Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Gospel text (*Mt* 16:21-27): 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."

Then 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 all according to his conduct."

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

Fr. Vimal MSUSAI
(Ranchi, Jharkhand, India)

Today, we consider that to see Jesus and follow Him means to have a mature obedience that enables us to listen and respond (response-able). And this is possible only in the person who is truly liberated from the childish cravings of the ego and passions: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (Mt 16,24). To hear and respond to God's call in our daily lives means that we possess the ability to forget ourselves and serve others. Only love makes such a risk possible (cf. Heb 5:8-9).

The sage Buddha tells that "To live a pure unselfish life, one must count nothing as one's own in the midst of abundance." A concrete example is the family life where parents have fully and generously dedicated themselves for the good of the children, perhaps even to the point of forgetting themselves. They choose to do so in order that their children will be well prepared for a better future. In so doing, the family will be one and united.

We have countless inspiring models from teachers, doctors, social workers, consecrated persons and saints. Pope Francis inspires us to "see" Jesus in our daily life, because "although the life of a person is in a land full of thorns and weeds, there is always space in which the good seed can grow. You have to trust in God!"

A grain of wheat can only be lifegiving once it falls to the ground and dies (cf. John 12:24). This is also true in Jesus who in dying will show all his love by giving his life. Thus, the example of the grain of wheat is the life of Jesus and of every disciple who wishes to serve him, witness to him and have life in him: “whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 16:25). Amen!

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “He who does not deny himself cannot approach Him who is above him. But if we abandon ourselves, where will we go outside of ourselves?” (Saint Gregory the Great)

- “This is not an ornamental cross or an ideological cross, but it is the cross of life, the cross of one’s duty, the cross of making sacrifices for others with. In assuming this attitude, these crosses, we always lose something. It is losing in order to win” (Francis)

- “By his loving obedience to the Father, "unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8), Jesus fulfils the atoning mission of the suffering Servant, who will "make many righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities" (Is 53:11)” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 623)

Other comments

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

Fr. Joaquim MESEGUER García
(Rubí, Barcelona, Spain)

Today, we contemplate Peter—an iconic figure and great witness and teacher of the faith— as a man of flesh and blood, with virtues and weaknesses, just like each one of us. We must be grateful to the evangelists for presenting the personalities of Jesus’ first followers in a realistic way. Peter, who makes an excellent confession of faith—as we see in the Gospel for the 21st Sunday—and deserves great praise from Jesus and the promise of the highest authority within the Church (cf. Mt 16:16–19), also receives a severe admonition from the Master, because he still has much to learn on his journey of faith: “Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do” (Mt 16:23).

Listening to Jesus’ admonition to Peter is a good reason to make an examination of conscience about our Christian being. Are we truly faithful to the teachings of Jesus Christ, to the point of genuinely thinking like God, or do we instead conform to the way of thinking and the standards of this world? Throughout history, we, the children of the Church, have fallen into the temptation of thinking according to the world,

of relying on material wealth, of eagerly seeking political power or social prestige; and sometimes we are driven more by worldly interests than by the spirit of the Gospel. Faced with these realities, the question arises once again: “What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?” (Mt 16:26).

After clarifying things, Jesus teaches us what it means to think like God: to love, with all that this entails in terms of self-sacrifice for the good of others. For this reason, following Christ means taking up the cross. It is a heartfelt following, because “with so good a Friend and Captain ever present, Himself the first to suffer, everything can be borne. He helps, He strengthens, He never fails, He is the true Friend” (Saint Teresa of Ávila). And… when the cross is a sign of sincere love, then it becomes luminous and a sign of salvation.