



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Docile and joyful

Thursday, 14 April 2016

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“Speak Lord, I am listening”. The Pope suggested we address God with these simple words of Samuel “when we have doubt, when we don’t know or when we simply want to pray”. The words are also an antidote to surrendering to the temptation to resist the Holy Spirit. During Mass at Santa Marta on Thursday, Francis recommended that we be not afraid when the Holy Spirit is at work and upsets our plans. Because it is joy, certainly not adhering to the letter of the law, that characterizes the life of a Christian who is docile to the work of the Spirit.

Francis began his homily by referring to the day’s passage from the Acts of the Apostles (8:26-40), in which “the Holy Spirit” is “the main character”. It isn’t Philip or the Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the queen. After all, the Pope added, “in the readings the Church has offered us in these days, it is clearly seen that it is the Spirit, the One who does things. It is the Spirit who creates the Church and makes her grow; this is the work of the Spirit”.

“In recent times”, the Pope said, “the Church has shown how capable it is of resisting the Spirit: closed, hardened, foolish hearts that resist the Spirit”. There were people who, even on seeing things — such as “the healing of the lame man by Peter and John at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple; the words and the great things done by Stephen — they were closed to these signs of the

Spirit, and they resisted the Spirit". Moreover, they even "tried to justify this resistance with a so-called faithfulness to the letter of the law".

Francis continued, "today, and tomorrow too, the Church proposes the opposite: it is not resistance to the Spirit but docility to the Spirit that is the proper attitude of a Christian". It is a matter of "being docile to the Spirit, and this docility enables the Spirit to operate and go forth to build the Church".

Returning to the day's passage from the Acts of the Apostles, Francis highlighted that we are dealing with "a bishop, Philip, one of the Apostles, busy as all bishops are, and certainly he had plans to work that day". But "the Spirit said: 'Rise and do this instead, leave the episcopate and go there'". Philip "obeyed: he was docile to the voice of the Spirit" and so, "left all that he had to do that day and went" where he was told". So it was that the Spirit called him to go "to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza", giving him no explanation: "Go!".

Along the road, Philip met "a gentleman, an Ethiopian proselyte: he was the minister of the economy, a great man of the queen of Ethiopia". That man, the Pope explained, "had come to worship God: he was worshipping God and reading Scripture". It was once again the Spirit who told Philip to go up to that chariot. And again, "he obeyed, docile to the word of the Lord".

The Acts of the Apostles tell us that "Philip heard him reading from Isaiah, and asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?'. But his interlocutor answered him: 'No, how can I, unless someone guides me?'. And thus, "he invited Philip to climb aboard the chariot and Philip explained what the prophet Isaiah had prophesied: namely, Jesus Christ". In a word, Philip "explained the salvation of the Gospel".

"Perhaps this explanation was a bit long", the Pope stated, "but they were on a journey, surely talking. The Ethiopian asked questions, Philip answered, and the Spirit also worked in the heart of the Ethiopian man". Indeed, the Spirit "offered the gift of faith: this man felt something new in his heart". Again, the Pope said, "continuing along the road, in that discussion, they came to some water and, being a practical man, he had a very practical, concrete profession, he said: 'See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?'. Thus, "he accepted the faith and requested Baptism: he was docile! Docility to the Spirit!".

This is the story of "two men: one preached the Gospel and the other knew nothing of Jesus", but in whom "the Spirit had sown the seed of healthy curiosity, not the curiosity of gossip". And "the Spirit gave him the gift of faith". Francis then explained that "after the ceremony of this Baptism, we might think that they both continued to talk, to speak. No, when they came up out of the water", Scripture says, "the Spirit of the Lord caught up Philip: right away! And the Eunuch saw him no more". The Acts tell us that "Philip, docile, was found at Azotus, preaching the Gospel". Of course, this "had not been in his plans, but he was docile to the Spirit". So, "whatever happened to the

Eunuch? He saw him no more! Did he weep? No!”. In fact, Scripture tells us that he “went on his way rejoicing”. This is “the joy of the Spirit, of docility to the Spirit”.

In recent days, Francis recalled, “we heard what resistance to the Spirit does”. Today, instead, “we have an example of two men who were docile to the voice of the Spirit”. The distinguishing sign “is joy”, because “docility to the Spirit is a source of joy”. This is why it is important to tell ourselves, “I would like to do something, this thing, but I feel that the Lord is asking something else of me: I will find joy there, where there is the call of the Spirit!”.

The Pope also proposed “a beautiful prayer to ask for this docility”. We find it, he explained, “in the First Book of Samuel: young Samuel was asleep and he heard the call and thought it was the priest, Eli”. So, Samuel “arose right away and went to him: ‘Here I am!’”. But Eli told him that he hadn’t called. Samuel, Francis recalled, then “returned to bed” but he heard the call again for a second and then a third time. Eli, said the Pope, “was not a good priest, but he understood the things of God: he perceived that it was the Lord who called!”. Therefore he said to Samuel: “Go lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears’”. This, the Pope said, “is a beautiful prayer to repeat: ‘Speak Lord, I am listening’”.