



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Speakers without authority

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People need a “good shepherd” who knows how to understand and touch the heart. Just like Jesus does. And it’s him that we have to follow closely, without being influenced by those who “speak about abstractions or moral casuistry”, from the many who “faithlessly negotiate everything with the politically and economically powerful”, from the “revolutionaries” who seek to start “so-called wars of liberation” based on politics or on a thinking far removed from the people.

Pope Francis focused on these four approaches during his Mass on Thursday, 26 June. The Pontiff highlighted, first of all, the truly vast number of people who followed Jesus: “Let’s consider the day of the multiplication of the loaves, there were more than five thousand”. There were people who followed Jesus closely, “along the way”. And the Gospel explains that they followed him “because Jesus’ words astonished their hearts: the astonishment of finding something good, great”. Jesus “indeed taught them as one with authority, not like their scribes”. The day’s reading from the Gospel of Matthew (7:21-29) speaks of this astonishment.

The Pope recounted that “the people needed teachers, preachers, experts with authority”. That those who “had no authority” spoke, but their words failed to reach the people, “they were far removed from the people”. The word was that Jesus, instead, “spoke in a way that touched the heart of the people, and which answered their questions”.

Pope Francis chose to speak about “these scribes, who in that time spoke to the people” but “whose message didn’t reach the heart of the people, and the people heard them and left”. He described four types.

Surely “the best known group was the Pharisees”, the Pope continued. He highlighted, however, that “there were also good Pharisees”. But “when Jesus referred to the Pharisees, he spoke about those who were bad, not the good ones”. They were people who “practised rituals of God, of religion, a series of commandments” and out of ten “they made more than 300!”. In short “they loaded this weight on the people’s shoulders” ‘You must do this! You have to!’”. They reduced faith in the living God to casuistry, ending in “contradictions of the cruellest casuistry”. And the people, for their part, “respected them, because people are respectful, but they didn’t listen to these casuistic preachers”.

Another group the Pope referred to “were the Sadducees: this group had no faith, they had lost the faith”. And thus, “they carried out their religious function by making deals with the powerful: politically powerful, economically powerful”. In short, “they were men of power and they bargained with everyone”. However, “the people didn’t follow them either”.

“A third group was that of the revolutionaries”, the Pope explained. In that era they were often called zealots. They were the ones who wanted a “revolution to free the people of Israel from the Roman occupation”. Thus, “there were also guerillas there”, but “people have common sense and know how to tell when the fruit is ripe and when it isn’t”. And so, “they didn’t follow them”.

Finally, “the fourth group” was made up of good people: the Essenes. The Pope described that “they were monks, good people who consecrated the life of God: they practised contemplation and prayer in the monasteries”. But “they were far from the people and the people couldn’t follow them”.

Thus, the Pope recounted, “these were the voices that reached the people”. Yet “none of these voices had the power to warm the heart of the people”. Jesus, on the other hand, managed to do so. And this is why “the crowds were astonished: they heard Jesus and the heart was warm”, because his message “touched the heart” and he “taught as a person with authority”. In fact, Pope Francis continued, “Jesus drew close to the people; Jesus healed the heart of the people; Jesus understood the problems of the people; Jesus wasn’t ashamed to talk to the sinners, he went to visit them; Jesus felt joy, he was pleased to go and be with his people”. And Jesus himself explains “why”, the Pope indicated, referring to the Gospel of John: “I am the good shepherd. My sheep hear my voice and they follow me”.

And this is “precisely why the people followed Jesus: because he was the good shepherd”. Certainly, the Bishop of Rome stated, “he wasn’t a casuistic and moralistic Pharisee; nor a Sadducee who made political deals with the powerful; nor a guerilla who sought the political

freedom of his people; nor a contemplative from a monastery. He was a shepherd". He "spoke the language of his people, he made himself understood, he spoke the truth, the matters of God: he never negotiated the matters of God. But he spoke of them in such a way that the people loved the matters of God. This is why they followed him".

Another key point the Pope emphasized is that "Jesus never distances himself from the people, and he never distances himself from his Father: he was one with the Father". And he thus had "this authority and this is why the people followed him".

"Contemplating Jesus the Good Shepherd" is precisely the time to examine the conscience: "Who am I pleased to follow? Those who speak to me about abstractions and moral casuistry? Those who call themselves people of God, but who have no faith and who negotiate everything with the politically and economically powerful? Those who always want to do strange things, destructive things, so-called wars of liberation, but who in the end aren't on the path of the Lord? Or with a faraway contemplative?".

Here then is the key question to ask ourselves: "Who am I pleased to follow? Who influences me?". A question which, Francis concluded, must push us to ask "God, the Father, that he allow us to be close to Jesus, to follow Jesus, to be astonished by what Jesus tells us.