

Commentary on the Gospel: Take up the Cross

Gospel for the 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Cycle A), and commentary.

Gospel (*Mt 10:37-42*)

He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.

He who receives you receives me,
and he who receives me receives him
who sent me. He who receives a
prophet because he is a prophet shall
receive a prophet's reward, and he
who receives a righteous man
because he is a righteous man shall
receive a righteous man's reward.
And whoever gives to one of these
little ones even a cup of cold water
because he is a disciple, truly, I say to
you, he shall not lose his reward.

Commentary

The Gospel according to Saint Matthew contains five great discourses by Jesus, alluding to the five scrolls of the Law of Moses or the Pentateuch. The second of these discourses is usually called the Missionary Discourse, because it contains our Lord's instructions for

those He is sending out to the towns and villages to announce the imminent arrival of the Kingdom of God. Just as on the previous Sunday, the liturgy today offers us a part of this discourse.

“He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me” (v. 37). Jesus’ demanding words ask his disciples for firm and generous decisions. He places the call to follow Him and evangelize above even the most important human realities, one’s own family and life.

Pope Francis explains the reason for this priority: “A father’s affection, a mother’s tenderness, the gentle friendship among brothers and sisters, all this, even while being very good and valid, cannot be placed before Christ. Not because He wants us to be heartless and ungrateful, but rather, on the contrary, because the condition of a disciple demands a

priority relationship with the teacher.”^[1] Jesus is not asking us to reject or neglect our loved ones. Rather He is insisting on the radical and primordial value of love for God and seeking the good of souls, which is the best way of loving others.

“He who does not take his cross and follow me...” (v. 38). It is surprising to see Jesus already speaking to the apostles about the Cross, when He has just chosen them at the beginning of his ministry in Galilee. We don’t know what they would understand from these words, spoken long before the Passion. In any case, their meaning is that the disciples can identify themselves with the Master; not only because they are sent out to preach the Gospel like Him, but also because they can sacrifice themselves for others, as Jesus will do on the Cross.

The image of the Cross produces a certain natural fear and could discourage us from following our Lord more closely. But we can overcome this fear if we know the true meaning of the Cross for each of us. Saint Gregory the Great said: “We can take up the Cross in two ways: either by overcoming our flesh through temperance or by making the needs of our neighbor our own through compassion.”[2]

For the majority of Christians, to take up the Cross each day often means to learn to overcome their own passions and whims, above all in order to make life more lovable and pleasant for others. As Saint Josemaria said: “The real obstacles that separate you from Christ—pride, sensuality... —are overcome through prayer and penance. And to pray and to mortify oneself is also to take care of others and to forget oneself. If you live like this you will see how most of

the setbacks you meet will disappear.”^[3]

But Jesus doesn’t speak only about renunciation. He also refers to the reward we receive when we follow Him closely and when we provide a service for his disciples. As Saint Josemaria also said: “To give oneself sincerely to others is so effective that God rewards it with a humility filled with cheerfulness.”^[4] Even the small service of offering a cup of water to a disciple should be done as if it were the Master himself who received it. And therefore it will not fail to be rewarded by God.

[1] Pope Francis, *Angelus*, 2 July 2017.

[2] Saint Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Evangelia*, 57.

[3] Saint Josemaria, *The Way of the Cross*, 10th Station, no. 4

[4] Saint Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 591.

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