



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Christians who can humble themselves

Tuesday, 24 June 2014

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 26, 27 June 2014)

Prepare, discern, decrease. These three verbs describe the spiritual experience of St John the Baptist, who came before the Messiah “preaching the baptism of conversion” to the people of Israel. During Mass on the Solemnity of the Nativity of John the Baptist, Pope Francis wished to once again set forth this trinominal as the paradigm of every Christian’s vocation, incorporating it within three expressions which refer to the Baptist’s attitude toward Jesus: “After me, before me, away from me”.

John worked above all to “prepare, taking nothing for himself”. The Pontiff recalled that he “was an important man: the people sought him and followed him”, because his words “were strong” like “a sharp sword”, according to the expression of Isaiah (49:2). The Baptist “reached the hearts” of the people. And if “perhaps he felt tempted to believe he was important, he never gave in to it”, as demonstrated by his response to the experts who asked him if he were the Messiah: “I am a voice, only a voice”, he said, “of one crying in the wilderness. I am only a voice, but I come to prepare the way to the Lord”. His first job, thus, was “to prepare the hearts of the people for an encounter with the Lord”.

But who is the Lord? The answer to this question lies in “John’s second vocation: to discern who the Lord was among so many good people”. And, as the Pope observed, “the Spirit revealed this to him”. Therefore, “he had the courage to say: ‘This is the one. This is the lamb of God, who takes

away the sins of the world”. While in preparing John said, “After me one will be coming...”, in discerning, in knowing how to discern and point out the Lord, he said: “This is the one... who was before me”.

This is where “John’s third vocation: to decrease” comes in, because, as the Bishop of Rome recalled, precisely “from that moment of his life he began to humble himself, to decrease so that the Lord would increase, to the point of allowing himself to be humiliated”. This was, Pope Francis noted, “John’s most difficult milestone, because the Lord had a manner that he hadn’t imagined, at which point in the prison” in which Herod Antipas had locked him, “he suffered not only the darkness of the cell but the darkness of his heart”. He was assailed by doubts: “But is he the one? Have I made a mistake?” So much so, the Pope continued, that he sent his disciples to Jesus to ask him: “Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?”.

The Pope emphasized that “John’s humiliation is twofold: the humiliation of his death, as the price of a whim”, but also the humiliation of not being able to glimpse “the history of salvation: the humiliation of the darkness of the spirit”. This man who “had proclaimed the Lord’s coming after him”, “had seen him before him”, “knew how to await him, knew how to discern”, now “sees Jesus far away. That promise has become distant. And he ends up alone, in the dark, in humiliation”; not because he loved to suffer but “so that the Lord would increase”. He ended up “humiliated but with his heart at peace”.

In conclusion, Pope Francis declared: “It’s beautiful to think of the Christian vocation like this”. In fact, “a Christian doesn’t proclaim himself, he proclaims another, he prepares the path to another: to the Lord”. In addition, “he must know how to discern, he must understand how to discern the truth from what may resemble the truth but is not: he must be a person of discernment”. Finally, “he must be a person who knows how to humble himself so the Lord may increase in the hearts and souls of others”.