



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

Never seated

Thursday, 4 May 2017

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Pope Francis called for a Church that “does not remain seated”, that knows how to listen to “people’s distress” like a mother who bears children “without proselytism”, and that witnesses to “the joy of being Christian”. The Pope spoke of the ecclesial mission of the Church during Mass on Thursday morning, 4 May. This mission, Francis stressed, applies not only to today’s Church, but to the Church of all times, as we gather from readings in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, which accompany the liturgy during the Easter season.

The Pontiff pointed out that the first thing the Apostles received from Jesus was a promise: “I will be with you until the end of the world”. We then see it proven in the Gospel according to Mark: “they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it”, (Mk 16:20). Therefore, Francis said, “the Lord, witness to obedience, is present in the preaching: from the beginning, he accompanies his disciples; he never leaves them alone, not even in the worst moments. Never”.

This is the basis on which the story of the Church begins, Pope Francis explained, as is well summarized in “the first eight chapters of the Acts of the Apostles”. There we can find “the sermons, baptisms, conversions, miracles, persecutions, joy and also that ugly sin of those who

approach the Church to carry out their own affairs, those benefactors of the Church who then in the end, swindle the Church". For example, in these first chapters, there is the story of Ananias and Sapphira.

The day's liturgy offers the narrative of the "conversion of a 'treasury minister'", a eunuch who was a court official of the queen of Ethiopia (Acts 8:26-40). "The Spirit tells Philip to go to this official", the Pope explained, inviting the congregation to read the entire passage on their own. Take "three minutes: read it calmly; it will be good for you", he said.

The Holy Father focused on three key phrases. Firstly, he pointed out that "the Spirit, the angel, told Philip to 'Rise and go'". Francis called this a "sign of evangelization" and a "sign of the Church". In fact, "the vocation of the Church is to evangelize; it is her great consolation; to evangelize", the Pope stressed. But how is this possible? He offered this answer: "Rise and go". The Spirit "does not say: 'remain seated, at ease, in your home'. No! In order to be ever faithful to the Lord, the Church

must be on her feet and on the move: 'Rise and go'". In fact, Pope Francis continued, "a church that does not rise, that does not journey, becomes sick and ends up closed with much psychological and spiritual trauma, closed within a world of gossip, of things ... closed, without horizons". The invitation, however, is clear: Rise and go; get on your feet and get moving.

The second word which emerges further on in the reading is "listen". The Spirit, in fact, invites Philip to approach the chariot of the court official, who was "a Judean proselyte" who "had come from Ethiopia to Jerusalem to worship God", the Pope explained. The text suggests a certain restlessness in his heart as he was reading the Bible, sitting in the chariot. Pope Francis noted that the Spirit did not tell Philip to "preach to him", but rather to "approach and listen".

And here we come to the next key word, the "second step", the Holy Father said; that of the "Church that knows how to listen; the Church that knows there is restlessness in every heart: all men, all women have restlessness in their heart, good or bad, but there is restlessness. Listen to that restlessness", the Pope said. We must listen, he continued, to "what people feel, what the hearts of these people feel, what they think", even if their thoughts are "mistaken", because it is important to "understand where the restlessness lies". Indeed, "we all have restlessness within us", the Pontiff said, and the Church must "find people's restlessness".

This is well recounted in the Bible passage where it says that, approached by Philip, the official "feels inspired to ask a question: 'About whom, pray, does the prophet say this?' — And he let him into the chariot". Philip, Pope Francis explained, "began to preach, to explain gently, and that restlessness found an explanation that filled that heart with hope". All this was made possible, he added, "because Philip approached and listened". Thus, the Pope stressed the importance of "listening, getting to know our people's restlessness".

Joy is the third word singled out by the Pope. Reviewing the passage, he noted the scene as they

came to the water. “That minister listened, and faith, the Spirit, was working within: the Lord was working there. He listened and understood that this prophecy was of Jesus, and faith in Jesus grew within him to such a point that”, when they reached the water, “it was he who asked for Baptism, because the Spirit had worked within his heart”. Thus, the Pontiff urged, “let us allow the Spirit to work in people’s hearts”.

The passage culminates, after the official’s baptism, with Philip being led by the Spirit to Azotus, as the eunuch “went on his way rejoicing”. This is the third word; “the joy of Christians”.

To conclude his reflection, Pope Francis returned to its key aspects. Firstly, “a Church on her feet, which goes out: ‘Rise and go’”: “the sister Church, a mother who listens to find the restlessness and — with the grace of the Holy Spirit, with the Lord who is there to confirm the Word with signs — finds the words to be spoken”; and finally the “Mother Church which gives birth to many children”. She does so in a non proselytising way with “the way of the witness to obedience”. It is a Church “which today says to us: ‘Rejoice’”.

This is “the joy of being Christian”, the Pope stressed. It is also experienced in bad times. “There was a great persecution of Christians after the stoning of Stephen, and Christians were scattered everywhere, like a seed taken by the wind. And they were the ones who preached the Word of Jesus”.