Monday of the Eleventh Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Mt* 5:38-42): Jesus said to his disciples: “You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow.”

“But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil”

Fr. Joaquim MESEGUER García
(Rubí, Barcelona, Spain)

Today, Jesus teaches us that hatred is overcome through forgiveness. The law of retaliation was a step forward, for it limited the right to revenge to a just proportion: you can only do to your neighbor what he has done to you, otherwise you would commit an injustice; this is the meaning of the adage "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." Even so, it was a limited step forward, since Jesus Christ in the Gospel affirms the need to overcome revenge with love; this is what He himself expressed when, on the Cross, he interceded for his executioners: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34).

However, forgiveness must be accompanied by truth. We do not forgive simply because we feel powerless or self-conscious. The expression "turn the other cheek" has often been confused with the idea of renouncing our legitimate rights. It is not that. Turning the other cheek means denouncing and challenging the person who has done it, with a peaceful but decisive gesture, the injustice they have committed. It's like saying to him: "You have struck me on one cheek. Do you want to strike me on the other cheek as well? Do you think your actions are correct?" Jesus calmly responded to the insolent servant of the high priest: "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" (Jn 18:23).

We see, then, what the Christian's conduct should be: not to seek revenge, but to stand firm; to be open to forgiveness and to say things clearly. It is certainly not an easy art, but it is the only way to curb violence and manifest divine grace to a world often lacking in grace. Saint Basil advises us: "Take heed and you will forget the insults and injuries that come to you from your neighbor. What sorts of things will each of you be called? He is abusive, but you are magnanimous; he is prone to anger and hard to bear, but you are longsuffering and meek. He will change his mind about the things he said, but you will never repent of your virtue.”

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “Therefore, in this kind of injuries which are wont to rouse vengeance Christians will observe such a mean, that hate shall not be caused by the injuries they may receive.” (Saint Augustine)

- “In the Gospel Jesus also speaks to us of holiness, and explains to us the new law, his law. We are required not only to avoid repaying others the evil they have done to us, but also to seek generously to do good to them.” (Francis)

- “Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that ‘everyone should look upon his neighbor (without any exception) as ‘another self,’ above all bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity’ (Vatican II) (...)” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nº 1931)