



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The ultimate instrument

Thursday, 21 January 2016

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On Thursday morning, during Mass at Santa Marta, Pope Francis cautioned against envy, a sin that can lead a person to kill. The first reading was taken from the First Book of Samuel (18:6-9, 19:1-7). It tells of “King Saul’s entrance into the city after the victory against the Philistines” which, the Pope said, was won with the “duel between David and Goliath”. Truly “it is the victory of the whole people”. For this reason the people “celebrated: it was almost a ritual celebration”. The Bible, Francis explained, recounts “that when King Saul died in battle, the army returned in silence after sunset: they were victorious, but did not celebrate because the king was dead”. This time, however, “they celebrated as was customary”.

Thus, the Scripture states that “the women came out of all the cities”, singing and dancing to celebrate the victory. It was even “a ritual of joy: let’s remember, said Francis, when King David danced before the ark: everyone sang, with timbrels, with songs of joy, and with instruments of music”.

The Bible also adds that the women were dancing and singing: “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands”. They were words “that were improvised at the time, perhaps because they fit the song”. Thus, “David had killed the Philistine — it’s true! — he was the instrument, and

the people had the sense that the king was the Lord's anointed one". And so "they sang: they knew the story of David and they broke out into song".

Meanwhile, "Saul, rather than being happy about this celebration, was very displeased by it". Evidently, "Saul's heart was somewhat askew", Francis explained, because "he did the math: 'They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands!'" In other words, "it was only a song, but he took it badly: why?".

The question, the Pontiff continued, is that there was something in Saul's heart "that incited him to take offence: he was jealous". He "felt an attack of jealousy there", because of that song. Thus the Bible tells us that "he was very angry". His heart "began to work in that direction". And "it worsened", inducing Saul to wonder about David: "what more can he have but the kingdom?". Therefore, he "eyed David from that day on", and constantly imagined: "This man will betray me!". For this reason, the Pope stated, Saul "decided to kill" David. And "the reason was not the song" but instead "it was his heart, sick with jealousy, that led Saul to envy".

Francis noted what an "ugly thing envy is!". Indeed it is an "ugly sin", and "jealousy and envy grow in the heart like wicked grass: it grows and smothers the good grass". Thus, "all that seems to make shade for it harms it: it is not at peace. It is a tormented heart, it is an ugly heart". Thus, as we heard, "the envious heart leads to killing, to death".

Indeed, Scripture states clearly that "through the devil's envy death entered the world". It is no coincidence, the Pope recalled, that "envy is also one of the works of the flesh listed by the Apostles when they say: 'the works of the Holy Spirit are these; the works of the flesh are these...'"

Francis reiterated that "envy kills and it doesn't tolerate another having something that I don't have". It always creates suffering, "because the heart of an envious or jealous person suffers: it is a suffering heart". This kind of "suffering leads [the heart] to desire the death of others".

Indeed, Francis warned, "how often in our communities — we needn't go very far to see this — out of jealousy one kills with the tongue". It so happens that "one envies another and gossip begins — and gossip kills". The Bible passage also recounts that King Saul, on the advice of his son Jonathan, stopped seeking to kill David. Then, however, "after time, in an abundance of rage", Saul actually tried to kill David, "as he was playing the lyre". Hence, envy "is a malady that comes and goes".

Continuing on, the Pontiff added: "Thinking about and reflecting on this passage of Scripture, I ask myself — and everyone — to look to see if there is something in my heart that can be ascribed to jealousy or to envy, which always leads to death and inhibits me from being happy". Because, he continued, "this sickness always leads one to look at another's advantage as if it is to your

detriment". And "this is an ugly sin: it is the beginning of many, many crimes".

"Let us ask the Lord", the Pope continued, to "give us the grace not to open our heart to jealousy, not to open our heart to envy, because these things always lead to death". He then recalled the attitude of Pilate, an intelligent man. "Mark says in the Gospel that Pilate realized that the chief scribes delivered Jesus to him out of envy".

Thus "envy — as interpreted by Pilate, who was very intelligent but cowardly! — is what led to Jesus' death". It was "the instrument, the ultimate instrument: they delivered Jesus to him out of envy".

Before returning to the celebration, Francis asked "the Lord for the grace to never deliver, out envy, a brother, a sister of the parish, of the community, or even a neighbour: each person has his or her sins, each person has his or her virtues. Each one has his or her own". He then recommended that we "see the good and not kill with gossip out of envy or jealousy".