Monday of the Twenty-first Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Mt* 23:13-22): Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You lock the Kingdom of heaven before men. You do not enter yourselves, nor do you allow entrance to those trying to enter. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You traverse sea and land to make one convert, and when that happens you make him a child of Gehenna twice as much as yourselves.

"Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'If one swears by the temple, it means nothing, but if one swears by the gold of the temple, one is obligated.' Blind fools, which is greater, the gold, or the temple that made the gold sacred? And you say, 'If one swears by the altar, it means nothing, but if one swears by the gift on the altar, one is obligated.' You blind ones, which is greater, the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? One who swears by the altar swears by it and all that is upon it; one who swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it; one who swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who is seated on it."

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You lock the Kingdom of heaven before men"

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Today, the Lord wants to enlighten us about a concept which, being elementary per se, very few succeed in assimilating in depth: guiding someone towards disaster is not guiding towards life but towards death. He who teaches how to kill or kills others is not a master of life, but "an assassin".

We could easily say that, today, the Lord is bad-tempered, He is fairly annoyed with those guides who make their fellow men lose their way and their taste of life and end up taking their life away: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You traverse sea and land to make one convert, and when that happens you make him a child of Gehenna twice as much as yourselves" (Mt 23:15).

Many are those who honestly try to enter the Kingdom of heaven, and removing this illusion of theirs is certainly very serious. These guides hold the keys to the entrance, but for them others represent nothing but a "toy", something quite fancy to hang on their belt, and nothing more. Pharisees go after people to "catch" them and induce them to accept their own religious conviction; not that of God, but their own; not to convert them into sons of God, but into sons of hell. Their pride does not uplift one to heaven, does not lead to life, but to perdition. What a terrible mistake!

“Blind guides, who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel!” (Mt 23:24). Everything is upside down, mixed up; the Lord has, repeatedly, tried to open up their ears and unveil the Pharisees' eyes, but Zacharias, the prophet, says: “They refused to listen; they stubbornly turned their backs and stopped their ears so as not to hear” (Za 7:11). Then, when the judgment comes, the judge will return a severe sentence: “I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.” (Mt 7:23). It is not enough to know best: it is necessary to know the truth and teach it with true humble faithfulness. Let us remember the quote from a true master of wisdom. St. Thomas Aquinas: “While the arrogant ones extol their own courage, they degrade the excellence of truth.”

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- "‘We are all one in the Lord’, rich and poor, slaves and free, healthy and sick alike; and one is the head from which all derive: Jesus Christ. And as with the members of one body, each is concerned with the other, and all with all" (Saint Gregory Nazianzus)

- “God has revealed his Holy Name to us as a gift: we must keep it in memory, in a silence of loving adoration. However, no word has been abused as much as the word ‘God’” (Benedict XVI)

- “Superstition is the deviation of religious feeling and of the practices this feeling imposes. It can even affect the worship we offer the true God, e.g., when one attributes an importance in some way magical to certain practices otherwise lawful or necessary…” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, nº 2111)

Other comments

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You lock the Kingdom of heaven before men”

Abbé Marc VAILLOT
(París, France)

Today, once again, the Gospel shows how the goodness of God, who watches over our happiness, is poured out. It tells us clearly what the sources are: truth, goodness, righteousness, justice, love... and all the virtues. It also warns us not to fall into the traps - excesses, lusts, deceptions, in a word, sins - that would prevent us from attaining such happiness.

Jesus uses His divine authority to show us clearly the absolute character of the good, which we must pursue, and the evil, which we must avoid at all costs. Hence, His lively and gentle exhortation to respect the magna charta of the Christian life: the Beatitudes, paths that give access to Happiness. In parallel, we find the threatening tone used in today's Gospel: the Curses of those destructive acts that must always be

avoided. It is the same Sacred Heart, the same Love that dictates the Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:1 ff) and the Curses.

It is very important to understand that one is as important as the other for those who want to be saved: "Blessed" are the poor; the hearts that thirst for justice; the merciful souls... "Woe to you"... when you scandalize others; when you teach but do not put it into practice; when you corrupt the sound doctrine; when you lead others astray from the right path...

Jesus adds firmly: the greater your responsibility before others, the stronger will be the curse that will fall upon you. Our Lord, in this passage, is addressing the notables: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! (Mt 23:13 ff).

Let us apply this divine teaching to our lives. Our good and our bad actions always have a double impact: one, which falls on ourselves, because each action improves or devastates us; the other, considering our situation as adults, parents, teachers, responsible in any aspect, each of our actions can have repercussions, good or bad, unsuspected: "life is not time merely passing by, life is about interactions" (Francis).

And we will have to give an account of it to the love of God!