

Monday 3rd in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (Mk 3,22-30): The teachers of the Law who had come from Jerusalem said, «He is possessed by Beelzebul: the chief of the demons helps him to drive out demons». Jesus called them to him and began teaching them by means of stories or parables, «How can Satan drive out Satan? If a nation is divided by civil war, that nation cannot stand. If a family divides itself into groups, that family will not survive. In the same way, if Satan has risen against himself and is divided, he will not stand; he is finished. No one can break into the house of the Strong one in order to plunder his goods, unless he first ties up the Strong one. Then indeed, he can plunder his house. Truly, I say to you, every sin will be forgiven humankind, even insults to God, however numerous. But whoever slanders the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven: he carries the guilt of his sin forever». This was their sin when they said, «He has an evil spirit in him».

«But whoever slanders the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven»

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Today, when we read about this event in the Gospel we are more than a little surprised when «the teachers of the Law who had come from Jerusalem» recognize Jesus' compassion for the oppressed and witness the divine miracles with which He blesses them, but then say, «He is possessed by Beelzebub», and «the chief of the demons helps him to drive out demons» (Mk 3:22). It is surprising how even intelligent people permit personal and religious animosity to blind them to the good in others. These teachers were in the presence of Him who personified Goodness. They must have sensed, as did others, the unassuming Heart of Jesus, and they will have understood that they stood before One who was the only true Innocent. Yet, because of their intransigence, they obstinately refused to acknowledge him. Those who claim to be knowledgeable in the things of God, were those who not only did

not recognize him, but who also accused him of being satanic.

While others might have retaliated in an angry outburst, or turned away from them and their contemptuous accusation, our Lord does not, for He knows that He must try to convince them of his divinity for the sake of their souls. As John Paul II has asserted, our Lord «is an insuperable testimony of patient loving and humble gentleness». His unlimited condescension brings Him to try to open their closed hearts by reasoning with them by parables, but to no avail. Finally, Jesus in the divine but stern authority of the Godhead warns them that their hard-heartedness is rebellion against the Holy Spirit, and that it will never be forgiven (cf. Mk 3:29). That rebellion remains unforgiven, not because God does not want to forgive, but because, to be forgiven, one must first recognize one's sin, which the rebellious will not do.

The Master knows that His followers also experience that same obstinacy, even when they are acting in good faith for the benefit of unbelievers. All of us will, at times, face the same kind of difficulties and rejection as Jesus did. When we do, let us remember Saint Terese of Jesus when she was leading her sisters closer to holiness.

Let us not, therefore, be surprised if we find in our path these contradictions. They will just be the sign we are following the right way of life. Let us then pray for these people and ask our Lord to give us the necessary patience.