



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Shrunken souls

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(by <http://www.osservatoreromano.va>)

A Christian's garment must be sewn with "memory, courage, patience and hope" in order to endure even the heaviest rains without giving up and shrinking. During during Mass at Santa Marta on Friday morning, 27 January, the Pope warned about the "sin of pusillanimity" — which is "being afraid of everything" and becoming "souls that shrink in order to preserve themselves". He recalled that Jesus himself warned that those "who seek to preserve their life, without taking risks and always citing prudence, will lose it".

Francis drew inspiration for his meditation from the day's First Reading from the Letter to the Hebrews (10:32-39). He began by noting that it is "an exhortation with three points of reference, three temporal points, shall we say: past, present and future". The Letter's author "begins with the past and exhorts us to recall: 'Remember the former days'". The Pope explained that these were "days of enthusiasm, of going forth in faith, when one begins to live the faith, the trials suffered". Indeed, "Christian life is not understood, even everyday spiritual life, without memory". And, the Pontiff continued, "not only does one not understand: one cannot live in a Christian way without the memory" of "God's salvation in my life", without "remembering the troubles in my life: how has the Lord saved me from these troubles?". For this reason "memory is a grace, a grace to ask for: 'Lord, may I not forget your passing in my life, may I not forget the good times, and also the bad;

the joys and the crosses.

Thus, the Pontiff explained, “a Christian is a person of memory”. Thus, “when we pick up the Bible, we see that the prophets always make us look back: consider what God did with you, how he freed you from slavery”. But “Christian life does not begin today, it continues today”. And, Francis continued, “memory is wisdom: to remember everything, the good, the not so good, the bad; many graces, many sins, the family, the personal history of each one”. Thus, “I go before God with my history; I must not cover it up, hide it: no, it is my history, before you”. Thus, “the exhortation to live a Christian life begins with this point of reference: memory”.

Then, the Pope continued, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews helps us “understand that we are walking in expectation of something; we are walking expecting to arrive or to encounter”. In other words “to reach a point: an encounter; to encounter the Lord”. In fact we read in the Letter: “For yet a little while, and the coming one shall come and shall not tarry”. And straight away “he exhorts us to live by faith: ‘My righteous one shall live by faith’”. Here “hope: looking toward the future” comes in to play.

Indeed, Francis explained, “as one cannot live a Christian life without remembering the steps taken, one cannot live a Christian life without looking toward the future with the hope of the encounter with the Lord”. In the Letter to the Hebrews, the author writes “a beautiful phrase: ‘for yet a little while’”. We are well aware, the Pope recalled, that “life is a breath”, it’s fleeting. “When we are young, we think we have so much time ahead, but then life teaches us that phrase that we all say: ‘how time flies, I’ve known him since he was a child, now he is married, how time flies!’”. Thus, “the hope of encountering Him is a life in tension between memory and hope, the past and the future”.

The third point “is in the middle: it’s today, that is, the present”, the Pontiff affirmed. It is a “today between the past and the future”. To live this today, the “advice” is “to continue with this attitude that describes the first Christians: of courage, of patience, of moving forward, of not being afraid”. This is because “Christians live the present — oftentimes painful and sad — courageously or with patience”. These are “two words that Paul and his disciple who wrote this letter like very much: courage and patience”. The Pope described it as “curious” that, for the word ‘patience’, the author of the text “uses a word in Greek which means ‘to endure’; and courage is honesty, he says here, to say things clearly, to move forward facing ahead”. These are “two words that he uses a really great deal: *parresia* and *hypomoné*, courage and patience”. And, Francis continued, “Christian life is this way”. It’s true, he recognized, that we are all sinners, “those before and those after”, and “if you want, afterwards we can make a list, but let us go forward with courage and with patience; let us not stay there, still, because this will not make us grow”.

Therefore, the Pontiff explained, “it is our Christian life, as today the liturgy exhorts us to live it” with great memory of the journey experienced, with great hope of that beautiful encounter which

will be a beautiful surprise”. Certainly, he continued, “we do not know when: it could be tomorrow, it could be in 15 years, we don’t know, but it is always tomorrow; it is soon, because time flies”. In any case, there must always be “the hope of the encounter”. And also the attitude of “enduring, with patience; bringing here patience and courage, honesty”, while “facing forward, without shame”. This is precisely the way “Christian life moves forward”.

To conclude, the Pope highlighted “a little thing to which the author” of the Letter to the Hebrews “calls the attention of the community to whom he is speaking: a sin”. It is a sin “which does not let them have hope, courage, patience and memory: the sin of pusillanimity”. It is a sin, Francis explained, “that does not let one be Christian, it is a sin that does not let you move forward because of fear”. For this reason, “many times, Jesus said: ‘Fear not’” — precisely to warn of “pusillanimity” and thus not to give up, not to “always back up”, being too careful, out of a “fear of everything”, and citing “prudence” as a reason for “not taking risks”.

You could also say, the Pope stated, that you follow “all the commandments, yes, it’s true; but this paralyzes you, it makes you forget many graces you have received; it takes away your memory; it takes away your hope because it doesn’t allow you to go”. Thus, “the present of a Christian is like that of a person going along the road when an unexpected rain comes, and his or her garment is not very good and the fabric shrinks: shrunken souls”. This very image shows the sin of “pusillanimity: the sin against memory, courage, patience and hope”.

Before resuming the Eucharistic celebration, Francis called for prayer that the Lord “make us grow in memory, make us grow in hope, give us each day courage and patience and free us” from the sin of “pusillanimity, which is the attitude of those who are “afraid of everything” and end up being “souls that shrink in order to preserve themselves”. Jesus tells us, however, that “those who seek to preserve their life will lose it”.