting “the light that comes from her Spouse”. Especially since “over the centuries, when the Church wanted to have her own light, she was wrong”. Even “the first Fathers” said that the Church is “a mystery like that of the moon. They called her *mysterium lunae*”, indeed, because “the moon doesn’t have its own light” but instead “receives it from the sun”.

Of course, the Pope explained, “it’s true that sometimes the Lord may call on his Church” to have “a little of her own light”. We remember when He asked “the widow Judith to take off her widow’s garments and array herself in her gayest apparel to do a mission”. But, the Pontiff said, “her widow’s attitude continued” to direct her “toward her Spouse, toward the Lord”. The Church “receives light from there, from the Lord”, and “all the services we do” in the Church help her “to receive that light”. When a service is lacking this light, “it’s not good” because “it causes the Church to become rich, or powerful, or to seek power, or to lose her way, as has happened so many times in history” and, Pope Francis pointed out, as it happens “in our life when we want to have another light: our own light, which is not really that of the Lord”.

The Gospel, the Pope noted, presents the image of the widow in that precise moment in which “Jesus begins to sense the resistance of the ruling class of his people: the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the scribes, the doctors of the law”. It’s as if He were to say: “All this happens, but look there!”, look at that widow. The comparison is crucial in order to recognize the true reality of the Church which, “when she is faithful to hope and to her Spouse, is joyous at receiving light from Him, of being, in this sense, a widow: waiting for that Sun to come”.

After all, “it’s not surprising that the first harsh encounter that Jesus has in Nazareth, after the one he had with Satan, occurred because He mentioned a widow and He mentioned a leper: two outcasts”. There were so many widows in Israel at that time, “but only Elijah was invited by that widow in Zarephath. And they got angry and wanted to kill him”.

When the Church is humble and poor, Francis concluded, and even “when the Church confesses her misfortunes — we all have them — the Church is faithful”. It’s as if the Church were saying: “I am darkened, but light comes to me from there!”, and this “does us so much good”. Thus, “let us pray to this widow who is surely in heaven” that “she may teach us to be like the Church”, renouncing “all we have” and keeping “nothing for ourselves” but instead giving “all for the Lord and for our neighbour”. Always humble and “without boasting of having our own light”, but “always seeking the light which comes from the Lord”.