



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Learning to do good

Tuesday, 14 March

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 12, 24 March 2017)

After the Lenten Spiritual Exercises concluded in Ariccia, Pope Francis resumed his customary celebration of morning Mass at Santa Marta, on Tuesday, 14 March. In his homily, the Pope focused on the conversion to which Christians are called, especially during Lent. It is a demanding path, he stressed, but one with “simple rules” which one must embrace in life, “not through words”, but concretely. And it is above all a journey in which no one is alone; all one has to do is allow “the Father who loves us” to “take us by the hand”. The Holy Father’s meditation was prompted by the day’s reading from the Prophet Isaiah, and the invitation to “wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Is 1:16-20).

Pope Francis singled out two expressions that “attract attention” in this passage; “cease to do evil and learn to do good”. In fact, he continued, this is precisely what the “journey of conversion” consists in. “It is simple”. These guidelines depend on what each person experiences personally. “Each of us does something bad every day: the Bible says that the holiest man sins seven times a day”. But it is important not to become accustomed to living a bad life, he explained. “If I do something bad, I notice it and I want to distance myself”, Pope Francis stressed. On this topic, he continued, Isaiah says you should “distance yourself from evil”, from “that which poisons the soul,

which reduces the soul, which sickens you". This, therefore, is the first step needed: to "distance yourself from evil".

But, Francis continued, this is not enough, as the passage continues: "learn to do good", because "it is not easy to do good: we have to learn to do so, always", he added. Fortunately, there is the Lord who "teaches" us and therefore, we must be like children, and "learn". Indeed, "in the journey of life, of Christian life, we learn every day. We must learn to do something each day, to be better than the day before", Francis stressed. This then, is the "rule of conversion: to distance yourself from evil and to learn to do good.... Converting oneself is not like going to a fairy who converts us with her magic wand, no! It is a journey. It is a journey of distancing yourself and of learning". It is a journey which requires "courage, to remove yourself" from evil and "humility to learn" to do good. And above all, it requires concrete acts, he explained.

It is no coincidence, the Pope said, that the Lord mentions several concrete examples through the words of the Prophet: "seek justice, correct oppression, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow"; there is an entire list of examples, but what is important, Francis said, is understanding that "we learn to do good with concrete acts, not with words". And in fact as we read in the Gospel of the day (Mt 23:1-12) that Jesus "scolds this ruling class of the people of Israel, for they 'preach but do not practice'; they do not know concreteness. And if there is no concreteness, there can be no conversion", the Holy Father added.

After identifying 'what' to do on the path to conversion, the Pope moved on to reflect on 'how' we should behave. Thus, he returned to the day's reading from Isaiah, which states: "Come now, let us reason together". The Lord therefore, "first invites us and then he helps us", Francis explained. He reflected on the language chosen by Jesus; "come now", as we read in Isaiah, and "rise" as he says to the paralytic: "Rise, take up your pallet and walk", (Mk 2:1-12) the same expression used with Jairus' daughter and with the widow's son at the doors of Nain.

God always invites us to rise, but he always "lends his hand", and he does this with his characteristic humility, Pope Francis said. In the passage of Isaiah, He says, "come now, and let us reason together". Thus, "He lowers himself to our level, as one of us; our God is humble", the Pope added. Here then is the logic which leads to conversion: "first the invitation, then the help", journeying with us, "to help us, to explain things to us, to hold our hand and lead us by the hand". And "the result of this is something marvelous: 'though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow'", Pope Francis continued. The Lord is thus "able to perform this miracle ... of transforming us. Not from one day to the next: no, no no! With the journey, on the path".

This, the Pontiff observed, is "the path of Lenten conversion. Simple. It is a Father who speaks, a Father who loves us. He really loves us. And he accompanies us", Pope Francis said. The only thing the Lord asks is that we be humble, he added. In fact, Jesus states: "whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted". Therefore, the Holy Father

concluded, “if you allow the Lord to take you by the hand and lead you forward”, and if “you rise and go with him, with this gesture of humility, you will be exalted; you will be forgiven; you will be made ‘white’”. And in this way, “we will grow as good Christians”.