



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE *DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE*

Depression or hope?

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Francis called for hope, that we not become depressed and frightened by a reality filled with so many wars and so much suffering. He reminded us that great buildings constructed without God are destined to collapse, such as it was for “wicked Babylon”, which fell due to the corruption of spiritual worldliness. So it was, too, for the “distracted Jerusalem”, which fell because it was self-sufficient and incapable of welcoming the Lord’s visitations. And this is why the right Christian attitude is always “hope” and never “depression”. This was the essence of Pope Francis’ words during morning Mass on Thursday in the chapel at Santa Marta. He dedicated the celebration to the Blessed Virgin of the Miraculous Medal, who is dear to the spirituality of the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul, the congregation which provides services in the Casa Santa Marta.

“In these final days of the liturgical year”, Francis pointed out, “the Church proposes that we meditate on the end, on the final days, on the end of the world”. And she does this through “various images, different topics”, and tomorrow’s will be “signs of the times”. She “again draws our attention toward the end: the appearance of this world will melt away and there will be another earth, another sky; but this one will end, it will end up transformed”. Thus, he explained, the Church calls us today to reflect on “the figure of two cities, the collapse of two cities: two cities that didn’t listen to the Lord, that fell away from the Lord; two cities that felt self-satisfied”. And thus, in

the First Reading from Revelation (18:1-2, 21-23; 19:1-3, 9), John speaks about the fall of Babylon, while in the Gospel reading, Luke (21:20-28) recalls Jesus' words regarding the fall of Jerusalem.

However, Francis explained, "the fall of these two cities happens for different reasons". On one hand is Babylon, "the symbol of evil, of sin". It is read in Revelation that Babylon had become "a haunt for demons, a cage for every unclean spirit, a cage for every unclean and disgusting beast". Babylon fell because of its corruption. The Apostle calls Babylon the "great harlot who corrupted the earth with her harlotry". Babylon, Francis stated, "was corrupt, felt itself to be the master of the world and of itself, with the power of sin". And "when sin accumulates, the capacity to cope is lost, and decay begins".

But "it happens this way with people too, with corrupt people who don't have the strength to cope". The Pope explained that "corruption gives you a sort of happiness, it gives you power and it also makes you feel self-satisfied"; however, "it doesn't leave room for the Lord, for conversion". This is also true of a "corrupt city". The word "corruption" speaks of many things today: of "not only economic corruption, but corruption with so many different sins; corruption with that pagan spirit, with that worldly spirit". After all, the Pontiff remarked, "the worst kind of corruption is the spirit of worldliness". Jesus, in fact, "asked the Father to protect his disciples from the world, from the spirit of the world, which makes you feel as if you're in Heaven here", enjoying abundance. However, "inside, that corrupt culture is a putrefied culture: dead and worse.... This cannot be seen".

Hence, Babylon is the "symbol", the Pontiff said, of "every society, every culture, every person separated from God", and also of those who are "separated from the love of neighbours" and who, in the end, "decay within themselves". And thus, "this Babylon, which was a haunt for evil ones, fell due to its spirit of worldliness, it fell due to corruption, she separated from the Lord because of corruption".

On the other hand, Pope Francis stated, "Jerusalem fell for another reason". First of all, "Jerusalem was the bride, the betrothed of the Lord: He really loved her!". However, "she wasn't aware of the Lord's visitations" and she "made the Lord weep", to the point that He said: "How often would I have protected you as a hen with her brood: you were unaware of my visits, of the many times that God visited you".

Therefore, the Pope indicated, "Babylon fell because of corruption, Jerusalem fell because of distraction, for not welcoming the Lord who came to save her". Basically, Jerusalem "didn't feel the need to be saved: she had the writings of the Prophets, of Moses, and that was enough for her". The writings, however, were "closed". As a result, there was "no room left to be saved, the door was closed to the Lord". And thus, "the Lord knocked at the door, but there was no one available to receive Him, to hear Him, to let Him save them". And in the end, Jerusalem fell.

The Pope advised that “these two examples can make us think about our life: we too, one day, will hear the blast of the trumpet”. But “which city will we be in that day? In the corrupt and sufficient Babylon? In Jerusalem, distracted and with closed doors?”. In any case, in the end, both will be destroyed.

In this period, however, “the message of the Church doesn’t end with destruction: in both texts there is a promise of hope”. Indeed, in the moment in which Babylon falls, “the cry of victory is heard: Alleluia! Blessed are those who have been called to the wedding feast of the Lamb. Alleluia, now the wedding feast begins, now that all is clean!”. Babylon, the Pontiff added, “wasn’t worthy of this feast”.

With respect to the fall of Jerusalem, the text “comforts us greatly with these words of Jesus: ‘Raise your heads!’”. The Lord calls us to “look” and not become “frightened by the pagans”, since “the pagans have their time and we must bear it with patience, as the Lord withstood his passion”. This is why the Lord says to “raise your heads!”.

The Pope concluded his meditation with this call to hope: “When we think about the end, the end of our life, the end of the world, every one of us will have our end; when we think about the end, with all our sins, with all our history, let’s think of the feast we will be given gratuitously and let’s raise our heads”. Therefore, let there be “not depression” but “hope”. It’s true, Francis acknowledged, that “reality is grim: there are so many, many populations, cities and people, so many people who are suffering; so many wars, so much hate, so much envy, so much spiritual worldliness and so much corruption”. This is why, the Pontiff confirmed, we have to ask “the Lord for the grace to be prepared for the feast that awaits us, with our heads always high”.