



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Examination of conscience

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(by: www.osservatoreromano.va)

Every evening, make an “examination of conscience”, like a prayer, to determine if it was “the Spirit of God or the spirit of the world” that prompted us throughout the day. This is a decisive action in our “spiritual battle” which leads us to “understand His heart” and the meaning of Christ. This is the suggestion that Pope Francis made during Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday, 4 September, recalling that a person’s heart is like a “battlefield” where, throughout the day, “the Spirit of God, which leads us to good works, to charity, to fraternity” encounters “the spirit of the world, which leads us to vanity, pride, sufficiency, gossip”.

In the first reading, referring to the passage from the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians (2:10-16), the Pope pointed out that “the Apostle Paul teaches the Corinthians the way to think like Christ, Christ’s sentiments” and to have the attitude that Christ had. It is the path that allows the Holy Spirit to work in us. Indeed, Saint Paul reminds us that we all received the Spirit of God.

Pope Francis explained that it is the Holy Spirit that enables us to carry on in life, that brings us to know Jesus, to have the same sentiments as Jesus. He reiterated that we can study a great deal, study the Bible, study history, study theology, but these are not the paths that lead us to have the same sentiments as Jesus. They certainly help, but the true way is to let oneself be drawn forward by the Spirit, by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that leads us to the heart of Jesus, to understand who Jesus is, how Jesus acts, what Jesus wants, what Jesus’ will is--to understand the heart of Jesus.

The question is, how can we get there? Saint Paul affirms that the “unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God” and therefore, as Pope Francis explained, we need the Holy Spirit for this journey, this Christian walk. Similarly, the Apostle Paul explains, “we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit of God”.

Essentially, reiterated the Pope, “There are two spirits, two ways of thinking, of feeling, of acting: that which leads me to the Spirit of God, and that which leads me to the spirit of the world”. And “this happens in our life: We all have these two ‘spirits,’ we might say”. There is the “Spirit of God, which leads us to good works, to charity, to fraternity, to adore God, to know Jesus, to do many good works of charity, to pray”, but there is also “the other spirit, of the world, which leads us to vanity, pride, sufficiency, gossip – a completely different path”.

“Our heart, a saint once said, is like a ‘battlefield, a field of war where these two spirits struggle’ and he called this a ‘spiritual battle’”, the Pope explained. “In the Christian life, one must fight to find space for the Spirit of God, and to cast away--like Jesus expelled the demon--the spirit of the world”, he added, referring to the day’s Gospel passage (4:31-37).

Reflecting further on this, the Pope suggested “a beautiful prayer that each of us can recite every day, before going to bed, looking back on the day” and asking ourselves “which spirit did I follow today? The spirit of God or the spirit of the world?”. He pointed out that this is what is meant by an examination of conscience--“feeling within our hearts what took place in this interior battle, and asking how I defended myself against the spirit of the world that leads to vanity, ugliness, vice, to pride”. In other words, “how did I defend myself from real temptations”. We must identify the temptations, Pope Francis stressed, and “this is to be done as a prayer, before going to bed, today, asking ourselves what kinds of feelings we had, identifying which spirit prompted us to which sentiments: the spirit of the world or the Spirit of God?”.

By making an examination of conscience with this evening prayer, the Holy Father continued, “if we are honest, we will often find that ‘today I was envious, I was greedy’”. This is “the spirit of the world”. Identifying these feelings is important because “we all face this interior battle, but if we do not understand how these two spirits work, how they act, we will be unable to move forward with the Spirit of God which helps us to understand Christ’s thoughts, the meaning of Christ”.

“It is very simple” said the Pope, “we have this great gift, which is the Spirit of God, but we are weak, we are sinners, and we also have the temptation of the spirit of the world”. And “in this spiritual battle, in this war of the spirit, we must be victors like Jesus, but we must know the path to take”. This is why, he continued “an examination of conscience is so useful, to look back on the day in the evening and say, ‘Yes, I was tempted in this way today, I was victorious here, the Holy Spirit inspired me’”. Essentially, it is about “knowing what is going on in the heart”.

The Pope then cautioned, “If we do not do this, if we do not know what happens in our heart--and I

don't say this, the Bible does--we are like 'animals that understand nothing', that move along through instinct". But "we are not animals, we are children of God, baptized with the gift of the Holy Spirit". "This is why it is important to understand what happened in my heart today. May the Lord teach us to make an examination of conscience every day".

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