



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Witnesses to obedience

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“Yes, I am a sinner; I am worldly, I have so much worldliness in my heart, but, Lord, you can do all: give me the grace to become a witness to obedience like you, and also the grace so as not to be fearful when persecution and slander arrive, because you have told us that when we are brought before the judge, it shall be the Spirit who will tell us how we must respond”. This was Pope Francis’ prayer at Mass on Thursday morning, 27 April. He invited the faithful to recite it with open hearts.

“Let us ask for this grace”, the Pontiff insisted, because “a Christian is not witness to an idea, a philosophy, a business, a bank, a power”; rather, he or she is a “witness to obedience, like Jesus”.

At the beginning of his homily, Francis took note of the day’s first reading from the Acts of the Apostles (5:27-33), which “continues that dialogue of the Apostles which began with John and the leaders, with the doctors of the law”. The Pope pointed out that “after the miracle of the healing of the lame man, which sparked the fury of the leaders, the community continued to grow and the Apostles performed so many miracles, so many signs”. Thus, “people went to them; they sought them to listen to them, and they also brought the sick so that they might be healed”. Indeed, in the same chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, it is said that the sick were accompanied by people, so

that “when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on some of them”. And “this was the faith of the people”.

Of course, the Pope acknowledged, “there was also trouble in the community; in the midst of this consolation there were some sly ones who wanted to further their career, like Ananias and Sapphira”. And the same sort of thing, Francis added, still happens today. “There were people who — at seeing these people of faith bring the sick there, in pilgrimage to the Apostles — would say: ‘but what ignorant people; they don’t know, these people do not know’”. This shows “the disdain for the faithful People of God who never do wrong, ever”. The same is true today, the Pope admitted. But “the Lord wanted the Church to be strong at that moment as a sign of his resurrection”.

The Acts also tell us, the Pontiff said, that “the leaders, filled with jealousy when they saw this, arrested the Apostles and put them in the common prison”. But “that night”, the Pontiff added, “as happened to Peter when he was in prison, an angel of the Lord went there; he opened the door”, calling on the Apostles to go forth and proclaim to the people. The Apostles immediately went to teach the people in the temple “at daybreak”, but the chief priests were informed, and the Apostles were called before the council. “I have said all this to show the development of the life of the Church in these early months”, the Pope explained, referring again to the first reading. The Acts recount that “in those days”, the Pope said, “the commander and the servants brought the Apostles and set them before the council; the high priest questioned them, saying, ‘Did we not strictly charge you not to teach in this name?’”. They obviously meant, “in Jesus’ name”. In fact, Peter and John had already been arrested and, when interrogated by the Sanhedrin, replied: “we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard”. But the leaders had forbidden them to continue preaching. Thus comes the new accusation: the members of the Sanhedrin say to the Apostles that, despite this ban, “you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us”.

But here, “Peter — the same Peter who, out of fear, had betrayed the Lord that Thursday night — today, courageously responds: ‘We must obey God rather than men’”. Peter’s response, the Pope affirmed, “makes us understand what an Apostle is, what a Christian is. A Christian is a witness to obedience, like Jesus”. And in fact, “Jesus obeyed; he became man, he abased himself, he annihilated himself”. Thus, in the same manner, “a Christian is a witness to obedience, as Jesus said to the Father: ‘Here is a body; I come to do your will’. Like Jesus, who in the garden of olives asked the Father to let this cup pass from him: ‘nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done’: I shall obey”.

Similarly, “a Christian is a witness to obedience”, said Francis, “and if we are not on this path to grow in witness to obedience, we are not Christians”, We must “journey down this path” to truly be witnesses “to obedience, like Jesus”. This is why a Christian “is not a witness to an idea, a philosophy, a business, a bank, a power”, but “a witness to obedience, like Jesus”.

The Pope observed that obedience is something more easily said than done, and that requires grace. “How does one become a witness to obedience; where does one study to become so?”. In

fact, “only the Holy Spirit can do this”, explained Francis. Because, “to become a witness to obedience is a grace of the Holy Spirit: he is the one who does this”. It is “the same speech we heard from Jesus to Nicodemus: ‘He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life’”.

“It is from above that this comes”, the Pope stressed: “it is from the Spirit. Jesus, anointed by the Spirit, brings the Good News. Let us think of the synagogue of Nazareth; only the Spirit can make us witnesses to obedience”.

Perhaps, Francis continued, one might say, “I go to that spiritual teacher” or, “I read this book”. Yes, the Pope explained, that’s “all fine and good, but only the Spirit can change our hearts and can make us all witnesses to obedience: it is a work of the Spirit and we must ask for it. It is a grace to ask: ‘Father, Lord Jesus, send me your Spirit so that I may become a witness to obedience’, that is, a Christian”. The Pontiff indicated “the consequences for a person who is a witness to obedience”. In this regard, he said, the conclusion “of today’s first reading is clear: ‘When they heard this they were enraged and wanted to kill them’”. Because persecution is “the consequence of the witness to obedience”. And in fact, “when Jesus lists the Beatitudes” he ends with the affirmation: ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted’, insulted”.

“The Cross can not be separated from the life of a Christian”, Francis said. “The life of a Christian is not a social status; it is not just a way of living a spirituality that makes us good, which makes us a little better. This is not enough. A Christian’s life is a witness to obedience and a Christian’s life is full of slander, gossip, persecution”. And, the Holy Father concluded, “this is the message of the Church of today”. She invites us to ask ourselves if we are truly Christians, that is, “witnesses to obedience, like Jesus”.