Thursday of the Eighteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Mt* 16:13-23): Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi and he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter said in reply, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus said to him in reply, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Then he strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised. Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him, “God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you.” He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

"You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do"

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Today, Jesus proclaims Peter very fortunate for his rightful faith declaration: “Simon Peter said in reply, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus said to him in reply, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father”.” (Mt 16:16-17). By this congratulation Jesus promises Peter the primacy of his Church; but, shortly after, He scolds Peter for having a very human and wrong idea of what the Messiah would do: “Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him, “God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you.” He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.” (Mt 16:22-23).

We have to be grateful to the evangelists for presenting us the first disciples of Jesus as they actually were: no idealized characters, but people of flesh and blood as ourselves, with their defects and virtues; which gets them closer to us and helps us to see that perfecting ourselves in Christian life is a certain path we all have to follow, for nobody is born knowing all the answers.

As we already know how history goes, let us accept Jesus Christ was the suffering Messiah prophet Isaiah announced who offered his life in the Cross. What is more difficult to accept is that we must keep on presenting his work by following the same path of surrendering, renunciation and sacrifice. Imbued, as we appear to be, with a society that encourages quick success, learning without any effort and in a funny way, achieving the maximum profit with the least possible strain, it should not surprise us we end up by seeing things more as people do than as God does. Once he received the Holy Spirit, Peter learned where the path he had to follow went through and he lived by this expectation. «World tribulations are full of sadness and empty of any prizes; but those we suffer for God are softened by the hope of an eternal prize» (St. Ephraem).

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “No one can have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother.” (Saint Cyprian)

- “Faith in Christ and discipleship are strictly interconnected. And, since faith involves following the Master, it must become constantly stronger. Peter and the other disciples also had to grow in this way, until their encounter with the Risen Lord opened their eyes to the fullness of faith.” (Benedict XVI)

- Moved by the grace of the Holy Spirit and drawn by the Father, we believe in Jesus and confess: 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God' (Mt 16:16). On the rock of this faith confessed by St. Peter, Christ built his Church. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 424)