



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

In the sign of the Cross

Tuesday, 4 April 2017

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 17, 28 April 2017)

“Making the sign of the Cross” in a distracted way, and showing off “the symbol of Christians” as if it were “the emblem of a football team” or an “ornament”, with precious stones and gold, has nothing to do with the “mystery” of Christ. Pope Francis offered this reflection in his homily on Tuesday morning, 4 April. The Pontiff called for an examination of conscience to consider precisely the Cross, to reflect on the way that each of us brings the only “instrument of Salvation” into our daily lives.

Referring to the day’s reading from the Gospel according to John (8:21-30), the Pope observed how striking it was that, “in this short Gospel passage, Jesus tells the teachers of the law, the scribes, several Pharisees three times: ‘you will die in your sins’”. He repeats this three times “because they did not understand the mystery of Jesus, because their hearts were closed and they were not capable of opening up a little, to try to understand that mystery which was the Lord”. In fact, the Pontiff explained, “dying in one’s own sin is a bad thing”, he continued, as “it means that everything ends there, in the filth of sin”.

However, “this dialogue, in which Jesus repeats three times: ‘you will die in your sins’, continues and, in the end, Jesus looks back to the story of Salvation and reminds them of something: ‘When

you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority”’. Thus, “the Lord actually says, ‘when you have lifted up the Son of Man’”, Francis pointed out.

Jesus’ words, the Pontiff observed, recall “what happened in the desert, which we heard about in the first reading (Num 21:4-9). The weary people, the people who cannot bear the journey, drift away from the Lord, speak ill of Moses and the Lord, and find those snakes which bite and kill”. Thus, “the Lord tells Moses to build a serpent out of bronze ‘and set it on a pole; and every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live’”.

The serpent, Francis explained, “is the symbol of evil; it is the symbol of the devil: he was the most astute of all the animals in the earthly paradise”. Indeed, “the serpent can seduce with lies”; he is the “father of lies: this is the mystery”. Thus, “should we look to the devil to be saved?”, the Pontiff asked. “The serpent is the father of sin, the one who caused humanity to sin”. In reality, “Jesus says: ‘When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he’. Obviously this is the mystery of the Cross”, the Pontiff stressed.

“The bronze serpent brought healing, but the bronze serpent was a sign of two things”: on the one hand, “the sin committed by the serpent, the seduction by the serpent, the astuteness of the serpent”; and on the other, “the sign of Christ’s Cross. It was a prophecy”, Francis explained. “This is why the Lord says to them: ‘when you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he’”. We could say, the Pope added, that “Jesus ‘made himself to be serpent’; Jesus ‘made himself to be sin’, and took upon himself all of humanity’s filth, all the filth of sin; and ‘he made himself to be sin’; he let himself be lifted up so that all people could look at him, the people wounded by sin: us. This is the mystery of the Cross. Paul says: ‘he made himself to be sin’, and he took the appearance of the father of sin, of the astute serpent”.

“Those who did not look at the bronze serpent after being bitten by a serpent in the desert, died in their sin, the sin of grumbling against God and against Moses”, Pope Francis explained. At the same time, “those who, like the serpent, do not recognize in that upraised man the strength of God who

made himself to be sin in order to heal us, will die in their sins”. Because “salvation comes only from the Cross, but from this Cross which is God made flesh: there is no salvation in ideas; there is no salvation in willingness, in wanting to be good”. In fact, the Pope continued, “the only true salvation is in Christ Crucified, because”, as symbolized by the bronze serpent, “only He could take on all the poison of sin, and thereby, healed us”, Francis explained.

“But what is the Cross for us?”, the Pontiff asked. “It is the sign of Christians; it is the symbol of Christians, and we make the sign of the Cross, but we do not always do so correctly. Sometimes we do it like this ...”, the Pope gestured, “because we do not have faith in the Cross”, the Pope said. “For some people, it is a badge of belonging: ‘yes I wear the Cross to show that I am Christian’”. And “this is fine”, he said; however, “not only as an emblem, as if it were a team, a

team emblem”, but rather, “as a reminder of the One who made himself to be sin, who made himself to be devil, serpent for us; who abased himself to the point of complete annihilation”.

“Others wear the Cross as an ornament; they wear crosses with precious stones to be seen”, Francis said. But, he continued, “God said to Moses, ‘whoever looks at the serpent shall be healed’; Jesus tells his enemies, ‘when you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he’”. Therefore, “those who do not look at the Cross with faith shall die in their own sin, they will not receive salvation”.

“Today, the Church suggests a dialogue with this mystery of the Cross, with this God who made himself to be sin, out of love for me. Each one of us can say, ‘out of love for me’”, the Pontiff continued, adding that we should ask ourselves the following questions: “How do I carry the Cross? — as a reminder? When I make the sign of the Cross, am I aware of what I am doing? How do I wear the Cross? — only as a symbol of belonging to a religious group? How do I wear the Cross? — as an ornament, a piece of gold jewelry with many precious stones?”. Or, “have I learned to carry it on my shoulders, where it hurts?”.

The Holy Father concluded with a prayer that “each of us today look at this God who made himself to be sin so that we do not die in our sins, and answer these questions which I have suggested to you”.