

Readings and reflection of 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

First reading: A reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah (20:7-9)

You have seduced me, Lord, and I have let myself be seduced;
you have overpowered me: you were the stronger.
I am a daily laughing-stock,
everybody's butt.
Each time I speak the word, I have to howl
and proclaim: 'Violence and ruin!'
The word of the Lord has meant for me
insult, derision, all day long.
I used to say, 'I will not think about him,
I will not speak in his name any more.'
Then there seemed to be a fire burning in my heart,
imprisoned in my bones.
The effort to restrain it wearied me,
I could not bear it.

Responsorial Psalm (62(63):2-6,8-9)

For you my soul is thirsting, O Lord my God.

O God, you are my God, for you I long;
for you my soul is thirsting.
My body pines for you
like a dry, weary land without water.

For you my soul is thirsting, O Lord my God.

So I gaze on you in the sanctuary
to see your strength and your glory.
For your love is better than life,
my lips will speak your praise.

For you my soul is thirsting, O Lord my God.

So I will bless you all my life,
in your name I will lift up my hands.
My soul shall be filled as with a banquet,
my mouth shall praise you with joy.

For you my soul is thirsting, O Lord my God.

For you have been my help;
in the shadow of your wings I rejoice.
My soul clings to you;
your right hand holds me fast.

For you my soul is thirsting, O Lord my God.

Second reading: A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans (12:1-2)

Think of God's mercy, my brothers, and worship him, I beg you, in a way that is worthy of thinking beings, by offering your living bodies as a holy sacrifice, truly pleasing to God. Do not model yourselves on the behaviour of the world around you, but let your behaviour change, modelled by your new mind. This is the only way to discover the will of God and know what is good, what it is that God wants, what is the perfect thing to do.

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia, alleluia!

May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
enlighten the eyes of our mind,
so that we can see what hope his call holds for us.

Alleluia!

Gospel: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew (16:21-27)

Jesus began to make it clear to his disciples that he was destined to go to Jerusalem and suffer grievously at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, to be put to death and to be raised up on the third day. Then, taking him aside, Peter started to remonstrate with him. 'Heaven preserve you, Lord;' he said 'this must not happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path, because the way you think is not God's way but man's.'

Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. What, then, will a man gain if he wins the whole world and ruins his life? Or what has a man to offer in exchange for his life?

'For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and, when he does, he will reward each one according to his behaviour.'

Reflection

How would we react if a good friend told us about a project that was not only extremely dangerous for him, but whose fatal outcome seemed almost certain? Encourage him? Advise him against? The latter would be the least: we would probably try all the to prevent this project from being implemented in the first place.

Everyone wants to be happy, no one wishes for unhappiness when his thinking is halfway healthy. Unfortunately life doesn't always play that way; we hardly ever find the so-called "ideal world" anywhere.

Peter also thinks this way: When his master begins to speak of the impending path of suffering, he reproaches him and we would probably have made the same, because suffering and death are not at all to our taste.

And how does Jesus react? Unusually sharp: the same Peter was named the rock on which he would build his church in last Sunday's Gospel. Today he calls him "Satan" because his thinking on this point is not divine but all too human. And Jesus quickly made it clear: the cross awaits not only him, everyone who wants to follow him must also expect the cross.

We heard in the first reading that the prophet Jeremiah also had to experience this reality in his standing up for God, of whom we believe that he completely unites everything that can be positive: joy, happiness, love, peace, life. But it is precisely the standing up for this God that brings him pain, unhappiness, discord, life threatening and hatred on the part of his fellow human beings.

Jesus makes no promises how beautiful and easy his path will be. Jesus says briefly and clearly: my path leads to the cross because people reject God and his message. None of his disciples could say: "If I had known that!" Jesus doesn't want to do propaganda and make illusory promises to collect votes or win an election. He wanted the apostles to properly understand his mission.

It certainly took time for his apostles to finally understand what it means to follow Jesus.

It takes time to want what God wants. But what does God want with this world, with us humans?

What God wants is often contrary to what people want. Jesus knew that. But Jesus wanted to show the world what God is like, what God plans to do with the world. That is why Jesus had to go his way. That way was love, non-violence. Jesus did not just endure people's hatred. No, Jesus did not answer the hatred of his opponents with counter-hatred, but with his defenselessness.

It's not easy to understand the way of God. Peter must have meant well when he made these remarks to Jesus. But God does not conform to our thinking.

According to us humans, the stronger should win, the weaker should succumb and serve the stronger. For us humans, the value of a person depends on success, on wealth. The longing to win the whole world is familiar to us humans from an early age.

It is different with God: it is the weakest who are most respected by God. Those who lead should see leadership as a service to others. To stand up for the weak is the logic of God, the logic of the cross. That logic doesn't promise us that our life will be beautiful. Success is not a name of God. But his strength is great in the weak.

We all have the task of God to work in word and deed for his honor and for the salvation of men. Our hearts may resist it at times, but Christ has promised us the Holy Spirit, the counsel and comforter, who help us to consistently follow his example.