Friday of the Eighteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Mt* 16:24-28): Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life? For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father’s glory, and then he will repay each according to his conduct. Amen, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom.”

“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me”

Fr. Pedro IGLESIAS Martínez
(Ripollet, Barcelona, Spain)

Today, the Gospel clearly confronts us with the world... It is absolutely radical in its approach, and it does not allow any half measures: “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me” (Mt 16:24). In many instances, when we are facing suffering generated by ourselves or by others, we can hear: “We have to accept the sufferings God sends us... This is God's will..., or words to that effect”. And we keep on gathering sacrifices in very much the same way as those trading stamps, we used to collect, with the hope of showing them at Heaven's audit department when the day arrives for us to give our statement of accounts.

But our suffering per se would be of little value. Christ was no stoic: He was thirsty, He was hungry, He was tired, He did not like to be forsaken. He let others help him... where He could, He soothed pain, whether physical or moral. So, what is happening, then?

Before loading with our “cross”, the first thing we must do is to follow Christ. It is not a matter of first suffering and then following Christ... Christ must be followed from our Love, and from there we can then understand the sacrifice, the personal negation: “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 16:25). Love and mercy may lead us to sacrifice. Any true love engenders, one way or another, some sort of sacrifice, but not all sacrifice engenders love. God is not sacrifice; God is love. Only from that perspective can pain, fatigue and the cross in our lives, have any meaning, as we follow the model of man the Father reveals to us in Christ. St. Augustine said: “When one loves, one does not suffer; but if one does suffer, the very suffering is loved.”

In the course of our lives, let us not seek a divine origin for our sacrifices and hardships—asking, “Why is God sending me this?”—but rather strive to find a divine purpose for them: “How can I turn this into an act of faith and love?” It is from this disposition that we truly follow Christ—and it is surely in this way that we become worthy of the merciful gaze of the Father. The very same gaze with which He looked upon His Son on the Cross.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “The soul will be a partaker of God Himself, and will do, together with Him, the work of the Most Holy Trinity. O souls created for this and called to this, what are you doing? What are your occupations? You do not see that, while seeking after greatness and glory, you are miserable and contemptible, ignorant.” (Saint John of the Cross)

- “What is important for all people, what makes their life significant, is the knowledge they are loved. God is there first and loves me. And that is the trustworthy ground on which my life is standing” (Benedict XVI)

- "We live by the Spirit"; the more we renounce ourselves, the more we "walk by the Spirit." (Gal 5:25; cf. Mt 16:24-26) (Catechism of the Church Catholic, no. 736)