



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Foolish Christians

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Being Christian means being “a bit foolish”, at least according to worldly logic. And this is by no means self-reflexive, since one cannot manage to do anything alone, and it is actually not to frighten us but to rescue us that the grace of God comes. During morning Mass, Pope Francis proposed these basic features of Christian life which are centred on the newness of the Gospel and which overturn worldly criteria.

Advising that Chapter Six of the Gospel according to St Luke — the day’s liturgy focused on verses 27-38 in particular — be read and reread, even four times if necessary, the Pontiff recalled that Jesus gave us “the law of love: to love God and to love one another as brothers”. And, the Pope added, the Lord did not fail to explain it “a bit further, with the Beatitudes” which nicely summarize “the Christian approach”.

In the day’s Gospel passage, however, Jesus goes a step further, explaining in greater detail “to those who surround Him to hear Him”. Let us look, said Pope Francis, first of all at the “verbs Jesus uses: love; do good; bless; pray; offer; do not refuse; give”. The Pope continued that, with these words, “Jesus shows us the path that we must take, a path of generosity”. He asks us first and foremost to “love”. And we ask, “whom must I love?”. He answers us, “your enemies”. And, with surprise, we ask for confirmation: “our actual enemies?”. “Yes”, the Lord tells us, actually “your enemies!”.

But the Lord also asks us to “do good”. And if we do not ask him, “to whom?”, He tells us straight away, “to those who hate us”. And this time too, we ask the Lord for confirmation: “But must I do good to those who hate me?”. And the Lord’s reply is again, “yes”.

Then he even asks us to “bless those who curse us”. And to “pray” not only “for my mama, for my dad, my children, my family”, but “for those who abuse us”. And “not to refuse anyone who begs from you”. The “newness of the Gospel”, the Pope explained, lies in the “giving of oneself, giving the heart, to those who actually dislike us, who harm us, to our enemies”. The passage from Luke reads: “And as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?”. It would merely be an “exchange: you love me, I love you”. But Jesus reminds us that “even sinners” — and by sinners he means pagans — “love those who love them”. This is why, Francis pointed out, “there is no credit”.

The passage continues: “And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same”. Again, the Pope said, it is simply “an exchange: I do good to you, you do good to me!”. And yet the Gospel adds: “And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you?”. The Pontiff’s clear-cut response: no credit, because “it’s a bargain”. St Luke then indicates, “even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again”.

All of Jesus’ reasoning, Pope Francis affirmed, leads to a firm conclusion: “Love your enemies instead. Do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Without interest. And your reward will be great”. And thus “you will be sons of the Most High”.

It is therefore evident, the Pope continued, that “the Gospel is a new message that is difficult to carry forward”. In a word, it means “go behind Jesus”. Follow him. Imitate him. Jesus does not answer his Father by saying, “I shall go and say a few words, I shall make a nice speech, I shall point the way and then come back”. No, Jesus’ response to the Father is: “I shall do your will”. And indeed, in the Mount of Olives he says to the Father: “Thy will be done”. And thus “he gives his life, not for his friends” but “for his enemies!”.

The Christian way is not easy, the Pope recognized, but “this is it”. Therefore, to those who say, “I don’t feel like doing this”, the response is “if you don’t feel like it, that’s your problem, but this is the Christian way. This is the path that Jesus teaches us”, the Pontiff said. This is the reason to “take the path of Jesus, which is mercy: be merciful as your Father is merciful”. Because “only with a merciful heart can we do all that the Lord advises us, until the end”. And thus it is obvious that “the Christian life is not a self-reflexive life” but “it comes outside of itself to give to others: it is a gift, it is love, and love does not turn back on itself, it is not selfish: it gives itself!”.

The passage of St Luke concludes with the invitation not to judge and to be merciful. However, the Pontiff said, “it often seems that we have been appointed judges of others: gossiping, criticizing, we judge everyone”. But Jesus tells us: “Judge not and you will not be judged; condemn not, and

you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven". And so, "we say it every day in the Our Father: forgive us as we forgive". In fact "if I do not first forgive, how can I ask the Father to forgive me?".

There is also, the Pope said, another really beautiful image in the Gospel reading: "Give and it will be given to you". And here "Jesus' heart can be seen to grow and he makes this promise which is perhaps an image of heaven". The Christian life, as Jesus presents it, seems truly to be "folly", Francis indicated. St Paul himself speaks of "the folly of the cross of Christ, which is not part of the wisdom of the world". For this reason "to be a Christian is to become a bit foolish, in a certain sense". And "to renounce that worldly shrewdness in order to do all that Jesus tells us to do. And, if we make an accounting, if we balance things out, it seems to weigh against us". But "the path of Jesus" is "magnanimity, generosity, the giving of oneself without measure". He "came into the world" to save and he gave himself, "he forgave, he spoke ill of no one, he did not judge".

Of course, the Pontiff recognized, "being Christian isn't easy" and we cannot "become Christian" with our own strength; we need "the grace of God". Therefore, there is a prayer, said the Pope, which should be said every day: "Lord, grant me the grace to become a good Christian, because I cannot do it" alone.

Francis concluded the meditation by acknowledging that "a first reading" of Chapter Six of Luke's Gospel "is unnerving". But, he suggested, "if we take the Gospel and we give it a second, a third, a fourth reading", we can then ask "the Lord for the grace to understand what it is to be Christian". And "also for the grace that He make Christians of us. Because we cannot do it alone".