



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Those who make merry through war

Tuesday, 25 February 2014

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 9, 28 February 2014)

Pope Francis commented on the day's readings from the Letter of James (4:1-10) and the Gospel of Mark (9:30-37). The Gospel is especially sobering, the Pope said. There we are told that the disciples "were discussing" and even "arguing on the way. And they did so in order to clarify who was the greatest among them: ambition". They carried on this discussion because "one or two of them wanted to be the greatest: fighting". Thus, the Pope said, "they withdrew their hearts". The disciples had "distant hearts" and "when hearts become distant war is caused". This is the essence of "the teaching that the Apostle James offers us today" as he poses a very direct question: "My brothers, what causes wars, and what causes fightings among you?"

These words "are sobering", the Pope said. For "every day we find reports of war in the newspapers". We read that "in this place people are divided" and there are "five dead". Elsewhere there are other victims and so it goes. So much so, he added, that "the dead seem to be part of the daily toll". And we "have become accustomed to reading these things". In fact, "had we the patience to list all of the wars that exist in the world right now, surely we would fill many pages".

"It seems as though the spirit of war has taken hold of us". Thus, "we make acts to commemorate the centenary of the great war" that left "many millions dead", and everyone is outraged"; and yet even today "the same things occurs: instead of a great war" there are "little wars everywhere". There are "peoples divided" who "kill and murder one another to protect their own interests".

“What causes wars, and what causes fightings among you? Is it not your passions that are at war in your members?, asks the Apostle James. Yes, the Pope replied, war is born “from within”. For “we do not buy wars, hatred and enmity at the supermarket. They are here, in the heart”. He then recalled that “when the story of Cain and Abel was explained to us as children with the catechism, we were all outraged: he killed his brother, we can’t understand it!”. And yet, “today many millions of brothers are killing one another. But we are used to it!” Thus, the “great war of 1914 outrages us” while “we are not outraged by the great war that has spread a bit everywhere, that is a bit more hidden”.

“Passion leads to war, to the spirit of the world,” the Pope said. Thus, “in the face of conflict, we habitually find ourselves in a curious situation”, which leads us “to move forward in resolving it by arguing, with a language of war”, whereas “the language of peace should prevail”.

What are the consequences of war? The Pope’s reply was clear: “Think of the starving children in refugee camps, think only of this! This is the result of war!”. He went even further in his reflection, adding: “And if you want, think of the great halls, of the parties held by the masters of the arms industries who make weapons”. The consequences of war are twofold: on one hand, “the sick, starving child in the refugee camp”, and on the other, “the great parties” and the beautiful life of the merchants of war.

“But what happens in our hearts?” the Pope asked. “The Apostle gives us this advice; it is very simple: ‘Draw near to God and he will draw near to you’”. This advice regards us all, for “the spirit of war which distances us from God is not only far away from us ... it is also in our homes”. This is clear from “the many families that have been destroyed because the father and mother are not able to find the path of peace and prefer war”. Truly, “war destroys”.

Pope Francis therefore issued an invitation to those present to “pray for peace”. For that “peace that seems to have become a word and nothing more”. Pray, he said, “that this word may be able to act”. Pray and follow the Apostle’s exhortation to recognize “our wretchedness”. It is from this wretchedness, the Pope warned, that “wars come: wars in families, wars in various quarters, wars everywhere”.

The words of St James indicate the path to peace. “Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to dejection”. The Pope proposed that we allow these strong words to form the basis of an examination of conscience: “Who among us has wept when reading the newspaper, when on TV he sees the images of so many dead?”

“What a Christian should do today — today eh, 25 February, today! — in the face of such widespread war” is this: he should “humble himself before the Lord”; he should “mourn and weep, he should humble himself”. The Pope concluded his meditation on peace, asking the Lord to enable us “to understand this” and thereby save us “from becoming accustomed to hearing about

war”.

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