Friday of the Fifteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Mt* 12:1-8): Jesus was going through a field of grain on the sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “See, your disciples are doing what is unlawful to do on the sabbath.” He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry, how he went into the house of God and ate the bread of offering, which neither he nor his companions but only the priests could lawfully eat?

Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests serving in the temple violate the Sabbath and are innocent? I say to you, something greater than the temple is here. If you knew what this meant, I desire mercy, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned these innocent men. For the Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath.”

"I desire mercy, not sacrifice"

Fr. Josep RIBOT i Margarit
(Tarragona, Spain)

Today, the Lord is watching what we have sown during our lives, to pick the fruits of sanctity. Will He find charity, love of God and fellow man? Jesus corrects the rabbis' meticulous casuistry making the Sabbath rest law totally unbearable: Will He have to remind us that He is only interested in our heart, in our capacity to love?

“See, your disciples are doing what is unlawful to do on the Sabbath.” (Mt 12:2). And the unbelievable thing is they sincerely meant it. How can anyone ever forbid doing a good deed? There is something that reminds us that no reason could exist excusing us from not helping others. True charity respects the demands for justice, by avoiding our falling into arbitrariness or whim, while preventing harshness from killing the true spirit of God's Law; for charity is nothing but a continuous invitation to loving, to give ourselves to others.

“I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Mt 12:7). Let us repeat it many times to engrave it on our heart: God, who is rich in mercy, wants us to be merciful. “How close God is to those who confess his mercy! Yes; God is not far from those contrite at heart” (St. Augustine). And how far away from God are we when we let our heart turn into hard stone!

Jesus Christ accused the Pharisees of condemning the innocent. That is a serious accusation. But what about us? Are we seriously interested in other people's problems? Do we judge them with affection and sympathy, as if we were judging a friend or a brother? Let us try not to lose our way, after all.

Let us beg the Mother of God to make us merciful and to show us how to forgive. Let us be benevolent and kind. And if we discover in our life some details that do not fit at the heart of this disposition, now is a good time to rectify them, by formulating some fruitful intention.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “Sweet is the word mercy; and if the mere name, how much more so the reality? If a man desires to obtain mercy in heaven, he should bestow it in this world.” (Saint Caesarius of Arles)

- “God's [Jesus] words have come down to us, through the Gospels, as a synthesis of the entire Christian message: true religion consists in love of God and neighbor.” (Benedict XVI)

- “In presenting with divine authority the definitive interpretation of the Law, Jesus found himself confronted by certain teachers of the Law (...). This was the case especially with the sabbath laws, for he recalls, often with rabbinical arguments, that the sabbath rest is not violated by serving God and neighbor (...)” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, Nº 582)