

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT 2006/B

People say very often “*Love is blind*”. One of the ways of understanding this saying is that when someone loves, he does not stop at the first glance at the limitations, the weaknesses and the faults of the beloved person. It does not necessary mean that the beloved person is incapable of mistakes or faults; what is at stake is the fact that he is seen as able to do more than that; he is believed to be capable of transcending himself beyond all possible limitations and faults.

The grandeur of God’s love for us is the theme of all the readings of this Sunday of Lent. The 1st reading expresses this theme from the bitter side of the history of the people of Israel and their deportation in Babylon. The text says that in those days, all the princes, the priests and all the people added infidelity to infidelity before God. Despite that God sent them messengers and prophets to warn them, they not only ignored them, but they also treated them badly until the day the enemy invaded the country and destroyed the temple.

However, God did not abandon them forever. In his love and compassion, He raised King Cyrus to help his people to return back home in the land of their ancestors and to reconstruct the temple. The lesson we learn from this text is that the history of the love between God and human beings never ends in condemnation. Even if we rebel against God and abandon him, He is always at our search until he finds us and takes us again to him. Like the unfaithful people of Israel, as soon as people leave God, they find themselves in trouble and misery. But, there is no prison or dark place that cannot be reached by God. No chains can resist the strength of his powerful love. He comes always back to rescue his people and set them free.

The history of God’s love for human beings is displayed in today’s Gospel in such a way that we see very clearly how in the sending of Jesus into the world, God wanted to express the abundance of his love for us. Therefore, the passion and the death of Jesus on the cross is the ultimate consecration of God’s love for us, but through which we are saved from the final damnation. Like the people of Israel who were saved from the biting of the snakes by gazing on the serpent of the bronze, so will be all those who believe in Jesus Christ lifted on the spot of the cross. In this perspective, the death of Jesus on the cross is a grace that God has granted us for our salvation.

In fact, Jesus refers to this event and states that it is the symbol of what is going to happen to him. He will also be lifted up on the cross, and all those who will look at him will be saved. Does this statement mean that just looking at the crucifix can save us or save anybody who keeps committing sins? Not at all, it cannot be so. To look at Jesus raised up means to believe in him, that is, to accept the message that he addresses to each one of us from the cross. Through this act of total love, he declares that the only way to fulfill one’s life is to give it up in love, as he did. It is not by repeating with our mouth the words of the Creed that we show belief, but by conforming our life to the life of Christ, by using it up in the service of our sisters and brothers.

John tells us also “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be have eternal life. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God”. In other words, God loves us too much that he does not judge us; whatever might be our personal record in the past or in the present. The only thing he wants is that we may change and be saved. Salvation comes to those who have the courage to give up their life as Christ did. If, on the contrary, one refuses to give up one’s life and opts for selfishness, pleasure, self-interest and easy satisfaction, one condemns oneself to death, that is, one destroys one’s life. It is not Christ who condemns, but each one does that as we take our stand in front of Christ. That is why every one of our actions and options should be considered very seriously, because they will yield consequences for eternity. In this context, the judgment is not something that will take place at the end of the world. It is today, now, at every moment that people choose to be saved by accepting Christ “lifted up” or are condemned by refusing to accept the cross.

How many times we have missed opportunities to make peace with God and ourselves! How many times we have preferred darkness to the light of Christ! Human history is repeatedly the same with its stubbornness of heart and lack of openness to God’s grace, mingled to war, violence, injustice and discrimination. And yet the mercy of God is always within our reach. His door is always open to those who are lost and are strayed. That is what St Paul is telling us in the second reading when saying: “God is rich in mercy”. In Jesus Christ, God commits himself to save what he once has created in his love. This commitment is not for a while, but endures forever.

We cannot save by ourselves; by ourselves we don not have the power to get out of our sinful situation. But God, who is rich in love and mercy, comes to our rescue. In Jesus he wants to take us out of our state and raise us to a new life. Salvation does not come from our merits; it is a gratuitous gift from the Father. So, nobody can boast of the good he finds in himself, and no one should despise those who have not yet opened up their heart to the grace. However, let it be clear to each one of us that, though it is true that we cannot gain salvation through our good works, it is also true that such good deeds are necessary response to the love God has for us. They are the signs that the grace of God has penetrated into our heart and is producing fruit. May this time of Lent helps us to response positively to the love of God shown in Jesus Christ. May we have eternal life God has prepared for us from all eternity by conforming our life to that of Jesus Christ. God bless you all!



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