

Saturday's Gospel: Making the Path to Heaven Easier

Gospel for Saturday in the 20th
Week of Ordinary Time, and
commentary.

Gospel (*Mt 23:1-12*)

Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders,

but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

“Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others.

“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Commentary

Our Lord's words in today's Gospel are quite harsh. They are a clear and forceful denunciation of behavior that God cannot tolerate: hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy is also unpleasant humanly speaking. So it is very easy to empathize with what Jesus is saying and agree with him. But what is not so easy is to examine our own hearts and ask ourselves to what extent our Lord's words apply to us. For hypocrisy is as subtle as it is unpleasant.

“They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads.” We can ask: do my life, my words, my attitude make the path of holiness easier and smoother for others, or on the contrary do they make it more “cumbersome”? Does my way of acting present an image of Christianity that makes it seem a

heavy burden or a path to happiness?

Without a doubt, it is very easy to tell one's children, or spouse or a brother or sister that they should behave in a certain way. But do we do what we are telling them to do ourselves? Do others come to realize, not through our words, but through our actions, the importance of always smiling, of treating everyone well, of not criticizing anyone behind their back, of not telling lies?

Saint Josemaría urged us: “let us generously put our hearts on the ground, so that others may tread softly and find their struggle more pleasant” (*Friends of God*, no. 228). This is what Jesus encourages us to do: to realize that we are not here to make the lives of others more difficult. We are called to be “facilitators” of holiness for all those around us.

What is the best way to do so? “The greatest among you will be your servant.” First of all, with our example, with our charity expressed in deeds of service.

Saint Paul wrote: “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (*Gal 6:2*). The Pharisees increased the burden of others. We are called to lighten it, just as our Lord does (cf. *Mt 11:28*).

“Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” Mary Most Holy teaches us that humility is not simply about “feeling humble”: it is about really and effectively putting our lives at the service of others. That is why our Lady is the best “facilitator” of the path to God, and why the Church invokes her as the *Gate of Heaven*.

Luis Miguel Bravo Álvarez

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