



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The courage to be bold

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The Holy Spirit alone gives us the “strength to proclaim Jesus Christ up to the final testimony”. And the Spirit “comes from whatever place, like the wind”. In his homily during Mass at Santa Marta on Monday, Pope Francis addressed the theme of “Christian courage” which is a “grace given by the Holy Spirit”.

His reflection began from a passage taken from the Acts of the Apostles (4:23-31), which comes after a long narrative “that begins with a miracle that Peter and John perform: the healing of the lame man who lay at the gate of the temple, seeking alms”. The Pope recalled the entire episode and pointed out that Peter looked at the lame man “and said: I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have: arise and walk”. The man was healed; the people were amazed “and praised God”. Thus “Peter seized the opportunity to proclaim the Gospel, to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ: to proclaim Jesus Christ”.

At that point, Francis explained, the priests found themselves in difficulty: they sent several men to arrest Peter and John, who were perceived as “uneducated, common men”. The two apostles “were in prison that evening”. The following day the priests decided to “forbid speaking in Jesus’ name, preaching this doctrine”. But they continued. Moreover, Peter, “who spoke for both of them”,

stated: “Even were it is right to obey you rather than God: we shall obey God!”. And he added those words “that we have heard so many times: ‘we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard’”.

Thereafter the Pontiff returned to the passage offered in the day’s Liturgy, which tells that when the two were released, they went to report to the community “what the chief priests and the elders had said to them”, and when the people heard this, they all “lifted their voices together to God” and began to pray, retracing the stages of salvation history up to Jesus. And “when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness”.

The Pontiff focused on this last word, “boldness”, indicating that we read in that common prayer: “And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants” not to escape but “to speak thy word with all boldness”. These are instructions for every Christian: “We could say”, Francis underscored, that “today too, the message of the Church is the message of the path of boldness, the path of Christian courage”. In fact, he explained, that word “could be translated as ‘courage’, ‘boldness’, ‘freedom of speech’, ‘not being afraid to say things’”. It is “parrhesia”. The two Apostles “have passed from fear to boldness, speaking freely”.

The Pope’s reflection came full circle with the re-reading of the passage from the Gospel according to John (3:1-8), regarding the “somewhat mysterious dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus about the ‘second birth’”. At this point the Pontiff asked: “In this whole story, who is the real protagonist? In this itinerary of boldness, who is the real protagonist? Peter, John, the lame man who was healed, the people who heard, the priests, soldiers? Nicodemus, Jesus?”. And the answer was: “The real protagonist is actually the Holy Spirit. Because he is the only one capable of giving us this grace of courage to proclaim Jesus Christ”.

It is the “courage to proclaim” that “distinguishes us from simple proselytism”. The Pope explained: “We did not advertise” to have “more ‘associates’ in our ‘spiritual company’”. This “is not needed, it is not Christian”. Instead, “what Christians do is to proclaim with courage; and proclaiming Jesus Christ fosters, through the Holy Spirit, that astonishment that makes us go forth”. Therefore, “the real protagonist in all of this is the Holy Spirit”, to the point that — as the Acts of the Apostles read — when the disciples ended their prayer, the place where they were gathered was shaken and they were all filled with the Spirit. It was, Francis stated, “like a new Pentecost”.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit is the protagonist, such that Jesus says to Nicodemus that he can be reborn but that “the wind blows where it wants and you hear its voice, but you do not know where it comes from nor where it goes. Whoever is born by the Holy Spirit is like this”. Hence, the Pontiff explained, “it is precisely the Holy Spirit that changes us, that comes from whatever place, like the wind”. Moreover, “the Holy Spirit alone gives us the strength to change our attitude, to change the history of our life, to change our belonging”. It is the Holy Spirit himself who gave strength to the

two Apostles, two “uneducated, common men”, to “proclaim Jesus Christ up to the final testimony: martyrdom”.

Here, then, is the lesson for every believer: “the path of Christian courage is a grace given by the Holy Spirit”. There are indeed “so many paths we could take, which even give us a certain courage”, for which one could say: “Look what a brave decision they made!”. All of this, however, “is an instrument of something greater: the Spirit”. And “if the Spirit isn’t there, we can do many things, a great deal of work, but it is pointless.

For this reason, the Pope concluded, the Church “prepares us to receive the Holy Spirit”. Now, “in the celebration of the mystery of the death and Resurrection of Jesus, we can remember all of salvation history”, which is also “our own salvation history”, and we can “ask for the grace to receive the Spirit, that he give us true courage to proclaim Jesus Christ”.