

28. October 2020

“To surrender to the Lord”

NOTE: We will take the Gospel that corresponds to the day (Wednesday of the Thirtieth Week of Ordinary Time), and not that of the Feast of Saint Simon and Jude Apostles, which is celebrated today.

Lk 13:22-30

Through towns and villages he went teaching, making his way to Jerusalem. Someone said to him, 'Sir, will there be only a few saved?' He said to them, Try your hardest to enter by the narrow door, because, I tell you, many will try to enter and will not succeed. Once the master of the house has got up and locked the door, you may find yourself standing outside knocking on the door, saying, "Lord, open to us," but he will answer, "I do not know where you come from." Then you will start saying, "We once ate and drank in your company; you taught in our streets," but he will reply, "I do not know where you come from; away from me, all evil doers!" Then there will be weeping and grinding of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrown out. And people from east and west, from north and south, will come and sit down at the feast in the kingdom of God. Look, there are those now last who will be first, and those now first who will be last.'

“Will there be only a few saved?” This is a serious question to the Lord, which we can ask today, although it seems as if people don't think much about it at this time, or believe that everyone will be saved in the end.

In fact, the spread of the coronavirus and the drastic measures that accompany it would be a good reason to reflect on the ultimate issues and thus the crucial questions of life. But the sermons on these issues are largely absent and it is quickly assured that the pandemic is not a punishment from God!

How can we be so sure of this? Would there not be enough reason for God to punish the world?

One could exchange the word punishment, which easily takes on a taste of “revenge” with the word rebuke, with the word “God's permission”. Then one gains a sense of this present plague. It is a serious call to repentance to change one's life according to the commandments and will of God.

We can also put the Lord's answer to the above question, whether only a few will be saved, into such a context: "Try your hardest to enter by the narrow door" and we further recall the word: "*Enter by the narrow gate, since the road that leads to destruction is wide and spacious, and many take it; but it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*" (Mt 7:13-14)

Jesus expects us to draw the consequences of our encounter with him completely. It is not enough just to have heard about him and to be with him in general (eating and drinking), but that we take discipleship seriously, that is, that we respond to his invitation with all our freedom.

Jesus names sin and injustice, which excludes from the Kingdom of God, as well as lukewarmness. We must be careful that a proclamation of mercy, omitting the gravity of sin, does not become a kind of sedative interspersed with sleeping pills. The words of the Lord, however, are stirring: "*I do not know where you come from; away from me... there will be weeping and grinding of teeth*"...

I remember a "fiery Jew" who is one of the Messianic Jews who recognise the Lord as Messiah and follow Him. He gave a talk in the Holy Land for the pilgrims that we looked after. In it he criticised that we Catholics had made a "soft and sweet Jesus", whom he did not know from the Holy Scriptures.

In a way, he must be justified. Today's words are unmistakably a call to sincere conversion, to really use all one's strength and not to practice a general cultural Christianity, a kind of "discipleship light".

In no way do I intend to promote a tense Christianity, in which everything is only deadly serious and one is constantly facing death and the devil. But you distort the image of faith and also the image of the Lord if you talk down or leave out those passages of the Bible which speak of serious conversion and make us aware that we can miss our life and even be lost for eternity.

What is certain is that God follows man in his infinite goodness, that he is always ready to forgive. But this attitude of God never leads to the relativization of sin and denies the possibility to separate from God and miss the way. Such serious statements as in today's Gospel and in many other passages of the Holy Scriptures should shake us awake and make us ready to withhold nothing from the Lord, as the two apostles we are thinking of today have done.

A lukewarm Christianity does not wake anyone up, but leaves us asleep. A Catholicism that adapts itself to the world will lose its inner strength and Christians will then be neither light of the world nor salt of the earth (*cf. Mt 5:13-14*).

One can only warn us to adapt to the world and to think that this is progress, Christianity must not be “up to date” and the Lord will cover all with mercy. Nothing is further away!

The text calls us to put an end to all lukewarmness with clear words and also by showing us consequences.

When we ask the Holy Spirit, he will follow us in his gracious perseverance and remind us of our good decision and the words of Jesus (*cf. Jn 14:26*). He is a true friend, a divine friend!