



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Appearance and truth

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“Jesus condemns people with good manners but bad habits”, because it is one thing to “appear good and beautiful”, but inner truth is something else. In the same way, it isn’t good to be bound exclusively to the letter of the law, because “law alone doesn’t save. Law saves when it leads you to the source of salvation”. During morning Mass at Santa Marta, Pope Francis called for an examination of conscience regarding the state of each Christian’s faith.

The day’s liturgy offered a Reading from the Gospel according to Luke (11:37-41), from which the Pontiff began his homily. He explained Jesus’ attitude with respect to the Pharisee who was scandalized because the Lord did not perform the ritual cleansing before his meal. Christ’s response was grim: “You are so concerned with the outside, with appearance, but inside you are filled with plunder and evil”. The words go along with those from a parallel passage from Matthew, where he speaks of greed and uncleanness and where the Pharisees are compared to “whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness”. In this regard, the Pope underscored that Jesus firmly condemned the Pharisees’ self-confidence in “having fulfilled the law”. He condemned “this cosmetic spirituality”.

This refers to the people “who liked to take walks in the town square”, and to be seen while they prayed, and to wear a dismal face while they fasted. “Why is the Lord like this?”, Francis asked himself, pointing out that, to describe the actions of the Pharisees, the Gospel uses two different but related adjectives: “plunder and evil”. He also explained that this evil is “strongly associated with money”.

The Pontiff then recounted a brief anecdote: “I once heard an elderly preacher of spiritual exercises, who said: “How is sin able to enter the soul? Oh, it’s simple! Through your pockets...”. Money itself is basically “the door” through which corruption enters the heart. This explains why Jesus stated: “Give for alms those things which are within”.

Pope Francis explained that “alms have always been, in the tradition of the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments, the touchstone of justice. A just man, a just woman is always linked to alms”: because with alms we share our own with others, we give what each one “has within”.

And thus the Holy Father returned to the theme of appearance and inner truth. The Pharisees whom Jesus speaks of “believed they were good because they did all that the law commanded should be done”. But law “alone doesn’t save”. Law saves “when it leads you to the source of salvation, when it prepares your heart to receive the true salvation that comes from faith”.

The same concept, the Pope specified, emerges from the day’s First Reading, taken from the Letter of Paul in which he disagrees with the Galatians (5:1-6) because they had been “very attached to the law” and “frightened of the faith” and had “returned to the prescriptions of the law” regarding circumcision. The Apostle’s words are also well suited to our own daily life, because the faith, the Bishop of Rome highlighted, “is not only reciting the Creed: we all believe in the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Spirit, in life everlasting...”. But if our faith is “immobile” and “inactive”, then “it’s of no use”.

Thus, what’s important in Jesus Christ is “the faith which becomes active in charity”. And this brings us back to the theme of alms, intended “in the broadest sense of the word”, in other words, “detached from the dictatorship of cash, from the idolatry of money” because “all greed distances us from Jesus Christ”.

This is why, the Pope explained, throughout the Bible there is “a lot of talk about alms”, whether the “small, everyday” alms or the more important ones. It is necessary, though, to pay attention to two things: we mustn’t “sound the trumpet when giving alms” and we mustn’t limit ourselves to donating only what’s extra. It’s necessary to “strip oneself” and not give “only the leftovers”. It’s important to do as that elderly woman did, “who gave all she had to live”.

One who gives alms and “sounds the trumpet” so that everyone knows “is not a Christian”. This, Francis indicated, is to act as a Pharisee, “it’s hypocritical”. To better illustrate the concept, the

Pope told about what happened once to Fr Pedro Arrupe, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus from 1965 to 1983. In the period that “he was a missionary in Japan”, while seeking offerings for his mission, he received an invitation from an important woman who wanted to make a donation. The woman didn’t receive him in private, but wanted to consign her envelope in front of “journalists who took photographs”. In other words, she “sounded the trumpet”.

Fr Arrupe, recalled the Pontiff, said that he had “suffered great humiliation” and had put up with her only for the good of “the poor of Japan, for the mission”. Once he returned home, he opened the envelope and discovered that there “were ten dollars” inside. If the heart doesn’t change, Pope Francis commented, appearance counts for nothing. And thus concluded his homily. “Today it will do us good to think about how my faith is, how my Christian life is: is it a Christian life of cosmetics, of appearance, or is it a Christian life with a faith which is active in charity?”. Everyone can examine his conscience “before God”. And “it is good for us to do so”.