

Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Gospel text (Jn 7:40-53): Some in the crowd who heard these words of Jesus said, “This is truly the Prophet.” Others said, “This is the Christ.” But others said, “The Christ will not come from Galilee, will he? Does not Scripture say that the Christ will be of David’s family and come from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?” So a division occurred in the crowd because of him. Some of them even wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

So the guards went to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, “Why did you not bring him?” The guards answered, “Never before has anyone spoken like this man.” So the Pharisees answered them, “Have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, which does not know the law, is accursed.” Nicodemus, one of their members who had come to him earlier, said to them, “Does our law condemn a man before it first hears him and finds out what he is doing?” They answered and said to him, “You are not from Galilee also, are you? Look and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.” Then each went to his own house.

“Never before has anyone spoken like this man.”

Fr. Fernand ARÉVALO
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Today, the Gospel presents the different reactions, which the words of our Lord produced. John's text does not offer us any word from the Master, but it does mention the consequences of what He said. Some thought He was a prophet; others said “This is truly the Prophet.” (Jn 7:41).

Jesus Christ is truly a “sign that will be contradicted” as Simon had told Mary (cf. Lk 2:34). Those who listened to Jesus' words did not remain indifferent to them, to the point that, on this occasion, as in many others, “a division occurred in the crowd because of him” (Jn 7:43). The reply of the officers who wanted to arrest the Lord centers the question and shows us the power of Christ's words: “Never before has anyone spoken like this man.” (Jn 7:46). It is like saying: His words are different; they are not empty boastful words, full of arrogance and falseness. He is “the Truth” and his way of speaking reflects this reality.

And if this happened amid his audience, his deeds provoked even more amazement and admiration; but also, criticism, gossip, hate... Jesus Christ spoke “the language of charity”: his deeds and his words showed the deep love He felt towards all men, especially those more in need of assistance.

Today as then, we Christians are —must be— “a sign of contradiction”, because we do not speak and behave like others do. By imitating and following Jesus Christ, we likewise must use “the language of charity and love”, a necessary language that, in fact, we can all understand. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, wrote in his encyclical *Deus caritas est*, “Love —caritas— will always prove necessary, even in the most just society (...). Whoever wants to eliminate love is preparing to eliminate man as such.”

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

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“He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God.” (Saint Irenaeus of Lyon)

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“At the root of the mystery of salvation, in fact, lies the will of a merciful God who does not want to surrender to the misunderstandings, failures and misery of man.” (Francis)

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“Among the religious authorities of Jerusalem, not only were the Pharisee Nicodemus and the prominent Joseph of Arimathea both secret disciples of Jesus, but there was also long-standing dissension about him, so much so that St. John says of these authorities on the very eve of

Christ's Passion, 'many... believed in him', though very imperfectly (Jn 12:42). This is not surprising, if one recalls that on the day after Pentecost 'a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith' (Acts 6:7), and 'some believers... belonged to the party of the Pharisees.' (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, N° 595)

Other comments

“Never before has anyone spoken like this man.”

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Today, we can feel how, a few days before His Passion in Jerusalem, the atmosphere around our Lord becomes “strained”. Because of him a kind of controversial argument begins. It could not be otherwise: “Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division” (Lk 12:51).

And it does not mean our Redeemer likes controversy and division, but rather that, before God, “half-baked ideas” are no good: “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters” (Lk 11:23). It is inevitable! Before him one cannot take a neutral stand: either He exists or He does not exist; either He is my Lord, or He is not my Lord. “No one can serve two masters” (Mt 6:24).

John Paul II considered that before God one must choose. The simple faith our good God requests from us implies an option. We have to choose because He does not want to impose upon us: He came to Earth in a discreet manner; He died stunned, without making any ostentation of his divinity (Phil 2:6). This is what Saint Thomas Aquinas so wonderfully expresses in his Adoro Te devote: “On the cross was veiled Thy Godhead's splendor; but here (in the Eucharist) Thy manhood lies hidden too”.

We have to choose! God does not impose upon us; He offers himself to us. And it is up to us to decide for him or not. It is a personal matter each one—with the help of the Holy Spirit—has to solve by himself. Miracles are useless, if man's dispositions are not humility and simplicity. We can see the Jews divided before the same facts. And this is because, in love matters, it is not possible to give a half-hearted, half way reply: Christian vocation implies radical response, as radical as the testimony of submission and obedience Christ gave in the Cross.