



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

One step each day

Thursday, 22 October 2015

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As an athlete must train every day to achieve his goals, so too the life of a Christian is to be marked by a constant effort, the “daily task” of making room for God, to “open the door” to the gift of salvific grace. Pope Francis offered a reflection marked by Pauline thought during the Mass at Santa Marta on Thursday morning. The underlying theme was that of conversion.

The Pope’s homily was inspired by the Liturgy’s First Reading, a passage from the Letter of St Paul to the Romans (6:19-23), in which the Apostle “recalls salvation, the grace of salvation”, and speaks of “the path of sanctification. He tells the new Christians: ‘You were at the service of iniquity — of sin — and you are now at the service of the gift of God’, that is to say, at the service of grace and sanctification”. Paul gives substance to his words, using “this image: you were at the service of iniquity with your body, with your soul, with your heart and with your mind. Everything was at the service of iniquity. Now your body, your soul, your heart and your mind must be at the service” of grace and sanctification. The Apostle indeed writes to his interlocutors that now they “have changed”, now something “fundamental” has happened to them, “namely, salvation in Jesus Christ, God’s gift”.

This, Pope Francis said, “is the catechesis of convert”. Paul, therefore, “exhorts us to convert”.

And it is a message that extends to our present day. “We might think”, the Pope said, “that most of us were baptized as children, not knowing the meaning of iniquity. We then learned its meaning in catechesis”, and so Paul’s counsel is also for us when he writes: “Do not use your soul, your heart and your body for sin, at the service of evil, of iniquity; but use them at the service of God’s gift, of the joy” that leads us to “eternal life in Jesus”.

Therefore the Pope summarized the meaning of conversion: “for a Christian”, he explained, “conversion is an assignment, an everyday task”. So that it might be understood more clearly, Pope Francis recalled St Paul’s image of an athlete. Using the example of the “man training in preparation for a match, making a great effort”, the Apostle says that: “if he makes this effort to win a match”, then we, “who must reach the great victory of Heaven, how could we not do the same?”. He urges everyone on several occasions “to move forward in this effort”.

However, a misunderstanding could arise and someone might ask: “Father, might I think that sanctification is achieved based on my efforts, as a victory is achieved by athletes through training?”.

“No”, the Pope replied, explaining: “The efforts that we make, our daily efforts of serving the Lord with our soul, with our heart, with our body and with our whole lives”, only serve to open “the door to the Holy Spirit”. Then it is the Spirit “who enters us and saves us”; the Spirit “is the gift in Jesus Christ”. If it were not so, Pope Francis said, “we would resemble fakirs: no, we are not fakirs. With our efforts, we open the door”.

One might make a legitimate objection here: “But Father, it’s difficult.... It’s hard to make this effort every day”. This is true, “it is not easy”, the Pope said, “because of our weakness, original sin, the devil always pulls us back”. Precisely in this regard, “the author of the Book of Hebrews warns against the temptation of moving backwards”, and he writes: “We are those who do not surrender”. Therefore, the Pope urged everyone “not to fall back, and not to yield”, recalling the striking image the Apostle Peter used to describe those “who tire of moving forward and in the end say: ‘I will stay here’”. They are, in fact, comparable to a “dog who returns to his vomit”. The day’s scripture passage, however, “exhorts and urges us to always move forward, a bit further every day”. Even when we are forced to face “a great difficulty”.

To provide even better understanding, Pope Francis spoke of a meeting that he had “several months ago” with a woman, “the young mother of a family — a good family — who had cancer, a horrible cancer”. Nevertheless, the Pope said, “she moved about with happiness, as if she were healthy. And speaking of this attitude, she told me: ‘Father, I am giving my all to beat this cancer’”. This is precisely the attitude that the Christian must have. “We have received this gift in Jesus”, the Pontiff explained, “and we have passed from sin, from the life of iniquity to the life of the gift in Christ, in the Holy Spirit, we must do the same”.

How? “One step each day. Every day a step”. And “there are many” opportunities. Pope Francis offered a few very simple examples: “Do I want to gossip about someone? Keep quiet”, or: “Am I a bit tired and do not want to pray? Go to pray a little”. We do not need to think of grand gestures, but of “little everyday things”. Because the “little things” are what “help us to not give up, to not fall back, to not return to iniquity; but to move forward towards this gift, Jesus’ promise that will be the encounter with him”.

As customary, the Pope concluded his homily with an invitation to prayer and personal commitment: “Let us ask the Lord for this grace: to be good in this exercise of life on the path to that encounter, because we have received the gift of justification, the gift of grace, the gift of the Spirit in Christ”.