
Pope Francis: meeting with Roman clergy, “bitterness is a subtle enemy”. “We should accept it, without getting angry at ourselves”

“Bitterness - which is not a fault - should be accepted. It can be a great opportunity. It may even be healthy, for it raises a spiritual alarm: be careful, for you have exchanged the Covenant for material securities, you are becoming ‘foolish and stone-hearted’”. Pope Francis explained this in his prepared remarks for today’s penitential liturgy with the Roman clergy in the Basilica of St John Lateran, which were read out by Cardinal Vicar Angelo de Donatis. “A subtle enemy that finds many ways to disguise and hide itself, and like a parasite, slowly robs us of the joy of the vocation to which we were once called” - this is how Pope Francis described bitterness, focusing on the many “bitternesses” that can creep into the life of a priest. “Acknowledging our bitternesses and addressing them allows us to get in contact with our humanity, with our blessed humanity”, Pope Francis began, citing Irenaeus of Lyon: “And thus also to remember that as priests, we are not called to be omnipotent, but sinful men, forgiven and sent”. “There is a sadness that we can lead us to God”, the Pope argued: “Let us accept it, without getting angry at ourselves. Perhaps it is the right time. Also St Francis experienced this, as he reminds us in his testament: “Bitterness will be turned into great sweetness, and easy, worldly sweetness will be turned into bitterness”. “Has the Lord disappointed us or have we replaced hope with our own expectations?”, this is the first question we should ask ourselves: “Indeed, the Christian hope is neither disappointing nor failing. To hope does not mean to believe that things will get better, but that everything that happens has a meaning in light of Easter”. “What is the difference between expectation and hope?”, Pope Francis asked: “Expectations arise when we spend our lives saving our lives: we strive for certainties, rewards, promotions... When we get what we want, we almost feel like we are never going to die, that things will always be the same! Because the reference point is us”. Hope, however, is “something that flows from the heart when we decide to stop defending ourselves”: “When I recognise my limitations, and that not everything begins and ends with me, then I realise the importance of trust”. To learn “distrust of ourselves, and trust in God” - this is the journey we should embark on. “I hope, not when nothing more can be done, but when I stop working for my interests alone. My life is savoury if I make Easter visible, not if things go my way”.

Valentina Bombelli