Thursday of the Seventh Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Mk* 9:41-50): Jesus said to his disciples: “Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward. “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut if off. It is better for you to enter into life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the Kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. “Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if salt becomes insipid, with what will you restore its flavor? Keep salt in yourselves and you will have peace with one another.”

“Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward”

Fr. Xavier PARÉS i Saltor
(La Seu d'Urgell, Lleida, Spain)

Today, the proclaimed Gospel is somewhat difficult to understand for Jesus' words are certainly very harsh: “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off (…). And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out” (Mk 9:43-47). Jesus is very demanding with those of us who are his followers. But Jesus simply wants to emphasize that we have to learn how to give up those things that may hurt us, even though we like them, for they can be the cause of all sin and vice. St. Gregory wrote: “We should not covet those things that only meet our material and sinful needs”. Jesus expects us to be radical. In another part of the Gospel, it is written: “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 10:39).

On the other hand, Jesus' demand is actually a demand for love and maturity. We shall not remain without our reward. That which makes our deeds meaningful must always be our love: We should know how to offer a drink of water to whomever is in need of it, not because of any personal interest, but simply out of love. We must discover Jesus in the needy and poor. Jesus only severely denounces and condemns those who do evil and scandalize, and who cause the little ones forfeit of the infinite goodness and grace of God.

Finally, we all have to overcome trial by fire. It is the fire of love and charity that redeems us from our sins so we can be the salt that flavors love, service and charity. As Christians, we find in our prayers and in the Eucharist the strength of faith and the good flavor of the salt of Christ. We shall not remain without our reward!

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “After the Lord teaches us that we should not scandalize those who believe in Him, he warns us with how much care we must avoid those who scandalize us, that is, who lead us with their word and their example to the ruin of sin.” (Saint Bede the Venerable)

- “Faith opens a “window” to the presence and working of the Spirit. It shows us that, like happiness, holiness is always tied to little gestures. These little gestures get lost amid all the other things we do, yet they do make each day different.” (Francis)

- “Scandal is an attitude or behavior which leads another to do evil. The person who gives scandal becomes his neighbor's tempter. He damages virtue and integrity; he may even draw his brother into spiritual death. Scandal is a grave offense if by deed or omission another is deliberately led into a grave offense.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nº 2284)