



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The holiness of negotiation

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We need to live “the little holiness of negotiation”, which is the “healthy realism” that “the Church teaches us”. This means rejecting the logic of “either this or nothing”, and embarking on the road of what is “possible” so as to be reconciled with others. This was the advice Pope Francis offered during Mass on Thursday morning in the Chapel of Santa Marta. When a baby started to cry during the homily, the Pope tenderly reassured the parents: “No, don’t worry, the sermon of a child in a church is more beautiful than that of a priest, a bishop or the Pope. Let him be: leave him to it, his is the voice of innocence, which is good for all of us”.

The Pope’s reflection was inspired by the passage from the Gospel of Matthew (5:20-26) in the day’s liturgy: “Jesus is in the midst of his people, and he teaches the disciples, he teaches the law of the people of God”. In fact “Jesus is the legislator that Moses had promised: ‘There will come one after me...’”. Therefore, He is “the real legislator, who teaches us how the law must be in order to be just”. However, “the people were somewhat disoriented, a bit in disarray, because they did not know what to do and the ones who taught the law were not coherent”. It is Jesus himself who says to them: “Do what they say, but not what they do”. Moreover, “they were not coherent in their lives, they were not a testimony of life”. In this way, “Jesus in this Gospel passage speaks of overcoming: ‘Your righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees’”. Therefore,

“these people were a bit imprisoned in this cage, with no escape, and Jesus showed them the way to get out: it is to always get up, overcome, move on”.

Along these lines, Pope Francis said, Jesus “uses a prime example — He uses many, right? — the first commandment, to love God and love our neighbour: ‘You have heard that it was said to the men of old: You shall not kill’, it is one of the commandments of love of neighbour, ‘but I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council, and whoever says ‘You fool!’ shall be liable to the hell of fire”.

Essentially, Jesus says that “it is not only a sin to kill”, but also “to insult and scold” our brothers. “It is good for us to hear this”, the Pope added, precisely “during this time when we are so accustomed to descriptions and we have a very creative vocabulary when it comes to insulting others”. Offending others, therefore, is also “a sin, it is murder”. To make statements like: “pay him no mind, he is crazy, he is stupid”, and “the many other bad words that we say when we do not show much charity to others”, is “to slap the soul of our brother, the true dignity of our brother”. This “is a sin”, the Pope reiterated.

Pope Francis pointed out that “Jesus settles” the doubts “of this people, who are disoriented and imprisoned, looking upwards: the law close up. He goes on, linking the conduct of the people with the worship of God and says: ‘If you go to the altar to make an offering, and you have a problem with your brother, or your brother has a problem with you, first go to your brother and be reconciled”’. This is “to go beyond the law, and what he says is a higher justice than that of the scribes and Pharisees”.

“So often we hear these things in the Church, so often!” the Pope noted, recalling how common it is to hear phrases such as: “That priest, that man, that woman of Catholic action, that bishop, that Pope who always tell us ‘you have to act like this!’ while he himself does the opposite”. This is precisely “the scandal that hurts the people and does not allow God’s people to grow, to move forward. It does not free them”. This people, the Pope continued, had also “seen the rigidity of these scribes and Pharisees”, so much so that “when a prophet came who gave them a bit of joy, they persecuted and even killed him: there was no place for prophets there”.

For this reason “Jesus told the Pharisees: ‘You have killed the prophets, you have persecuted the prophets, those who were bringing fresh air”’. Jesus, “as he said in the synagogue of Nazareth, came to bring us the year of grace, to bring us liberation, true liberation: that of Jesus”. Pope Francis said that “generosity, holiness, is to go out, but always, always upwards: to move up”. This “is liberation from the rigidity of the law and also from the idealism that is not good for us”.

“Jesus knows us so well”, the Pope explained “and he knows how we are made because he is the creator, he knows our nature”. This is what he suggests: “If you have a problem with a brother — he uses the word ‘adversary’ — bring yourselves to an agreement”. In this way the Lord “also

teaches us a healthy realism: many times you cannot achieve perfection, but at least you do what you can, you reach an agreement so as not to end up in court". This is the "healthy realism of the Catholic Church: the Catholic Church never teaches "either this, or this". Rather, "the Church says: "this and this". In short, "strive for perfection: reconcile yourself with your brother, do not insult him, love him, but should you have any problem at least put yourself in agreement, so as to avoid war". This is the "healthy realism of Catholicism". Whereas, "it is not Catholic but heretical" to say: "either this or nothing".

"Jesus always knows", assured Pope Francis, "how to walk with us, he gives us the ideal, he accompanies us towards the ideal, he frees us from being locked into the rigidity of the law and he tells us: 'Do this to the extent that you can'. And he understands us well". This "is our Lord, it is he who teaches us", saying: "Please, do not insult each other, do not be hypocrites. You go to praise God with the same language with which you insulted your brother. No, do not do that, but do what you can, at least avoid war amongst yourselves, agree with each other". The Pope added, "Allow me to share a term with you which might seem a bit strange, it is the little holiness of negotiation: I cannot do everything, but I want to do everything, I am going to agree with you, at least let us not insult one another, let us not make war and let us live together in peace".

"Jesus is great", the Pope said in conclusion, "and he frees us from all of our miseries, even from that idealism that is not Catholic". Therefore, "let us ask the Lord to teach us, first, to leave all rigidity, but to go upwards, to be able to adore and praise God; that He may teach us to be reconciled with one another; and also, that He may teach us to agree with each other to the extent that we can".