



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The Pentecost of Ephesus

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Are our hearts “restless” because we are “moved by the Holy Spirit”, or do our hearts need “spiritual electrocardiograms” because they are dead, flat-lined, “emotionless?”. Christians should ask themselves this essential question, Pope Francis said during Mass at Santa Marta on Monday, 29 May. At the beginning of the week in which “the Church prepares to receive the Holy Spirit and has us reflect on the Holy Spirit and asks us to pray that the Holy Spirit might come into the Church, into our heart, our parish, into our community”, Pope Francis invited Christians to “anticipate this gift of the Father which Jesus has promised to us”.

In his reflection, the Pope drew inspiration from the day’s first reading, which was dedicated to the preaching of Saint Paul at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-8). One immediately notes, Pope Francis said, “that this community had received the faith not knowing about the Holy Spirit”. In fact, the Pope added, this reading could be called “The Pentecost of Ephesus”, since “the same thing occurred there as happened in Jerusalem”.

And yet, he observed, “these people were believers”. But when Paul asked them: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”, they responded: “We have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit”. Thus, in this narrative, we find before us the “reality of a Church, good people, people of faith, people who believed in Jesus Christ” but who “were there without even knowing this gift of the Father: the Holy Spirit”. Thus, “Paul laid hands upon them” and so it began: “The Holy Spirit

came on them; and they spoke with tongues”.

The Holy Father explained that, for the disciples of Ephesus, the descent of the Holy Spirit “began the stirring of the heart” because he is the one “who moves our heart, who inspires us, who teaches us”. Indeed it is the Spirit who “moves the heart”, who feeds “emotions in the heart”. Moreover, the Pope added, Jesus himself had said it: the Spirit “will teach” and will help you recall “all that I have taught you”.

What happened to the disciples of Ephesus is a recurring experience in the New Testament passages which introduce us to many different people who “have heard this message and have changed their lives”. Pursuing this vein of thought, the Holy Father said, “we can ask ourselves: what moved Nicodemus to go at night to speak with Jesus?”. It was precisely “that restlessness” of heart. And “what moved the Samaritan woman to stay behind and speak with Jesus after she had given him water?”. The answer is that she felt her “heart had changed”. And again, “what moved the sinner to go to Jesus and to wash his feet with her tears? And what moved so many people to approach Jesus? Let us think of that woman, the one with the haemorrhage: who was it that moved her and gave her that sentiment, that idea: ‘If I but touch the hem of his cloak, I will be healed?’”. The response is always the same: it is “the Holy Spirit” — he “moves the heart”.

In his customary manner, Pope Francis then applied his reflection to the daily life of all Christians, suggesting that we each ask ourselves: “Am I like those of Ephesus, never even knowing of the existence of the Holy Spirit? What is the Holy Spirit’s place in my life, in my heart? Am I able to hear him? Am I capable of asking for inspiration before making a decision, speaking a word or doing something? Or is my heart sedate, emotionless, an unmovable heart?”. Actually, the Pope noted, the problem is that for “certain hearts, were we to do a spiritual electrocardiogram, the result would be a flat-line, emotionless”.

This spiritual reality is even described in the Gospels, the Holy Father recalled, noting that the doctors of the law “were believers in God; they knew all the commandments, but their hearts were closed, unmoving; they were not open to discussion”.

The Pope said it is therefore necessary “to open ourselves up to the Holy Spirit”. Someone might object: “Hey, I have heard this ... but, Father, isn’t that sentimentalism?” — ‘No, it can be, but no. If you go down the right path, that is not sentimentalism’”. Just as easily, we might hear someone else say: “I have felt the desire to do this, to go visit a sick person or to change my life or to leave this ...”. The important thing, Pope Francis explained, is “to feel and to discern: to discern what I feel in my heart”, because “the Holy Spirit is the master of discernment”.

Certain challenges are in fact desirable: “a person who does not have this stirring in the heart, who does not discern what is happening, is a person who has a cold faith, an ideological faith. His faith is an ideology, simple as that”. This is what was described in the Gospel: “the drama of those

doctors of the law who took issue with Jesus”.

Thus, the Pope said, we need to ask ourselves: “What is my relationship with the Holy Spirit? Do I pray to the Holy Spirit? Do I ask the Holy Spirit for light? Do I ask him to guide me along the path I must choose in my life and also every day? Do I ask him to give to me the grace to distinguish good from the lesser good? Because good is easily distinguished from evil. But there is that hidden evil which is the lesser good, but it has hidden the evil. Do I ask for this grace?”.

At the end of the day, the question the Holy Father hoped to “sow” in the hearts of each one of us is: “What is my relationship with the Holy Spirit?”. Every Christian, he suggested, ought to ask him or herself: “Is my heart restless because it is stirred by the Holy Spirit?”; and also: “Do I ask for that grace to understand what is happening in my heart?”; and finally, “when I feel like doing something, do I stop and ask the Holy Spirit to inspire me, that he tell me ‘yes’ or ‘no’, or do I calculate in my mind: ‘This yes, because if not ...’?”.

The task is that of being open to listening: “What is the Spirit saying to me?”. Not surprisingly, the Holy Father recalled, in Revelation, the Apostle John, addressing “each of the seven churches of that time, began in this way: ‘Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches’”. Therefore, the Pope concluded, “today let us ask for this grace to listen to what the Spirit is saying to our Church, to our community, our parish, our family and to me, to each one of us: the grace to learn this language of listening to the Holy Spirit”.