



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

When a man is down

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“Rise and go”, the Lord said to Saul, who had fallen to the ground on the road to Damascus. He likewise sent Ananias to baptize the converted persecutor. “Rise and go”, the Pope said, is also a call to each of us, because a Christian “must be on his feet with his head held high”, while “a man with a closed heart is a man who is down”. For Mass at Santa Marta on Friday, with a meditation on the biblical account of the conversion of Saul, taken from the Acts of the Apostles (9:1-20), Pope Francis continued to discuss the importance of docility to the action of the Holy Spirit, and to reflect “on the attitude of those people who have a closed heart, a hard heart, an arrogant heart”.

The previous day’s liturgy had highlighted how both the Apostle Philip and the queen’s minister opened their hearts to the voice of the Spirit”. This Friday of the Third Week of Easter, then brings us the story of Saul, “the story of a man who lets God change his heart: the transformation from a closed, hard, misguided heart to a man with a heart docile to the Holy Spirit”.

Saul, the Pontiff explained, “was present at the martyrdom of Stephen”, and he “agreed”. He was “a strong, brave young man, zealous in his faith, but with a closed heart”. In fact not only “did he not want to hear about Jesus Christ” but he went even further and began “to persecute Christians”. Thus, confident, he asked permission to “do the same” in Damascus.

While he was travelling, the Pope continued, “suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him”. Then “he fell to the ground and heard a voice”. This man, “the strong, confident Saul, was on the ground”, in other words, he was “down”. And as he was down, Francis continued, he “understood his truth; he understood that he was not a man as God wanted, because God created us, all of us, to be on our feet, heads held high”.

At this point the Lord said “a key phrase, the same one he had said to Philip in giving him the mission to go and find the Ethiopian proselyte: ‘You, rise and go!’”. Moreover, the Lord said to Saul, a confident man who knew it all: “enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do”. It was as if to say: “you still have to learn”. It was humiliation, and that’s not all.

Rising from the ground Saul “realized he was blind” and thus “let himself be guided”. Here, the Pope remarked, “his heart began to open”, as he was compelled to be led by the hand to Damascus. “This man was down”, and he “understood immediately that he had to accept this humiliation”. In this regard the Pontiff explained that “humiliation” is “precisely the way to open the heart”. Indeed, “when the Lord sends us humiliation or allows humiliation to come to us, it is precisely for this reason: so the heart may be opened, may be docile” and “be converted to the Lord Jesus”.

The narrative then moves on to Ananias. To him too, the Lord said: “Go. Rise and go”. So the disciple “departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit”. This key phrase embraces a fundamental detail: “the main character in these stories”, Francis pointed out, “is not the doctors of the law, nor Stephen, nor Philip, nor the eunuch, nor Saul... it is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a protagonist of the Church who leads the People of God”.

At this point in the Acts we read that “something like scales fell” from Saul’s eyes “and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized”. His “hardness of heart”, with the experience of humiliation, became “docility to the Holy Spirit”. Saul, “who believed that he was the one with the truth, and who had persecuted Christians, received the Lord’s grace to see and understand his truth: ‘You are a down and you must rise!’”.

It is a lesson for everyone: “it is beautiful”, the Pope said, “to see that the Lord is able to change hearts and make a hard, stubborn heart become a heart docile to the Spirit”. However, Francis added, it is important that “we not forget those key words”. First and foremost: “Rise”, because “a Christian must be on his feet with his head held high”. Then: “Go”, because “a Christian must go, must not be closed in on himself”. Finally, “let yourself be led”, as did Paul who “let himself be led like a child; entrusted himself to the hands of another, whom he did not know”. There is, in all of this, the Pontiff explained, “the work of the Holy Spirit”.

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