Friday of the First Week of Lent

Gospel text (*Mt* 5:20-26): Jesus said to his disciples: "I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the Kingdom of heaven.

"You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, 'Raqa,' will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to fiery Gehenna. Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court with him. Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Amen, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny".

"Leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother"

Fr. Thomas LANE
(Emmitsburg, Maryland, United States)

Today, the Lord challenges us to convert as He speaks about what goes on in our hearts. The commandment says "You shall not kill" (Mt 5:21), but Jesus reminds us that there are other ways of killing life in others. We can kill life in others by harboring excessive anger towards them in our hearts or not treating them respectfully and calling them "Fool" (cf. Mt 5:22).

The Lord calls us to be people of integrity: "Leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother" (Mt 5:24), i.e. the faith we profess in our celebration of the Liturgy should flow over into our daily lives and affect how we live. So Jesus asks us to be reconciled with our enemies. A first step along the road to reconciliation is to pray for our enemies as Jesus requested. If we find this difficult it is good to remember and picture in our minds Jesus dying for those whom we dislike. If others have seriously hurt us let us pray for healing of painful memories and the grace to forgive. As you pray, ask the Lord to walk back in time with you to the time and place of the hurt and replace your hurt with His love so that you may be free to forgive.

As Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI wrote, "If we want to present ourselves to him, we must also take a step towards meeting one another. To do this we must learn the great lesson of forgiveness: we must not let

the gnawing of resentment work in our soul, but must open our hearts to the magnanimity of listening to others, open our hearts to understanding them, eventually to accepting their apologies, to generously offering our own."

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- "Nothing makes us so like God, as being ready to forgive." (Saint John Chrysostom)
- "That the Lord, in this Lenten season, gives us the grace to learn to blame ourselves, each in his solitude, and to pray: have compassion for me, Lord, help me to feel shame and give me mercy, so that I may be merciful with others." (Francis)
- "From the Sermon on the Mount onwards, Jesus insists on conversion of heart: reconciliation with one's brother before presenting an offering on the altar, love of enemies, and prayer for persecutors, (...) prayerful forgiveness from the depths of the heart, purity of heart, and seeking the Kingdom before all else. This filial conversion is entirely directed to the Father." (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, Nº 2608)

Other comments

«If you are not righteous in a much broader way than the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven»

Fr. Joaquim MESEGUER García
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Today, Jesus exhorts us to go beyond legalisms: «I tell you, then, that if you are not righteous in a much broader way than the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees, you cannot enter the Kingdom of heaven» (Mt 5:20). The Law of Moses aims at the necessary minimum to guarantee coexistence; but Christians, led by Jesus Christ, and full of the Holy Spirit, have to try to overcome this minimum to reach the climax of love. The Scribes and the Pharisees were strictly abiding by the Commandments; when looking over our own life, could we say the same? Let us therefore be careful not to look down on their religious experience.

What Jesus is teaching us today is to avoid feeling too safe just because we try hard to fulfill those requirements that may render us righteous in the face of God, as the Scribes and the Pharisees used to do; but, rather, to put our emphasis on our love for God and for our brothers; the kind of love that will allow us to go beyond the coldness of the Law while humbly recognizing our own shortcomings in a sincere conversion.

There are those who say: ‘I am good for I do not steal, nor do I kill, nor have I ever hurt anybody’; but Jesus admonishes us that this is not enough, as there other ways to steal and to kill. We can kill someone else's illusions; we can look down on our neighbor, overshadow him or alienate him; we can bear malice against him, and all this means killing too, not physically but, indeed, morally and spiritually.

Throughout our life, we can find many adversaries, but we are our own worst enemy when we stray from the Gospel. This is why, in seeking reconciliation with our brothers, first we have to be reconciled with ourselves. Saint Augustine tells us: «As long as you are your own adversary, the Word of God will also be your adversary. Become friendly with yourself and you will have become reconciled with it».