



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Advice for the weekend

Friday, 9 June

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 27, 7 July 2017)

The Holy Father suggested reading the Book of Tobit “this weekend”. It requires only “a quarter of an hour” to read, but it is worth the effort because the Book of Tobit “teaches us how to behave in the journey of life”, both “in the many beautiful moments” and “in the many unpleasant moments”. In his homily on Friday morning, 9 June, Pope Francis observed that the reading “also teaches us to discern”, so as not “to allow ourselves to be tricked” by the “fireworks” of life nor by the deepest despair, which should be faced with prayer, patience and hope. He suggested the parallel stories of the two biblical characters of Tobit and Sarah — the father-in-law and the daughter-in-law presented in the Book of Tobit, as an occasion for a personal examination of conscience.

“The Bible is the Word of God, and God speaks to us when we read and meditate upon the Bible”, Pope Francis said at the beginning of his reflection. He noted that “these days, until tomorrow, the

liturgy has us reflect on the Book of Tobit: a narrative that, I would say, is a normal story, just like the stories of many people”, the Pope explained. “Above all, it is the story of two people: of Tobit, the father of Tobias, and of Sarah”. It is “the story of a father-in-law and a daughter-in-law; a story which makes us reflect”. And “it would be lovely” the Pope suggested, if “each of us were to take up this Book of Tobit today or this weekend; it’s short and can be read in very little time; a quarter

of an hour — and see how the Lord moves the story forward, leads the life of people forward, even our own”.

“In [the lives of] these two people — Tobit and Sarah, father-in-law and daughter-in-law — there are awful moments, beautiful moments, as in all of life”, the Pope explained. Above all, “there are unpleasant moments: Tobit is persecuted, he is mocked, he is insulted”. He is even “insulted by his own wife”, Anna, who clearly “was not a bad woman; she worked hard to keep the household going because he was blind; he had gone blind”. It is “an unpleasant moment which cannot be explained”, the Pope continued. And thus both Anna and Sarah were suffering, because “she too had been insulted” and, even though she was still very young, she nevertheless wanted to kill herself. “Both of them, in those terrible moments, asked to die”: and Tobit, too, had done the same when he noticed that all had become “black, dark, gloomy”.

“All of us”, affirmed Pope Francis, “have gone through terrible, intense moments: not as intense as this, but we know what it feels like in a dark moment, in a moment of suffering, in a moment of difficulty”. But “Sarah thinks: ‘if I hang myself, will I not cause my parents to suffer?’; and she stops and prays”. Meanwhile, the Pontiff continued, “Tobit says: ‘this is my life, let us continue on’, and he prays”. This is precisely “the attitude which saves us in terrible situations: prayer”, the Pope explained. And also “patience, because they are both patient with their own pain”. Tobit and Sarah are also encouraged by “the hope that God hears us and these horrible moments pass”. And thus, “in moments of sadness”, whether “few or many; in dark times”, we must always remember to turn to “prayer, patience and hope”.

But “there are also beautiful moments” to be found in the story of Tobit and Sarah, the Holy Father observed. In fact, their story “as we have heard, ends well”. Certainly “it is not the ‘happy ending’ of novels, no”. However, it is “a lovely moment: after their suffering, the Lord comes close to them and saves them”. Therefore, the Pope continued, “there are beautiful, authentic moments, like this one: not those moments with counterfeit beauty, that are all artificial, a fireworks display, for this is not the beauty of the soul”. And “what do these two do in the beautiful moments? They thank God, opening their heart in a prayer of thanks”.

Tobit and Sarah’s attitude inspired Pope Francis to propose a personal examination of conscience. “I ask myself, and I ask us all, this question: do I, in the terrible moments and in the beautiful moments, know how to discern what is happening in my soul? Do I understand what is happening? In the awful moments, do I know that this is the cross and that there isn’t an explanation and it can also appear to be a curse?”. Precisely “in these moments”, the Pope continued, “do I manage to pray, to have patience and to have at least a little hope?”. And also: “in the beautiful moments, do I allow joy to enter my heart, but that joy which is from God, that urges me to thank God, or do I fall into vanity and do I believe that all of life is like this? Today is this way and tomorrow will be a different way, no?”.

It is a fact, the Holy Father maintained, that “our life journeys between bad times and times of weakness, but the Lord is always there”. The Pope then continued with an examination of conscience: “Do I know how to discern the Lord’s presence, to turn to him in prayer? And then in praise, in the beautiful moments, the praise of joy, to thank him for what has happened?”.

In conclusion, the Pope renewed his earlier recommendation to read the story of Tobit and Sarah “this weekend”, to take the Bible in hand and find the Book of Tobit. “This story teaches us how to behave on life’s journey, with many beautiful moments and with many terrible moments, and it also teaches us to discern”. In fact, Sarah “made a discernment: ‘It is better that I don’t hang myself because this would cause great suffering to my parents’”. In the same way, “Tobit also realized that one must wait, in prayer, in hope for the salvation of the Lord”. Pope Francis concluded with the following advice: “as we read this book this weekend, let us ask for the grace to be able to discern what is happening in the bad situations of our life; and how to keep going, and what happens in the beautiful moments, and to not be tricked by vanity”.