Thursday of the Thirty-first Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Lk* 15:1-10): The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” So Jesus addressed this parable to them. “What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it? And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy and, upon his arrival home, he calls together his friends and neighbors and says to them, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance.

“Or what woman having ten coins and losing one would not light a lamp and sweep the house, searching carefully until she finds it? And when she does find it, she calls together her friends and neighbors and says to them, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found the coin that I lost.’ In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

"There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents"

Fr. Francesc NICOLAU i Pous
(Barcelona, Spain)

Today, the evangelist of God's mercy recounts two parables of Jesus that illuminate his divine behavior towards those sinners returning to the right path. With the human image of joy, he reveals God's goodness finding pleasure in the homecoming of those who moved away from sin. It is like coming back to the Father's home (as more distinctly will be said in the Parable of the Lost Son). “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (Jn 3:17), and He did it while welcoming those that, full of confidence, “were all drawing near to listen to Jesus” (Lk 15:1), as He healed their soul just as the doctor heals the body of the ailing (cf. Mt 9:12). While the Pharisees believed they were so righteous and felt they needed no doctor, the evangelist says it actually is for them that Jesus presents the parables we read today.

If we feel spiritually sick, Jesus will tend to us and will be happy that we have gone to Him. But if, on the contrary, we would think as those proud Pharisees did, that we need not plead for forgiveness, the divine Doctor will not heal us. Each time we recite the Lord's Prayer, we must feel like sinners, as we say “and forgive us our trespasses…” And we surely must be grateful to Him for doing so! As we must also be grateful that He has placed so mercifully at our disposal, the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Let us hope our haughtiness will not make us look down on it. Saint Augustine tells us that Jesus Christ, God and Man, gives us an example of humbleness by removing the corruption of our arrogance, “for, though great is the misery of a haughty man, greater still is the mercy of the humble God.”

Let us further add that the lesson Jesus gives to the Pharisees is also an example for all of us; we cannot keep sinners away from us. The Lord wants us to love them as He has loved us (cf. Jn 13:34) and we must rejoice to bring the lost sheep back home or to recover the lost coin.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- "Hence, the mercy of God toward us is more wonderful, because it is not for the just nor for the holy, but for the wicked and godless, that Christ died." (Saint Leo the Great)

- "Because of “the Good Shepherd, the good Christian goes out, is always outward bound: he always goes out of himself, is always going out toward God, in prayer, in adoration”. And “he goes out toward others to bring the message of salvation”. (Francis)

- "Ordained ministers are also responsible for the formation in prayer of their brothers and sisters in Christ. Servants of the Good Shepherd, they are ordained to lead the People of God to the living waters of prayer: the Word of God, the liturgy, the theological life and the Today of God in concrete situations." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2686)