Friday after Ash Wednesday

Gospel text (*Mt* 9:14-15): Then the disciples of John approached him and said, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but your disciples do not fast?” Jesus answered them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

“The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast”

Fr. Xavier PAGÉS i Castañer
(Barcelona, Spain)

Today, the first Friday of Lent, having experienced the fast and abstinence of Ash Wednesday, we have tried to offer fasting and the prayer of the Holy Rosary for peace, which is so urgently needed in our world. We are willing to keep this Lenten exercise that the Church, Mother and Teacher, asks us to observe, and to remember that the Lord himself said: “The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast” (Mt 9:15). We desire to live it not only as the fulfillment of a precept to which we are bound, but above all, by seeking to find the spirit that leads us to live this Lenten practice and that will help us in our spiritual progress.

In seeking this profound meaning, we can ask ourselves: what is true fasting? The prophet Isaiah, in today's first reading, already comments on the fast that God appreciates: "Is it not sharing your bread with the hungry, bringing the afflicted and the homeless into your house; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed; your vindication shall go before you, and the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard" (Is 58:7-8). God likes and expects from us everything that leads us to authentic love for our brothers and sisters.

Every year, the Holy Father John Paul II wrote us a Lenten message. In one of these messages, under the motto "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35), his words helped us discover this same charitable dimension of fasting, which moves us - from the depths of our hearts - to prepare for Easter with an effort to identify ourselves, ever more, with the love of Christ that led him to give his life on the Cross. In short, "what the Christian should be doing at all times should be done now with greater care and devotion" (Saint Leo the Great, Pope).

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “There are three things by which faith stands firm. They are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. If you have only one of them, you have nothing.” (Saint Peter Chrysologus)

- “The Sacred Scriptures and the entire Christian tradition teach that fasting is a great help to avoid sin and all that leads to it. True fasting, as the divine Master repeats, is rather to do the will of the Heavenly Father.” (Benedict XVI)

- “Jesus' call to conversion and penance, like that of the prophets before him, does not aim first at outward works, "sackcloth and ashes," fasting and mortification, but at the conversion of the heart, interior conversion. Without this, such penances remain sterile and false (...).” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, № 1430)