Friday of the Thirteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Mt* 9:9-13): As Jesus passed by, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post. He said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples. The Pharisees saw this and said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" He heard this and said, "Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. Go and learn the meaning of the words, I desire mercy, not sacrifice. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."

"Follow me"

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Today, the Gospel speaks to us of a vocation, that of Matthew the publican. Jesus is preparing a small group of disciples that would continue his work of Salvation. And He chooses whom He wants: whether fishermen or from humble professions. He even calls to follow him, a tax collector, a highly abhorred role by the Jews —who considered themselves as perfect Law-abiding citizens—, because they saw it as tantamount to having a sinful life, as they collected taxes in the name of the roman governor, whom they did not want to submit to.

It suffices with Jesus beckoning him to his service: "Follow me" (Mt 9:9). A single word by the Master, and Matthew leaves his profession and, happily, invites him to his home to celebrate with a joyous dinner. It was only natural that Matthew had a group of good friends, of the same "professional guild", to join him at his table. But, according to the Pharisees, all that kind of people were confirmed sinners publicly recognized as such.

The Pharisees could not therefore silence it and they comment to some of Jesus' disciples: "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Mt 9:10).

Jesus' answer is immediate: “Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do” (Mt 9:12). The comparison is perfect: “I did not come to call the righteous but sinners” (Mt 9:13).

These words of the Gospel are topical. Jesus keeps on inviting us to follow him, each one of us according to his condition and profession. And, more often than not, to follow Jesus means to leave behind some messy passions, or some poor family relationships, or just a waste of time, to allot some moments to prayer, to the Eucharist feast or to some missionary pastoral care. In other words “no Christian ought to think of him as his own master, for he is submitted to God's service” (St. Ignatius of Antioch).

Jesus is, indeed, asking me to change my life, so I wonder: which group do I belong to, to the perfect persons or to those who sincerely accept they can dramatically improve? For I can improve, can't I?

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “My sweet Lord, turn the eyes of Your mercy upon Your people; for You will be the more glorified if You pardon so many creatures.” (Saint Catherine of Siena)
- “Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy. Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us.” (Francis)
- “Jesus performed acts, such as pardoning sins, that manifested him to be the Savior God himself. Certain Jews, who did not recognize God made man, saw in him only a man who made himself God (Jn 10:33), and judged him as a blasphemer.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nº 594)