



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Beyond formalities

Tuesday, 1 April 2014

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 14, 4 April 2014)

In his homily during Holy Mass, Pope Francis reflected on the day's Gospel (Jn 5:1-6), in which Jesus heals a man who has been paralyzed for 38 years.

"When Jesus sees the man," the Pope began, "he asked him: do you want to be healed?". The man replied: "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is troubled, and while I am going another steps down before me". For it was believed that when the waters were troubled, an angel of the Lord would come to heal". Jesus responded with a command: "Rise, take up your pallet, and walk". And the man was healed.

Here, the Pope noted, the Evangelist "changes the tone of the account and recalls that the day was a Sabbath". He then reports the reactions of those who reproved the man because he was carrying his pallet on Sabbath day. This way of acting is reminiscent of our own attitudes before the many physical and spiritual maladies of the people," the Pope said, "and here I find two strong spiritual illnesses it would be good for us to reflect on a little".

The "first illness" is the one afflicting the paralyzed man. He had "resigned himself to it", the Pope said, "perhaps saying to himself: 'life is unfair, others are more fortunate than I am'". "There is a plaintive tone" in this way of speaking, he added. Yet "there is resignation but there is also bitterness". It is an attitude reminiscent of "many Catholics who lack enthusiasm and who are

bitter,” who repeatedly say to themselves: “I go to Mass every Sunday but it is better not to become involved! I believe for my own sake, but I don’t feel the need to give it to others: each one peacefully at his own home”. These people, he added, also take the attitude that “if you do something they well in life they’ll reprove you: so it’s better not to take the risk!”.

“This is the illness of *acedia*”, the Pope explained, and it “cripples apostolic zeal” and “causes Christians to come to a standstill”. They are “peaceful, but not in the good sense of the word: they are people who do not bother to go out to proclaim the Gospel, people who are anaesthetized”. This condition leads one to believe that “it is better not to get involved”.

Spiritual *acedia* is a form of sadness, the Pope explained. It causes Christians to become “fundamentally sad ... to become individuals who not lightsome, but negative”. The Pope then warned that this “illness exists among Christians: perhaps we go to Mass every Sunday” but we also say, “please, do not disturb!”. Christians “who lack apostolic zeal are of no help and benefit to the Church”. Unfortunately, the Pope said, today there are so many “selfish Christians” who commit “the sin of *acedia* against apostolic zeal, against the desire to give the newness of the Gospel to others; that newness which I have been freely given”.

The other the Pope pointed to is “formalism”. The Jews upbraid the man whom Jesus healed only because he carried his pallet on the Sabbath. It mattered nothing that he was happy, so happy that “he danced in the middle of the street” because “he was finally free of his physical malady and also free of *acedia*, from sadness”. The Jew’s replay is stark: “This is the way things are here, and you must do this!”. “They were only interested in formalities: it was the Sabbath and it was not permitted to perform miracles on the Sabbath! The grace of God cannot act on the Sabbath!”. The Pope equated this attitude with that of “Christians who are hypocrites, and who allow no space for God”. For them, the Pope observed, “the Christian life is a matter of having all one’s documents in order!”. However, in doing so “they close to the door to the grace of God”. And, he added, “we have many of them in the Church!”.

Therefore, “there are those who are afflicted by the sin of *acedia*”, who “are incapable of moving forward with apostolic zeal and who have decided to come to a standstill in their sadness and resentment”. And there are those “who are incapable of bringing salvation to others because they close the door” and concern themselves “only with formalities”, to such an extent that “you cannot!” is the expression they use most often.

“We also experience these temptations, and we must know how to defend ourselves against them”, the Pope said. “Faced with these two temptations ... in the field hospital, which is a symbol of the Church today, amid so many wounded people”, Jesus certainly does not give in to *acedia* or formalism. Rather, “he draws near to man and says to him: ‘do you want to be healed?’”. And to the man who replies yes, “he gives grace and sends him on his way”. Yet, the Pope noted, the Gospel also tells us that shortly after the man had been healed, Jesus finds him again in the

temple and says to him: “See, you are well! Sin no more!”. The two Christian sayings are then: “do you want to be healed?” and “sin no more!”. Jesus first heals the man who is ill and then commands him “to sin no more”.

“This is the Christian way, the way of apostolic zeal” that enables us to “draw near to so many wounded people in this field hospital, to those who often have been wounded by men and women in the Church”. We need to speak with them like a brother or sister, Pope Francis concluded, by inviting them to be healed and “to sin no more”.