



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Privatized salvation

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God saves us “personally”. He saves us “by name” but always included “within a people”. During Mass at Santa Marta on Thursday, Pope Francis cautioned against the risk of “privatizing salvation”: indeed “there are forms, there are modes of conduct, that are wrong, and incorrect models of living a Christian life”. Referring to the passage from the Letter to the Hebrews (10:19-25) read in the morning’s liturgy, the Pontiff highlighted that if Jesus truly “inaugurated a new way of life” and “we must follow it”, then it is also true that “we must follow it how the Lord wants, according to the form that He wants”, and not by the incorrect model of those who tend to “privatize salvation”.

Indeed, the Pope explained, Jesus “saved all of us, but not generically. Everyone, each one, by first and last name. And this is “personal salvation”. Each of us can say it is “for me”, because “the Lord looked at me, gave his life for me, opened this door, this new way for me”. There is, however, the “risk of forgetting that He saved us” not only “individually, but within a people”, for “the Lord always saves us within a people”. When the Lord “calls Abraham, He promises to create a people”. And this is why we read in the Letter to the Hebrews: “Let us consider... one another”. If, Francis emphasized, I interpret salvation as being “salvation for me alone”, then “I’m going the wrong way: privatizing salvation is the wrong way”.

But “what are the criteria in order not to privatize salvation?”. They can be found precisely in the passage from the Reading. There is “first of all, the criterion of faith”, the Pope explained. “Faith in Jesus purifies us”; and then “let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience”. The first criterion, therefore, is “the sign of faith, the path of faith”. There is then another criterion which lies in “an oft-forgotten virtue: ‘hope’”. Indeed, we must maintain “the confession of our hope without wavering”, which is “like the handmaid: it is what leads us forward, enables us to see the promises and go forward”. Finally, the third criterion is “love”: we must make sure that we “consider one another, stir up one another to love and good works”.

A concrete example, the Pontiff said, can be found in parish or community life: when “I’m there, I can privatize salvation” if I am there “only socially”. To avoid this risk, “I must ask myself: when I speak, do I communicate faith; [when] I speak, do I communicate hope; [when] I speak, do I practice and communicate love”? Because “if, in a community, we don’t speak, we don’t encourage one another in these three virtues, the members of that community have privatized the faith”.

Here is the error: “each one seeks his own salvation, not the salvation of all, the salvation of the people”. Yet “Jesus saved each one, but within a people, within a Church”. At that point it happens that “you are saved, but not as the Lord saved you”. In this regard, the author of the *Letter to Hebrews* “provides important advice: let us not stay away from our assembly”. It is practical advice, which the Pope paused to explain: it happens, in fact, “when we assemble — in the parish, in a group — and we judge others”, by saying: “I don’t like this.... I come because I have to come, but I don’t like it...”, we end up “staying away”. What emerges is “a sort of scorn toward others”. And this is not the door, the new and living way that the Lord has opened, has inaugurated”.

This also happened in the first years of the Church. Paul, for example, “rebukes those who go to meetings to serve the Eucharist and also have lunch, but among themselves, leaving the others there. They scorn the others; they stay away from the entire community; they stay away from the People of God”. In reality, “they privatized salvation”, thinking: “salvation is for me and for my small group, but not for the whole of the People of God”.

This, the Pontiff recalled, “is a really big mistake. It’s what we call and see as: the ecclesial elite”. It happens when “among the People of God, small groups are created” who “think they are good Christians” and might even have “good will, but they are groups that have privatized salvation”.

For this reason, Francis recapitulated: “if I am in my parish, in my group, in my family”, the criteria for recognizing “whether I am a true child of the Church, a child of God, saved by Jesus, within his people, are: if I speak of faith, if I speak of hope, if I speak of love”. But be careful: “when in a group we talk about many things and we don’t mutually give one another strength, we don’t do good works” then we “end up neglecting the large group in order to form small groups of the elite”.

However, God “saves us within a people, not among the elite, which we have created with our philosophy or our way of understanding the faith”.

Thus, we must ask ourselves: “Do I tend to privatize salvation for myself, for my group, for my elite”? Or ask: “do I not neglect the People of God as a whole, do I not fall away from the People of God, even if I am always in the community, in the family, with the language of faith, of hope and the language of works of love? The Pope concluded by asking “that the Lord give us the grace to always feel we are the People of God, saved personally”. For the truth is that “He saves us by name”, but “within a people, not within the the small group I create for myself”.