



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

How and how much

Monday, 19 October 2015

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 43, 23 October 2015)

“Covetousness is a form of idolatry” to be fought with the capacity to share, to give and to give oneself to others. The thorny subject of the relationship between mankind and wealth was the focus of Pope Francis’ meditation during Monday morning’s Mass at Santa Marta.

Beginning with the passage from the Gospel of Luke (12:13-21) that tells of the rich man concerned with storing the crops from his harvest, the Pontiff pointed out that “Jesus stood firmly against richness”, but “not about wealth in and of itself”: God, in fact, “is rich” — he “presents himself as rich in mercy, rich in so many gifts” — but “what Jesus condemns is really the attachment to possessions”. Indeed, he “clearly states” how “very difficult” it would be for a rich man, in other words, a man attached to possessions, to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

The concept, continued the Pope, is repeated in an even stronger way: “You cannot serve two masters”. In this case, Francis emphasized, Jesus does not place God in opposition to the devil, but God against wealth, because the opposite of serving God is serving wealth, working for wealth, to have more of it, to be secure”. What happens in this case? The riches “become security” and religion a kind of “insurance agency”: ‘I’m insured with God here and I’m insured with riches here”. But Jesus is clear: “This is impossible”.

In this regard the Pontiff also referred to the Gospel passage “of the young man so good that Jesus was moved”, the wealthy young man who went away “saddened” because he did not want to leave everything in order to give it to the poor. “Attachment to possessions is a form of idolatry”, the Pope said. Indeed, we are faced with “two gods: God, the living One, the living God, and this god of gold, in whom I place my security. And this is impossible”.

The Gospel passage for the day’s Liturgy also proposed “two brothers who argue over their inheritance”. This is a circumstance that we experience even today: let’s consider, Francis said, “how many families we know who have argued, who argue, who do not greet each other, who hate each other over an inheritance”. It happens that “what’s most important is not love of family, love of children, of brothers and sisters, of parents, no: it’s money. This destroys”. Everyone, the Pope said with conviction, “knows at least one family torn apart like this”.

Covetousness, however, is also at the root of wars: “yes, there is an ideal, but behind it is money: the money of arms dealers, the money of those who profit from war”. Again, Jesus is clear: “Take heed, and beware of all covetousness: it is dangerous”. Covetousness, in fact, “gives us this security that is not true and it leads, yes, to prayer — you can pray, go to Church — but also to having an attached heart, and in the end it winds up damaged”.

Returning to the Gospel example, the Pontiff traced the profile of the man spoken of: “You see he was good, he was a successful entrepreneur. His company was given a plentiful harvest, he always had many possessions”. But rather than thinking of sharing with his workers and their families, he contemplated how to store them. He sought “always more”. Thus, “the thirst of attachment to possessions never ends. If your heart is attached to possessions — when you have many — you want more. And this is the god of a person attached to possessions”. For this reason, Francis explained, Jesus says to take heed and beware of all covetousness. And, by no coincidence, when “he explains the way to salvation, the Beatitudes, the first is poverty of spirit, that is, ‘don’t be attached to possessions’: blessed are the poor in spirit”, those who “are not attached” to riches. “Perhaps they have them” — the Pope observed — but so as to serve others, to share, to enable many people to move forward”.

Someone, he added, might ask: “Father, how is it done? What is the sign that I am not in this sin of idolatry, of being attached to possessions?”. The answer is simple, and it too is found in the Gospel: “from the earliest days of the Church” there is “a sign: give alms”. However, that’s not enough. Indeed, if I give to those who are in need “it is a good sign”, but I must also ask myself: “How much do I give? My leftovers?”. In this case, “it is not a good sign”. I have to realize whether in giving I deprive myself of something “that might be necessary for me”. In that case my gesture “signifies that love for God is greater than my attachment to wealth”.

Therefore, Francis summarized, the “first question: Do I give?”; second: “How much do I give?”; third: “How do I give?”. In other words, do I give like Jesus, by giving “with a loving caress, or like

one who is paying a tax?”. He then asked: “When you help people, do you look them in the eyes? Do you touch their hand?”. We must not forget, the Pontiff said, that before us “is the flesh of Christ, it’s your brother, your sister. And in that moment you are like the Father who never leaves the birds of the sky without food”.

Thus, Pope Francis concluded, “let us ask the Lord for the grace to be free of this idolatry, the attachment to possessions”; let us ask him for “the grace to look to him, so rich in his love and so rich in his generosity, in his mercy”; and also for the grace “to help others by giving alms, but as he does”. Someone could say: “But Father, he isn’t depriving himself of anything...”. To be exact, the response is that: “Jesus Christ, being equal to God, deprived himself of this, he lowered himself, he debased himself”.