Tuesday of the Sixth Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Mk* 8:14-21): The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. Jesus enjoined them, “Watch out, guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” They concluded among themselves that it was because they had no bread. When he became aware of this he said to them, “Why do you conclude that it is because you have no bread? Do you not yet understand or comprehend? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes and not see, ears and not hear? And do you not remember, when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many wicker baskets full of fragments you picked up?” They answered him, “Twelve.” “When I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many full baskets of fragments did you pick up?” They answered him, “Seven.” He said to them, “Do you still not understand?”

“Watch out, guard against the leaven of the Pharisees”

Fr. Juan Carlos CLAVIJO Cifuentes
(Bogotá, Colombia)

Today—once again—we see the wisdom of the Lord Jesus. His behavior is surprising, as it is out of the ordinary; it is original. He has just performed some miracles and is moving to another area where God's grace must also reach. In this context of miracles, before a new group of people who are waiting for him, he warns them: "Watch out, guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod" (Mk 8:15), for they—the Pharisees and the Herodians—do not want God's Grace to be known, and instead spend their time spreading bad leaven throughout the world, sowing weeds.

Faith does not depend on works, for "a faith that we ourselves can determine is not a faith at all" (Benedict XVI). On the contrary, works depend on faith. Having a true and authentic faith implies an active, dynamic faith; not a conditioned faith that remains only on the surface, in appearances, that gets caught up in trivialities... Ours must be a real faith. We must see with the eyes of God and not with those of sinful man: "Do you not yet understand or comprehend? Are your hearts hardened?" (Mk 8:17).

The kingdom of God expands in the world as when a measure of yeast is placed in dough; it grows without anyone knowing how. This is how authentic faith must be, which grows in the love of God. Therefore, let nothing and no one distract us from the true encounter with the Lord and his saving message. The Lord never misses an opportunity to teach, and he continues to do so today: "We must free ourselves from the false idea that faith no longer has anything to say to the people of today" (Benedict XVI).

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “Lay aside, therefore, the evil, the old, the sour leaven, and be changed into the new leaven, which is Jesus Christ. Be salted in Him, lest anyone among you should be corrupted, since by your savour you shall be convicted.” (Saint Ignatius of Antioch)

- “By denouncing the ‘leaven’ of Herod, Jesus Christ unmasks one of the facets of the sinful temptation: the appearance of realism. By making decisions is when the question arises: what really matters in my life?” (Benedict XVI)

- “As leaven in the dough, the newness of the kingdom should make the earth ‘rise’ by the Spirit of Christ. This must be shown by the establishment of justice in personal and social, economic and international relations, without ever forgetting that there are no just structures without people who want to be just.” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, Nº 2832)

Other comments

“Do you have eyes and not see, ears and not hear?”

Fr. Lluís ROQUÉ i Roqué
(Manresa, Barcelona, Spain)

Today, we see that Jesus —as often happened with the Apostles— was not always understood.

At times it is difficult. We may see wonders, have things explained crystal clear or receive a good doctrine. No matter, we deserve His scolding: “Do you not yet understand or comprehend? Are your hearts hardened?” (Mk 8:17).

We would like to tell Him we understand Him and that our mind is not closed, but we do not dare to. Like the blind of the parable, we may ask Him, to listen to our pleading: “Lord, please let me see” (Lk 18:41), to have faith and see; and, as the psalmist says: “Direct my heart toward your testimonies and away from gain” (Ps 119:36) to have a good disposition, to listen, receive the Word of God and make it fruitful.

Today and always, it would also be good, to pay attention to Jesus' warning: “Watch out, guard against the leaven of the Pharisees.” (Mk 8:15); the truth is so far away... We seem “fanatical believers”, who do not understand “when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23). We must also beware “the leaven of Herod” which is proud, despotic, sensual, and only wants to see and feel Jesus for pleasure's sake.

But, how to keep away from this “yeast”? Well, just by doing a continuous, intelligent and pious evaluation of the Word of God which will let us grow individually “pious as infants: but not ignorant, because each one of us must try, to the best of his abilities, to seriously and scientifically study the faith… That is, to have the piety of children coupled with the doctrinal knowledge of a theologian” (Saint Josemaria Escrivá).

Thus, enlightened and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, alerted and led by the good Shepherds, stimulated by all the faithful Christians, we shall believe what we ought to believe and we shall do what we ought to do. First, though, we must have the “desire” to see: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (Jn 1:14), visible, palpable; and the “desire” to listen: it was the Virgin Mary's response that made Jesus say: “Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it” (Lk 11:28).