

Saturday's Gospel: Beside Jesus, a Time for Joy

Gospel for Saturday in the 13th
Week of Ordinary Time, and
commentary.

Gospel (*Mt 9:14-17*)

Then the disciples of John came to Jesus, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?”

And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then

they will fast. And no one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; if it is, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.”

Commentary

In today's Gospel, Jesus teaches us the true meaning of fasting. He tells us that external fasting must be accompanied by a right interior attitude, by simplicity of heart.

The critical attitude of the Pharisees, apparently a result of their zeal for the law, reveals, in contrast, a lack of knowledge of the true meaning of the law and also a lack of rectitude of

intention. For these Pharisees, fasting had an absolute value in itself. But they also modified these fasts on special occasions. Jesus makes them see that the “bridegroom” is present. He himself is the “bridegroom.” He is the Messiah, and is going to take the Church as his bride. Fasting has a meaning in the context of penitence, but now, while he is with them, it is a time for joy.

Our deeds reveal what is in our hearts. If we go to Mass and have faith in Christ’s real presence in the Eucharist, we will try to arrive on time and dress well; we will take part actively and show respect. What is truly great needs to be celebrated. Banquets can also be an authentic thanksgiving to God, who has provided nourishment for us and wants us to realize that our life is always a gift from Someone who loves us immensely.

Pope Francis points to the true meaning of fasting: “Prayer, charity and fasting are the principal ways that allow God to intervene in our lives and in the world. They are the weapons of the spirit.”^[1] —

But if our intention is twisted, the meaning of fasting can be lost completely: “Even prayer, charity and fasting can become self-referential. In every act, even the most noble, there can hide the worm of *self-complacency*. Then our heart is not completely free, for it seeks, not the love of the Father and of our brothers and sisters, but human approval, people’s applause, our own glory.”^[2] —

Fasting, a traditional Jewish practice, is something good, and we Christians try to practice it with this good spirit. But what we aspire to is a time for joy, when fasting will have lost its

meaning because we will live with God forever.

^[1] Francis, Homily, 2 March 2022.

^[2] Ibid.

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