



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The imprisoned word

Friday, 21 March 2014

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In his homily at Holy Mass, Pope Francis commented on the Readings from the day's liturgy, taken from the Book of Genesis (37:3-4; 12-13; 17-18) and from the Gospel of St Matthew (21:33-43, 45). "During these days of Lent," the Pope began, "the Lord draws close to us and the Church leads us towards the Paschal Triduum, towards the Death and Resurrection of Jesus".

The first Reading recounts the story of "Joseph, who is a prophetic figure and type of Jesus: he was sold for 20 shekels by his brothers". The Gospel of Matthew presents the parable of the householder who let his property out to tenants. "Jesus tells the people and the Pharisees, the priests and the elders of the people this parable to make them understand how far they have fallen".

Pope Francis observed that the Gospel places us before "a drama, not of the people — for the people understood that Jesus was a great prophet — but of the leaders of the people, and some of the priests of that time, of the doctors of the law, and of the elders whose hearts were not open to God's word". In fact, "they heard Jesus, but rather than seeing in him God's Promised One, or rather than considering him to be a great prophet, they were afraid of him".

Essentially, the Pope said, theirs was "the same sentiment as Herod's". They too thought: "this man is a revolutionary, let us stop him in time, we must stop him!". Therefore "they sought to

capture him, and they sought to put him to the test so that he would fall and be captured: it was a persecution against Jesus". But why this persecution, the Pope asked? "Because these people were not open to God's word; they were enclosed within their egoism".

It is within this context that "Jesus tells the parable: God gave as an inheritance a land with a vineyard which he had planted and tilled with his own hands". In fact we read in the Gospel that the householder "planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower". They are all things which "he did himself, with great love". And then "he let the vineyard out to tenants".

This is "exactly what the Lord has done with us," the Pope explained. "He has lent us life," and with it, "the promise" that he would come to save us. "Yet this people saw a profitable business venture in it: the vineyard is beautiful, let's take it, it's ours!". Thus, as the Gospel tells us, "the season of fruit drew near, and the householder's servants went to get his fruit. But the tenants, who had already placed themselves as masters of the vineyard, said: no, let us cast them out, this is ours!"

This parable recounts "the drama of this people and of us all", the Pope added. "They made themselves masters of God's word; and the word of God became their word, a word fashioned according to their own interests, their own theologies, their own ideologies ... everyone interpreted it according to his own will, according to his own interests"; and "they murdered to maintain this". In fact, the Pope added, this is precisely what happened to Jesus. "The chief priests and the Pharisees understood that he was speaking about them when they heard this parable", and thus "they sought to capture him and have him killed".

Yet in this way "the Word of God becomes dead, it becomes trapped", he added. And "the Holy Spirit becomes locked up in the desires of each of them. The same thing happens to us when we are not open to the newness of God's word, when we are not obedient to God's word". Disobeying the word of God is like trying to say: "this is no longer God's Word: now it is ours".

As "the word of God died in the heart of these people, it can also die in our hearts," the Pontiff observed. And yet the word "does not end there, for it is alive in the heart of the simple, the humble, the people of God". In fact, those who were seeking to capture Jesus were afraid of the people because they considered him to be a prophet. "The simple crowd followed Jesus because what Jesus said did them great good and warmed their hearts. They didn't use the Word of God for their own interests". Rather, they "listened and sought to be better".

At this point, the Pope suggested that we think about "what we can do so as not to kill the Word of God, so as not to make ourselves masters of this word, to be docile, and not to lock up the Holy Spirit". He indicated two simple ways: humility and prayer.

“The people who would not accept God’s word but rather who said ‘this is God’s word, but I interpret it according to my own interests!’ were certainly not humble”, he remarked. “They were proud, self important, they were the supposed ‘doctors’. They were people who “believed they had the power to change the meaning of God’s word”.

However, he said, “there were also good and humble priests, humble Pharisees who received the Word of God in the right spirit; for example, the Gospels speak about Nicodemus”. Therefore, “the main disposition one needs in order to listen to God’s word is humility”, since “without humility one cannot welcome and receive God’s word”.

The second disposition needed is prayer. The people of whom the parable speaks “did not pray, they didn’t need to pray: they felt quite secure and strong, they felt that they were gods”.

Therefore, Pope Francis said: “with humility and prayer let us go forward in listening to God’s word and obeying the Church. Thus, what happened to these people will not happen to us: we will not kill in order to defend a word which we believe to be God’s word” but which in reality is actually “a word we have utterly altered”.

The Pope concluded, praying that “the Lord grant us the grace of humility to look upon Jesus as the Saviour who speaks to us: he speaks to me! Each one of us ought to say: he speaks to me! When we read the Gospels: he is speaking to me!” Pope Francis also invited those present to “open their hearts to the Holy Spirit, who gives power to these words” and “to pray, to pray much that we might all be docile to receive this word and to obeying it”.