

15. September 2024

The need for faith

Mc 8:27-35

Jesus went on with his disciples, to the villages of Caesare'a Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Eli'jah; and others one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." And he charged them to tell no one about him. And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter, and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men." And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

Although we have heard these words many times and know them well, how tragic is what the Lord is telling us here! Jesus has to command His disciples not to reveal to anyone their recognition of the Messiah, even though His coming into the world is the message of salvation for all humanity and a source of constant joy.

What a distortion of reality!

Perhaps we humans have become accustomed to a lack of faith and are no longer aware of the perversions that have become common in many areas of human life. But if we look at it with the light of faith, we will see the deep darkness that hangs over the world. The recognition of the Messiah is the light that would tear away this darkness! God has mercy on man!

It is God's mercy that gives us true hope by sending us His own Son. Thanks to this, we can raise our eyes to God with confidence, and even death itself acquires meaning.

But unfortunately, people find it difficult to recognise the Messiah and to understand the way He had to take for our salvation. Even in Jesus' day, when people heard His preaching, saw His miracles and knew His testimony, there were many who did not come to the profession of faith that Peter uttered in today's Gospel.

Why is this so?

This is a question we cannot answer, because we know that the grace of faith is an undeserved gift, whether we receive it from our parents as children or whether we experience a conversion at some point in our lives. So we cannot say for sure why one person receives the gift of faith and another does not.

This in no way means that God has predestined some people for faith and not others, as the doctrine of predestination erroneously teaches. Nor is it irrelevant whether a person believes or does not believe, whether he belongs to this or that religion. In His Son Jesus Christ, God revealed the true faith and entrusted it to the Church. He had previously spoken through the prophets (cf. Heb 1:1-2). Now the Church has been entrusted with the mission of proclaiming the true faith.

When a person receives this proclamation and thus comes to know the truth, he is faced with a decision: either he opens himself to the truth and to the working of the Holy Spirit, or he closes himself off.

If a person closes himself off, this will always have serious consequences, because man was created for God and therefore for the truth. If he closes himself to the message of faith, God's plan cannot be realised in him and the grace of salvation cannot reach him. Consequently, this person will not be able to take the place that God has prepared for him in the plan of salvation. If he lives in sin and is not converted, his eternal salvation will be in danger.

The question we have to ask ourselves, then, is what we can do to bring people to faith, so that, like Peter, they too can recognise: "You are the Christ".

As faithful Catholics, we know the answer: pray intensely, offer our sacrifices to the Lord, walk consistently on the path of holiness, practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, and take every opportunity to proclaim the Gospel in an authentic way.

We know that the Lord wants to reach all people and that we are called to cooperate in this mission. God wants to save all people through His Son! Through Him, God's love goes out in search of His children, and we are invited to join in this search.