

Twelfth Sunday in Ord. Time C/2013

The readings of this Sunday talk about the suffering of the servant of the Lord. They invite us to take up our own suffering in the footsteps of the servant and grow in the knowledge of God.

The first reading talks about the outpouring of God's spirit upon his people of Israel. The presence of the Spirit will bring a change of attitude on the people so that they come to know the servant of the Lord that God is preparing for them. As the servant will be pierced, the people will fix their eyes on him and lament for him as someone does for a firstborn. But, that suffering of God's servant will bring for God's people purification from their sins and uncleanness.

What is behind this text is the idea that God wants his people to be purified and clean. Another idea is the truth that in order to attain that objective God uses his servant as a mediator.

This text allows us to understand today's Gospel as Jesus invites us to take up our cross and to follow him. First of all, the Gospel says that once when Jesus was praying in solitude, he asked his disciples who the crowds thought he was. They answered that, according to the popular opinion, people thought he was John the Baptist, or Elijah or one of the prophets.

Willing to make sure that the disciples knew the truth about his identity, he asked what they themselves said about him. At that time, Peter answered on behalf of the disciples that he was "the Christ of God". But, Jesus rebuked them and directed them not to tell anyone about it.

Once he said that, he started talking to the disciples about his passion, death and resurrection. After that, he told them all about the importance of bearing the cross and following him, because losing one's life for the sake of the Gospel was really saving it.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing I want to highlight is about the hidden identity of Jesus. In fact, many of the people who were in contact with Jesus had certainly some opinion about him and about his identity. Though they saw many of his miracles and heard his teachings, they could not come to discover his true identity.

That is what transpires in the rumors the disciples report at the question of Jesus' identity. Confronted with such a truth, there was nothing else to do for Jesus than to hear from his own disciples what they thought about him. It was at that time that Peter gave the right response that Jesus was the Christ.

The interesting question here would be that of knowing how, unlike the popular opinion, the disciples were not mistaken on Jesus' identity? It is because their close friendship with Jesus had brought them in such an intimacy with him that, in the end, they had come to know who he truly was. They did not have an opinion of him based on sayings, but on what they had personally experienced by living with him.

I highlight this point in order to bring to our awareness the truth that everything we do in our spirituality in order to deepen our relationship with Jesus is always beneficial to us. All our exercises of devotion, prayers, adoration, help us build a strong relationship with Jesus and bring us close to his heart from where we can know his identity as Messiah.

The second point I want to bring is about the reality of the cross. The cross is part of our life and there is no way of escaping it. It can take many forms and many faces; but whatever might be its form or face, it remains always what it is, namely something we have to bear and to deal with for the whole of our life. It can appear in the sickness or the illness we have and we want to get rid of without success. It can appear in a broken relationship we try to fix without success. It can appear in the sacrifice we have to accept for the good of those entrusted to us in our vocation. It can appear in the deception or the disappointment of life that plagues our life, etc.

It would be an illusion to think of Christian life without the cross. That is why we cannot follow Jesus without being ready to take up our cross after him. In that sense, the cross is our means of connection to Jesus, to his suffering and death. Only after the suffering can we have access to the resurrection. As he did, so shall we do.

Does it mean that because we bear the cross after Jesus, it is easy? No. Given its nature, any cross is heavy, difficult and sometimes annoying. That is why when we have a cross to bear, we have to turn to Jesus and ask his assistance so that we might not be overwhelmed and discouraged. We have always to pray that Jesus may help us to be patient as he was until the day the cross is not anymore on our shoulders.

The question Jesus asked his disciples, about who they think he is, is a test question that each one of us has to answer. But, we have to answer it with the truth in the background of our mind that Christ suffered and died before rising from the dead. His identity goes hand in hand with the cross. If, then, we are his disciples, we have to be ready to accept the cross as part of our life. Let us, then, ask the grace to bear our cross with patience and dignity at the example of Christ. May God bless you all!

Zechariah 12: 10-11; 13: 1; Galatians 3: 26-29; Luke 9: 18-24



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