

Scandal, defeat come when clergy, lay refuse to let God transform them

Carol Glatz Catholic News Service | Jan. 16, 2014 The Francis Chronicles
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Priests, bishops and lay Catholics who cause scandal are living lives cut off from God, and their corruption ends up poisoning others, Pope Francis said.

"The Word of God was rare in these scandals; the Word of God was rare in these men and women. They didn't have a connection with God," he said Thursday during his early morning Mass in the Domus Sanctae Marthae, where he lives.

The pope based his homily on the day's reading from the First Book of Samuel (4:1-11) in which the people of Israel have become distant from God and are defeated by the Philistines.

Eli, the high priest of Israel, has become "lukewarm" in his faith, the pope said, and Eli lets his sons -- Hophni and Phinehas -- continue to serve as priests, even though they are corrupt.

The people of Israel have put all their confidence in the Ark of the Covenant, seeing it "as something magic" that will help them in their battle, the pope said, according to Vatican Radio.

But then "the defeats come; the ark is taken by the enemies. There was no true faith in God, in his real presence in their lives," he said.

The pope said the Scripture reading should make people think about their relationship with God: Is it something external? Formal? Distant? Or have people really let "the Word of God enter our heart, change our heart?" he asked.

When the church and the people of God suffer defeat, it is because people have closed their hearts to God, he said.

Defeat comes to people's lives "simply because they don't hear the Lord, they don't seek the Lord, they don't let themselves be sought by the Lord."

After tragedy strikes, these same people, with their hardened hearts, then cry out to God, "Oh, Lord, what happened?" the pope said.

They make the same complaints, he said, found in the day's responsorial Psalm (44:10-25): "You made us the reproach of our neighbors, the mockery and the scorn of those around us. ... Why do you hide your face, forgetting our woe and our oppression?"

"But are we ashamed? (There are) so many scandals that I don't want to mention them one by one, but we all know what they are. We know where they are," he said.

Without mentioning the sexual abuse of minors by clergy, the pope said some of these scandals "made us pay a lot of money. Good! One has to do this."

"The embarrassment of the church! But are we ashamed of these scandals, of these defeats of priests, of bishops, of laypeople?"

Rarely did any of the men and women who caused the church scandal have the Word of God rooted deeply in their lives, he said.

"They had a position within the church, a position of power, even luxuries. But not the Word of God," the pope said.

Maybe they liked to show off their cross or insignia, but they carried it around like the people of Israel carried the ark, he said, "without a living relationship with God and the Word of God."

Scandals hurt the holy and faithful people of God, who are hungry for "a hearty meal" -- the bread of life, he said.

"Poor people!" he said. "We don't give them to eat, in these cases -- the truth. And we even give them -- many times -- a poisoned meal to eat."

The pope asked people to pray that God would help them never forget him, to remember he is alive and to enter their hearts.

While the pope's homily was based on the Scriptures read at the Mass, the same day two Vatican representatives testified before the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva on the church's response to the scandal of the sexual abuse of minors.

As a signatory of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Holy See is asked to answer questions and review its progress or problems in implementing the treaty.

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