



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Listen first

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How can you recognize a Christian? By her attitude. During Mass at Santa Marta on Thursday, Pope Francis commented on the Gospel passage from the liturgy of the day, likening the image of the house built on rock to the everyday life of the faithful.

The Holy Father began by pointing out that the passage from Matthew (7:21-29) concludes “a series of catecheses that Jesus gives to the people” and that the people following the Lord are “astonished”, because “he taught them as one with authority, and not like their scribes”. Francis immediately drew from it a lesson for everyone: “people know when a priest, a bishop, a catechist, a Christian, has that consistency which gives them authority”, when he “really knows how to discern”.

After all, in an earlier passage, Jesus himself “admonishes his disciples, the people, everyone: ‘Beware of false prophets’”. The correct word, “although it is a neologism”, the Pope said, would be “pseudo-prophets”. These pseudo-prophets “resemble little sheep, good sheep, but they are predatory wolves”. The Gospel Reading recalls precisely the verse in which Jesus explains how to discern “where the true preachers of the Gospel are, and where are those who preach a gospel which is not the Gospel”.

There are, the Pope explained, “three key words to understanding this: speak, do, and listen”. Regarding “speaking”, Jesus states: “Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven”. He continues: “On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’”. However, he will respond to them: “I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers”.

Why is there this opposition? Because, the Pontiff said, “these people speak, they do”, but they lack “another attitude, which is very basic, which is actually the foundation of speaking, of doing”: they don’t “listen”. Indeed, Jesus continues: “Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them...”. Therefore, “the speak-listen binomial isn’t enough” — in fact, it can even be deceiving. The correct binomial is another one: it is “listening and doing, putting into practice”. Sure enough, Jesus tells us: “Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock. Then the rain falls and the winds blow, but the house remains firm, because it is a house of stone, built on rock”. However, “one who hears the words but does not make them his own, who lets them pass, that is, he doesn’t take them seriously and doesn’t put them into practice, will be like a man who builds upon sand”.

Here then is the key to recognizing false prophets: “You will know them by their fruits”. In other words, the Pope said, “by their attitude: so many words, they speak, they are prodigious, they do great things but their heart is not open to hear the Word of God, they are afraid of the silence of the Word of God”. These are “pseudo-christians, pseudo-pastors”, who “do good things” but “the rock is missing”.

The Collect prayer of the day declaims: “You never abandon those who trust in the rock of your love”. But these “pseudo-christians”, instead, lack “the rock of God’s love, the rock of the Word of God”. And, Francis added, “without this rock they cannot build: they are pretending, because in the end it all falls”.

These are “pseudo-pastors, worldly pastors, the pastors or Christians who talk too much”, said the Pope. Perhaps it’s because “they are afraid of silence” and “perhaps they do too much”. They are incapable of acting from the standpoint “of listening”; they operate starting from themselves, “not from God”.

Thus, the Pope summarized, “one who simply speaks and acts, is not a true prophet, is not a true Christian, and in the end everything will fall”, because “it is not on the rock of God’s love, it is not ‘made of stone’”. On the other hand, “one who knows how to listen and from listening, does, with the strength of the word of another, not her own”, this one “remains firm like the rock: although she is a humble person, who doesn’t seem important”, she is great. And “how many of these great ones there are in the Church!”, the Pope emphasized, adding: “How many great bishops, how many great priests, how many great faithful who know how to listen and from listening, do!”.

Pope Francis also drew a modern-day example in the figure of Teresa of Calcutta, who “heard the Lord’s voice: she didn’t speak, and in the silence she knew how to listen”, and therefore, how to act. “She did so much”, the Pontiff said. And like the house built on rock, “neither she nor her work fell”. From her witness we understand that “the great ones know how to listen and from listening, they do. For their faith and their strength” stand “on the rock of the love of Jesus Christ”.

The Pope concluded his meditation by connecting it to the Eucharistic celebration that was to follow. He recalled how the liturgy uses “the strong, firm altar of stone” as a “symbol of Jesus”. Upon this altar Jesus becomes “weak, he is a piece of bread” given to all. The Lord “became weak” to make us strong. “May he accompany us in this celebration”, Francis prayed, “and teach us to listen and to do”, and to do beginning “from listening, not from our own words”.