



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

If our heart is like the local market

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In his homily at morning Mass on Tuesday, 7 January, Pope Francis commented on the first Reading from the Letter of St John (3:22-4:6) in which the Apostle, he said, “seems almost obsessive” in repeating various counsels, particularly the counsel: “abide in the Lord”.

“Abide in the Lord,” the Holy Father repeated, and he added: “the Christian, man or woman, is one who abides in the Lord”. But what does this mean? Many things, the Holy Father said. And yet, he explained, the passage from the Letter of John emphasizes a particular attitude that a Christian must adopt if he wishes to remain in the Lord, i.e. the full awareness of “what is happening in his heart”.

The Christian who abides in the Lord knows “what is happening in his heart”. That, the Pope noted, is why “the Apostle says: ‘Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits’; know how to discern the spirits, to discern what you are feeling, what you are thinking, what you want, and whether it is truly to abide in the Lord or something else which distances you from the Lord”. “Our hearts,” he continued, “always have desires, wants, thoughts: but are all of these from the Lord? That is why the Apostle says: test what you are thinking, what you are feeling, what you want... If it is in line with the Lord alright; but if not...”.

It is then necessary “to test the spirits,” the Holy Father repeated, “to see whether they are from

God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world". Not only can the prophets be false, the Pope warned, but also their prophecies and suggestions. That is why we always need to be watchful". "Indeed," he said, a Christian is precisely a man or woman "who knows how to watch his or her heart".

A heart in which "many things come and go," he added, "is like a local market where you find everything". This is precisely the reason why the constant work of discernment is so needed, in order to understand what is truly of the Lord. "But how do I know," he asked, "that something is of Christ?". The Apostle John indicates the criteria we should follow. Again citing the Letter of St John, he said: "every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already".

"It is so simple: if what you desire, or what you think travels down the road of the Incarnation of the Word, of the Lord who comes in the flesh," it means that it is of God. However, if it does not travel by that road, then it does not come from God. Essentially, it is a matter of recognizing the road travelled by God, who "emptied himself, who humbled himself unto death on the Cross". Self abasement, humility and also humiliation: "this," the Holy Father said, "is the way of road of Jesus Christ".

Therefore, if a thought or a desire "leads you on the road of humility, of self-abasement and of service to others, it is of Jesus; but if it leads you on the road of self-importance, of vanity and of pride, or on the road of abstract thought, it is not of Jesus". The temptations Jesus underwent in the desert attest to this. "All three of the devil's temptations to Jesus were suggestions aimed at distancing Jesus from this path, from the path of service, from humility, from humiliation, from the act of love he made by his life".

"Let us think about this today," the Pope said. "It will do us good. First: what is going on in my heart? What am I thinking? What am I feeling? Do I pay attention to what comes and goes or do I let it go? Do I know what I want? Do I test what I desire? Or do I simply take everything? Beloved, do not believe every spirit; but test the spirits". Pope Francis added that often our hearts are "like a road that everyone takes". This is precisely why we need to "test" and ask ourselves "if we always choose the things that come from God, if we know what comes from God, if we know the right criteria by which we should discern" our desires and our thoughts. And, Pope Francis concluded, we must never forget that "the true criteria is the Incarnation of God".