



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Hearts of stone

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There are no compromises: either we let ourselves be loved “by the mercy of God” or we choose the way “of hypocrisy” and do as we please, allowing our heart to keep growing harder. This is the history of the relationship between God and man, from the time of Abel until now. It was the focus of Pope Francis’ homily during Mass at Santa Marta on Thursday morning.

The Pontiff began with the words of the Responsorial Psalm — “Harden not your hearts” — and asked: “Why does this happen?”. To find the answer, he referred to the First Reading from the Prophet Jeremiah (7:23-28), which somewhat summarizes the “history of God”. But can we really say that “God has a history?”. How is this possible, given that “God is eternal?”. It’s true, Francis explained, “from the moment that God began to dialogue with his people, He entered history”.

And the history of God with his people “is a sad history”, because “God gave everything” and in exchange “He received only unpleasant things”. The Lord said: “Listen to my voice; then I will be your God and you shall be my people. Walk in all the ways that I command you, so that you may prosper”. That was the “way” to happiness. “But they obeyed not, nor did they pay heed”. Instead, they obstinately continued to walk “in the hardness of their evil hearts”. In other words, they did not want to “listen to the Word of God”.

That choice, the Pope explained, has characterized the entire history of the People of God: “let us consider the assassination, the death of Abel, killed by his brother, the evil heart of envy”. Yet, although the people continually “turned their backs” to the Lord, He “never tired”. In fact, he “untiringly” sent the prophets. But still, man did not listen. Instead, Scripture tells us: “they have stiffened their necks and done worse than their fathers”. Thus, “the situation of the People of God worsened through generations”.

The Lord says to Jeremiah: “When you speak all these words to them, they will not listen to you, they will not answer. Say to them: This is the nation that does not listen to the voice of the Lord, or take correction”. And then, the Pope explained, He adds something “terrible: ‘Faithfulness has disappeared’. You are not a faithful people”. Here, Francis said, it seems that God is weeping: “I have loved you so much, I have given you so much...” but you have done “everything against me”. A weeping which evokes that of Jesus “looking at Jerusalem”. After all, the Pontiff explained, “all of this history, in which faithfulness had disappeared, was in Jesus’ heart”. A history of unfaithfulness regarding “our personal history”, because “we do our own will. But in doing so, on the journey of life, we follow a path of hardening: the heart hardens, it turns to stone. The Word of the Lord doesn’t enter. The people fall away”. This is why, the Pope indicated, “today, on this Lenten day, we can ask ourselves: do I listen to the voice of the Lord, or do I do what I want, whatever I please?”.

The advice of the Responsorial Psalm — “Harden not your hearts” — is found “so many times in the Bible” which, to explain the “unfaithfulness of the people”, often uses “the figure of the adulteress”. Francis recalled, for example, the well-known passage from Ezekiel 16: “Yours is a long history of adultery. You, the people, have not been faithful to me, you have been an adulterous people”. There were also many times in which Jesus “rebukes the disciples for this hardened heart”, as He does with those on the road to Emmaus: “O foolish and hardhearted ones!”.

The Pope explained that the evil heart — of which “we all have a little” — “doesn’t allow us to understand God’s love. We want to be free”, but “with a freedom that enslaves us in the end, rather than that freedom of love that the Lord offers us”.

This, the Pope highlighted, also happens in institutions. For example, “Jesus heals a person, but the heart of the doctors of the law, of the priests, of the legal system, are so hard, they are always looking for excuses”. And therefore they say to Him: “You drive out demons in the name of the demon. You are a demonic sorcerer”. The legalists “believe that the life of faith is regulated only by the laws that they make”. Jesus called them “hypocrites, whitewashed tombs, outwardly beautiful but inside filled with iniquity and hypocrisy”.

Unfortunately, Francis said, the same thing “happened in the history of the Church”. Let us consider “poor Joan of Arc: today she’s a saint! Poor girl: these experts burned her alive because,

they said, she was a heretic". Or let's think, more recently, of "Blessed Rosmini: all of his books were on the Index. You couldn't read them, it was a sin to read them. Today he is blessed". In this regard the Pontiff underscored that, as "in the history of God with his people, the Lord sent his prophets to tell them that He loved his people", likewise, "in the Church, the Lord sends saints". It is they "who lead forth the life of the Church: it is the saints. It isn't the powerful, it isn't the hypocrites". It is the "holy man, the holy woman, the child, the holy youth, the holy priest, the holy sister, the holy bishop...". In other words, it is they "whose hearts are not hard", but are instead "always open to the Lord's word of love". It is they who "aren't afraid to let themselves be caressed by the mercy of God. This is why saints are men and women who understand such misery, human misery, and accompany people closely. They do not scorn people".

The Lord is clear with the people who "have lost their faithfulness": "Those who aren't with me are against me". One could ask: "Isn't there a way to compromise, a little here and a little there?". No, the Pontiff said. "Either you are on the path of love, or you're on the path of hypocrisy. Either you let yourself be loved by the mercy of God, or you do what you want, according to your heart which grows harder, each time, on this path". There is no "third path of compromise: either you're holy or you take the other path". Whoever "doesn't gather" with the Lord, not only "abandons things" but "worse: scatters, destroys. He/she is a corruptor", one "who corrupts".

Because of this unfaithfulness, "Jesus weeps over Jerusalem" and "weeps over each one of us". In Matthew Chapter 23, the Pope recalled, there is a terrible curse against the "leaders who have hardened hearts and want to harden the hearts of the people". Jesus says: "upon them will come the blood of all the innocent, beginning with that of Abel. They will be held accountable for all the innocent blood, shed by their wickedness, by their hypocrisy, by their corrupt, hardened, petrified hearts".