



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Clinging to the written word

Monday, 11 April 2016

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 15, 15 April 2016)

What matters to Jesus is a person's life, not a framework of laws and words: the slaying of Stephen and Joan of Arc, the death of many other innocent people throughout history and even the suicide of Judas remind us of how much harm can be done by "a heart closed to the Word of God, closed to the truth". The Pope spoke about this during Mass at Santa Marta on Monday morning.

In the first reading taken from the Acts of the Apostles (6:8-15), Francis explained, "we hear the passage regarding the dispute involving Stephen and the judgement" against him. "Some of the doctors of the law, the learned scribes, arose to dispute Stephen", the Pope recalled. "But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke". Indeed, "Stephen was anointed by the Holy Spirit and had the very wisdom of the Holy Spirit, and he spoke with strength, with the same wisdom that Jesus had. But it was God, who spoke with authority, the authority that comes from God, the authority that comes from the Holy Spirit".

Having nothing to set against him, Francis continued, those who belonged to the synagogue "instigated several men" to unjustly accuse Stephen of having spoken "blasphemous words against Moses and God". Thus, unable to dialogue with him and open their heart to the truth, "they

immediately took the path of slander". The Acts recount that Stephen was seized and led before the Sanhedrin and that false witnesses were also presented against him.

The story of Stephen, the Pope noted, is significant: "A heart closed to the truth of God clings only to the truth of the law, of the written word — not just that of the law, but of the written word — and finds no way out except lies, false witness, and death". Jesus himself "had rebuked this attitude because the same thing had happened with the prophets of the Old Testament". Jesus said to those people "that their fathers had killed the prophets, 'and you build their monuments, their tombs'". But their "response is more than hypocritical, it is cynical: 'Had we lived in the time of our fathers, we would not have done the same'". And thus, "they wash their hands and they judge themselves pure". But their "heart is closed to the Word of God, it is closed to the truth, it is closed to God's messenger who brings prophecy to enable the People of God to go forward".

"It saddens me", Francis shared, "when I read that passage in the Gospel of Matthew, when Judas repented and went to the priests and said 'I have sinned', and wanted to give back the silver pieces". They responded to him: "What is that to us? See to it yourself!". They had "a closed heart in regard to this poor, penitent man who didn't know what to do". They told him: "See to it yourself". Thus Judas "went and hanged himself".

Then, "what did they do when Judas hanged himself? They spoke and said: 'poor man'". Those 30 pieces of silver then, "are blood money, and cannot enter the temple". In essence, they were "the learned scribes" and so they followed "this rule, this one, this one...".

To them, the Pope emphasized, "a person's life wasn't important", nor was "Judas' remorse: the Gospel says that he repented and returned". But to them what mattered was "only their framework of laws and the many words and the many things that they had built". It is precisely the "hardness of their heart, the stupidity of heart of these people who, since they were unable to withstand the truth of Stephen, sought testimony and false witnesses to judge him: Stephen's fate is marked like that of the prophets and like that of Jesus".

This way of doing things "repeats" over time, Francis said. "It did not happen only in the early times of the Church". Indeed, he said, "history tells of many people who are killed, judged, even though innocent: judged with the Word of God against the Word of God". Consider "the witch hunts or Joan of Arc" and also "many others who were burned, condemned because they did not 'adjust' themselves, according to the judges, to the Word of God".

Before concluding, the Pope pointed to "the model of Jesus who, in order to be faithful and to obey the word of the Father, ended up on the cross". Francis again evoked the image of Jesus' great tenderness in calling the disciples of Emmaus: "foolish men, and slow of heart". Thus, in conclusion, Francis asked the Lord "to look, with the same tenderness, at the small or great foolishness of our heart, to caress us", while calling us "'foolish men, and slow of heart', and may

he begin to to explain things to us”.