



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Mending holes in the fabric of the Church

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Christians risk “disqualification”, as St Paul admonishes, if they insist on performing brotherly correction without charity, truth and humility, making room for hypocrisy and gossip. In truth this service to others requires one, first of all, to recognize oneself as a sinner and not to sit in judgment, as the Pope recalled during Mass at Santa Marta.

Francis pointed out straight away that “in recent days the liturgy has led us to meditate on many Christian attitudes: to give, to be generous, to serve others, to forgive, to be merciful”. These “are approaches”, he explained, “which help the Church to grow”. But today especially, “the Lord makes us consider one of these approaches, which he has already spoken of, and that is brotherly correction”. The bottom line is: “When a brother, a sister from the community makes a mistake, how does one correct them?”

Always through the liturgy, the Pope continued, “the Lord has given us advice on how to correct” others. But “today he resumes and says: one must correct him or her, but as a person who sees and not as one who is blind”. Pope Francis referred to the Gospel according to Luke (6:39-42): “Can a blind man lead a blind man?”.

Thus to correct it is necessary to see clearly. And to follow several rules of behaviour that the Lord himself proposed. “First of all, the advice he gives to correct a brother, we heard the other day”, the Pope recalled. “We heard it the other day; it is to take aside your brother who made the error and speak to him”, telling him, “brother, in this regard, I believe you did not do right!”.

And “to take him aside”, indeed, means “to correct him with charity”. It would be like “performing surgery without anaesthesia”, resulting in a patient’s painful death. And “charity is like anaesthesia which helps him to receive the care and to accept the correction”. Here then is the first step toward a brother: “take him aside, gently, lovingly, and speak to him”.

The Pope then, turning also to the many religious present at the celebration at Santa Marta, advised that one always speak “with charity”, without wounding, “in our communities, parishes, institutions, religious communities, when one must say something to a sister, to a brother”.

Along with charity, it is necessary to “tell the truth” and never “say something that isn’t true”. In fact, Pope Francis pointed out, “many times in our communities things are said to another person that aren’t true: they are libelous”. Or, “if they are true” however, they “harm the reputation of that person”.

In this respect, according to the Pope, the following may be a way to approach a brother: “I am telling you this, to you, what you have done. It is true. It isn’t a rumour that I heard”. Because “rumours wound, they are insults to a person’s reputation, they are strikes at a person’s heart”. And so “the truth” is always needed, even if at times “it isn’t good to hear it”. In every case if the truth “is told with charity and with love, it is easier to accept”. This is why it is necessary to speak “the truth with charity: this is how one must speak to others about faults”.

Jesus speaks of the third rule, humility, in the passage of Luke’s Gospel: correct others “without hypocrisy, that is, with humility”. It is good, the Bishop of Rome advised, to point out to oneself “if you must correct a tiny flaw there, consider that you have so many” that are greater. The Lord says this effectively: first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck from the eye of another. Only in this way “will you not be blind” and “will you see clearly” to truly help your brother. Thus “humility” is important in order to recognize that “I am a greater sinner than him, a greater sinner than her”. Afterwards “I must help him and her to correct this” flaw.

“If I do not perform brotherly correction with charity, do not perform it in truth and do not perform it with humility, I become blind”, the Pope admonished. And if I do not see, it is asked, how do I “heal another blind person”.

In substance, “fraternal correction is an act to heal the body of the Church”. Francis described it with a compelling image: it is like mending “a hole in the fabric of the Church”. However, one must

proceed “with much sensitivity, like mothers and grandmothers when they mend”, and this is the very manner with which “one must perform brotherly correction”.

On the other hand, Francis indicated, “if you are not capable of performing fraternal reproof with love, with charity, in truth and with humility, you will offend, damage that person’s heart: you will create an extra tale that wounds and you will become a blind hypocrite, as Jesus says”. Indeed, the day’s reading from the Gospel of Luke reads: “You hypocrite, first take the log out of your eye”. And while it is necessary to recognize oneself as being “a greater sinner than the other”, as brothers, however, we are called to “help to correct him”.

The Pontiff did not fail to offer practical advice. There is, he said, “a sign which perhaps can help us: when one sees something wrong and feels that he should correct it” but perceives “a certain pleasure in doing so”, then it is time to “pay attention, because that is not the Lord’s way”. Indeed, “in the Lord there is always the cross, the difficulty of doing something good”. And love and gentleness always come from the Lord.

This whole line of reasoning on fraternal correction, the Pope continued, demands that we not judge. Even if “we Christians are tempted to act as scholars”, almost as if to “move outside the game of sin and of grace, as if we were angels”.

This is a temptation that St Paul also speaks of in his First Letter to the Corinthians (9:16-19, 22-27): “lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified”. The Apostle therefore reminds us, “a Christian who, in community, doesn’t do things, even brotherly correction, in charity, in truth and with humility, is disqualified”. Because “he has not managed to become a mature Christian”.

Francis concluded by praying that the Lord “help us in this brotherly service, so beautiful and so agonizing, of helping brothers and sisters to be better”, pushing ourselves “to always do so with charity, in truth and with humility”.