



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Sinners with white gloves

Tuesday, 17 June 2014

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 25, 20 June 2014)

The exit door for the corrupt is asking forgiveness and doing penance. Pope Francis emphasized this during Holy Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday morning, 17 June. Pope Francis returned to tackle the issue of corruption, reflecting on the day's reading from the First Book of Kings (21:17-29), which recounts the story of the martyr Naboth, and relating it to the ongoing events of corruption that can be found almost daily in the news. When this happens, it is "our Christian duty to seek forgiveness for them", to ask the Lord to "grant them the grace to repent, so that they don't die with a corrupt heart". In other words, "to condemn the corrupt, yes; to ask for the grace not to become corrupt, yes"; but "also to pray for their conversion!"

From the Bible passage, the Holy Father identified three aspects for reflection: the definition of corruption, the destiny of the corrupt, and their opportunity for salvation.

Regarding the first aspect, it is the Prophet Elijah who defines "clearly what makes a corrupt person". In the day's reading, King Ahab, who was responsible for the stoning death of Naboth after Naboth refused to sell his vineyard to the king, is found in that same vineyard. Elijah confronts him with these words: "Have you killed, and also taken possession? ... you have sold yourself...". Indeed, when a corrupt person "goes down this path of corruption, today one thing, tomorrow another. He diminishes his life, he takes something and sells himself, repeatedly", the Bishop of Rome described. It's basically "as if he stops being a person and becomes a piece of

merchandise”. In fact, the corrupt person “actually is a piece of merchandise! Buy and sell: ‘this man, yes, has a high price: you can buy him and then sell him!’. This is the definition: he’s a piece of merchandise!”

Regarding the second aspect — what the Lord will do with the corrupt — the Pope first recalled the three categories discussed in his homily the previous day: “the corrupt politician, the corrupt businessman and the corrupt clergyman”, explaining that “all three harmed the innocent, the poor, because it’s the poor who pay for the feast of the corrupt! They foot the bill”. Thus, regarding the destiny of the corrupt, Pope Francis highlighted that, in the reading, the Lord himself says “clearly what he will do: ‘I will bring evil upon you; I will utterly sweep you away, and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free in Israel... for the anger to which you have provoked me, and because you have made Israel to sin’”. In fact, “the corrupt anger God and make people sin”. This is why the Lord uses harsh words with Ahab, the archetype of all corrupt, when Elijah prophesies that “In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood”. It’s no accident, the Pope continued, that when Mary reads in her hymn of praise, the story of salvation, she says that “the Lord has scattered the proud and put down the mighty from their thrones”. Jesus himself explained the reason: “Any of you who caused scandal, it would be better for you if you were thrown into the sea”. This is precisely the point: “the corrupt scandalize, they scandalize society, scandalize the people of God” and, therefore, “the Lord is a bit angry with the corrupt, because they scandalize, because they exploit the defenseless, enslave them”. Like Ahab, thus, “the corrupt sells himself to do evil, but without knowing: he believes he is selling himself to have more money, more power. But he sells himself to do evil, to kill”.

Of course, the Pope clarified, “when we say: ‘this man is corrupt; this woman is corrupt...’”, we should stop and reflect a moment, asking ourselves whether we can prove our assertion. Because “saying a person is corrupt is saying this: it’s saying that he is condemned; it’s saying that the Lord has kicked him out”. People who deceive, who steal, who kill, they run the risk of being “cursed by God because they’ve exploited the innocent, the defenseless; and they did it with white gloves, from a distance, without getting their hands dirty”.

In every case there is an “exit door for the corrupt”. It’s offered in the same reading: “‘And when Ahab heard those words, he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about dejectedly’. He began to do penance”. The Pontiff compared the experience of Ahab with “that man who was so good, but who fell into corruption: Saint David. ‘I’ve sinned!’ And he cried and did penance; he repented”. Thus “to ask forgiveness” is “the exit door for the corrupt, for corrupt politicians, for corrupt businessmen and for corrupt clergy”. In fact, “this pleases the Lord”: he forgives, but he does so “when the corrupt do what Zacchaeus did: ‘I’ve stolen, Lord. I’ll give back fourfold what I’ve stolen!’”. From this point, the Holy Father invited a concluding prayer for all those who are corrupt, asking forgiveness for them, that they may be granted “the grace to repent”.

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