



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

How to create dialogue

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Pope Francis continued his reflection on the first book of Samuel (24:3-21), which recounts the confrontation between Saul and David. “Yesterday,” the Pope reminded those who were present at the morning celebration of Mass, “we heard the word of God, which allowed us to see what jealousy does, what envy does in families and in Christian communities. We saw this story played out in the opposition Saul harboured in his heart against David: so jealous was he that he wanted to kill him”.

“Today,” the Pope continued, “the word of God allows us to see another attitude, that of David”, who “knew very well” that he was “in danger; he knew that the king wanted to kill him. And he found himself in a situation in which he could have killed the king, and the story would have ended there”. And yet “he chose another path”; he preferred “to draw near, to seek to clarify the situation, to explain himself, he chose the path of dialogue to make peace”.

Instead, Saul “brooded over bitterness in his heart”. He insulted David “because he believed him to be his enemy. And this bitterness grew in his heart”. Unfortunately, the Pope said, “these imaginings always grow stronger when we listen to them within ourselves. And they create a wall that distances us from the other person”. Ultimately, we end up “isolated in the bitter broth of our resentment”.

Yet David, “by the Lord’s inspiration”, breaks this mechanism of hatred “and says no, I want to talk to you”. And thus it is, the Pope explained, “that the path of peace begins, with dialogue”. But, he warned, “dialogue is not easy, it is difficult”. And yet, it is only “with dialogue that we build bridges of peace in relationships rather than walls that distance us”.

“For dialogue to occur, what we need above all else is humility. It was David who, in humility, said to the king: look, ‘I could have killed you, I could have done this to you, but I don’t want to do it! I want to be close to you because you are the authority, you are the Lord’s anointed!’”. David’s act was an “act of humility”.

We don’t need to raise our voice in order to dialogue “what we need is meekness”. And “we need to consider that the other person has something more that we do”, as David did. Looking at Saul, he said to himself: “He is the Lord’s anointed, he is more important than I am”. We need to do what we prayed for in the opening of Mass: become all things to all”.

“Humility, meekness, becoming all things to all” are three basic elements of dialogue. However, the Holy Father noted, even though “it is not written in the Bible, to do this we have to eat a lot of crow: yet we must do it because that’s how peace is made!” Peace is made “with humility and humiliation”, by seeking always to “see in the other person the image of God”. Solutions to so many problems are found “through dialogue in families, in communities, in all quarters”. It requires a readiness to acknowledge to another person: “But listen, excuse me, this is what I thought...”. The right attitude is “to humble oneself: it is always good to make a bridge, always always!”. This is in keeping with the manner of someone who wants “to be Christian”; even if, as the Pope admitted, “it is not easy, it is not easy!”. And yet “Jesus did this, he humbled himself unto the end, he showed us the way”.

The Pope then offered another practical piece of advice: to open up dialogue “we need to not allow too much time to pass”. Problems should be addressed “as soon as possible, at the first possible opportunity once the storm has passed”. Right away, we need “to draw near in dialogue, because time makes walls grow, as it makes weeds grow and impede the growth of the wheat. Once walls have grown, reconciliation is so difficult; it is so difficult!”. The Bishop of Rome made reference to the Berlin Wall, which for many years had been an element of division, and he noted that the possibility “also exists in our hearts” of becoming like Berlin, of putting up a wall against others. Hence the Holy Father’s invitation “not to let too much time pass” and “to seek peace as soon as possible”.

In particular, the Pope wished to speak to spouses: “It is normal for you to argue, it is normal”. Seeing a smile from several couples who were present at morning Mass, he reminded them that “in marriage there are arguments, and sometimes even plates go flying”. However, he advised, “never end the day without making peace; without talking, which sometimes only takes a small gesture”.

“I am afraid of these walls that grow each day and breed resentment and even hatred,” the Pope said. He again pointed to young David: “he could have gotten perfect revenge”, he could have killed the king, but “he chose the path of dialogue with humility, meekness, sweetness”. Pope Francis concluded by asking “St Francis di Sales, the Doctor of gentleness and sweetness” to give “all of us the grace to build bridges with others, and never walls”.