



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Resistance vs docility

Tuesday, 9 May 2017

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Pope Francis praised early evangelizers for their “docility to the Holy Spirit in welcoming and announcing the Word”. He pointed out during Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday morning, 9 May, that this was the secret to that first and extraordinary evangelization.

Lay people, “dispersed by the persecution that broke out because of Stephen’s martyrdom”, were the ones who brought “the Word to the Gentiles of Antioch”, the Pope said. It was there that “they were called ‘Christian’ for the first time”, receiving the encouragement of the community of the Apostles in Jerusalem, through Barnabas. The Holy Father renewed the call for prayers “for Antioch” and offered the Mass to “the sisters of Casa Santa Marta” — the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent De Paul — who were celebrating “the feast day of their co-founder, Saint Louise de Marillac”.

Pope Francis quoted a passage from the day’s first reading from the Acts of the Apostles: “it begins with these words: ‘in those days, those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen’” (Acts 11:19-26). In fact, he explained, “after Stephen’s martyrdom, a great persecution broke out in Jerusalem and the believers were scattered everywhere”. The Pope remarked that “only the Apostles” remained while “lay people left, were dispersed. It was they who

brought the Good News of Jesus: the dispersed”, he pointed out.

Persecution followed the martyrdom of Stephen “who so many times — many times! — had reprimanded the leaders, the doctors of the law, for their hardheartedness”. Stephen’s “harshest words” which he “continuously repeated” were indeed: “You have always resisted the Holy Spirit”. He spoke against this “resisting the Holy Spirit, being resistant to the Holy Spirit”. “We have spoken at length about this resistance to the Holy Spirit in the last few days”, the Pope added.

“Today’s readings reveal another attitude, the opposite one: docility to the Holy Spirit which is the attitude of Christians”. Exploring this thought and referring to the Acts of the Apostles, the Pope said: “I ask myself ... why did those people who travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, Antioch speak ‘the word to none except Jews’”; why “did they still have this mentality that salvation was for Jews [alone]?”. However, Pope Francis observed, the passage goes on to say that, “there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene who, on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them and a great number that believed turned to the Lord”.

For these Christians, the Pontiff explained, it was natural to take “the step of announcing Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, because they felt the Holy Spirit within them urging them to do so: they were meek”. It was thus “lay people who brought the Word after the persecution because they had this docility to the Holy Spirit”.

“Today I would like to say something about this docility”, Pope Francis said. James, the Apostle, “in the first chapter of his letter advises us to receive the Word with meekness, welcoming it as it comes: the Word that the Holy Spirit brings”. And to do so we must be “open, not closed, not rigid: open”, he stressed. “The first step is to welcome the Word. The first step in the journey of meekness is to welcome the Word: to open our heart, receive it, allow it to enter like a seed that will sprout”.

Once the Word is welcomed, “it can later be examined more closely”, the Pope noted. “The second step is to know the Word: to know the Word and to know Jesus”. In today’s Alleluia refrain, he observed, “we sang: ‘My sheep hear my voice says the Lord: I know them, and they follow me’”. Thus, “they know me and they follow me” (cf. Jn 10:22-30). “The flock does not follow bandits; it does not follow those who do not enter through the door”, the Pope said, emphasizing the words ‘to know’: “they know what is the Word of Jesus thanks to the power of the Holy Spirit because they are meek before the Spirit”.

“And thus, the third step is becoming familiar with the Word”, the Pontiff explained. It is in fact, important “to always take the Word with us, to read it, to open our hearts to the Word, open our hearts to the Spirit who allows us to understand the Word”, he continued. “The fruit of receiving the Word, of bringing it with us, of this becoming familiar with the Word, is a great ‘fruit’. The attitude of

someone who does this”, is animated by “kindness, benevolence, joy, peace, self control, meekness”, Pope Francis said. This is also “everything that Paul says to the Galatians in the fifth chapter of his Letter”, the Pontiff added.

“This is the way that gives us meekness before the Spirit”, Pope Francis said. However, “I have to receive the Spirit who leads me to the Word with meekness, and this docility, that is, not resisting the Spirit, will lead me to this way of living, to this way of acting”, the Pontiff explained.

The correct path to follow therefore, is to “receive the Word with meekness, to know it and to ask the Spirit for the grace to make it be known”. And then to leave “space for this seed to sprout and grow into those attitudes of kindness, meekness, good will, peace, charity, self control: all of this makes up the Christian way”, Pope Francis said.

The Acts of the Apostles tells us that “when news came to Jerusalem that these people from Cyprus and Cyrene were announcing the Word to the Gentiles, they too were somewhat afraid and sent Barnabas to Antioch: ‘But what is happening? These people are ruining the faith; why is the Word being preached to Gentiles, to the uncircumcised? Why do they preach it, not the Apostles, but these people whom we do not know?’”, the Pope reflected.

“They sent Barnabas to Antioch”, the Pope continued. “When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he was glad; and he exhorted them all to be faithful to the Lord with steadfast hearts, faithful to the Lord”. Barnabas, as recounted in the Acts, “was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (Acts 11:23).

“Thus, the Holy Spirit guides us not to err”, but “to welcome the Spirit with docility, to know the Spirit in Word and to live according to the Spirit”, the Pope explained. This attitude is the opposite of “the resistance for which Stephen reprimands the leaders, the doctors of the law: ‘you have always resisted the Holy Spirit’”.

Pope Francis then invited the faithful to question “whether we resist the Spirit, whether we make any resistance to him or whether we welcome him with meekness. These are the words of James: ‘to receive with meekness’”. It can be simplified into “resistance versus docility”, the Pope said as he invited the faithful to ask for the grace of being meek.

In his concluding remarks, the Pope said he wished to add something which was slightly beyond the scope of his homily: “I like to say this, which is how this reading ends: it was in the city of Antioch that they first gave us our surname; in that very place. The disciples were called ‘Christian’ for the first time in Antioch. This is beautiful, but let us pray for Antioch”, the Pope concluded.
