



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

The Christian's compass

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The “compass of a Christian is to follow Christ Crucified”: not a false, “disembodied and abstract” God, but the God who became flesh and brings unto himself “the wounds of our brothers”. This is the powerful call to conversion that Pope Francis suggested for Lent, during Mass on Thursday morning, 2 March.

“The word, the exhortation of the Church from the very beginning of Lent is ‘repent’, said the Pope, quoting from the Gospel passage taken from Matthew (4:17): “repent, says the Lord”.

So today, Francis explained, “the Liturgy of the Word makes us reflect on three realities that lie before us as conditions for this conversion: the reality of man — the reality of life; the reality of God; and the reality of the journey”. These “are realities of the human experience, all three, but which the Church, and we too, have before us for this conversion”.

The first reality, therefore, is “the reality of man: you are faced with a choice”, said Francis, referring to the passage from Deuteronomy (30:15-20) proposed by the liturgy: “See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil”. We men are faced with this reality: either it is good, or it is evil.... But if your heart turns away and if you do not listen and allow yourself to be

drawn in to worshipping other gods”, you will walk the path of evil. And this, the Pope explained, “we perceive in our lives: we can always choose either good or evil; this is the reality of human freedom. God made us free; the choice is ours”. But the Lord “does not leave us on our own; he teaches us, admonishes us: ‘be careful, there is good and evil’. Worshipping God, fulfilling the commandments is the way of goodness; going the other way, the way of idols, false gods — so many false gods — they make a mess of life”. And “this is a reality: the reality of man is that we are all faced with good and evil”.

Then, the Pontiff continued, “there is another reality, the second powerful reality: the reality of God”. Yes, he said, “God is there, but how is God there? God made himself Christ: this is the reality and it was difficult for the disciples to understand this”. As an example, Francis pointed to the day’s Gospel passage from Luke (9:22-25): “Jesus said to his disciples: ‘The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised’”. Thus “God took up all of human reality, minus the sin: there is no God without Christ. A God ‘disembodied’, without Christ, is not a real God”. In fact, the Pope explained, “the reality of God is God-made-Christ for us, for our salvation, and when we distance ourselves from this, from this reality, and we distance ourselves from the Cross of Christ, from the truth of the Lord’s wounds, we also distance ourselves from God’s love, from his mercy, from salvation and we follow a distant ideological path of God: it is not God who came to us and who came close to save us and who died for us”.

This, Francis stressed, “is the reality of God. God revealed in Christ: there is no God without Christ”. In this regard, the Pope shared a thought: “I can think of a dialogue by a French writer of the last century, a conversation between an agnostic and a believer. The well-meaning agnostic asked the believer: ‘But how can I ... for me, the question is: how is it that Christ is God? I cannot understand this, how is it that Christ is God?’. And the believer said: ‘For me this is not a problem, the problem would be if God had not made himself Christ’”.

Therefore, the Pope stressed, “this is the reality of God: God-made-Christ; God-made-flesh; and this is the foundation of the works of mercy”, because “the wounds of our brothers are the wounds of Christ; they are the wounds of God, because God made himself Christ”. And, Francis warned, “we cannot experience Lent without this second reality: we must convert ourselves not to an abstract God, but to a concrete God who became Christ”.

Here, then, is “the reality of man: we are faced with good and evil — the reality of God — God-made-Christ — and the third human reality, the reality of the journey”. The question to ask then is, “how do we go, which road do we take?”. The Pope answered by referring to Jesus’ own words: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”. Because, the Pope affirmed, “the reality of the journey is that of Christ: following Christ, doing the will of the Father, as he did, by taking up the daily crosses and denying ourself in order to follow Christ”. This means “not doing what I want, but what Jesus wants: following Jesus”. And Jesus

says “that on this path we lose our life so as to regain it afterwards; it is a continuous loss of life, the loss of ‘doing what I want’, the loss of material comforts, of always being on the path of Jesus, who was in service to others, to the adoration of God: that is the just path”.

These, Pope Francis concluded, are the three realities: “the human reality — of man, of life, of man faced with good and evil; the reality of God — God who made himself Christ, and we cannot worship a God who is not Christ, because this is the reality”. There is also “the reality of the journey — the only sure way is to follow Christ Crucified, the scandal of the Cross”. And “these three human realities are a Christian’s compass, with these three road signs, which are realities, we will not take the wrong path”. Hence, the Pope also made this suggestion at the beginning of Lent: “‘Repent,’ says the Lord; that is, take seriously these realities of the human experience: the reality of life, the reality of God and the reality of the journey”.