



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The king and the woman

Thursday, 13 February 2014

(by L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly ed. in English, n. 8, 21 February 2014)

Pope Francis spoke about the risk of corruption at the Mass he celebrated on Thursday morning, 13 February, in the Chapel of Santa Marta. He pointed to two emblematic figures from Scripture: King Solomon, and the woman who asks Jesus to heal her possessed daughter. The Pope wanted to encourage those who each day quietly set out in search of the Lord, passing from idolatry to the true faith.

The “two figures” the Pope chose for his sermon were taken from the day's readings. He referred to the first Book of Kings (11:4-13) to speak about Solomon, and to the Gospel of Mark (7:24-30) to present the image of the woman “who spoke Greek and was Syro-Phoenician”, and who begged Jesus “to drive out the demon from her daughter”. The Pope explained how Solomon and the woman take two opposite paths. “Today the Church invites us to reflect on the journey from paganism and idolatry to the living God, and also on the journey from the living God to idolatry”.

The Gospel tells us that, in turning to Jesus, the woman is “brave”, like any “desperate mother” who would do anything “for the health of their child”. “She had been told that there was a good man, a prophet”, the Pope said, and so she went to look for Jesus, even though she “did not believe in the God of Israel”. For the sake of her daughter “she was not ashamed of how she might look before the Apostles”, who might say amongst themselves “what is this pagan doing here?”. She approached Jesus to beg him to help her daughter who was possessed by an unclean spirit.

But Jesus responds to her request saying “I came first for the sheep of the house of Israel”. He “speaks with harsh words”, saying: “Let the children help themselves first, because it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs”.

The woman — who “certainly had never attended university” the Holy Father said — did not respond to Jesus “with intelligence, but instead with a mother's gut, with love”. She said: “Even the dogs under the table will eat the children's crumbs”, as if to say: “Give these crumbs to me!”. Moved by her faith, “the Lord worked a miracle”. She “returned home, found her daughter lying on her bed, and the demon was gone”.

Essentially, it is the story of a mother who “risked making a fool of herself, but still insisted” out of love for her daughter. She left “paganism and idolatry, and found health for her daughter” and, for herself she “found the living God”. The Pope explained that hers is “the way of a person of good will, who seeks God and finds him”. For her faith, “the Lord blesses her”. This is also the story of so many people who still “make this journey”. “The Lord waits for” these people, who are moved by the Holy Spirit. “There are people who make this journey every day in the Church of God, silently seeking the Lord”, because they “let themselves be carried forward by the Holy Spirit”.

However, the Pope warned, there is also “the opposite path”, which is represented by the figure of Solomon, “the wisest man on earth, who had received many great blessings; he had inherited a united country, the union that his father David had made”. King Solomon had “universal fame”, he had “complete power”. He was also “a believer in God”. So why did he lose his faith? The answer lies in the biblical passage: “His women made him divert his heart to follow other gods, and his heart did not remain with the Lord, his God, as the heart of David his father did”.

The Pope said that Solomon “liked women. He had many concubines and would travel with them here and there: each with her own god, her own idol”. “These women slowly weakened Solomon's heart”. He, therefore, “lost the integrity” of the faith. When “one woman would ask him for a small temple” for “her god”, he would build it “on a mountain”. And when another woman would ask him for incense to burn for an idol, he would buy it. In doing so “his heart was weakened and he lost his faith”.

“The wisest man in the world” lost his faith this way, the Holy Father said. Solomon allowed himself to become corrupt because of “an indiscreet love, without discretion, because of his passions”. Yet, the Pope said, you might say: “But Father, Solomon did not lose his faith, he still believed in God, he could recite the Bible” from memory. To this objection the Pope replied: “having faith does not mean being able to recite the Creed: you can still recite the Creed after having lost your faith!”.

Solomon, the Pope continued, “was a sinner in the beginning like his father David. But then he continued living as a sinner” and became “corrupt: his heart was corrupted by idolatry”. His father

David “was a sinner, but the Lord had forgiven all of his sins because he was humble and asked for forgiveness”. Instead, Solomon’s “vanity and passions led” him to “corruption”. For, the Pope explained, “the heart is precisely the place where you can lose your faith”.

The king, therefore, takes the opposite “path than that of the Syro-Phoenician woman: she leaves the idolatry of paganism and comes to find the living God”, while Solomon instead “left the living God and finds idolatry: what a poor man! She was a sinner, sure, just as we all are. But he was corrupt”.

Referring to a passage from the Letter to the Hebrews, the Pope expressed his hope that “no evil seed will grow” in the human heart. It was “the seed of evil passions, growing in Solomon’s heart” that “led him to idolatry”. To prevent this seed from developing, Pope Francis indicated “the good counsel” that was suggested in the Gospel reading of the day: “Receive with meekness the Word that has been planted in you and it can lead you to salvation”. With this knowledge, the Pope concluded, “we follow the path of the Canaanite woman, the pagan woman, accepting the Word of God, which was planted in us and will lead us to salvation”. The Word of God is “powerful, and it will safeguard us on the path and prevent us from the destruction of corruption and all that leads to idolatry”.