



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

A still small voice

Friday, 13 June 2014

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Before entrusting us with a mission the Lord prepares us, putting us to the test with a process of purification and perception. In his homily at Holy Mass on Friday morning, 13 June, the Pope reflected on the story of the prophet Elijah (1 Kgs 19:11-16) and the fundamental rule of Christian life.

“In the first reading, we heard the story of Elijah”, said the Pontiff, and about “how the Lord prepares a prophet, how he works in his heart so this man may be faithful to his word and do what the Lord wishes”.

The prophet Elijah “was a strong person, of great faith. He reproached the people for worshipping God and worshipping idols: if you have worshipped idols, you have worshipped God poorly! And if you have worshipped God, you have worshipped the idols poorly!” This is why Elijah said that the people limped “with both feet”, were unstable and weren’t solid in their faith. He was brave in his mission, in the end posing a challenge on Mount Carmel to the priests of Baal, whom he defeated. “And to finish the story he killed everyone”, thus putting an end to the idolatry “in that part of the people of Israel”. So Elijah was “pleased that the Lord’s strength was with him”.

However, continued the Pope, “the following day, Queen Jezebel — who was the king’s wife, but it was she who ruled — threatened him and told him she would kill him”. In the face of this threat,

Elijah “was very afraid and depressed: he left and wanted to die”. The very same prophet who, the previous day “had been so brave and had defeated” the priests of Baal, “today is down, doesn’t want to eat, wants to die, so deep was his depression”. And all this, the Pope explained, “because of a woman’s threat”. Thus “the 400 priests of the idol Baal didn’t scare him, but this woman did!”

This is a story that “shows us how the Lord prepares” for the mission. Depressed, Elijah went into the wilderness “and he lay down and waited to die. But the Lord called him” and told him to eat a bit of bread and to drink because, he told him, “you still have a long way to walk”. And so Elijah “ate, drank, but then he lay down once again to die. And the Lord once again called him: go on, go on!”

The problem is that Elijah “didn’t know what to do, but heard that he had to climb the mountain to find God. And he was brave and he went there, with the humility of obedience. Because he was obedient”. Despite his discomfort and “great fear”, Elijah “climbed the mountain to wait for God’s message, God’s revelation: he prayed, because he was good, but he didn’t know what would happen. He didn’t know, he was there and he waited for the Lord”.

This is written in the Old Testament: “a great and strong wind rent the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind”. Elijah, the Pope commented, “perceived that the Lord wasn’t there”. The Scripture continues: “and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake”. Pope Francis indicated that Elijah “knew how to discern that the Lord wasn’t in the earthquake and wasn’t in the wind”. The First Book of Kings continues: “and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice”. And “when Elijah heard it”, he realized it was the Lord passing by and “he wrapped his face in his mantle” and worshipped the Lord.

Indeed, affirmed the Bishop of Rome, “the Lord wasn’t in the wind, the earthquake or the fire, but was in that still small voice: in the peace”. In other words, “the Lord was in a sonorous thread of silence”.

Elijah thus “knows how to perceive where the Lord is and the Lord prepares him with the gift of perception”. Then he bestows his mission: “You’ve taken the test, you’ve been put to the test of depression”, in being down, “in the hunger; you’ve been put to the test of perception” but now — we read in Scripture “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria; and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel; and Elisha...”.

This was precisely the mission that Elijah was waiting for, the Pope explained. And the Lord put him through that long course of trials to prepare him for the mission. Perhaps one could argue, it would have been “much easier to say: you were very brave in killing those 400 men, now go and anoint this one!” Instead, “the Lord prepares the soul, he prepares the heart” and he does this

through trials, obedience and perseverance.

And “thus is Christian life”, the Pontiff said pointedly. Indeed, “when the Lord wants to give us a mission, he wants to give us a task, he prepares us to do it well”, just “like he prepared Elijah”. The important thing is “not that you’ve encountered the Lord” but “the whole journey to accomplish the mission that the Lord entrusted to you”. And this is precisely “the difference between the apostolic mission that the Lord gives us and a good, honest, human task”. Thus “when the Lord bestows a mission, he always employs a process of purification, a process of perception, a process of obedience, a process of prayer”. Thus, he reiterated, “it’s the Christian life”, that is “devotion to this process, to let ourselves be guided by the Lord”.

A great lesson springs from Elijah’s story. The prophet “was afraid, and this is very human”, because Jezebel “was a wicked queen who killed her enemies”. Elijah “is afraid, but the Lord is more powerful” and makes him understand that he “needs the Lord’s help in preparing for the mission”. Thus, Elijah “walks, obeys, suffers, perceives, prays and finds the Lord”. Pope Francis ended with a prayer: “May the Lord grant us the grace to allow ourselves to prepare every day on the walk of our life, so we may witness the salvation of Jesus”.