



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

From sadness to joy

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“Don’t be afraid”, especially in difficult moments: this was the message that Pope Francis offered in his homily, reflecting on the readings of the day: the Acts of the Apostles (18:9-18) and the Gospel of John (16:20-23). It was a message of hope to spur us on to be brave and to have “peace of soul”, especially when tested — in sickness, in persecution, in daily familial problems — certain that we will later live true joy, because “after the darkness, the sun always shines”.

In this regard the Pope quickly pointed to St Paul’s witness — a “very courageous” man — presented in the reading. Paul, he explained, “had done many things because he had the strength of the Lord, his vocation to carry forth the Church, to preach the Gospel”. Although it seems that even he was afraid at times, such that the Lord said to him one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid” (Acts 18:9).

Therefore, even St Paul “felt what we all feel at times in our lives”, that is, “a bit of fear”. A fear that leads us to even rethink our Christian life, to ask ourselves, in the midst of many problems, if perhaps in the end “wouldn’t it be better to lower the bar a bit”, to be “not so Christian”, to find “a compromise with the world” so that “things wouldn’t be so difficult”.

St Paul, however, who “knew that neither the Hebrews nor the pagans liked what he was doing”, did not apply this line of reasoning. And the Acts of the Apostles describe the consequences: he was taken before the tribunal, and then came the persecution and other problems. All of this, the Pope continued, come back to us “in our fears, in our despair”. We begin to wonder whether fear comes from being Christian. The Pope then recalled, “Jesus himself had fear. Consider the prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: ‘Father, let this cup pass from me’. He was filled with anguish”. But Jesus also said: “Do not be afraid, go forth!”. This is precisely what he speaks of in his farewell to the disciples, when he tells them definitively in the Gospel of John: “You will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice” (16:20-23). What’s more, they will mock you.

This, accordingly, then happened. “Let’s think about the spectacles in the Colosseum, for example, with the first martyrs” who were forced to “die as the people were entertained”, saying: “This is how these fools who believe in the Risen One end up”. For many, Christian martyrdom “was a party — to see how they die!”. Thus, it happened exactly as Jesus told his disciples: “the world will rejoice” while “you will be sorrowful”.

There is, thus, “Christian fear, Christian sorrow”. The Holy Father then explained that “we must be honest with ourselves: not all of Christian life is a party. Not all of it! We cry, we often cry!”. There are many difficult situations in life — he noted, for example, “when you are sick, when you have a problem in your family, with a son or a daughter, with your husband or wife. When you see that your wages don’t last to the end of the month, when you have a sick child, or you see that you can’t pay the mortgage and you lose your house”. We have “many problems”. Yet “Jesus tells us: do not be afraid!”.

There is also “another sorrow”, Pope Francis added, “which happens to all of us when we go down the wrong path” or when “to put it simply, we ... try to buy joy, worldly happiness, the sinful kind”, and “in the end there is an emptiness inside us, there is sorrow”. And this is truly “the sorrow of malicious happiness”.

But although the Lord doesn’t conceal this sorrow, he leaves us not only with this word; instead, he goes on and says: “But if you are faithful, your sorrow will become joy”. This is the key point: “Christian joy is a hopeful joy. But in the moment of trial we do not see it”. Indeed, it is “a joy that is purified by trials, even by everyday trials”. The Lord says: “your sorrow will turn into joy”. A difficult discourse to make understandable, the Pope recognized. It is seen, for example, “when you go to the home of someone who is ill, a sick person who is really suffering, to say: “cheer up, be strong, tomorrow you will have joy!”. This allows that suffering person to feel “as though you let them hear Jesus”. This is “an act of faith in the Lord” and it is for us as well “when we are really in the dark and cannot see a thing”. An act that lets us say: “I know, Lord, that this sorrow will turn to joy. I don’t know how, but I know it will!”.

These days, Pope Francis observed, during the liturgy the Church celebrates the moment in which

“the Lord went away and left the disciples alone”. In that moment, “perhaps some of them felt afraid”. But in everyone “there is hope, the hope that the fear, that the sorrow will turn to joy”. And “to make us really understand that this is true, the Lord gives the example of a woman giving birth”, explaining that “Yes, it is true that a woman suffers in childbirth, but then when the baby is with her, she forgets” about all the pain. And “what remains is the joy”, the joy “of Jesus” a joy purified in the fire of trials, of persecutions, of all that one must do to be faithful”. This only “is the joy that remains, a joy hidden in a few of life's moments, which is not felt in the difficult times, but which comes afterward”. And this is “a hopeful joy”.

This, then, is “the Church’s message today: Do not be afraid”, be “brave in suffering, and understand that afterward comes the Lord; afterward comes joy; after the darkness comes the sun”. The Pontiff then expressed the hope that “the Lord gives all of us this hopeful joy. He also explained that peace is “the sign that we have this hopeful joy”. Bearing witness to this “peace of soul” are especially the many “sick people at the end of life, in pain”. Because “this peace”, concluded the Pope, “is the seed of joy, hopeful joy”. If in fact “you have peace of soul in times of darkness, in times of difficulty, in times of persecution, when everyone is enjoying your pain”, it is a clear sign that “you have the seed of the hopeful joy that will come”.