



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

No dichotomy between Christ and the Church

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In his homily at Holy Mass, Pope Francis reflected on a verse from Psalm 132 which he said “opens the door to reflecting on the word of God in today’s liturgy”. Reciting the psalm’s first verse, he said: “Remember, O Lord, in David’s favour, all the hardships he endured”. This psalm, he said, “presents David as a model, it presents King David as a man who laboured much, who struggled much for the Kingdom of God”.

This psalm verse, the Pope continued, is linked to “the passage from the second book of Samuel (7:18-19,24-29)”, which recounts David’s words to the Lord as he reflects on his dwelling place: “I live in a palace but the Ark of the Lord is still in a tent: let us build a temple”. The Lord’s response is negative: “No, not you, your son will do it!”. The Pontiff added: “David accepts this, and he accepts it with joy” as he presents himself before the Lord and speaks to him “as a son to a father”.

David said: “Who am I, O Lord, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me thus far?”. First he asked himself: “Who am I?”. He knew well that he was once “a young shepherd of sheep — as he says elsewhere, he was ‘taken from among the sheep’” — and that he had become “the king of Israel”. This is the meaning of David’s question: “Who am I?”

David’s question reveals that he “had a strong sense of belonging to the People of God,” the Pope

said. And the Pontiff remarked: “this caused me to reflect that it would be good to ask ourselves what are the signs that we belong to the Church, that we think and feel with the Church”. “The Christian isn’t someone who is baptized and then goes his own way ... the first fruit of baptism is that you belong to the Church, to the people of God; a Christian without the Church is incomprehensible. This is why the great Paul VI said that it is an absurd dichotomy to love Christ without the Church; to listen to Christ but not to the Church; to remain with Christ on the margins of the Church. It is an absurd dichotomy”. “We receive the Gospel message in the Church and we are sanctified in the Church. Our way is in the Church”. The alternative, he said, “is a fantasy” or as Paul VI said, “an absurd dichotomy”.

The Pope then delved more deeply into the meaning “of thinking with the Church”. He explained: “in Latin we say *sensus Ecclesiae*: it means feeling and thinking and willing in and with the Church”. And “in reflecting on this passage about David, on his sense of belonging to the people of God, we find three pillars of this belonging, of this thinking and feeling with the Church: humility, fidelity and the service of prayer”.

Regarding the first, the Bishop of Rome explained that “a person who isn’t humble cannot think and feel with the Church: he thinks what he likes. We see true humility in David who asks: ‘Who I am, O Lord God, and what is my house?’”. David, he said, “is aware that salvation history did not begin with me and it will not finish when I die. No! It is truly a history of salvation” through which “the Lord guides you, makes you go forward and then calls you; and then history continues”. Humility is the awareness that “the history of the Church began before us and will continue after us” for “we are only a small part of a great people travelling along the way of the Lord”.

The second pillar, fidelity, is “joined to obedience”. In this regard, Pope Francis again put forward the figure of David who “obeys the Lord and is faithful to his teaching, to his law”. Thus fidelity for us means “fidelity to the Church, fidelity to her teaching, fidelity to the Creed, fidelity to her doctrine, and safeguarding this doctrine”. Thus “humility and fidelity” go together.

Pope Francis continued: “Paul VI also reminded us that we receive the message of the Gospel as a gift. And we must transmit it as a gift, not as our own possession. We give a gift that we ourselves have received. We must be faithful to this transmission, because we have received and we must give a Gospel that is not our own, but which is the Lord’s. And we must not become lord and master over the Gospel, lord and master of a received doctrine to be used however we please”.

Lastly, the Pope focused on the third pillar: “the third pillar is service: service in the Church; there is service to God and service to our neighbour, to our brethren ... but here I will only mention service to God”. Turning once more to David, he noted that “when he finishes reflecting before God, which is prayer, he prays for God’s people”. This, the Pope said, “is the third pillar: to pray for the Church”.

In the Second Book of Samuel we hear David pray: “O Lord, God, thou art God, and thy words are true, and thou hast promised this good thing to thy servant”. The Lord has also promised us that “the Church will never be destroyed and that the gates of hell shall never prevail against her,” the Pope said. He then continued reading David’s prayer: “Now therefore may it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue forever before thee!”. The Pontiff noted that David’s words raise a question: “What is your prayer for the Church like? Do we pray for the Church? Each day at the Mass, but at home, no? When do we pray?”. We need to pray to the Lord “for the whole Church, all over the world”, he said. This is the essence of “serving God by praying for the Church”.

“Humility,” Pope Francis concluded, makes us understand that “we have been inserted into a community as a great grace” and that “salvation history did not begin with me nor will it end with me: each of us can say this”. Fidelity reminds us that “we have received the Gospel, we have received doctrine” to which we must be faithful and which we must safeguard. And service moves us to be constant in “prayer for the Church”. May the Lord, he said, “help us to go along this road to deepen our belonging in the Church, our thinking and feeling with the Church”.