



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

A house not for rent

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The Pope coined three terms [in Italian, “butchering the Italian language a bit”, as he himself admitted] — “uniformists, alternativists and advantagists”. He used them for his description of the 3 types of Christians who create division in the Church.

With the day’s Gospel passage as his starting point (Jn 17:20-26), the Holy Father lingered on the image “of Jesus in prayer: he prays for his disciples; he prays for all those who will be coming, coming to hear the preaching of the Apostles; he prays for the Church. And what does the Lord ask of the Father?”, the Pope asked himself. The response was, “the unity of the Church. That the Church may be one, that there be no divisions, that there be no battles”. For this, he remarked, “the Lord’s prayer is essential, because [creating] unity in the Church isn’t easy”. He referred to the “many” who “claim to be in the Church, but have only one foot inside”.

“For these folks — explained Pope Francis — the Church isn’t really their home”. This means those people who live like renters — “a little here, a little there”. Actually “there are some groups who rent the Church, but don’t consider her their home”.

Among them, the Bishop of Rome identified three precise categories, starting with “those who want everyone to be equals in the Church”: the “uniformists”, whose manner is to “make everything uniform: everyone as equals”. These people have been present from “the very

beginning”, that is, from “when the Holy Spirit willed that the pagans be allowed to enter the Church”, recalled the Pope, referring to the many who demanded that pagans become Hebrews before they could join the Church. This shows that uniformity goes hand in hand with rigidity; and it was not without reason that Pope Francis described these Christians as “rigid”, because “they don’t have the freedom that the Holy Spirit bestows. And they confuse what Jesus preached in the Gospel [with] their doctrine of equality”, although “Jesus never wanted his Church to be rigid”. Therefore, because of their “attitude, they don’t enter the Church. They call themselves Christians, they call themselves Catholics, but their rigid attitude distances them from the Church”.

Regarding the second group, the “alternativists”, the Pope categorized them among those who think, “I’ll enter the Church, but with this idea, with this ideology”. They propose conditions “and their membership in the Church is thereby partial”. They too “have one foot outside the Church; they’re renting the Church” but don’t really experience it; and they too have been present from the very outset of evangelical preaching, as testified by “the agnostics, whom the Apostle John harshly lambasted: ‘We are... yes, yes... we are Catholics, but with these ideas’”. They seek an alternative, because they don’t share the common experience of the Church.

Finally, the third group includes those who “look for advantages”. They “go to Church but for personal advantage, and wind up doing business in the Church”. These are the swindlers, who have also been around since the very start — such as Simon the magician, Ananias and Sapphira, who “took advantage of the Church for their own profit”. Modernizing the discourse, Pope Francis denounced those characters of the type often found “in community or diocesan parishes, and in religious congregations”, disguising themselves as “benefactors of the Church”. We’ve seen many of them, he said, essentially “parading about as benefactors and in the end, under the table, running their scams”. They too, obviously, “don’t believe the Church as mother”.

But Christ’s message is quite different: to all these types, the Pontiff continued, Jesus says that “the Church isn’t rigid, it’s free! In the Church there are many charisms, there’s great diversity in people and in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Jesus says: in the Church you must give your heart to the Gospel, to what the Lord has taught, and never have an alternative for yourself! The Lord tells us: if you want to enter the Church”, do so “for love, to give all, all your heart and not to do business for your benefit”. Indeed, “the Church is not a house for rent” for all those who “want to do as they please”; on the contrary, “it is a home to live in”.

And to those who object that “it’s not easy”, to keep both feet in the Church, because “there are so many temptations”, Rome’s bishop recalled him who “creates unity in the Church, unity in the diversity, in the freedom, in the generosity” who is the Holy Spirit, whose specific “duty” is to actually create “harmony in the Church”. Because “unity in the Church is harmony. Everyone — he added with a joke — we’re different, we’re not equal, thank God”, otherwise “it would be hell!”. But “we are all called to be docile to the Holy Spirit”. And this is exactly the virtue that will save us from being rigid, from being “alternativists” and from being “advantagists” or swindlers in the Church:

docility to the Holy Spirit, he who “builds the Church”.

And this docility transforms the Church from a house “for rent” into a house in which everyone feels at home. “I’m at home — explained the Pope — because the Holy Spirit gives me this grace”. He then requested “the grace of unity in the Church: to be brothers and sisters in unity”, feeling “right at home. Unity in the diversity of everyone” but “free diversity”, without imposing conditions. “May the Lord send us the Holy Spirit — was Pope Francis’ closing invocation — and create this harmony in our communities, parishes, dioceses, movements”.