



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Misery and glory

Tuesday, 8 April 2014

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In his homily at Holy Mass, Pope Francis commented on the day's Readings from the Book of Numbers (21:4-9) and the Gospel of John (8:21-30). The Pope began: "In this Gospel Jesus speaks three times about dying in one's sin: 'you will die in your sins'. And this was our fate, and the fate of the people who passed through the Red Sea, who spoke against the Lord and spoke against God, against Moses, saying: 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt?'. If the Lord had not given them a sign to save them, they would have died in their sins. For alone we cannot leave our sins behind".

"The doctors of the law ... taught the law", the Pope said, but they did not clearly understand this point. Certainly they thought about God's forgiveness, but they felt strong and self reliant. They knew everything, but in the end they made religion and the worship of God a culture of their own values.... Yes, they thought the Lord could forgive, they knew it. But they kept him at a distance".

Drawing on the day's first Reading from the Book of Numbers, the Pope then explained that "in the desert the Lord commanded Moses to make a serpent and to set on a pole and then 'everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live'".

What is the serpent?, the Pope asked. "The serpent is the sign for sin. We think of the Book of Genesis: it was the serpent that seduced Eve, that suggested that she sin". And God commands

[Moses] to lift up the serpent, that is sin, as a flag of victory. It is something that one “cannot understand well if one does not understand what Jesus said in the Gospel. Jesus says to the Jews: ‘When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me’”. Lifting up the symbol of their sin and transforming it into an instrument of salvation therefore represents the redemption which comes from Christ lifted up on the Cross.

“Christianity,” the Pope continued, “is not a philosophical doctrine, it is not a programme of life that enables one to be well formed and to make peace. These are its consequences. Christianity is a person, a person lifted up on the Cross. A person who emptied himself to save us. He took on sin. And so just as in the desert sin was lifted up, here God made man was lifted up for us. And all of our sins were there”. Therefore, Pope Francis explained, “one cannot understand Christianity without understanding this profound humiliation of the Son of God, who humbled himself and made himself a servant unto death on the Cross. To serve”.

Like St Paul, we too can speak about what we glory in. Yet for our part, the Pope said, we can only boast about our sins. We don’t have other things to boast about: this is our poverty and misery”. Yet “thanks to the mercy of God, we glory in Christ Crucified. And that is why there is no Christianity without the Cross, and there is no Cross without Jesus Christ”.

Therefore, “the heart of God’s salvation is his Son who took upon himself our sins, our pride, our self reliance, our vanity, our desire to be like God. A Christian who is not able to glory in Christ Crucified has not understood what it means to be Christian. Our wounds, those which sin leaves in us, are healed only through the Lord’s wounds, through the wounds of God made man who humbled himself, who emptied himself. This is the mystery of the Cross. It is not only an ornament that we always put in churches, on the altar; it is not only a symbol that should distinguish us from others. The Cross is a mystery: the mystery of the love of God who humbles himself, who empties himself” to save us from our sins.

“Where is your sin?”, the Pope asked. “Your sin is there on the Cross. Go and look for it there, in the wounds of the Lord, and your sins shall be healed, your wounds shall be healed, your sins shall be forgiven. God’s forgiveness is not a matter of canceling a debt we have with him. God forgives us in the wounds of his Son lifted up on the Cross”. Pope Francis therefore concluded, expressing his hope that “the Lord might draw us to himself and that we might allow ourselves to be healed”.