



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Abstaining from injustice

Friday, 20 February 2015

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 9, 27 February 2015)

“Using God to cover up injustice is an extremely grave sin”. Pope Francis issued this stern warning against social injustice, most of all the sort caused by those who exploit workers, during Mass on Friday morning in the chapel at Casa Santa Marta.

The starting point for the Pontiff’s reflection was the prayer recited at the opening of the Mass, which asked the Lord “to accompany us on this Lenten journey, so that our external observance may correspond to a profound renewal of the Spirit”. That is, he clarified, so that “what we do outwardly has a correspondence, bears fruit in the Spirit”. In other words, “in order that the outward observance is not a formality”.

To render his reflection more concrete, Francis gave the example of one who practices the Lenten fast, thinking: “Today is Friday, I can’t eat meat. I’ll make myself a nice plate of seafood, a nice banquet.... I’m observing it, I’m not eating meat”. But this way, he added immediately, amounts to “sins of gluttony”. This example is “the distinction between formal and real” that is spoken of in the First Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah (58:1-9a). In this passage, the “people lamented because the Lord did not hear their fasts”. From his part the Lord reproaches the people, and Pope Francis summarized His words like this: “On the day of your fast, you conduct your business,

you torment all your workers. You fast between arguments and quarrels, and hit with wicked fists". Thus, "this is not fasting, not eating meat but then doing all these things: arguing, exploiting the workers", and so on.

Jesus too, Francis added, "condemned this suggestion of piety in the Pharisees, in the doctors of the law: outwardly performing many observances but without truth of heart". The Lord says in fact: "Do not fast any more as you did today, change your heart. And what is the fast that I choose? Dissolve the chains of wickedness, cut the thongs of the yoke, let the oppressed go free and break every yoke, share your bread with the hungry, bring the poor and the homeless into your house, clothe those you see naked, without neglecting your kin". This is "doing justice", the Pope said, this "is true fasting, which is not only external, and outward observance, but a fast that comes from the heart".

The Pontiff then pointed out that in the Tablets there are "the laws regarding God and the laws regarding one's neighbour", and how they both go together. "I cannot say: I fulfil the first three Commandments... and more or less the others. No, they are joined: love for God and love for one's neighbour are joined and if you want to do real, not formal, penance, you must do it before God and also with your brother, with your neighbour". It's enough to consider what the Apostle James said: "You can have so much faith, but faith which does no works dies; of what use is it?".

The same is true for "my Christian life", Francis commented. And those who seek to ease their conscience by attesting: 'I'm a serious Catholic, Father, it's really gratifying.... I always go to Mass, every Sunday, I take Communion...'. The Pope responded: "Okay. But how is your relationship with your employees? Do you pay them under the table? Do you pay them a fair wage? Do you make contributions for their pension? For their health and social security?". Unfortunately, he continued, so many "men and women have faith, but split the Tablets of the Law: 'Yes, I do this'. — 'But do you give alms?'. — 'Yes, I always send a check to the Church'. — 'Okay. But at your Church, at your home, with those who depend on you, whether they are your children, your grandparents, your employees, are you generous, are you fair?'. Indeed, he stated, you cannot "make offerings to the Church on the shoulders of injustice" perpetrated against your employees. And that is exactly what the Prophet Isaiah sets forth: "One who does not do justice with the people who are dependent on him is not a good Christian". Neither is "one who does not deprive himself of something necessary in order to give it to another who is in need".

Thus "the journey of Lent is twofold: to God and to neighbour". And it must be "real, not merely formal". Francis emphasized that Lent is not only about "not eating meat on Fridays", meaning "doing some little things" while one's "selfishness, exploitation of others, ignorance of the poor" continue to grow. We need to make a quantum leap, considering especially those who have less. The Pontiff explained this by asking each faithful: "'How is your health, you who are a good Christian?'. — 'Good, thank God; but also, when I need to, I immediately go to the hospital and, since I belong to the public health system, they see me right away and give me the necessary

medicines'. — 'It's a good thing, thank the Lord. But tell me, have you thought about those who don't have this relationship with the hospital and when they arrive, they have to wait six, seven, eight hours?'. This is not an exaggeration, Francis confided, having heard of a similar experience from a woman who recently waited eight hours for an urgent medical visit.

The Pope's thoughts then went to all the "people who live this way here in Rome: children and the elderly who do not have the possibility to be seen by a doctor". And Lent is the season to think about them and how we can help these people: "But Father, there are hospitals". — "Yes, but you have to wait eight hours and then they have you return a week later". Instead, he indicated, we should be concerned about people in difficulty and ask ourselves: "What are you doing for those people? What will your Lent be like?". — "Thank God I have a family who follows the Commandments, we don't have problems...". — "But during Lent is there room in your heart for those who haven't fulfilled the Commandments? Who have made mistakes and are in prison?". — "Not with those people, no...". — "But if you are not in prison it is because the Lord has helped you not to fall. Is there room in your heart for inmates? Do you pray for them, that the Lord may help them change their life?".

To conclude, Francis asked the Lord to accompany "our Lenten journey" in order that "our external observance may correspond to a profound renewal of the Spirit".