

Wednesday's Gospel: Perseverance

Gospel for Wednesday in the 34th Week of Ordinary Time, and commentary.

Gospel (*Lk 21:12-19*)

Jesus said to his disciples:

“But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake. This will be a time for you to bear testimony. Settle it therefore in your minds, not to meditate beforehand how to answer;

for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and kinsmen and friends, and some of you they will put to death; you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives."

Commentary

Jesus' eschatological discourse continues with his description of the end times. Here the omen is even more disturbing: the persecution of Jesus' own disciples, because of his name.

This is what happened in the early Christian community, shortly after the Holy Spirit descended on the

Apostles. They acted fearlessly in Jesus' name, despite being imprisoned and mistreated. Nothing could stop them. Through their prayer, they received the strength of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Acts 4:24-31*).

The first martyr, Stephen, "did great wonders and signs among the people" (*Acts 6:8*). Those who heard him "could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke" (*Acts 6:10*). Everything was fulfilled just as Jesus had predicted, because of the disciples' deep trust in Him. They valued the salvation of souls more than their own life. Not only that, they were "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name" (*Acts 5:41*).

In truth, that rejection of the apostles' words was the path planned by God to make his message reach many men and women: "the word of God increased; and the number of

the disciples multiplied greatly" (*Acts 6:7*).

We marvel at the perseverance shown by the first Christians, through which they not only saved their own souls, but also those of thousands of other people. But the persecution of the Church has not ceased down through the centuries; it is in fact a sign of its vitality, of its perennial youth.

Today Jesus and his Spirit continue to vivify the souls of so many Christians who are not afraid to give their lives for the Gospel, also praying for their persecutors, because they love them and forgive them, faithful to Jesus' words and example: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (*Mt 5:44*); "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (*Lk 23:34*).

This is what Stephen did, before being stoned to death: "Lord, do not

hold this sin against them" (*Acts 7:60*). We need the same prayerful attitude, forgiveness and perseverance in doing good in our daily lives when we encounter those who seem to oppose the Church's mission.

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