



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

As a grain of sand

Thursday, 6 April 2017

(by L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly ed. in English, n. 17, 28 April 2017)

Each Christian should set aside one day as a day of remembrance, to reread his or her own life history and to place it within the context of the history of a people, Pope Francis said during Mass at Santa Marta on Thursday morning, 6 April. "I am not alone; I am a people, a people dreamt by God", he explained.

Inspired by the day's liturgical readings which focused on the figure of Abraham, father of the faith (Gen 17:3-9 and Jn 8:51-59), the Pontiff noted that during the Lenten season, believers are often encouraged to "pause and reflect". We are asked, the Pope said, to "stop, stop for a moment. Think about your father". At the centre of this attention is Abraham.

The first reading, in fact, "speaks about that dialogue between God and Abraham in which God makes the covenant with him", Francis said. Meanwhile, in the Gospel, Jesus and the Pharisees refer to Abraham as "father" because he is "the one who began to generate this people, who today are the Church; it is us: loyal faithful", the Pontiff explained. Therefore, accepting the invitation of the Scripture, he added, "it will be good for us to think about our father, Abraham".

What, then, are the fundamental aspects of the Abraham narrative that are important to

remember? Firstly, Francis noted, he “obeyed when he was called to leave and to go to another land which he was to receive as inheritance”. Thus, Abraham “trusted; he obeyed; and he set out without knowing where he was going”, the Holy Father pointed out. He was a “man of faith, a man of hope”. At 100 years of age and with a barren wife, he “believed when he was told he would have a son”. He believed “against all hope. This is our father”, Francis explained. “If someone tried to describe Abraham’s life, he could say: ‘this one is a dreamer’”, the Pope added. But note: Abraham “was not crazy”. His was a “dream of hope”.

This aspect of his identity was also confirmed later when his son was a youth, and Abraham “was put to the test” by God, the Pope said. “He was asked to offer [his son] as a sacrifice: he obeyed and went on, against all hope”. This is who “our father Abraham is”, Francis stressed. He is someone who “goes forward, forward, forward”. In the Gospel, Jesus says that Abraham “rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad” (Jn 8:56).

He had the joy of “seeing the fullness of the promise of the covenant, the joy of seeing that God had not deceived him, that God is always true to His covenant”, the Pontiff continued. And even today believers are called to do what the Responsorial Psalm 105[104] says: “Remember the wonderful works that he has done, his miracles and the judgements he uttered”. All Christians are “descendants of Abraham”. It is like “when we think about our father who is gone: remembering dad, the good things about dad”, Francis explained. We can do the same with “our father Abraham”, by remembering how “great” he was.

The greatness of the Patriarch was founded on a “pact” with God. For his part, the Pope stressed, Abraham gave obedience; “he always obeyed”. And on God’s part, there was a promise: “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations” (Gen 17:4-5). And, Abraham believed.

The Pope paused to reflect on the beauty and the greatness of God’s promise to Abraham, “who was childless at 100 years of age and with a barren wife”. God told him, “I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you and kings shall come forth from you” (Gen 17:6). Then, referring to another dialogue from the Genesis passage, the Pope recounted: “Listen look, look to the sky: can you count the stars?’ — ‘Oh no, impossible!’ — ‘So shall your descendants be. Look at the beach on the seashore: can you count each grain of that sand?’ — ‘But it is impossible!’ — ‘So shall your descendants be’”.

“Today in obedience to the Church’s invitation, we pause and can truthfully say: ‘I am one of those stars. I am a grain of sand’”, Francis said.

But the bond with Abraham does not complete Christian identity, the Pope continued. “We are children of Abraham, but before Abraham there is another Father. And before us, there is another

Son. And in our history, between Abraham and us, there is the other history, the great one, the history of the Father in heaven and of Jesus”, Pope Francis explained. This is the reason why in the Gospel passage, Jesus “responded to the Pharisees and the doctors of the law: ‘Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad’”. This is “the great message. Today the Church invites us to pause and to look at our roots, to look at our father who made us a people, a sky full of stars, beaches full of grains of sand”, the Pontiff added. Therefore, every Christian is called to “look at history” and to realize that “I am not alone; I am a people. Let us go together. The Church is a people, a people dreamt by God, a people to whom he gave a father on earth who obeyed; and we have a Brother who gave up his life for us, to make us a people”. Beginning with this awareness, “we can look to our Father, say ‘thank you’; look to Jesus, say ‘thank you’; and look to Abraham”, thankful that “we are part of the journey”.

At the end of his meditation, Pope Francis suggested a practical commitment: “Let us make today a day of remembrance” in order to understand that “in this great history, in the context of God and Jesus, there is the little history of each of us”. Thus, he add, “I invite you to take five minutes today, ten minutes to sit down, without the radio, without television; sit down and think about your own history: the blessings and the troubles, everything; the graces and the sins: everything”. In remembering, he said, each of us will be able to encounter “the fidelity of that God who remained true to his covenant, stayed true to the promise he had made to Abraham, stayed true to the salvation that he had promised in his Son Jesus”.

“I am sure that in the midst of perhaps bad things”, Pope Francis concluded, “because we all have them, many bad things, in life — if we do this today, we will discover the beauty of God’s love, the beauty of his mercy, the beauty of hope. And I am sure that all of us will be filled with joy”.