



On the feast of St. Paul's conversion, **Pope Francis has warned against rigidity and living a double life.**

According to Vatican Radio, Pope Francis did so today, May 5, 2017, during his daily morning Mass at Casa Santa Marta.

The Pontiff drew inspiration from today's first Reading from the Acts of the Apostles, which recounts of Saint Paul's conversion from Saul, "a rigid persecutor," to Paul, "a meek and patient proclaimer of the Gospel."

It was at the stoning of St. Stephen, that the name Saul appears, **Francis recalled, describing the future evangelist as a "young," "rigid," man who was convinced of the rigidity of the law.**

While he was rigid, he was "sincere," Francis reflected. On the other hand, Jesus condemned those who were rigid, without sincerity.

No Double Lives

In his homily, **Francis criticized those in the Church nowadays, who use rigidity to cover-up their own sins.**

"They are rigid people living a double life: **They make themselves look good, sincere, but when no one sees them, they do ugly things.** On the other hand, this young man was honest. He believed that."

"When I say this, I think of the many young people in the Church today who have fallen into the temptation of rigidity. Some are sincere, they are good. **We have to pray that the Lord might help them to grow along the path of meekness.**"

Others, he said, "use rigidity in order to cover over weakness, sin, personality problems; and they use rigidity" to build themselves up while sacrificing others.

In this way, Pope Francis explained, Saul grew even more rigid, to the point where he couldn't tolerate what he saw as a heresy, and therefore began to persecute the Christians.

In parentheses, the Pope suggested, at least Saul allowed children to live, noting nowadays, those who persecute Christians don't even spare children.

Turning to when Saul went to Damascus to arrest Christians, and on the road there, Francis stated Francis recalled how on the way, he encountered "another Man, who spoke with a language of meekness: **'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'**"

Sincerity, Meekness

"This rigid young man, who had become a rigid man – but sincere! – was made a little child, and allowed himself to be led where the Lord called him."

This is, Francis pointed out, the power of the meekness of the Lord."

Saul, having become Paul, the Jesuit Pope pointed out, proclaimed the Lord to the very end, and suffered for Him.

"He, who had persecuted the Lord with the zeal of the law," Francis stressed, "said to the Christians, 'With those same things by which you have drawn away from God, with which you have sinned – with the mind, with the body, with everything – with those same members now you are perfect, you give glory to God.'"

Warning Against Rigidity

Urging those present to pray for those who are rigid, "that they may follow the way of meekness of Jesus," the Pope noted there is a dialogue between what is sufficient, rigidity, and meekness.

This is, he explained, **"the dialogue between a sincere man and Jesus, who speaks to him with sweetness."**

Thus, he said, "begins the story of this man whom we have known from his youth, in the stoning of Stephen, who would end up betrayed by an internal conflict among Christians."

Path of Christians

In the minds of some, the Holy Father admitted, the life of Saint Paul "is a failure," like that of Christ.

Yet, he admonished, “this is the path of the Christian: to go forward along the path marked out by Jesus: the path of preaching, the path of suffering, the path of the Cross, the path of the resurrection.”

Pope Francis concluded his homily with the following prayer: “Today, in a special way, let us pray to Saul for those in the Church who are rigid: for the rigid who are sincere, as he was, who have zeal, but are mistaken. And for the rigid who are hypocrites, those who live a double life.”