



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Like a mother defending her children

Tuesday, 17 September 2013

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 39, 25 September 2013)

Like a mother who loves us, protects us, and gives us the strength to carry on the battle against evil. This is how Pope Francis described the Church in his homily on Tuesday morning, 17 September, during the Mass he celebrated in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae.

Commenting on the passage from the Gospel of Luke which recounts the resurrection of the widow of Nain's son (7:11-17), the Pope described Jesus, who sees the woman in front of the dead body of her only son, and "he took compassion on her". Pope Francis described this feeling of Christ as "the capacity to suffer with us, to be close to our sufferings and to make them his own". Besides, Jesus understood "what it meant to be a widow at that time", when mothers were left alone to raise their children they had to rely on the help and charity of others.

The Bishop of Rome's thoughts turned to other widows mentioned in the Bible. To them the Lord shows special "care, a special love", to the point that they have become "an icon of the Church, because", he explained, "the Church is in a certain sense a widow too: her husband has gone away and she walks through history hoping to find him again, to meet with him. Then once and for all she will be his bride". But, the Pope warned, "in the meantime the Church is alone", and the Lord is not visible to her: this is why the Church "has a certain dimension of widowhood".

The first result of this widowhood is that the Church becomes “brave”, like a mother “who protects her children”, just as the widow in the Gospel “who went to the corrupt judge to defend her children and eventually won”. Because, the Pope stressed: “our Mother Church has that courage, the courage of a woman who knows that her children are hers, and that she must defend them and bring them to meet her husband”.

Courage gives place to the second element: strength, as seen in other widows described in Scripture: among them Naomi, the great-grandmother of David, “who was not afraid to be alone”, and the Maccabean widow with seven sons “who, in staying faithful to God, and in order not to deny the law of God, was martyred by the tyrant”. What struck Pope Francis about this woman was the fact the Bible stressed that “she spoke in dialect, her native language” just as “our Mother Church does”, who speaks to us in the language of true orthodoxy, which we all understand, the language of the Catechism, that powerful language, that strengthens us and gives us the strength to carry on the battle against evil”.

Summarizing his own reflections the Pontiff then recalled the Church’s dimension of widowhood, as she journeys through history expecting to meet, to find her bridegroom”. For the rest he pointed out that “our Mother Church is this way: a faithful Church knows how to cry. She weeps for her children and prays”. Indeed “when the Church does not weep, something is wrong” whereas the Church functions when the Church “goes forward and makes her children mature, gives them the strength, accompanies them to the last leave-taking, to entrust them to her spouse, whom she too will meet at the end”. And since the Pope sees “Our Mother Church in this widow who cries”, we must wonder what the Lord says to this mother to comfort her. The answer can be found in the Gospel of Luke when Jesus says: “Do not weep!”. They are words that seem to say: do not cry, because “I am with you, I am accompanying you, I await you there, in the nuptials, the ultimate nuptials, those of the Lamb”; stop crying “this son of yours that was dead now lives”. And to the latter, the third figure presented by the Gospel, the Lord turns, saying: “young man, I say to you, arise”. According to the Pontiff these are the very words which the Lord speaks to men and women in the sacrament of reconciliation, “when we are dead because of sin, and we go to ask for his forgiveness”.

Luke ends his narrative with the description of the young man who had died, was raised and sits up and begins to speak; and of Jesus who restores him to his mother just as he does with us. The Pope noted, “when he forgives us, he restores life in us”, for “our reconciliation does not end with the dialogue” with the priest who gives us forgiveness, but it is completed “when he brings us back to our mother”.

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