



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

The dictatorship of uniformity

Thursday, 10 April 2014

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 16, 18 April 2014)

In his homily at Holy Mass, Pope Francis commented on the day's Readings from the Book of Genesis (17:3-9) and the Gospel of John (8:51-59). The Pope introduced his remarks noting how "the day's readings set before us God's promise to our father Abraham" to make him "the father of a multitude of nations".

The Bishop of Rome explained that "from that moment on, the people of God began to journey in search" of a way for this promise to be fulfilled, for it to become a reality. It was a promise, he said, "which even for Abraham, took the form of a covenant". God in fact said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendents after you throughout their generations".

In this way, the Pope continued, "we understand that the commandments are not a cold law; the commandments were born out of this relationship of love, this promise, this covenant".

Drawing on the day's Gospel, the Pope expanded upon his reflection: "the mistake of the doctors of the law who were not good and wanted to stone Jesus — at the time there were also good Pharisees and doctors of the law — was to separate the commandments from the promise, from the covenant"; that is, "to separate the commandments from the heart of God, who had

commanded Abraham to journey on”.

According to Pope Francis, their mistake came from “not understanding the path of hope: they believed that everything had been completed and fulfilled with the commandments”. However, he said, “the commandments find their origin in love for God’s faithfulness and are rules for going forward, indications for not erring; they help us to continue on until we reach the end of our journey in an encounter with Jesus”. Yet “the people of whom the Gospel speaks today did not know how to connect the fulfillment of the commandments with God’s covenant with their father Abraham”. Continually they repeat: “there are laws we must observe!”. They did so “because their hearts were closed, their minds were closed to everything that was new and to all that the prophets had foretold”. For them the only thing that mattered was this: that “we have to do it this way, and this is the way to proceed!”.

This is “the tragedy of the closed mind and heart,” the Pope said. “When the heart and mind are closed there is no room for God”. Yes, he explained, we are merely who we are, and yet we are convinced that “people have to do only what I say”, and we are certain that we are doing “just what the commandments say”.

“It is impossible for Jesus to convince a closed mind, impossible to give a new message” which, in fact, “is not new” but “is exactly what had been promised by God’s faithfulness and the prophets”. And yet Jesus’ interlocutors “do not understand: their minds are closed, their thoughts are closed, because in their egoism, in their sins, they have closed their hearts”. Theirs is “a closed way of thinking that is not open to dialogue, to the possibility that there is something else, to the possibility that God might speak to us and tell us what the journey is like, and how he journeyed with the prophets”. Surely, the Pope said, “these people had not listened to the prophets, and they were not listening to Jesus”. Yet theirs “went beyond simple stubbornness. No, it was more! It was the idolatry of their own thought: ‘I see it this way, this is how it must be and there is no other way!’”.

The Pharisees in today’s Gospel “had one single way of thinking and they wanted to impose this way of thinking on the people of God. Jesus therefore reproaches them for laying so many commandments on the backs of the people. He reproaches them for their inconsistency”, which resulted from their way of thinking: “this is how it must be done!”. They had adopted a “theology that was a slave to this one way of thinking”. In the end “there was no possibility for dialogue, for opening oneself to the newness that God heralded through the prophets”. Indeed, “these people killed the prophets” and they “closed the door to God’s promise”.

“The phenomenon of uniform thought” has caused “misfortune throughout human history”, the Pope said. “Over the course of the last century we all saw how the dictatorship of uniform thought ended up killing many, many people”. Those who were responsible for such atrocities were of the mind: “it is impossible to think otherwise, one has to think like this!”

“Today too,” the Pope said, “uniform thought has been made into an idol. Today one has to think in a certain way, and if you don’t think in this way you aren’t modern, you aren’t open”. Or worse, he said, many times “when some governments ask for financial help, we hear them respond: ‘if you want this help you have to think this way and you have to enact this law and that, and that other’”.

Therefore “today, too, a dictatorship of uniform thought exists and this dictatorship is the same” as the one established by the people described in today’s Gospel. The way of acting is the same. There are those today who “take up rocks to stone the freedom of nations, the freedom of the people, freedom of conscience, the people’s relationship with God. And today Jesus is crucified once again”.

Thus, “this is not a story of long ago, of evil Pharisees — but there were also good Pharisees — of certain people who were closed. It is also a story of our own day”. The Pope added that, in the presence of such dictatorships, “the Lord’s advice is always the same: watch and pray”.

Pope Francis concluded his homily exhorting those present “not to be foolish” and to “be humble and pray that the Lord may always grant us the freedom of an open heart, to receive his word which is full of promise and joy! It is the covenant! And with this covenant may we continue on!”