

Saturday's Gospel: The Smile of God's Children

Gospel for Saturday in the 1st
Week of Lent, and commentary.

Gospel (*Mt 5:43-48*)

Jesus said to his disciples:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you

love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Commentary

God has not waited for us to love him. *He loved us first (1 Jn 4:19)*. But not only that: he also loved us after original sin. He loves us before, during and after every fall. He loves us in spite of ourselves. And after the Cross, he sees us as those for whom his Son gave his life. We are worth all the blood of Christ. That is, we are worth everything to God.

This is how God acts, and he wants us to act in the same way. The

problem is that, in our case, excuses so quickly arise.

The neighbor I dislike because he once didn't greet me. The lady at the corner store who sent me away without even looking at me. The clerk at the bank who did nothing to solve my problem. My sister-in-law, who is so loud. My boss, who is unbearable. My children, who are too much for me at times.

And we could go on with an infinite list. For each person we know, we could mention a defect, a mistake made, or even some harm they caused us. But Jesus, in this passage from the Sermon on the Mount, makes it very clear to us: there is no valid excuse. Our Lord loved us first, and gave his life for all men and women. Jesus was always ready to greet everyone: even Judas in the Garden of Olives.

In a world filled with darkness, we Christians are called to bring light. In a world filled with long faces, we Christians are called to spread a smile. In a world filled with people staring into space and listening to headphones, we Christians are called to always say, no matter what, “hello, how are you.”

Neuroscience has made advances that enable us to understand better why laughter is contagious. Even science tells us that a smile is contagious. We never know what greeting a person by smiling at them might lead to. Perhaps it is the first step to enable “the fire of Christ that we carry in our hearts” (cf. *The Way*, no. 1) to begin warming other lives. If it seems to us that no one around us smiles, we can start by smiling ourselves, showing that we are “children of our Father who is in heaven.” We will surely meet with more than one surprise.

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