

28. February 2020

## “Fasting as preparation”

*Mt 9,14-15*

*Then John's disciples came to him and said, “Why is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not?” Jesus replied, “Surely the bridegroom's attendants cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.”*

Wedding and fasting, at first glance, do not belong together!

The wedding is joy and time to celebrate. This is what happens in our earthly life, and the Lord takes this reality as a metaphor, to explain to us that His presence among the disciples is a celebration.

Fasting, besides being a sacrifice, an expression of mourning, a form of asceticism, a reinforcement for the spiritual combat, among others; is an important preparation for something special. Fasting reminds us that we live in expectation, that we still need something, that not everything is yet complete.

This is how it was in the times before Jesus' birth. John the Baptist and his disciples were waiting for the coming of the Messiah. They knew that what they were living was still something temporary and directed toward a great destination. In a certain sense we can say this for all the time of the Old Covenant: it was not yet complete, something was missing. Paul speaks of the Law as a guardian:

*“So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,”* (Gal 3,24-25).

The disciples, then, are no longer in a time of waiting; but the bridegroom has already come. He is in their midst and leads them to the marriage of the Lamb. It is a time of joy: the disciples can live in communion with Him, with the living God, who is in the midst of men.

But in today's text the Lord reveals to us that a time of fasting will come for his disciples too, when the bridegroom is taken away from them. Thus, fasting came into the life of the Church!

Lent, this long and special time of fasting that we have begun, with the sign of the ash cross on our forehead, is the preparation for the supreme Feast of the Church: The Resurrection of Christ.

When that day comes, the preparatory fast will be completed. When Christians exclaim: “The Lord is risen”, they no longer think of the long time of fasting; but rather the joy of the Resurrection triumphs over everything. This can be experienced, for example, in Jerusalem, where there are many Eastern Christians, who are very expressive in their joy.

But it is not yet time. We take the first steps on the fasting path and hear about the way of the Lord with his disciples, about his teachings, about the miracles. We also heard the exhortations to a deep conversion. We must understand which fasting is pleasing in the eyes of God.

The Sacred Scripture gives us rich nourishment to prepare us for the great event of our faith, to encounter God more deeply during the time of fasting and to lead the soul towards the grace of Easter.

We can then turn fasting into active waiting, into a time to adorn our soul for the arrival of the Bridegroom, to go inside ourselves and to bring out from there all that could displease the heavenly Guest. Let us put on the ornament of virtues, to cause him joy and welcome him! We know well how the Lord would like to meet us when He comes!

Restrictions on some sensual levels for Lent are also useful! If we always have everything we desire, and are never ready to make a sacrifice, it will be more difficult for us to understand life as a gift of God's goodness.

A wonderful text that appears in the times of Lent is in the preface of the Holy Mass is: *“For you will that our self-denial should give you thanks, humble our sinful pride, contribute to the feeding of the poor, and so help us to imitate you in your kindness.”*

But above all, the Lord desires that we work on our hearts, because the good works, which the Lord understands as right fasting, come from a purified heart. If our heart is transformed, becoming similar to that of Jesus and Mary, the Holy Spirit will find an open field where God's grace can penetrate us ever more deeply.

Let us approach this time with courage, because preparation is part of the feast. We are prepared for eternity throughout our lives, every day, every hour.