



# The Holy See

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POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE  
*DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ*

*Rigid but honest*

*Friday, 5 May 2017*

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 20, 19 May 2017)

Pope Francis called for prayer for Christian “hypocrites” who today, with their “double life”, concealing “sins and personality flaws”, are blinded by rigidity, such that they do not look anyone in the eye, not even children. This was the Pontiff’s focus at Mass on Friday morning, 5 May, where he also spoke of people in the Church, particularly young people, who have fallen into the “temptation of rigidity” but, although they are wrong, at least they are “honest”. The Pope prayed “that the Lord help them grow on the path of gentleness”.

Francis drew inspiration for his homily from the day’s reading from the Acts of the Apostles (9:1-20), which “we have heard many times”. Perhaps, he added, “considering what happened to Saul”, we might have said that “it would do this person good to fall off the horse”.

“The first time Saul’s name appears is in the stoning of Stephen”, the Pontiff explained. Saul “was a rigid, idealistic youth, with the rigidity of law that he had learned at the school of Gamaliel”. And “he was convinced about this: that is why he was there, watching as Stephen — who, in [Saul’s] opinion, had committed the sin of blasphemy — was stoned”. And Saul “approved of the stoning, the Book says”.

Saul, a “rigid young man, was honest”. He was “wrong! — but honest”, the Pope pointed out. “He believed and he acted”. However, at “times Jesus had to condemn rigid people who were not

honest". And with regard to "those doctors of the law, he tells us to 'do as they say, but not as they do'". Indeed, Francis continued, there are rigid people who lead a "double life: they come across as nice, honest, but when no one is looking they do bad things".

This was not Saul's way, however. "This young man was honest: he sincerely believed". And, Francis confided, "I think — when I say this, about many young people who have fallen into the temptation of rigidness, today, in the Church — some are honest; they are good. We must pray that the Lord help them grow on the path of gentleness". Surely, the Pontiff also noted, "others use rigidness to cover weaknesses, sins, personality flaws, and they use rigidness to rank themselves above others".

Pope Francis observed that Saul was always "honest, rigid", and "he had zeal for the law: he encouraged threats and bloodshed against the Lord's disciples". Because to him, what the Apostles were preaching was "heresy", and not to be tolerated. Thus, Saul "went to the high priest", we read in the Acts, "and asked for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem". However, Saul "at least let the children live", said Pope Francis, noting that "today, not even this" can be counted on.

Thus, "with this zeal", the Pope continued, Saul "went to Damascus to arrest Christians in order to bring them in chains to be judged, and if necessary, even stoned". And this was the reason for "the meeting between that man who encourages threats and bloodshed and another man who speaks with a language of gentleness: 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'". And Saul responded, "Who are you, Lord?". And, with gentleness, came the reply: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do".

Thus, "the rigid youth, who had become a rigid — but honest! — man, became as a child", allowing himself to be "led where the Lord had called him". This is "the power of the Lord's gentleness". Saul, who was "blind after this vision", had to be led "by the hand to Damascus". With his "honesty, he did not grumble: he stayed silent". And "since he knew the law, he knew that the path was prayer and fasting, and for three days he prayed and fasted: blind, in the dark, waiting".

Then, enter the "elderly Ananias, who grumbles a bit" to the Lord because he heard what Saul had done to Christians in Jerusalem. But the Lord's mandate to Ananias was clear: "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name".

Jesus, the Pope observed, "does not tell Paul, 'come with me, I will make you king; I will give you power'". On the contrary, he says: "you will suffer", and "Paul assents". Thus, "the power of the Lord's grace meets Paul's honesty". And "in this way, this man preaches to others about his experience, from one side to the other: persecuted, with many problems, even in the Church, he

even had to endure Christians quarreling amongst themselves”. But, Pope Francis continued, “he, who had persecuted the Lord with zeal for the law, will say to Christians: to the extent that you have distanced yourselves from the Lord, you have sinned, with your mind, with your body, with everything — with the same members now be perfect: give glory to God”.

Thus, “there is a dialogue among sufficiency, rigidness and gentleness”, the Pontiff explained. In other words, “the dialogue between an honest man and Jesus, who speaks to him with kindness: thus begins the story of this man whom we met as a youth, in the stoning of Stephen, and who will end up being betrayed”. Perhaps “to some people, this man’s life is a ‘failure’: look how he ended up!”. To others, too, “Jesus’ life is a ‘failure’”, seeing “how he ended up”. But “this is the way of Christians: going forward on the footprints that Jesus left, footprints of preaching, footprints of suffering, a trail to the Cross, a trail to the Resurrection”.

The Pope then, “in a special way”, entrusted to the intercession of Saul “the rigid people who are in the Church”, as well as those like Saul, who are “rigid” but “honest, who have zeal, but are wrong”, and even the “rigid hypocrites, those who live a double life, those to whom Jesus said: ‘do as they say, but not as they do’”. Thus, Pope Francis concluded, today, “let us pray for the rigid”.