

Sunday 22nd (A) in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (Mt 16,21-27): Jesus began to make it clear to his disciples that He must go to Jerusalem; He would suffer many things from the Jewish authorities, the chief priests and the teachers of the Law. He would be killed and be raised on the third day. Then Peter took him aside and began to reproach him, «Never, Lord! No, this must never happen to you». But Jesus turned to him and said, «Get behind me, Satan! You would have me stumble. You are their king not as God does, but as people do».

Then Jesus said to his disciples, «If you want to follow me, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me. For whoever chooses to save his life will lose it, but the one who loses his life for my sake will find it. What will one gain by winning the whole world if he destroys himself? There is nothing you can give to recover your own self. Know that the Son of Man will come in the Glory of his Father with the holy angels, and he will reward each one according to his deeds».

«If you want to follow me, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me»

Fr. Joaquim MESEGUER García
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Today, we can also see Peter—a most remarkable figure and great testimony and teacher of the faith—as a man of flesh and blood. With virtues and failings, as each one of us. We have to be grateful to the Evangelists for having realistically acquainted us with the personality of the first followers of Christ. Peter, who—as we read in the Sunday's 21st Gospel—makes an excellent confession of faith, and deserves a great praise by Jesus and the promise of the maximum authority within the Church (cf. Mt 16:16-19), also receives a sharp reprimand from the Master, because, on his journey to faith, he still has a lot to learn: «Get behind me, Satan!

You would have me stumble. You are their king not as God does, but as people do» (Mt 16:23).

Listening to Jesus' scolding Peter gives us a good motive to make an examination of conscience about our Christian personality. Are we truly faithful to the teachings of Jesus, to the point of actually thinking like God, or are we rather adapting ourselves to the criteria and way of thinking of this world? Throughout history, the sons of the Church have fallen into the temptation of following this world thinking, of leaning on the material riches, of yearning for politic power or social prestige; and at times, we are more keen on the worldly interests than in the spirit of the Gospel. Before these facts, we are asked once again the same question: «What will one gain by winning the whole world if he destroys himself?» (Mt 16:26).

After clearing up these things, Jesus teaches us what thinking like God means: to love, with whatever is implied about denying ourselves in favor of our neighbor. This is why following Christ means taking up the Cross. It is a very tight following, because «with so good a friend and so good a captain at our side, Who came forward first of all to suffer, one can bear everything. He helps us; He gives us strength; He never fails; He is a true Friend» (St. Teresa of Avila). And..., when the Cross is a sign of sincere love, then it becomes enlightening and a sign of salvation.