



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

The devil exists

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In his homily at Holy Mass, Pope Francis focused his reflection on the Christian's battle against Satan and the reality of the devil in the world today. "The devil also exists in the 21st century, and we need to learn from the Gospel how to battle against him"; and we must not be "naive" about his ways. In fact, he said, we need to be very aware of the strategies he employs to entrap us. For the devil is not a thing of the past.

In his comments Pope Francis spoke explicitly about our "battle" with the father of lies. Even "Jesus' life was a battle: he came to conquer evil, to conquer the prince of this world, to conquer the devil". Jesus battled against the devil, who many times sought to tempt him. "During his earthly life, he experienced temptation and persecution". Thus, Pope Francis observed, "we who want to follow Jesus, and who by our baptism have taken to the Lord's path, must be well aware of this truth: we too are tempted, we too are objects of the demon's attacks", for "the spirit of evil does not want us to become holy, it does not us to bear witness to Christ, it does not want us to be disciples of Christ".

The Pope then asked: "What does the spirit of evil do to snatch us away from Jesus' path through temptation?". He replied: "the devil's temptations have three main characteristics, and we have to be aware of them in order to not to fall into his trap". First "the temptation begins subtly but then it grows and increasingly grows stronger". Then "it infects someone else ... it spreads to another

and seeks to take root in the community". Finally, "to calm the soul, it seeks to justify itself". In short: it "grows, spreads and justifies itself".

Turning to the Scriptures, Pope Francis noted that we see this reality played out in "Jesus' temptation" in the desert, which "appears almost as a seduction". "The devil proceeds slowly" and says to Jesus: "But why not do this? Throw yourself from the temple and save thirty years; in just one day everyone will say of you: behold the Messiah!". The Pope remarked that this is the same tactic "he used with Adam and Eve". The devil said to them: "Taste the apple, it is good, it will make you wise!" The devil employs the tactics of seduction: he speaks "almost as though he were a spiritual master, as though he were an advisor".

However, "if the temptation is rejected, it grows and returns stronger". In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus warns that "when the devil is rejected, he turns around and goes looking for several companions and returns with this band". This is how "temptation grows and becomes stronger. It grows by involving others". This is exactly what happened with Jesus, as we read in the day's passage from the Gospel of John (10:31-42). The Pope said: "the devil involved Jesus' enemies, who at this point were speaking to him stone in hand", ready to kill him. Here we see clearly temptation's power to grow by spreading to others.

The third characteristic of the devil's temptation is that "in the end it seeks to justify itself". Here Pope Francis recalled the people's reaction when Jesus returned "for the first time to his home in Nazareth" and went to the Synagogue. First, they were struck by his words, and then immediately the temptation arose: "Is this not the son of Joseph the carpenter and Mary? By what authority does he speak if he never went to university and if he has never studied?". They sought to justify their desire "to kill him there and then, to throw him off the mountain".

In the day's Gospel from John, Jesus' interlocutors also want to kill him. So much so that "they have stone in hand as they speak to him". "The temptation turned everyone against Jesus"; and everyone sought to justify himself. Pope Francis identified "the climax of this self-justification" in the high priest's statement: "Enough, you all know nothing! Do you not know that it is better that one man die for the people? He must die to save the people!". Everyone agreed: thus it was a "complete justification".

"When we are tempted, we travel down this same road", the Pope warned. "We are tempted and it grows and spreads to others". Just think of gossip: if we are "a little envious of one person or another", we don't contain our envy but sometimes share it with others by speaking badly about the person. This is how gossip "seeks to grow and spread to another person and yet another ...". This "is the way gossip works, and we have all been tempted to gossip". Pope Francis then confided: "I too have been tempted to gossip! It is a daily temptation", that "begins slowly, like a trickle of water".

This is why we have to “be careful when we feel something in our heart that would lead to destroying people, destroying reputations, destroying our lives, leading us into worldliness and sin”. We must be “careful because if we do not stop ourselves in time, that trickle of water, when it grows and spreads, will become a tidal wave that leads us to justify ourselves”, just as the people from the day’s Gospel justified themselves and eventually said of Jesus: “it is better than one man die for the people”.

“We are all tempted, because ... our spiritual life, our Christian life, is a battle”, the Pope said. This comes from the fact that “the devil does not want us to become holy, he does not want us to follow Jesus”. “Of course one of you will say: but Father, you are so old fashioned, speaking about the devil in the 21st century!”. To this Pope Francis replied: “watch out, the devil exists! The devil exists even in the 21st century. And we must not be naive. We must learn from the Gospel how to battle against him”.