



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Justice and mercy

Friday, 24 February 2017

(by L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly ed. in English, n. 10, 10 March 2017)

“Lord, let me be just, but just with mercy”. Pope Francis recommended this prayer in order to avoid the “hypocritical blunder” of resorting to the “logic of ‘yes you can’, and ‘no you can’t’”. Know that “in God, justice is mercy and mercy is justice”. These are the essential lines of the reflection offered by the Pontiff during Mass at Santa Marta on Friday morning, 24 February.

“There were three groups of people who followed Jesus”, Francis began, referring to the day’s passage from the Gospel of Mark (10:1-12). Thus, “the crowd followed him in order to learn, for he spoke with authority”. Of course, the Pope added, they also followed him “in order to be healed”. The second group was comprised of the “doctors of the law”, who instead “followed him in order to put him to the test: they approached and asked questions in order to test him”. Then there were “the disciples, the third group: they followed him because they were drawn to him: Jesus himself had called them to be near”. And thus “these three groups were always following Jesus”.

Mark recounts that Jesus was approached by “these doctors of the law. It is clear, the Gospel states”, that “in order to put him to the test, they asked Jesus if it were lawful for a husband to disavow his wife”. But, the Pope explained, “Jesus did not answer whether it was lawful or not; he did not enter into their casuistic logic, because they thought of the faith only in terms of ‘you can’ or ‘you cannot’; to what point that ‘you can’, to what point that ‘you cannot’”. However, “Jesus doesn’t enter into that casuistic logic”, but instead asks them a question: “What did Moses

command you?”. He asks them, in other words, “what is in your law?”. In answering Jesus’ question, Francis noted that the doctors of the law “explain the permission Moses gave for divorcing one’s wife, and it is they who fall into the snare, because Jesus defines them as ‘hard of heart’”. Thus, Jesus “speaks the truth, without casuistry, without permissions, the truth: ‘From the beginning of Creation, God made them male and female’”. And Jesus continues: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother” and “set out on a journey”, and “is joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”. For this reason “they are no longer two, but one flesh”. And this, the Pope affirmed, “is neither casuistry nor permission: it is the truth. Jesus always speaks the truth”.

In the Gospel, Mark then describes the reaction of “the third group, the disciples, at home: they question him again on this subject so as to better understand, because they knew about this permission of Moses, this law of Moses”. And “Jesus is even clearer: ‘whoever divorces his wife — except for unchastity — and marries another, commits adultery’”.

Thus, Jesus speaks “the truth”, the Pontiff continued. He “moves out of the casuistic logic and explains things as they were created; he explains the truth”. But “surely, one may think: ‘Yes, this is the truth, but you, Jesus, went there to speak with an adulteress!’”. Furthermore, “an adulteress many times over: five, I believe”. In doing so, “you became unclean. And you also became unclean because that woman was a pagan; she was a Samaritan. And speaking with one who was not a Jew made you unclean”; moreover, “because you drank from the glass of one who had not been purified”. Thus, “why do you say that this is adultery, that this is grave, and then you speak with that woman, you explain the catechism to her and also drink what she gives you?”. Indeed, the Pontiff continued, “they once brought you an adulteress — clear to everyone: they caught her in adultery — and what did you say in the end? ‘I do not condemn you, do not sin again’. But how can this be explained?”, one could object.

“It is the Christian journey”, the Pontiff responded. It is the “journey of Jesus, because he too — let us consider Matthew, Zacchaeus, the feasts He had with all the sinners — went to eat with them”. And “Jesus’ journey is clearly seen; it is the journey from casuistry to the truth and to mercy: Jesus leaves casuistry aside”. And “those who wish to put him to the test, those who think with this ‘you can’ logic, he defines — not here, but in another Gospel passage — as hypocrites”. This also applies, the Pope continued, “with the fourth commandment: these men refused to take care of their parents, with the excuse that they had given a nice offering to the Church — hypocrites!”. Because, Francis observed, “casuistry is hypocritical thinking: ‘you can, you cannot’”. A thought “that can then become more subtle, more evil: ‘Up to this point, I can. But from here to there, I cannot’”, which is the “deception of casuistry”. Instead, we must turn “from casuistry to truth”. And, “this is the truth”, the Pope noted. “Jesus does not negotiate truth, ever: he says exactly what it is”.

But there is not “only truth”, the Pontiff explained. There is “also mercy, because he is the incarnation of the Father’s mercy and cannot deny himself”. Indeed, “he cannot deny himself

because he is the Father's truth, and he cannot deny himself because he is the Father's mercy". And this, Francis continued, "is the path that Jesus teaches us to take. It is not easy, in life, when temptations arrive: let us consider temptations in business". In that case, businesspeople say: "I can do so up to here; I'll fire these employees and earn more over here". This is "casuistry". Indeed, "when temptations reach the heart", the Pope stated, "this journey to escape from casuistry to truth and to mercy is not easy: it takes the grace of God, because [grace] helps us to go forth in this way. And we must always ask for it".

Francis suggested we pray: "Lord, may I be just, but just with mercy". But "not just, covered by casuistry". Instead, he recommended that our prayer should be: Lord, help us be "just in mercy, as you are, just in mercy". The Pope then added that a person with the "casuistic mind-set may ask: what is more important in God, justice or mercy?". But this "is a sick thought, which seeks a way out: what is more important?". In reality, these are not two but "one single thing. In God, justice is mercy and mercy is justice". And, the Pope concluded, "may the Lord help us to understand this way, which is not easy but will make us happy" and also "will make many people happy".