December 13th: Memorial of Saint Lucy, Virgin and Martyr

Gospel text (*Mt* 25:1-13): Jesus told his disciples this parable: "The Kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones, when taking their lamps, brought no oil with them, but the wise brought flasks of oil with their lamps. Since the bridegroom was long delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight, there was a cry, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all those virgins got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise ones replied, 'No, for there may not be enough for us and you. Go instead to the merchants and buy some for yourselves.' While they went off to buy it, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went into the wedding feast with him. Then the door was locked. Afterwards the other virgins came and said, 'Lord, Lord, open the door for us!' But he said in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.' Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

«The careless bridesmaids took their lamps as they were and did not bring extra oil»

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Today, we commemorate St. Lucia, virgin and martyr. The parable of today's Gospel reflects what the life of men on Earth is. Now, in our time, we all have the torch of life, which supposedly is to produce light, i.e., bear fruit. This is the most judicious! At the same time, we all desire eternity: in fact, all the virgins in the parable wanted to go out to meet the bridegroom. But, to enter into Life, it must be illuminated by faith, just as the lamp works on oil.

Lucia - which means "light for the world" - was educated in the Christian faith and she consecrated her virginity to God. To preserve her virginal love for Jesus Christ she was martyred the year 304. It was when the emperor Diocletian instigated the third great persecution against the Christians. This emperor, who retired shortly, afterwards, was able to witness the peace for all Christians with the proclamation of the Edict of Milan, in the year 313, by Emperor Constantine.

So things are: Lucia, a simple girl, still a virgin, and Diocletian, a full emperor, were contemporaries. Lucia will always be remembered all over the world with joy by many people: her name is even included amongst the Saints mentioned in the 1st Eucharistic Prayer (the "Roman Canon") of the Mass. The memory

of Diocletian, on the contrary, does not go beyond the Church history books that describe the persecutions of the Roman Empire against the Christians. A sad and worthless memory!

The memory of the Saints — especially of the martyrs - is not lost nor wears out with the passage of centuries. This is what remains: holiness. The remaining things just go by... With St. Ambrose's words, «Christ wanted you, Christ chose you (...). Retain Him, ask Him not to leave. The word of God is not understood by tedium or retained by neglect. We embrace Christ against us by the bonds of charity, by the reins of the understanding; we retain Him with the love of our soul». The understanding of the faith and the charity links: this is what remains immortalized forever...