

17. February 2023

## Self-denial

Mk 8:34–9:1

*He called the people and his disciples to him and said, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. What gain, then, is it for anyone to win the whole world and forfeit his life? And indeed what can anyone offer in exchange for his life? For if anyone in this sinful and adulterous generation is ashamed of me and of my words, the Son of man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.' And he said to them, 'In truth I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.'*

The concept of "self-denial", which introduces us to a deeper sense of following the Lord, is less and less understood today. This term describes in a realistic way what has to happen so that God's plan can unfold in our life.

To "deny oneself" means not to seek on one's own the realisation of one's desires and illusions. Thus, this concept shows us the profound truth that man does not know the way to true happiness on his own. We are still too self-absorbed and too weakened to move firmly in a supernatural light and to advance on the path of God. Usually, man remains focused on himself and now, with God's grace, he has to learn to centre his whole heart on God. Even if he intends to put nothing before Him, this does not necessarily mean that he will always put it into practice. Likewise, the fact of loving a certain virtue and being attracted to it does not mean that one has already acquired it.

Thus, self-denial becomes a spiritual path, which can even lead to martyrdom, so that one becomes capable of giving up even one's own life for the love of God. The key concept here is love!

To walk the path of self-denial means that love for Christ becomes greater than our self-love. If we follow the Lord and ask Him for this to happen in us and be transformed by His Spirit, then a deep process of purification will begin. The Lord

will make us see those points where we still possess ourselves and, at the same time, invite us to renounce ourselves in order to follow Him. This also implies accepting the cross that is in our way... We often resist this cross, but it is precisely its acceptance that is an important step towards self-denial and makes our love for Jesus grow.

In the context of what has been said so far, the "saving his life" mentioned by Jesus in today's Gospel is also to be understood. Although these words must have referred primarily to the concrete danger of persecution, there is no doubt that they also have an inner meaning. Whenever we want to "save our life", i.e. seek our security not in God's will but elsewhere, we are invited to abandon ourselves completely to God, to entrust ourselves to Him... This also applies to those moments when we risk avoiding certain steps necessary for spiritual growth or avoiding necessary confrontations; when we dare not confess to the Lord because we fear the consequences... In all these moments we are, so to speak, "saving our life"; and yet we will lose it. If, on the other hand, we lose this self-centred life for the Lord's sake, then the life of grace will grow, so that we "save the supernatural life".

If we carefully develop our spiritual life through self-denial, we will be able to remain true to our faith when it comes under attack.

We can notice a growing apostasy in the world, which is increasing rejection and even hostility towards the Christian faith. In these difficult times it is all the more important to undertake the ways of self-denial and to follow Christ. The living presence of the Holy Spirit, who displays in us His gifts and particularly that of fortitude, will enable us to bear good witness even in a hostile environment, without being ashamed of the Lord's words. In His strength, we will confess the Lord and cling to Him.

The Lord will remember this and will not be ashamed of us on that Day, when He comes among the holy angels with the glory of the Father!