



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Even today people are killed in the name of God

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Pope Francis reflected on the day's Readings from the Acts of the Apostles (5:34-42) and the Gospel of John (6:1-15). His reflection focused on three icons which the Readings depict: the joy of Christian martyrs, Jesus' love for the people, and the hypocrisy of the religious leaders with all their political manoeuvring.

Reflecting on the presence of Christian martyrs in the world today, Pope Francis said: "Today there are many [martyrs]: consider that in several countries you are sent to prison only for carrying the Gospel! You cannot wear a cross, they will make you pay a fine! But their hearts are joyful". The Pope noted that the icon of "the joy of testimony" unites the Apostles with the martyrs of today. Indeed, he said, we read in the Scriptures that when the Apostles were arrested and beaten, they were nonetheless full of joy at having borne witness to the Lord.

In the Gospel the Evangelist John recounts that "a great crowd" followed Jesus "because they saw the signs which he performed on those who were diseased, who were possessed". However, they also followed him in order to listen to him, "because the people said of him: this man speaks with authority! Not like the others, the doctors of the law, the Sadducees, all of these people who speak but without authority". The latter "did not speak powerfully like Jesus ... powerfully, not because Jesus cried out: he was strong in his meekness, in his love, he was strong in the gaze" with which he "looked upon the people with great love". For strength is love: this is Jesus' authority and that is

why “the people followed him”.

The Pope noted that the day’s Gospel passage shows “how Jesus loves the people” and “thinks about the people’s hunger: ‘The people who are here are hungry, how are we going to feed them?’” Jesus “speaks, preaches, loves, accompanies, moves along with the people”, the Pontiff said. He is “meek and humble”. In fact, “when the people, caught up in the enthusiasm of seeing a person so good, who speaks with authority and loves them so much, they wanted to make him king, he stops them. And he tells them: no, not this! And he goes away”. In this way, Jesus truly helped the people.

Pope Francis then moved to the day’s First Reading taken from the Acts of the Apostles, which portrays the disciples in the throes of “problems with the Sanhedrin, when the Sadducees take them into custody after the healing of a sick person”. After the healing, “the high priest with his supporters, i.e. the sect of the Sadducees, who were filled with jealousy, captured the Apostles and threw them into the public prison”. However, the Pope added, “we know that the Angel enabled the Apostles to escape from prison”; and immediately they went to teach in the temple. The reaction of the high priest and his party at this point is to bring the Apostles before the Sanhedrin.

The Pope then said: “I would like to reflect a little on this phrase: full of jealousy. They were full of jealousy because “they could not tolerate the people following Jesus. They could not abide it” and that is why “they were jealous”. It is an ugly attitude, the Pope said: for one passes from jealousy to envy.

And yet, he continued, “these people knew well who Jesus was, they knew” because “they were the same people that had paid the guards to say that the Apostles had stolen the body of Jesus. They paid to silence the truth”. And “when we pay to hide the truth, we are involved in great evil”. The people also knew who these people were and they did not follow them. Rather, “they tolerated them because they had authority: authority over worship, authority over the ecclesiastical discipline at the time, authority over the people”.

“The people followed Jesus”, who said clearly to those in power that they were “laying oppressive burdens on the faithful”. The powerful do not tolerate Jesus’ meekness, they do not tolerate the meekness of the Gospel, they do not tolerate love and they ultimately pay [to silence the truth] out of envy, out of hate.

We ought to compare these two icons, the Pope remarked. The icon of Jesus who felt compassion for the people; for, as the Gospel says, he looked upon the people “as sheep without a shepherd”; and the icon of “these others with their political manoeuvring, with their ecclesiastical manoeuvring to continue to dominate the people”.

We see this attitude repeated in the Acts of the Apostles, the Pope explained. “When they had called in the Apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak the name of Jesus, and let them go”. In short, the Pope noted, “they had to do something” and so they decided “we will give them a good beating and then send them home!”.

They committed an injustice because they considered themselves “masters of consciences” and “they felt they had the power to do so”. Pope Francis added: “today, too, there are many people like this in the world”.

The Pope then confided that he wept at the news of “Christians who have been crucified in a certain non-Christian country”. He stated that “even today there are people who murder and persecute others in the name of God”. However, “today there are also people” who, with the same attitude as the Apostles, “leave the presence of the council, rejoicing that they are counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name of Jesus”.

This, he said, is today’s “third icon”: “the joy of bearing witness”. It is the icon of Christians who say: “We have borne witness to Jesus, we rejoice that we have been counted worthy to suffer dishonour in the name of Jesus”.

These three icons should be considered closely, the Pope said, since they pertain to the central question of the “history of salvation”. Pope Francis concluded his homily once again setting forth these three icons: “Jesus with the people”; in contrast to “the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of the people who imprisoned the people with so many commandments, with cold, hard legality; and who also paid to hide the truth”; but these do not undermine the “joy of Christian martyrs, the joy of so many of our brothers and sisters throughout history who have felt this joy, this gladness at being counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name of Jesus”.