



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Beguiled by the serpent

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The illusion of happiness and power, lacking horizon and hope. The difficulty of man's relationship with wealth was at the heart of Pope Francis' reflection during Monday morning Mass at Santa Marta.

The liturgy of the day offered a passage from the Gospel according to Mark (10:17-27) which speaks of the young rich man, an episode which the Pontiff said could be entitled "The journey from joy and hope to sorrow and closing in on oneself". That young man, indeed, "wants to follow Jesus, sees Him and runs to Him, thrilled, to ask Him a question: 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?'. To which, after an appeal to follow the commandments, the Lord exhorts him: "You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me". And the young man's "countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions".

From enthusiasm to sorrow: "He wanted to go with Jesus but he left by another path". The reason? "He was attached to his possessions. He had many possessions. And in the final analysis, the possessions won". Francis emphasized Jesus' sharp approach to this reaction: "He said to his disciples with conviction: 'How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the

kingdom of God”. Indeed, the Holy Father explained, “there is a mystery in the possession of wealth. Riches have the capacity to seduce, to lead us into seduction and make us believe we are in an earthly paradise”. The Pope offered an example in this regard: “I recall that in the 1970s I saw for the first time a closed community, of people who were wealthy; it was closed to protect against thieves, to be secure”. There were also good people, but they were enclosed in that sort of “earthly paradise”. This happens, he said, when we close ourselves off “to protect possessions”: we lose “the horizon”. And “living without a horizon is sad”.

The Pontiff then went a little deeper: it’s important to consider, that “things that are closed become ruined, they become corrupt. Attachment to riches is the start of every kind of corruption, everywhere: personal corruption, corruption in business, even small corruption in commerce” — such as that, the Pope explained, of those who subtract a few hectograms from the correct weight of merchandise — “political corruption, corruption in education...”. So many live their lives “attached to their own power, to their riches, they believe they are in paradise. They are closed, they have no horizon, they have no hope. In the end they will have to leave it all”.

To render this concept more understandable, the Pontiff also recalled the parable in which Jesus speaks to the man who, wearing elegant clothes “feasted lavishly every day”: he “was so closed within himself that he no longer saw past the end of his nose: he didn’t see that there, at the gate to his house was a man who was hungry, sick, full of sores”. The same thing happens to us: “attachment to riches makes us believe that all is well, there is an earthly paradise, but it takes away our hope and our horizon. And living with no horizon is a barren life, living without hope is a sad life”.

However, Francis specified, this is criticizing “attachment” and not “good management of riches”. In fact, riches “are for the common good, for all”, and if the Lord grants them to someone, it is “for the good of all, not for oneself, not to close within one’s heart, which then becomes corrupt and sorrowful”. Jesus uses a powerful expression: “How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God”. Riches, the Pope stated, “are like the serpent in the earthly paradise, they beguile, they deceive, they make us believe we are powerful, like God. In the end they take away the best, hope, and cast us into unseemliness, into corruption”. This is why Jesus states: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God”.

From this point the Pope derived valuable advice for everyone: those who possess riches need to refer “to the first Beatitude: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit’; that is to say, to strip themselves of this attachment and let the riches that the Lord has given be for the common good”. The “only manner” of behaviour is “to open your hand, open your heart, open the horizon”. If, on the other hand, “your hand is closed, your heart is closed like that man who had banquets and dressed in luxurious clothing: you have no horizons, you don’t see others who are needy and you will end up like that man: far from God”. The same thing happened to the young rich man: “he had the path for

happiness, he sought it and ... he lost everything". Due to his attachment to possessions "he ends up defeated".

Therefore, the Pontiff concluded, we must ask Jesus for the grace "not to be attached to possessions" in order not to run the risk of a "closed heart, corruption and barrenness".