



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Three lifestyles

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During Mass at Santa Marta on Friday morning Pope Francis explained that there are “three lifestyles”. He drew from the passage from the Gospel according to Mark (11:11-25), which presents three attitudes linked to figures: those “of the fig tree”, the “businessmen in the temple” and “the man of faith”.

Previously, during the morning celebration on Thursday, Pope Francis had spoken of the characteristics of three types of disciples of Jesus — those “who didn’t hear the cry for help” of the blind man, those who “pushed people away from Jesus” and, last, “those who help the people in need to go to Jesus” — calling for an examination of conscience for each person to identify which group he or she belongs to. Thus he returned this, the following morning, to a similar reflection inspired by the Gospel Reading of the day.

The fig tree, he explained, “represents infertility, that is to say, a barren life, incapable of giving anything”, because that type of person “lives for himself; undisturbed, selfish”, who doesn’t want “problems”. In the Gospel passage, Jesus curses the fig tree for being infertile, “because it made no effort to bear fruit”. Therefore, it symbolizes the “person who does nothing to help, who lives only for herself, so she wants for nothing”.

Such people, the Pope continued, “become neurotic” in the end. And “Jesus condemns the spiritual barrenness, the spiritual selfishness” of those who think: “I live for myself: so I never want for anything, let the others make do for themselves!”.

Then there is a second “lifestyle”, which is that “of those who exploit, the unscrupulous businessmen in the temple”. They “even exploit the sacred place of God by conducting business: they change coins, sell sacrificial animals, among them they even have a sort of union among themselves for protection”. Their lifestyle is “not only tolerated but even permitted by the priests of the temple”. For a clearer understanding, the Pontiff recalled another “really ugly” scene from the Bible, which describes “those who make a business of religion”: the story of the priest whose sons “urge the people to make offerings and really profit, even from the poor”. “Jesus spares no words” for these men, and says to the merchants in the temple: “My house shall be called a house of prayer.... But you have made it a den of robbers”. The Pope paused on this harsh passage: the people “went there in pilgrimage to ask the Lord’s blessing, to make a sacrifice” and even there “those people were exploited”; the priests “didn’t teach them to pray, didn’t give them the catechesis.... It was a den of robbers”. They didn’t care whether there was true devotion: “you pay, you enter...”. They performed the rites “without true devotion”. Francis digressed from this point to invite reflection: “I don’t know if it would do us good to consider whether something like this happens with us in certain places”: in other words, “utilizing the things of God for our own profit”.

There is, finally, a third type, the one “that Jesus advises, namely, the life of faith”. To describe it, the Pontiff returned to the Gospel of Mark and recalled that when the disciples saw the fig tree shriveled to the root “because Jesus had cursed it”, Peter said to him: “Master, look! The fig tree which you cursed has withered!”. And Jesus, taking the opportunity to point out the just lifestyle, responded: “Have faith in God.... whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.... Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you will receive it, and you will”.

Therefore, the Pope explained, “what will come to pass is exactly what we ask with faith: it is the lifestyle of faith”.

One could ask: “Father, what must I do for this?”. To Francis, the answer is simple: “Ask the Lord, but with faith, that he help you do good things”. It’s simple, but has “one condition”, which is exactly what Jesus said: “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one. It’s the only condition, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses”.

Thus, the third lifestyle suggested is to live “the faith so as to help others, to be closer to God”, the faith “that works miracles”. The Pontiff then summarized the three paths presented to Christians: the first is that of the “barren person” who doesn’t wish to “bear fruit in life” and who leads “a comfortable, calm life without problems, and leaves”: the lifestyle of one who doesn’t bother doing good. Then there are those “who take advantage of others, even in the house of God; the

exploiters, the unscrupulous businessmen of the temple”, those whom Jesus “drives out” with a whip. And finally, the lifestyle of those who have “trust in God”, knowing that what they ask of the Lord with faith, “will come to pass”. And this is precisely what “Jesus advises us: the path of Jesus”, which can be taken only on one condition: “forgive, forgive others, so your Father may forgive you of so many things”.

In conclusion, the Pope invited everyone to ask the Lord — “in the sacrifice of the Eucharist” — to teach “each one of us, the Church”, to never fall “into barrenness or commercialism”.