Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Gospel text (*Lk* 9:22-25): Jesus said to his disciples: “The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised.”

Then he said to all, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?”

“If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me”

Fr. Josep Mª MASSANA i Mola OFM
(Barcelona, Spain)

Today is the first Thursday of Lent. The ashes our Church placed on our foreheads yesterday are still fresh, introducing us into this holy time, a forty-day journey. Jesus, in the Gospel, teaches us two paths: the Way of the Cross that He must walk, and our path in following Him.

His path is the Way of the Cross and death, but also of His glorification: " The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected… and be killed and on the third day be raised" (Lk 9:22). The path we must take is, essentially, no different from that of Jesus, and it shows us how to follow Him: " If anyone wishes to come after me…" (Lk 9:23).

Embracing His Cross, Jesus followed the Father's Will; we, by taking up our own cross, accompany Him on His Way of the Cross.

The path of Jesus is summarized in three words: suffering, death, resurrection. Our path also consists of three aspects: Self-denial, taking up the cross every day, and following Jesus (the first two are attitudes, while the third is the essence of the Christian vocation).

If we do not deny ourselves and do not take up the cross, we are only seeking to affirm and protect ourselves —we want to "save our life," as Jesus says. But, in trying to save it, we will lose it. On the other hand, if, for the sake of Jesus, we do not strive to avoid suffering and the cross, we will save our life. It is the paradox of following Jesus: "What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit

himself?" (Lk 9:25).

These words of the Lord, which closes today's Gospel, shook the heart of Saint Ignatius and led to his conversion: "What if I did what Saint Francis did, and what Saint Dominic did?" May these same words also help us to convert this Lent!

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “Let us look steadfastly to the blood of Christ, and see how precious that blood is to God which, having been shed for our salvation, has set the grace of repentance before the whole world.” (Saint Clement of Rome)

- “We cannot think about the Christian life apart from this journey that He first made. It is the journey of humility. For the Christian way of life without the cross is not in fact Christian, and if the cross is a cross without Jesus, it is not Christian.” (Francis)

- “Conversion is accomplished in daily life by gestures of reconciliation, concern for the poor, the exercise and defense of justice and right, (...) acceptance of suffering, endurance of persecution for the sake of righteousness. Taking up one's cross each day and following Jesus is the surest way of penance.” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, Nº 1435)