



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Dried out roots

Tuesday, 28 March 2017

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 14, 7 April 2017)

There is a sin that “paralyzes” people’s hearts, leading them to “live in sadness” and making them “forget joy”. The sin is “sloth”, the attitude that leads people to become like trees with “dried out roots”, lacking the “will to go on”. For them, Jesus’ word is like a shock: “rise!”, pick up your life and “go on!”. The Pope reiterated these words during Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday, 28 March.

The Pontiff’s entire meditation on the liturgy of the day was accompanied by one of the most important recurring symbols in the Bible: water. In the first reading, Ezekiel (47:1-9, 12) “speaks about water, a water that issued from the Temple of God, the water of God, a blessed water”. Indeed, the Pope clarified, it is “a torrent of water, so much water”; a “healing” water. The Prophet describes “many beautiful, green trees” growing “near that water”. They are clearly a symbol that signifies “the grace, love and blessing of God”. These trees “were green, beautiful; they were not dry”. Juxtaposing these words with those of Psalm 1 — “Blessed is the just man because he shall be like a tree planted by streams of water” — we immediately understand the symbolism that applies to the “just and good person”.

Water also appears in the Gospel of John (5:1-16), the Pontiff noted. It is that of the pool of Bethzatha, a pool “which has five porticoes. In these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame,

paralyzed”. According to tradition, Francis explained, every so often an angel would descend from heaven to stir the waters, and the first people to jump in at that moment would be healed. So these people were always there waiting, seeking to be healed.

Among them was a paralyzed man who had been there for 38 years. Jesus, “knew that man’s heart” and knew that he had been there a long time. Thus, Jesus “asked him: ‘Do you want to be healed?’”. First of all, the Pope observed, we should note how beautiful it is that Jesus says to the paralyzed man and, through him, also to those of our time: “Do you want to be healed? Do you want to be happy? Do you want to improve your life? Do you want to be filled with the Holy Spirit? Do you want to be healed?”.

Faced with this question, Francis continued, “all the others who were there, invalids, blind, lame, paralytics, would have said: ‘Yes, Lord, yes!’”. But this was “a strange man” and “he replied to Jesus: ‘Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is troubled, and while I am going another steps down before me’”. His response, in other words, “is a complaint: ‘See Lord, how awful, how unfair life has been to me. All the others can go and be healed; I have been trying for 38 years but...’”.

The Pontiff explained: “This man was like the tree; he was near the water but had dried out roots. He had dried out roots, and those roots did not reach the water; they could not take up the healthfulness of the water”. This reality is easily “understood from his attitude, from his grumbling” and from his always seeking “to blame others: ‘The others always step down before me; I am a poor man, here for 38 years...’”.

This describes “the sin of sloth”, which is an awful sin. This man’s sickness, the Pope said, “was not so much from paralysis, but from sloth, which is even worse than having a lukewarm heart”. Sloth, he continued, is living just to live; it is “not having the will to go on, not having the will to do anything in life”. It is losing “the memory of joy”. Indeed, “this man did not even know the word joy, he had lost it”.

This, the Pope emphasized, is an “awful disease”, which leads one to hide behind justifications such as “I am comfortable like this; I am used to.... Life has been unfair to me...”. Thus, behind the words of the paralyzed man, “we see the resentment, the bitterness of that heart”. Yet “Jesus does not reproach him”. He looks at him and tells him: “Rise, take up your pallet, and walk”. And that man picks up his pallet and goes.

The Gospel narrative continues, indicating that it was the sabbath and that the man went to meet the doctors of the law, who objected: “No, it is not lawful, for the code says that you cannot do this on the sabbath.... Who healed you?”. Referring to Jesus, they continued: “No, because he goes against the code, he is not a man of God”. The Pope then outlined a brief profile of the paralyzed man, one who “did not know how to make do in life”, pointing out that he “did not even say ‘thank

you” to Jesus. He did not even ask his name. The man, in his distinctive “sloth”, simply rose and went off. This detachment shows once again what “an awful sin” sloth is.

This sin, the Pope explained, can affect everyone: it is “living because oxygen, air, is free”; it is “living, always watching others who are happier than me, living in sadness, forgetting joy”. In short, it is “a sin that paralyzes; it makes us paralyzed. It does not let us walk”. To us too, Jesus says: “Rise, take your life as it is; take it up and go on. Do not fear; go on with your pallet — ‘But, Lord, it is not the latest model...’ — Go on, with that pallet”, which may be “ugly, perhaps, but go on! It is your life; it is your joy”.

Thus, the first question the Lord asks everyone today is: “Do you want to be healed?”. And if the answer is “Yes, Lord”, Jesus exhorts: “Rise!”. Thus, the Pontiff concluded, recalling the antiphon of the day’s Mass (“All who are thirsty, come to the waters ... though you have no money, come and drink with joy”), if “we say to the Lord: ‘Yes, I want to be healed. Yes, Lord, help me; I want to get up’, we will know what the joy of salvation is”.