



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

From astonishment to power

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A Christian must avoid the temptation of going from the “astonishment of encountering the Lord” to trying to exploit it to acquire power, thereby giving in to the spirit of worldliness. This was Pope Francis’ admonition during Monday’s Mass at Santa Marta.

His reflection was inspired by the texts offered in the day’s liturgy, particularly the passage taken from the Gospel of John (6:22-29), which recounts that the people, out of material interest, were seeking Jesus after the multiplication of the loaves and the fish. The Gospel, the Pope recalled, “says that, after the fast and the temptation in the desert, Jesus was filled with the power of the Spirit and began to pray”. Thus “He went to Nazareth, where He grew up”. And “there He announced his mission with that passage from the Prophet Isaiah: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, sight to the blind, liberty to the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s grace’.

This, the Pope indicated “was his plan, this was his mission”. Jesus concluded his discourse by saying: “Today the scripture has been fulfilled”. With this proclamation his mission began. Then began “the miracles, the signs, the healings: these healings which the people saw” and thus “believed in Him and brought the sick to Him”. But “Jesus did this because it was his mission”.

Therefore this is “another step, the catecheses of Jesus: He taught the people with the Beatitudes, many parables”.

Therefore, the Pope pointed out, “we see three steps: the proclamation of his mission, his work of bringing health, goodness, healing, and the catecheses”. And “the people followed Him and said: ‘we have never heard a man speak like this’”. They recognized that He spoke “as one who had authority, that power of the Spirit that Jesus had”.

The Gospel, Francis continued, then tells us that “one day the people were following Jesus and spent the whole day listening to his teachings”. However, He “noticed that they were hungry and we all know how that story ends: there were only five loaves and Jesus multiplied the loaves and the people were amazed”. Thus, “the miracles of Jesus, his words, astonished the people” and they said: “This man is the prophet, He is the man of God!”.

The Pontiff reflected that those same people, however, “after being fed, began to feel something else”. In other words, they said: “Let’s exploit of this man, let’s really take advantage, let’s make Him king!”. Essentially, from that “astonishment, they slipped toward power”. But “Jesus withdrew again to the hills by himself”, the Pope said, quoting the day’s Gospel passage. Thus, “these people sought Him the next day and didn’t find Him, but they were calculating”. And they said: “He isn’t on the boat, but there’s only one boat here. They didn’t really understand”. Finally “they found Him on the other side of the sea”.

When He saw all of those people flocking, “Jesus received them with such goodness”. They asked Him: “Rabbi, when did you come here?”. As always, “He, answered them, with such goodness: ‘Truly, truly I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs’ — as if to say, not out of the astonishment which leads you to worship God — ‘but because you ate your fill of the loaves’”. In substance, He said to them: “You seek me out of material interest”. Therefore, the Pope said, “He corrects this attitude”.

It was an attitude, however, which “is repeated in the Gospels”, Francis noted. “Multitudes followed Jesus out of interest”, even “among his Apostles”, like “the sons of Zebedee, who wanted to be the prime minister and the other the minister of the economy: to have power”.

Therefore, the Pope pointed out “that unction of preaching good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives, sight to the blind, liberty to the oppressed, proclaiming a year of grace: — as that unction “darkens, it becomes lost and transforms into a matter of power”.

Even on “the day of the Ascension the same thing happens”, when the Apostles ask Him: “will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”. In short, the Pontiff explained, “there has always been this temptation” to move from that “astonishment of encountering Jesus, to exploiting it”.

After all, “this was also proposed to Jesus by the devil in the temptations: one regarding the bread” and “the other regarding the spectacle”. He said, “let’s create a fine spectacle, so all the people will believe in you!” And then the third temptation, “the apostasy: namely, the adoration of idols”. This too “is an everyday temptation of Christians, ours, of all of us who are the Church: the temptation not of power, of the Spirit’s power, but the temptation of worldly power”. In this way “one falls into that religious warmth which leads you to worldliness, that warmth which grows and grows” until ending up in “that attitude which Jesus called hypocrisy”. He said as much to his disciples: “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, of the doctors of the law”. Thus, “leaven, bread: beware of his, which is hypocrisy”.

In this way, in fact, one becomes a merely “Christian in name, in external attitude, but his heart” lies elsewhere. In this respect, returning to the Gospel of John, Francis repeated the word of Jesus to the crowd that followed Him: “Truly, truly I say to you: you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves”. Herein lies “our daily temptation: slipping toward worldliness, toward power, and hence, faith, the mission weaken. The Church weakens”.

However, the Pope said reassuringly, the Lord “awakens us, with the witness of saints, with the testimony of martyrs who proclaim to us every day that travelling the path of Jesus is that of his mission: to proclaim the year of grace”. The Gospel also tells us that “the people understand Jesus’ rebuke” and for this reason they ask Him: “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?”. Jesus answered them: “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent”. In other words, “faith in Him, in Him alone; trust in Him and not in other things that lead us in the end, far away from Him”.

Before continuing the Mass, Francis asked the Lord “to grant us this grace of astonishment of the encounter and also that He help us not to fall to the spirit of worldliness, which is that spirit which, behind or under a superficial layer of Christianity, will lead us to live as pagans”.