Sunday 8th (B) in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Mk* 2,18-22): One day when John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, some people asked Jesus, «Why is it that both the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but yours do not?». Jesus answered, «How can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the day will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them and on that day they will fast. No one sews a piece of new cloth on an old coat, because the new patch will shrink and tear away from the old cloth, making a worse tear. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins, for the wine would burst the skins and then both the wine and the skins would be lost. But new wine, new skins!».

«New wine, new skins!»

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Today, we can detect an expression of grievance in the Pharisees and in some disciples of the Baptist who, quite shocked, ask the Lord why his disciples do not fast. Jesus answers them with another upsetting question: «How can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the day will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them and on that day they will fast» (Mk 2:19-20).

Jesus introduces Himself as the bridegroom in love with Mankind, which He invites, not to a dinner but to a feast, similar to a wedding banquet, because He has announced to Mankind the Good News of salvation. Jesus Christ was using the old epitome of the prophets and psalms that presented Yahweh-God as a spouse deeply in love with his wife, the faithful people. Hosea, the prophet, today, refers to it: «I will espouse you to me forever: I will espouse you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy» (Hos 2:21).

The Lord meant that the Kingdom of God was a new reality. It was like a wedding feast. The philosophy of Moses' Law was no longer applicable. The newness of the Kingdom He was preaching was like a new wine. When Jesus tells them that «no one puts new wine into old wineskins, for the wine would burst the skins and then both the wine and the skins would be lost. But new wine, new skins!» (Mk 2:22), the people understand him perfectly well because Jesus country was full of vineyards.

Today, many of our fellow citizens do not know what a “skin” is. They have never seen one. The skins were containers made of animal skins that, sewn, greased and rubbed with glue, were employed to contain wine. When the wine was new it was so strong that it could burst the old skins. Countrymen knew it quite well.

The Pharisees and their disciples were like old skins that could unstitch and crack out of so much abuse. They were used to their routine. They could not assume the “newness” of the preaching of that young man from Nazareth.