



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Faith is not casuistry

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Pope Francis reflected on the day's first Reading from the Letter of St James (2:14-24, 26), which states that just as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. "The teaching of the Apostle James is a commentary on faith: he wants to explain well what faith is". Therefore, "he plays on this contrast between faith and works". The Apostle's statement "is clear", the Pope said. "Faith that does not bear fruit in works is not faith".

"So often, we also make mistakes on this point," the Pope continued. "We hear it said: I have great faith!", or "I believe everything!"; however, at times "the person who says this leads a lukewarm, weak life". So much so that "his faith is like a theory, but it is not alive in his life".

"When he speaks about faith, the Apostle James speaks precisely about doctrine, about the content of the faith". It is as though he were saying to each of us: "you can know all the commandments, all the prophecies, all the truths of the faith, but if this" does not translate into "practice and works, it is useless".

Thus, "we can recite the Creed theoretically even without faith," he said, "and there are many people who do so! Even the demons!". In fact, he added, "the demons know very well what the Creed says and they know it is the truth. The Apostle says that 'they tremble', because they know that it is the truth" even though they do not have faith. The demons "know the whole of theology,

they have Denzinger memorized, but they do not have faith. Having faith is not a matter of having knowledge: having faith means receiving God's message brought to us by Jesus Christ, living it out and carrying it forward".

Pope Francis then pointed to "the signs" by which we can recognize "a person who knows what we are to believe but who does not have faith". The Pope noted two particular signs that we find in the Gospel. A first sign is "casuistry", and he recalled all those who approached Jesus to present him with cases such as: is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?" Or the case in which "a woman was widowed, poor thing, who according to the law had to marry the seven brothers of her husband in order to have a child". This "is casuistry," the Pope said. And "casuistry is precisely the place to which all those people go who believe they have faith" but only have a knowledge of its content. Thus, "when we find a Christian" who only asks "if it is licit to do this and if the Church could do that," it either means "that they do not have faith, or that it is too weak".

The second sign is ideology. We cannot be "Christians who think of the faith as a system of ideas, as an ideology," Pope Francis said. It is a risk that "also existed in Jesus' time" and was set forth by the gnostics. "The Apostle James says that ideologues of the faith are the Antichrist". Thus, the Pope explained, "those who fall into casuistry or ideology are Christians who know doctrine but who lack faith. Like the demons, with the difference that the demons tremble, whereas these do not: they live in peace".

Pope Francis then proposed three figures taken from the Gospel, who "do not know doctrine but who have great faith". First, he spoke about the Canaanite woman, who was a pagan but who had faith in Jesus "because the Holy Spirit had touched her heart". She "bore witness to her faith: this is the key word". Then there was the Samaritan who "beforehand did not believe anything" or whose belief was misguided, but who came to believe "once she encountered Jesus": that is, prior to encountering Jesus she had a "casuistic way of thinking", she wondered if she had to worship God "on this mountain or that". But after having "spoken with the Lord, she felt something" in her heart and in haste "went away to say: I found a man who told me all that I ever did!". She had faith "because he encountered Jesus Christ and not abstract truths".

The third Gospel figure which the Pope put forward is the "man born blind who went to Jesus to ask him for the grace to see". And "then, poor thing," the Pope said, "he became involved in a battle between the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the doctors of the Law: he and his parents were called upon to give an account after this annoying and bothersome episode". The Gospel tells us that "the Lord looked at him and said to him: 'Do you believe?'". The man born blind "did not know theology, perhaps he knew the commandments", and yet he recognized in Jesus the Son of God "and falling to his knees he worshipped the Lord".

These are the two contrasting realities: on the one hand, there are "those who have doctrine and know things", and on the other there are "those who have faith". Between them stands a certainty:

“faith always leads to witness. Faith is an encounter with Jesus Christ, with God”. And this encounter “leads to witness”, as the Apostle James emphasizes in his Letter, stating that “faith without works, faith that does not really involve you and that does not lead you to bear witness, is not faith. It is words and nothing more than words”.

The Pope concluded his homily by inviting those present to consider these three figures and to ask for “the grace to have a faith that bears fruit and that leads to proclamation and to witness”.