



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

God of surprises

Monday, 8 May 2017

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Peter had the courage to be surprised by the novelty of the Holy Spirit, to break the rigid response of “this is the way it has always been done”. He was not afraid of creating “scandal” or of not fulfilling his mission as the “rock”. He had the freedom not to hinder “God’s grace”, and not to “silence the din that the Spirit makes when he comes to the Church”. In his homily at Mass on Monday morning, 8 May, Pope Francis invited the faithful to ask the Father for the “grace of discernment”, and urged them not to commit the “sin of resisting the Holy Spirit”.

“In these chapters that we have read in the last few weeks from the Acts of the Apostles” (11:1-18), the Pontiff began, “we can see the Christian community is moving; and what moves the community is the Holy Spirit”. It is important to remember, Francis said, “that Jesus himself had promised this to the disciples at the Last Supper: ‘I will not leave you all alone. I will send you the spirit of truth; he will guide you to the full truth; he will teach you and remind you’”. Thus, “it is the Holy Spirit himself who moves this Church: we have heard of many miracles, many curious things”, the Pontiff said. “Some were surely afraid of these novelties in the Church”.

“The Spirit is the gift of God”, the Pope explained, “of this God, our Father, who always surprises us: the God of surprises”. This is “because he is a living God, a God who abides in us, a God who

moves our heart, a God who is in the Church and walks with us; and he always surprises us on this path". Thus, "just as he had the creativity to create the world, so he has the creativity to create new things every day", the Pope continued. He "is the God who surprises".

However, Francis continued, "this also creates difficulty: for example the Apostles, the brothers who were in Judea came to know that the Gentiles had also accepted God's word". Referring to them as "the uncircumcised", they wondered: "How can this happen? Peter and the others must be mistaken; they went beyond searching for a novelty". And thus, the Pope explained, "mistrust began" and it reached the point that "when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised faithful scolded him, saying: 'You went into the homes of uncircumcised men and ate with them!'" It was as if to say, "look at the scandal you are causing! You, Peter, the rock of the Church, where are you taking us?".

We read in the Acts, the Pontiff observed, that "Peter recounts what happened, and, in all simplicity", he describes "that vision in the sky". He then also speaks about those "men who ask him to go to this Gentile's home". And just as Peter was speaking to them, the Holy Father continued, "the Holy Spirit descends, disrupts everything and Peter baptises: he understands God's sign and is capable of making a brave decision; he is capable of accepting God's surprise", Pope Francis said.

At the end of his discourse, Peter "excuses himself" saying these words: "if then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?". This, Pope Francis pointed out, is "truly the word of the apostolic instrument, of that Apostle who feels as an instrument of God: who am I to stop God's grace, to silence the din of the Holy Spirit when he comes to the Church?".

"Before the Lord's many surprises — after this, the Apostles have to meet and discuss and reach an agreement in order to take the step forward that the Lord wants — before so many things", the Holy Father had "two words" in mind: resistance and closure.

"Always, since the time of the prophets until today, there has been the sin of resisting the Holy Spirit: resistance to the Spirit", Pope Francis stated. "This is the sin for which Stephen scolds the very members of the Sanhedrin: 'You and your fathers have always resisted the Holy Spirit'". This resistance can also be expressed by saying: "no, this is the way it has always been done", almost as if to say: "do not come with these novelties: Peter, calm down, take a pill to calm your nerves, keep calm", the Pontiff added.

But this is actually "closure to the voice of God", Pope Francis warned. "In Psalm 95[94], the Lord tells his people: harden not your hearts as your fathers did at Meribah". Instead, "seek the Lord's will, the Lord's voice, what the Lord wants", the Pontiff stressed. "What the Lord wants is other people; we heard this in the Gospel: 'I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them

also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd” (Jn 10:11-18). Instead, the Gentiles were judged, as if “condemned”, and even the “proselytes, the Gentiles who became believers” were seen as “second class believers; no one said it but in fact”, it was so, Francis explained.

“Closure, resistance to the Holy Spirit”, the Pope continued, also occurs through “that phrase that always closes, that stops you: ‘This is how it has always been done’”. However, he pointed out that this way of doing things “kills; it kills freedom; it kills joy; it kills faithfulness to the Holy Spirit who always moves forward, leading the Church forward”. After all, the Pontiff continued, “how can I know whether something is of the Holy Spirit or of worldliness, whether of the spirit of the world or of the spirit of the devil?”.

The only way is “to ask for the grace of discernment”, Pope Francis explained. “The instrument that the Spirit himself gives us is discernment: to discern, in any case, as one must do”. Indeed, “this is what the Apostles did. They met, they spoke and they saw that this was the path of the Holy Spirit”. On the other hand, “those who did not have this gift, or who had not prayed, so as to ask for it, remained closed and still”. Christians “must know how to discern, especially at a time with so much communication, with so many novelties, to know how to discern: to discern one thing from another, to discern which is the novelty, the new wine that comes from God; which is news that comes from the spirit of the world and which is news that comes from spirit of the devil”.

“Some may wonder”, the Pope suggested: “if these Gentiles were sinners and were damned and then they changed, then does faith change?”. The answer is “no”, the Pope responded. “Faith never changes. Faith is the same, but it moves; it grows; it broadens”, he explained. “Saint Vincent of Lérins, an elderly monk from the 5th century, said these words: ‘the truths of the Church go forward’; *‘ut annis consolidetur, dilatetur tempore sublimetur aetate’*”. That is, Francis explained, “they strengthen with the years, develop with time and become deeper with age”. That is, “they become stronger with time, with the years; they broaden with time and grow with the age of the Church”. This is the way, he stressed. “It is the same truth, but it helps us understand better”. Jesus’ words come to our aid: “there shall be one flock”. In fact, “the disciples did not understand what Jesus was trying to say”, which was: “the Gentiles will also receive the Holy Spirit”.

The Pontiff ended by inviting the faithful to ask “the Lord for the grace of discernment so as not to take the wrong path and not to fall into idleness, into rigidity, into the closing of the heart”.