



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The seduction of chiaroscuro

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There is a strong and dangerous “virus” that threatens us, but there is also a Father “who loves us so much” and protects us. The subtle seduction of hypocrisy was the theme of Pope Francis’ homily during the Mass celebrated at Santa Marta on Friday morning.

The Pope made reference to the day’s Gospel passage (Luke 12:1-7), where “Jesus was in the midst of thousands of people” — such a multitude had gathered around him “that they trod upon one another” — and before “speaking to people, to teach them” as he normally did, Jesus turned “to the disciples who were there”. In the midst of such a multitude “he spoke to them about a very small thing: leaven”.

The Pope likened the Lord’s warning — “Beware the leaven of the Pharisees” — to that of “a doctor who tells his staff, his aids: ‘Watch carefully so that all these people are not infected by the virus’”. The “leaven of the Pharisees”, Francis said, is “hypocrisy”. Jesus always spoke very frankly to them about this hypocrisy, saying “to their faces”: “Hypocrites. Hypocrites: you are hypocrites!”.

But what, essentially, is the virus that Jesus is referring to “in the midst of the multitude”? The Pope explained: “Hypocrisy is that way of living, acting, and speaking that is not clear” and that is

presented in an ambiguous way: “maybe smiling, perhaps serious ... it is not light, it is not darkness”. It is a bit like a serpent: “it moves in a way that doesn’t seem to threaten anyone”, and it has “the charm of chiaroscuro”. Hypocrisy indeed has a charm to it, “that of not saying things clearly; the charm of lies, of appearances”. Likewise, in the Gospels, Jesus makes some points on the behaviour of the “hypocritical Pharisees”, saying they are “full of themselves, of vanity” and that they like to “stroll through the town square” to show that they are important.

Jesus warns about them and repeats the message, saying to all: “Do not fear, do not be afraid: just beware of the leaven of these people, because all that is hidden will be brought to the light. Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed upon the housetops”. In other words: hiding does not help, because in the end “everything will be clear”. Jesus said this, the Pope explained, “because the leaven of the Pharisees brought people to love the darkness more than the light”. The Apostle John stressed this point when he wrote: “Men loved darkness rather than light”.

Continuing his reflection the Pope added that Jesus “draws attention to trusting in God”. If it is true that “this leaven is a virus that sickens” and kills — indeed, Jesus warns: “Beware! This leaven brings darkness. Beware!” — then it is also true that there is someone “greater”. It is “the Father in heaven”. When describing the Father’s caring presence, Jesus said: “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered”. Then came his “final admonition: ‘Fear not; You are of more value than many sparrows!’”.

The Pope expanded precisely on this aspect. “In the face of all of these fears”, he said, which are instilled by the “virus”, by the “leaven of Pharisee-like hypocrisy”, we should be comforted by what Jesus tells us: “There is a Father. There is a Father who loves you. There is a Father who cares for you”. In the face of the “seduction of chiaroscuro, the serpent’s seduction”, Jesus reassures us, saying: “Do not worry, the Father loves you, he defends you. Trust in him. Do not be afraid of these things”. Thus, the Pope explained, Jesus “began with the littlest in the midst of the multitude, and concluded with the greatest, with the Father who takes care of everything, even the littlest, so they do not get sick, and so they do not spread this disease”. Pope Francis highlighted that: “When Jesus tells us this, he invites us to pray”, he invites us to pray that we will not fall “into this Pharisee-like attitude that is neither light nor darkness”, that is always just halfway and “never reaches the light of God”.

Therefore, the Pope concluded, “Let us pray a lot”. Let us ask the Lord: “Watch over your Church, which is all of us: watch over your people, over those who gathered and trod upon one another. Watch over your people, that they may love the light, the light that comes from the Father, that comes from Your Father”. We must, the Pope concluded, ask God to watch over his people “that we not become a hypocrites, that we not fall into the comfort of life”, and that we “have the joy of

knowing that there is a Father who loves us so much”.

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