



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

A name or an adjective

Thursday, 25 February 2016

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Are we open to others and capable of mercy, or do we live locked up within ourselves, slaves to our own selfishness? On Thursday morning, the Gospel parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31), presented in the day's Liturgy, guided Pope Francis in a reflection on the quality of Christian life. Referring also to the entrance antiphon (taken from Ps 139[138]:23-24), the Pontiff emphasized the importance of asking the Lord for "the grace of knowing" whether we are "on the path of lies or on the path of life".

Francis explained that we are in the wake of the reflection that, in previous days, spoke of "the religion of doing" and the "religion of talking". He drew inspiration from two Gospel characters, the rich man, described as a man who was "clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day". The characterization might seem a bit contrived, but it means to show us a person who "had it all, every opportunity". Then there is "a poor man named Lazarus" at his gate, "full of sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores".

The Pope analyzed the description of the characters and pointed out that the rich man, "who is seen in the final dialogue with Father Abraham", was a "man of faith", who had "studied the law, knew the Commandments" and who "surely went every Sabbath to the Synagogue and once a year to the Temple". In short, he really was "a man who had a certain religiosity". At the same

time, the Gospel narrative shows that he was also “a closed man, locked up inside his own little world, the world of banquets, clothes, vanity, friends”. Closed within his “bubble of vanity”, he “did not have the ability to look beyond it” and did not “realize what was happening outside of his closed world”. For example, “he did not think about the needs of many people or of sick people’s need for company”. Instead he thought only of himself, “of his wealth, of his good life: he was given to the good life”. He was, said the Pontiff, concluding his analysis, a “seemingly religious” man. He was, in fact, a perfect example “of the religion of talking”. The rich man “did not know the peripheries, he was completely locked up within himself”. Yet the periphery was “close to the door of his house”, but “he did not know it”. This, Francis explained, “is the path of lies”, from which, in the antiphon, we asked the Lord to free us.

From this description, the Pontiff expanded on the interior analysis of the rich man, a person who “trusted only in himself, in his things”, and “did not trust in God”. He was a long way from the “blessed man who trusts in the Lord”, who is contrasted in the Responsorial Psalm, taken from Psalm 1. “What legacy”, the Pope asked, “did this man leave?”. Surely, he said, again quoting the Responsorial Psalm, he is not “like a tree planted by streams of water”, but rather “like the chaff which the wind drives away” (Ps 1:3, 4).

This man had a family; he had brothers. The Gospel narrative recounts that he asked Father to send someone to caution them: “Stop, this is not the path!”. But he died, Francis explained, and “he did not leave a legacy, he did not leave life, because he was only closed within himself”.

The Pontiff emphasized that the aridness of this life was accentuated by a particular detail: in speaking about this man, the Gospel “does not say what his name was; it only says that he was a rich man”. This detail is significant, because “when your name is only an adjective, it is because you have lost: you’ve lost substance, you’ve lost strength”. One might say: “this person is rich, this one is powerful, this one is capable, this one is a career priest, a career bishop...”. It often happens, the Pope continued, that we begin to “designate people with adjectives, not with names, because they do not have substance”. This was the reality of the rich man in the day’s reading.

At this point Francis asked a question: “Didn’t God who is Father, have mercy on this man? Didn’t he knock at his heart in order to move him?”. The answer is, “yes, he was at the door, he was at the door, in the person of Lazarus”. Lazarus — this man has a name. Lazarus, the Pope added, “with his needs and his miseries, his disease, was actually the Lord who was knocking at the door, so that this man would open his heart and mercy could enter”. Instead, the rich man “didn’t see”, because “he was closed”, and “for him there was nothing beyond the door”.

The Gospel passage, the Pontiff said, is helpful to all of us at the midpoint of the Lenten journey, in order to raise a few questions: “Am I on the path of life or on the path of lies? How many locks do I still have on my heart? Where is my joy: in doing or talking?”. Moreover, is my joy “in going outside of myself in order to meet others, in order to help”, or “is my joy in having everything organized,

locked up inside myself?”.

As we consider all of this, Pope Francis concluded, “let us ask the Lord” for the grace “to always see the Lazarus who knocks at our heart” and for the grace to “go outside of ourselves with generosity, with an attitude of mercy, so that God’s mercy can enter our heart”.