

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Gospel text (Lk Lk 5:27-32): Jesus saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the customs post. He said to him, “Follow me.” And leaving everything behind, he got up and followed him. Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were at table with them. The Pharisees and their scribes complained to his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus said to them in reply, “Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners.”

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Today we see how Lent is moving forward and the strength of the conversion our Lord summons us to. The figure of Matthew, the apostle and evangelist, is very representative of those of us who think that, because of our background, or because of our personal sins or complicated life, we are unworthy of our Lord.

Well, no, we are not; to remove any doubt we might still have, Jesus Christ is offering us the possibility of following Him, as He did with the first evangelist, Levi the tax collector, to whom He simply says: “Follow me” (Lk 5:27). Jesus does with him exactly the opposite of what a “judicious” mentality would do pretending to be “politically correct”. Levi —instead— came from a world where he was openly rejected by all his compatriots, as he was considered, just because of the fact he was a publican, and a helper of the Romans and, possibly, as much of a corrupt by the “commissions” he might receive, who indulged in choking the poor to collect their taxes; in short, he was considered a public sinner.

Those considering themselves as perfect, could not even think of Jesus not only not requesting them to follow Him but not even asking them to His own table.

However, by choosing Levi, Our Lord Jesus Christ is telling us that it is rather this

kind of people whom He prefers to call to expand His Kingdom; He has chosen the sick, the sinners, those who consider themselves unworthy: “Rather, God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong” (1Cor 1:27). For these are those who need help and, as such, they will also understand those also in need.

We are not to think God wants spotless and immaculate followers to serve Him. That privilege belongs only to Our Mother. But for us, subjects of God's eternal salvation and Lent's protagonists, God wants just a contrite and humble heart. In words of Saint Augustine: “God has made you weak to give you his own power”. This is the type of person who, as the psalm says, God would not despise.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

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“But, if you will, you may be healed. Entrust yourself to the Physician, and He will couch the eyes of your soul and of your heart. Who is the Physician? God, who heals and makes alive through His word and wisdom. God by His own word and wisdom made all things.” (Saint Theophilus of Antioch)

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“A first fact strikes one: Jesus does not exclude anyone from his friendship. ‘I came not to call the righteous, but sinners’ (Mk 2:17). The good news of the Gospel consists precisely in this: offering God's grace to the sinner!” (Benedict XVI)

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“Jesus invites sinners to the table of the kingdom: ‘I came not to call the righteous, but sinners’. He invites them to that conversion without which one cannot enter the kingdom, but shows them in word and deed his Father's boundless mercy for them and the vast ‘joy in heaven over one sinner who repents’ (Lk 15:7) The supreme proof of his love will be the sacrifice of his own life ‘for the forgiveness of sins’ (Mt 26:28).” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, N° 545)