May 2nd: Memorial of Saint Athanasius, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

Gospel text (*Mt* 10,22-25a): Jesus said to his disciples, «Everyone will hate you because of me, but whoever stands firm to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next. For sure, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. A student is not above his teacher, or a slave above his master. A student should be glad to become like his teacher, and the slave like his master».

«When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next»

Fr. Antoni CAROL i Hostench
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Today we celebrate St. Athanasius (Alexandria, circa 300), one of the most important Fathers of the Church. As a youngster he joined the Council of Nicaea (year 325), the first one of the Ecumenical Councils. It was there where the "Creed" we recite at the Mass on holidays, originated.

At that time, the Alexandrian presbyter Arius was spreading his doctrine which pretended that the "Logos" Christ was not truly God, but a “created God”, an intermediate being between God and man. Arius was trying to rationally elucidate the mystery of the Incarnation of the Divine Child. But it was a suicide and a futile attempt. Suicide because by diluting this mystery he could not achieve anything but cutting the approach of man towards God, and making it unreachable for us. Futile because the divine mysteries are not to be "eliminated", but to be considered and by considering them, to enjoy them.

Against the Arian heresy, Athanasius emerged as «the impassioned theologian of the Incarnation of the "Logos," the Word of God, who, as the Prologue of the fourth Gospel says, 'became flesh and dwelt among us' (Jn 1:14) » (Benedict XVI). The Council of Nicaea asserted that the Son, the Logos, is "of the same substance" ("homoousios", consubstantial) than the Father; He is Fully God; wholly divine.

But «the Arian crisis, believed to have been resolved at Nicaea, persisted for decades with complicated events and painful divisions in the Church» (Benedict XVI). In that scenario, Athanasius - Bishop of Alexandria from the year 328 - had to flee five times from his city. Thus, the Master's words: «you will be hated by everyone because of me (...). When they persecute you in a place, flee to another"(Mt 10: 22-23) were fulfilled in him. Athanasius, suffering because of his faith, spent up to seventeen years in exile.

However, those years were of great benefit for the Christian faith: Athanasius had the opportunity to propagate in the West - in Trier and, later, in Rome - the doctrine of Nicaea, and also the ideal of

monasticism, which was founded and led in Egypt by this friend St. Antony Abbot. They were providential years: God knows better! Certainly, «The student is not above his master» (Mt 10.24).