



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Old women and the theologian

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It is the Holy Spirit who gives “identity” to the Christian. This is why — Pope Francis said in his homily during morning Mass at Santa Marta — “you can have five degrees in theology, but not have the Spirit of God”. And “you might be a great theologian but you are not a Christian”, precisely “because you do not have the Spirit of God”.

Thus, he pointed out, “many times we find, among our faithful, simple old women who perhaps didn’t finish elementary school, but who speak to you about things better than a theologian, because they have the Spirit of Christ”. And the Pope offered the example of St Paul, who despite his effective preaching had no particular academic qualifications — he had not taken courses in “human wisdom” at the Lateran or Gregorian” Pontifical Universities — but he spoke to satisfy the Spirit of God.

In the passage of the Gospel according to Luke proposed for the day’s Liturgy (4:31-37), the word “authority” appears twice. The people “were astonished by Jesus’ teaching, for his word was with authority”, the Pope affirmed. And then again, at the very end of the passage, the Gospel tells that “they were all amazed and said to one another: ‘What is this word? For with authority and power he commands...’”. Thus, Pope Francis continued, “the people were astonished because when Jesus spoke, when he preached, he had authority which the other preachers didn’t have, which the other legal experts didn’t have, those who were teaching the people”.

The question to ask yourself is: “But what is this authority of Jesus, this new thing which astounded the people? This gift, different from the legal experts’ manner of speaking and teaching?”. And the answer is definitive. “This authority”, the Pontiff explained, “is precisely the unique and special identity of Jesus”. Indeed, “Jesus was not a common preacher; Jesus was not one who taught the law like all the others: he did so in a different way, in a new way, because he had the strength of the Holy Spirit”.

Pope Francis then recalled that the day before, “in the liturgy, we read that passage in which Jesus presents himself, visits his synagogue and he speaks of himself in the words of the Prophet Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me” and “he has sent me to proclaim”. The Holy Father explained that this, too, confirms that “the authority which Jesus has comes precisely from this special anointing of the Holy Spirit: Jesus is anointed, the first Anointed One, the true Anointed One”. And “this anointing gives authority to Jesus”.

“The very identity of Jesus is the Anointed Being”, the Pontiff restated. He is “the Son of God, anointed and sent, sent to bring salvation, to bring freedom”. Thus “this is the identity of Jesus, and because of this the people said: ‘This man has special authority, which the legal experts who teach us do not have’. But”, the Pope added, “some are scandalized by this manner of Jesus, this style of Jesus”.

Here then, “the liberty, the freedom of Jesus is the very anointing of the Holy Spirit”. And, Francis exhorted, we can ask ourselves what our identity as Christians is”. In the First Letter to the Corinthians (2:10-16), St Paul explains that “we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom”. And in this regard the Pontiff highlighted that “Paul’s preaching” does not emanate from “human wisdom”, because his words were “taught to him by the Holy Spirit”. In fact, the Pope emphasized, he “preached with the anointing of the Spirit, expressing spiritual matters of the Spirit in spiritual terms”.

However, Francis noted, using the very expressions of St Paul: “The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, ... and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned”. Thus “if we Christians do not understand the gifts of the Spirit, we do not bear and we do not offer testimony, we do not have identity”.

After all, “these gifts of the spirit” seem only “a folly”, such that those who lack identity are “not able to understand them”.

The Pontiff recalled, referring again to the Letter of St Paul, that the “spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one”. Indeed, the Pope added, again quoting the words of the Apostle, “who has known the mind of the Lord? But now we have the mind of Christ, that is, the Spirit of Christ”. And “this is the Christian identity: not having the spirit of the world, that manner of thinking, that manner of judging”.

Ultimately, “what gives authority, what gives identity is the Holy Spirit, the anointing of the Holy Spirit”. This is why, according to the Pope, “people don’t love those preachers, those legal experts, because they spoke truthfully about theology, but they didn’t reach the heart, they didn’t give freedom, they weren’t capable of doing so in a manner the people identified with, because they were not anointed by the Holy Spirit”. However, the Pope clarified, “the authority of Jesus — and the authority of the Christian — comes from this very capacity to understand the gifts of the Spirit, to speak the language of the Spirit; it comes from this anointing of the Holy Spirit”.

Pope Francis concluded by praying to the Lord to give us “the Christian identity, that which You have: give us your Spirit; give us your way of thinking, of feeling, of speaking: that is, Lord grant us the anointing of the Holy Spirit”.