



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

We are all ostiaries

Monday, 12 May 2014

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Pope Francis commented on the day's first Reading from the Acts of the Apostles (11:1-18), which he confided he finds "one of the most beautiful passages" in the Scriptures, and which "has much to teach bishops".

It is strong from the outset, he said: "Now the Apostles and the brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter sent up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, 'Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?'"

In their eyes "this was a real scandal", something they never thought could have happened. Indeed, for them it was unthinkable even to enter a house and sit at table with uncircumcised men, for reasons of impurity. Yet Peter not only did this but he even baptized them. In short, the Pope said, they thought he was was a "madman". Just as if, for example, tomorrow an expedition of Martians came ... green, with long noses and big ears, just like children draw them ... and one were to say, 'I want to be baptized!'. What would happen?

The Acts of the Apostles says that Peter "recounts what had happened, as though it had been the Spirit" who moved him, "the same Spirit who had told Phillip to go and baptize Candace's minister for the economy", as we read in Acts some days ago.

The Spirit “moved Peter to go out”. And Peter obeyed. “We know what happened then,” the Pope said. “Cornelius and his entire household were baptized”. Peter replied to the reproofs of “the brethren of the Church of Jerusalem”, by saying: “if then God gave to them the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus, who was I that I could withstand God?”.

This is a question that challenges each one of us today, the Pope remarked. “For when the Lord shows us the way, who are we to say: no, Lord, it is imprudent, no, ought we to do it this way?” It is Peter who decides and says: “who was I that I could withstand?”. This is truly “a beautiful word for bishops, priests and also for Christians: who are we to close the doors?”. It is no accident that the “ministry of the ostiary” existed in the Church from the earliest times, the doorkeeper who receives people and lets them in; but “there had never been a ministry of a door closer, never!”.

Moreover, the Pope continued, the Lord had told his disciples that he would send “another Paraclete” who “would guide them into all truth”. Therefore, “the Lord leaves the guidance of his Church to the Holy Spirit: it is he who guides us all with the grace received in baptism and in the Sacraments”.

The Holy Spirit did not exhaust his mission on the day of Pentecost, the Pope affirmed. There was “great chaos”, to the point that “they were saying: perhaps these people didn’t have a cafe latte and had a little wine for breakfast!”. Yet “they were not drunk”: indeed, from that day on “the Spirit went ahead, carrying the Church forward”.

The Pope then noted that the behaviour of the Christians of Jerusalem who were good believers was “interesting”. Having once called Peter a “madman”, they listened to his explanation and then “they calmed down and began to glorify God saying: ‘Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life’”.

It is “the Holy Spirit who, as Jesus says, teaches everything”. And does so in a way that causes us to “remember what Jesus has taught us”. The Spirit “is God’s living presence in the Church, it is he who makes the Church go out, who makes the Church always journey on, beyond the limits”. It is he “who guides the Church with his gifts; one cannot understand Jesus’ Church without this Paraclete whom the Lord sends us” and who leads “to these unimaginable choices”. To adopt “a saying of St John XXIII: it is the Holy Spirit who updates the Church and makes her go forward!”.

The Pontiff invited Christians “to ask the Lord for the grace of docility to the Holy Spirit, docility to this Spirit who speaks to us in our heart, speaks to us in the circumstances of our life, speaks to us in ecclesial life, in the Christian community, speaks to us always: go on, decide, do this...”. He also suggested that Christians remember Peter’s question: “who am I that I could withstand the Holy Spirit? Who am I to change the ministry of the ostiary in a Church that, instead of opening, closes doors? Who am I to say ‘here and no further’? Who am I to cage the Holy Spirit?”.

In responding to these questions, the Bishop of Rome expressed his hope that “the Lord may grant us all that calm that the Christians of Judea had” after listening to Peter, and that he “may grant us the grace to glorify God”. The early Christians had said: “to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life”. The Pope therefore concluded praying that God might grant to people who are far from the Church and who perhaps have a negative opinion of her “that they be converted, that they may have life, for the Holy Spirit is supreme.