



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

The twelve pillars

Friday, 22 January 2016

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 4, 29 January 2016)

“Praying and witnessing” are the “two tasks of bishops”, who are the “pillars of the Church”. But should they weaken, it is the People of God who suffer. This is why, during Mass at Santa Marta on Friday morning, Pope Francis recommended persistent prayers for the successors of the twelve Apostles.

The Pontiff’s reflection on the figure and the mission of the bishop began from the day’s passage from the Gospel of Mark (3:13-19). “There is a word, in this passage of the Gospel, which draws our attention: Jesus ‘appointed’”. This word “appears twice”. Mark writes: “He appointed twelve, whom he also named Apostles”. And then again Mark repeats: “‘He appointed the twelve’, and he named them, one after another”. Hence, the Pontiff explained, “from among the people who followed him, the Gospel tells us, Jesus called to him those that he wanted”. In other words, “there is a choice: Jesus chose those he wanted”. And, of course, “he appointed the twelve, whom we call Apostles”. Indeed, Francis continued, “there were others: there were disciples”, and on one occasion “the Gospel speaks of 72”. But “they were something else”.

The “twelve were appointed ‘that they might be with him and he might send them forth to preach and have authority to drive out demons’”, the Pope explained. “It is the most important group that

Jesus chose, so ‘that they might be with him’, closer, and that ‘he might send them forth to preach’ the Gospel” and “to have the authority to drive out demons”, Mark adds. These very “twelve are the first bishops, the first group of bishops”.

These twelve “elected ones”, Francis pointed out, “were conscious of the importance of this election, such that after Jesus was assumed into heaven, Peter spoke to the others and explained to them that, in light of Judas’ betrayal, something had to be done”. Thus, those who had been with Jesus, from the Baptism of John until the ascension, chose “a witness ‘with us’ — Peter says — to the Resurrection”. This is how, the Pope continued, “Judas’ place is filled, it is taken by Matthias: Matthias was elected”.

Then, “the liturgy of the Church”, referring to “certain expressions of Paul”, calls the twelve “the pillars of the Church”. Yes, the Pontiff affirmed, “the Apostles are the pillars of the Church. And the bishops are the pillars of the Church. The election of Matthias was the Church’s first episcopal ordination”.

“Today I would like to say a few words about bishops”, Francis said. “We bishops have the responsibility of being witnesses: witnesses that the Lord Jesus lives, that the Lord Jesus is risen, that the Lord Jesus walks with us, that the Lord Jesus saves us, that the Lord Jesus gave his life for us, that the Lord Jesus is our hope, that the Lord Jesus always welcomes us and forgives us”. This is “the witness”. As a result, Pope Francis continued, “our life must be this: a witness, a true witness to the Resurrection of Christ”.

When Jesus, as Mark tells us, makes “this choice” of the twelve, he has two reasons. First of all “that they might be with him”. This is why “the bishop is obliged to be with Jesus”. Yes, “it is a bishop’s first duty: to be with Jesus”. It is also true “at that point, in the early times, when the problem arose that the orphans and widows were not well looked after, the bishops — these twelve — gathered and pondered what to do”. And “they introduced the figure of the deacon, saying: ‘let the deacons look after the orphans and the widows’”. Meanwhile, Peter says that the twelve have “two tasks: praying and proclaiming the Gospel”.

So, Francis explained, “the bishop’s first task is to be with Jesus in prayer”. Indeed, “the bishop’s first task is not making pastoral plans... no, no!”. It is “praying: this is the first task”. While “the second task is being a witness, that is, preaching: preaching the salvation that the Lord Jesus brought us”.

The two tasks are not easy, the Pontiff acknowledged, but “it is precisely these two tasks that strengthen the pillars of the Church”. In fact, “should these pillars weaken, because the bishop doesn’t pray or he prays very little, or forgets to pray; or because the bishop does not proclaim the Gospel, occupying himself with other things, the Church also weakens; she suffers. The People of God suffer”. This happens “because the pillars are weak”.

For this reason, Francis stated, “I would like to encourage you today to pray for us bishops: because we too are sinners, we too have weaknesses, we too run the risk Judas had: he too was chosen as a pillar”. Yes, the Pope continued, “we too run the risk of not praying, of doing something other than proclaiming the Gospel and driving out demons”. This is why the Pope encouraged prayer “that the bishops might be what Jesus wanted and that we all might bear witness to the Resurrection of Jesus”.

After all, he added, “the People of God pray for the bishops. During every Mass we pray for the bishops: we pray for Peter, the head of the episcopal college, and we pray for the local bishop”. But “this may not suffice: we say the name out of habit and move on”. It is important “to pray for the bishop from the heart, to ask the Lord: ‘Lord, take care of my bishop; take care of all the bishops, and send us bishops who are true witnesses, bishops who pray and bishops who help us, through their preaching, to understand the Gospel, to be certain that you, Lord, are living, you are among us””.

Before returning to the celebration, the Pope again encouraged prayer “for our bishops: it is the task of the faithful”. Indeed, “the Church without a bishop cannot move forward”. Therefore, “we are all obliged to pray for our bishops, but it is a duty of love, the duty of children to the Father, the duty of brothers and sisters, that the family may remain united in the confession of Jesus Christ, living and risen”.