



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Corruption and mercy

Monday, 3 April 2017

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In the profoundly human crossroads between “innocence and sin, corruption and law”, Jesus asks that we always look upon others with mercy, without passing judgement on their heart. Pope Francis offered this thought during morning Mass on Monday, 3 April.

“The Word of God that the Church offers for our meditation today”, Francis began, appears to be about two women caught in the act of adultery: one “a fictitious adultery, a pretense; the other true”. He was referring to the story of Susanna recounted in the Book of Daniel (13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62), and that of the adulteress narrated in the Gospel of John (8:1-11). A “profound” message comes across through these two women, as the two readings present “four people”, and “four different situations”. It is precisely “what the Church wants us to think about today, to see: innocence meets sin, corruption meets law”. Indeed, the Pontiff continued, the day’s liturgy offers “an encounter among these four things: innocence, sin, corruption and law”.

The Pope began by describing the situation of an innocent woman: “Susanna, falsely accused by those two elder judges. She is forced to choose” between “faithfulness to God and to the law, or saving her life”. Who knows, the Pontiff observed, “perhaps Susanna was a woman who had other sins, because we are all sinners”. In fact “the only woman who has no sins is Our Lady; all others,

all of us, have them". But "Susanna was a woman with minor sins; she was not an adulteress; she was faithful to her husband"; and this is "the innocence" presented by the liturgy. Then there is "sin: the other woman" — as told by John — "was caught in the act of sinning; she had truly sinned; she was an adulteress; she had been unfaithful to her husband". Then comes "corruption", which we find "in the judges in both cases, both with Susanna and with the other adulterous woman", because "in both cases the judges were corrupt". And lastly, there is "the law, the fullness of the law: Jesus".

Thus, in the day's liturgy, these four realities meet: "innocence, sin, corruption and law", namely, the "law in its fullness". It is certainly not the only Gospel case of "judges becoming corrupt": in Chapter 18 of Luke, "Jesus speaks about another man who neither fears God nor cares for anyone". Indeed, Francis observed, "there have always been corrupt judges in the world", and we find them "today too, in every part of the world". The question, he said, is "why" a person becomes corrupt.

In reality, the Pope explained, corruption is worse than sin, because I can sin, "I slip, I am unfaithful to God, but then I try to do no more, or I try to settle with the Lord, or at least I know it is not good". On the other hand, "corruption is when sin enters" repeatedly "your conscience and does not even leave you room for air; all becomes sin: this is corruption".

As for the corrupt, "they believe they are doing things well in this manner"; they believe they can act with impunity, Pope Francis explained. Moreover, "in the case of Susanna", the two elders "even confess their corruption" and "tell the truth: they were corrupted by the vices of lust". They say to Susanna: "Look, the garden doors are shut, no one sees us, and we are in love with you; so give your consent, and lie with us. If you refuse, we will testify against you that a young man was with you, and this was why you sent your maids away" (Dan 13:20). In other words, they say to her: "either you do this or we will bear false witness".

"It is not the first Bible case with false testimonies", Pope Francis said. "Let us think about Nabot, when Queen Jezebel gives all that false testimony; let us think of Jesus, who is condemned to death through false witness; let us think about Saint Stephen".

However, the Pontiff warned, referring to John's Gospel passage, "the teachers of the law who bring this woman – scribes, Pharisees – are also corrupt, and they say to Jesus: 'Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. What do you say about her?'" (Jn 8:4). Although the testimony against Susanna was false, in this case, Father explained, it was true. And while Susanna "was innocent, this one was a sinner". And in both cases, "they are judges". The elders with Susanna "had lost their minds, allowing lust to take possession of them", Francis explained. Meanwhile, they "had lost their minds, by allowing a very rigid interpretation of the law to grow within them, leaving no room for the Holy Spirit: corruption of lawfulness of legalism, against grace".

“And then there is the fourth person, Jesus: the fullness of the law”, Francis continued. He appears “as teacher of the law before these men who are teachers of the law: ‘what do you say about her?’, they ask him”. The Lord responds to the “false judges who accused Susanna”, through Daniel’s words: “offspring of Canaan and not Judah, beauty has deceived you and lust has perverted your heart. This is how you have both been dealing with the daughters of Israel, and they were intimate with you through fear” (Dan 13:56). And again, “You old relic of wicked days, your sins have now come home, which you have committed in the past, pronouncing unjust judgements, condemning the innocent and letting the guilty go free” (Dan 13:52).

“This is the corruption of these judges”, the Pontiff continued, referring to the passage from the Old Testament. To the other judges, however, “Jesus does not say much”. Instead, he responds: “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her”. He then turns to the sinner and says “Neither do I condemn you; go and do not sin again”. This, the Pope explained, “is the fullness of the law; not that of the scribes and Pharisees who had corrupted the mind by making many laws, many laws, without leaving room for mercy: Jesus is the fullness of the law, and Jesus, judges with mercy”.

The Lord “lets an innocent woman go free through the prophet of the People”, Francis said. Indeed, “to the corrupt judges”, the Prophet’s words are quite harsh: “you old relic of wicked days”. He then says to “the judges corrupted by an evil attitude regarding the law: ‘let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her’”. Thus “Jesus, the completely innocent man, can say ‘mother’ to the innocent because his mother is the only innocent woman”.

The Pope concluded by calling on the faithful to think of “this path, of the evil with which our vices judge people”, because “we judge others in our hearts”. Thus, we should ask ourselves, whether “we are corrupt, or not yet”. We should look to “Jesus who always judges with mercy: Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again”.