February 5th: Memorial of Saint Agatha, Virgin and Martyr

Gospel text (*Lk* 9:23-26): Jesus said to all, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself? Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."

“Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”

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Today, we celebrate the memory of Saint Agatha, a virgin probably martyred during the Decian persecution. Our natural instincts impel us to seek our protection, to run away from the risk of pain and death. Except in odd cases, we strongly stick to our life. And by trying to save it the wrong way, more often than not we end up by losing it.

To truly save this life, we must —apparently— lose it. Many have died trying to save someone else. Many missionaries and volunteers have lost their life in an attempt to defend the values of justice and announce Jesus' message. But they have not lost their life; they have actually saved it!

This is the Christian's law. This is the consequence of being a disciple of Jesus. If we want to become his disciples, Jesus said it very clearly: “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23). It is not possible to be at the same time a good “Christian” and carry an easy and selfish life. The good father, the good mother, know that their responsibility is to “give their life” for the sake of their son: sleepless nights, sacrifices, efforts, work, patience… This is what to be a Christian means. We must be always willing to offer our life for Christ.

This is how Saint Agatha, the saint born in Sicily in the 3rd Century, perceived it. It was not possible to conform her total love for Jesus with the Roman prefect's amorous advances that were trying to force her to break her promise of virginity. Agatha, a young Christian girl, received the most terrible and cruel death threats. But she had already drunk from the Gospel fountain: “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it” (Lk 9:24). And she begged the Lord for His strength in order not to fail Him.

It is not easy to resist the temptations of our society that call for a life of comfort, effortless and without any engagements. They promise us a “salvation” that will never reach us. They beguile us. As Saint Agatha did, we are also to pray with the Psalm: “Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings from the wicked who despoil me” (Ps 17:8-9).

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “Agatha, her goodness coincides with her name and way of life. She teaches us by her example to hasten to the true Good. God alone.” (Saint Methodius)

- “Following Jesus is a joy. However, one needs to follow Jesus along his way and not according to the way of the world.” (Francis)

- “The intercession of the saints. ‘Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness (...). They do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus (...). So by their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped’ (Vatican II).” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, nº 956)