



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Two kinds of persecution

Tuesday, 12 April 2016

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There are two types of Christian persecution, the Pope said on Tuesday morning, during Mass at Santa Marta. There is the explicit kind — to which he related to the martyrs killed at Easter in Pakistan — and the sort of persecution that is polite, disguised as culture, modernity and progress, and which ends up taking away man's freedom and even the right to conscientious objection. But in the very suffering of persecution, Francis recalled, Christians know that the Lord is always at their side.

For his meditation the Pontiff drew inspiration from the first reading, taken from the Acts of the Apostles (7:51-8:1). We heard about “the martyrdom of Stephen”, he explained. “The tradition of the Church calls him the Protomartyr, the first martyr of the Christian community”. However, even “before him there had been child martyrs” who had suffered persecution under Herod. “From that time until today there have been martyrs in the Church, there have been and there are”. There are “men and women persecuted simply for confessing and for saying that Jesus Christ is Lord: this is prohibited!”. Indeed, this confession “at certain times, in certain places, provokes persecution”.

This is clearly manifest, the Pope stated, “in the passage of the Acts of the Apostles that we will read tomorrow: after the martyrdom of Stephen, a great persecution broke out in Jerusalem”.

Then, “all the Christians fled, only the Apostles remained”. Thus, persecution, Francis said, “is the daily bread of the Church: after all, Jesus said so”.

When we are tourists in Rome, the Pope continued, “we go to the Colosseum and think of the martyrs killed there by lions”. However, martyrs are not limited to those in the Colosseum. In reality, martyrs “are men and women of every day: present day, with Easter Sunday just three weeks ago”. Francis’ thought went to “those Christians who were celebrating Easter in Pakistan”. They were “martyred just for celebrating the Risen Christ”. And “thus the history of the Church continues with her martyrs”. Because “the Church is the community of believers, the community of confessors, of those who profess that Jesus is Christ. Indeed, the Church is the community of martyrs”.

Persecution, the Pope noted, “is one of the characteristics, one of the traits of Church, pervading her entire history”. And “persecution is cruel, like that of Stephen, like that of our Pakistani brothers and sisters three weeks ago”. It is cruel “the way Saul was cruel at the death of Stephen”. Saul “went into houses, seized Christians and took them away to be judged”.

There is, however, also “another kind of persecution that is not often spoken about”, Francis noted. The first form of persecution “is due to confessing the name of Christ” and it is thus “a clear, explicit type of persecution”. The other kind of persecution is “disguised as culture, disguised as modernity, disguised as progress: it is a kind of — I would say somewhat ironically — polite persecution”. You can recognize “when someone is persecuted not for confessing Christ’s name, but for wanting to demonstrate the values of the Son of God”. Thus, it is a kind of “persecution against God the Creator in the person of his children”.

In this way “we see every day that the powerful make laws that force people to take this path, and a nation that does not follow this modern collection of laws, or at least that does not want to have them in its legislation, is accused, is politely persecuted”. This is a form of “persecution that takes away man’s freedom”, and even the right to “conscientious objection! God made us free, but this kind of persecution takes away freedom!”. Thus, “if you don’t do this, you will be punished: you’ll lose your job and many other things, or you’ll be set aside”.

“This is the persecution of the world”, the Pontiff continued. And “this persecution even has a leader”. In the persecution of Stephen, “the leaders were the scribes, the doctors of the law, the high priests”. On the other hand, “Jesus named the leader of polite persecution: the prince of this world”. We see him “when the powerful want to impose attitudes, laws against the dignity of the children of God, persecute them and oppose God the Creator: it is the great apostasy”. Thus, “Christian life continues with these two kinds of persecution”, but also with the certainty that “the Lord promised not to distance himself from us: ‘Be careful, be careful! Don’t fall into the worldly spirit. Be careful! But go forward, I will be with you’”.

In his concluding prayer, Francis asked the Lord for “the grace to understand that a Christian’s path must always persevere amid both kinds of persecution: a Christian is a martyr, that is, a witness, one who must bear witness to Christ who has saved us”. This means “on the journey of life, bearing witness to God the Father, who created us”. On this path a Christian “must suffer many times: this brings so much suffering”. But “such is our life: Jesus is always beside us, with the consolation of the Holy Spirit”. And “this is our strength”.