



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Courageous women

Tuesday, 31 May 2016

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 24, 17 June 2016)

There are two attitudes that are unequivocal signs of being a Christian: “joyful service” and “reaching out to others”. In the Mass he celebrated on Tuesday in the Chapel of Santa Marta, Pope Francis offered advice for Christians who “believe they are sufficient” but in fact “are not entirely so”. He invited us to follow the example of “courageous women” like Mary, who are able to face difficulties and obstacles in order to serve others.

Looking at today’s liturgy, so “full of the joy that fills our hearts”, the Pope first reflected on a few passages from the first reading of the Prophet Zephaniah (3:14-18): “Rejoice and exult with all your heart! The Lord is in your midst, you shall fear disaster no more”; and again: “God is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory, he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love”. That is to say, the Pope explained, “it is God who rejoices with us”, who “renews us”. This passage expresses “a great joy, a joy that fills our hearts and our lives”. Then Pope Francis turned to the Gospel of Luke (1:39-56): “Mary’s encounter with her cousin”, he said, exudes the “same atmosphere of joy: ‘My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God’”. Even Jesus rejoices and leaps in his mother’s womb: “everything there is joy, everything”.

The Pope said “this is the fresh air that the liturgy brings to us today: the message of joy”. He

commented that it is an “awful thing” when Christians have “an unhappy face”. Indeed, sad Christians are an “awful, awful thing”. In fact, “they believe” that they are Christians “but they are not entirely so”.

In this joyful atmosphere, “that today’s liturgy gives us as a gift”, the Pope emphasized two aspects: “an attitude” and “a fact”.

The attitude to be taken from the Gospel passage is that of “service”. Mary indeed “goes to serve”. Pope Francis highlighted “the two verbs that introduce this story in Luke’s Gospel”, namely: “Mary stood up”, that is to say, she decided: “I am going to do something”, and then “she went with haste”. What is “astonishing”, the Pope said, is precisely that this girl of 16 or 17, but no older, quickly went on this journey, where there would surely be robbers, but she was brave. She stood up and went”. Mary did not use excuses like: “No, I’m pregnant”, or even: “I am the queen of the world, because the king comes to me”. She simply “arose and went” showing all of her “womanly courage”.

In this respect, the Pope took a moment to call to mind “the courageous women who are in the Church” and who “are like Our Lady”: women who “carry the family forward” and “the children’s education”, capable of confronting “many hardships and so much pain”, women “who care for the sick.... Courageously: they get up and serve, they serve”. In them we recognize the “Christian sign” of service. And, remembering that “he who does not live to serve, does not live”, Pope Francis repeatedly stressed the importance of an attitude of “joyful service”. It is a joy that also requires “mortification”, that is, choosing not only what we like. Mary, for example, “arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah”. She went “far away” and “certainly did so alone. She was brave”.

The Gospel also proposes a “fact”, that is, “the encounter” between Mary and Elizabeth. “These two women”, the Pope said, “come together and meet with joy, as do women who care for each other: they hug, they kiss...”. It was an encounter that was, in short, characterized by “celebration”. Therefore, “encounter is another Christian sign”. In fact, the Pope explained, “a person who claims to be Christian but is not able to reach out to others, to encounter others, is not totally Christian”. The Pope added that “both service and encounter demand” that we “go out of ourselves; that we go out to serve and go out to encounter, to embrace another person”.

It is precisely with this kind of service and encounter, that in Mary — who just one week before “was working, unaware that her cousin was pregnant”; then, adding to the “great joy of motherhood” are “the joy of serving and the joy of encounter” — the promise of the Lord is renewed and carried out “in the present”.

In this regard, the Pope commented: “If we could learn this — service and reaching out to others, not refusing encounter — if we could learn this, the world would change”. He concluded by

reiterating: “Two things only, to serve and to encounter, and we will experience joy, this joy of God’s presence among us”.