

Lectio Divina. Friday of the Eighteenth Week in Ordinary Time.

Learn to pray / Spirituality

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1) Opening prayer

Father of everlasting goodness,
our origin and guide,
be close to us
and hear the prayers of all who praise you.
Forgive our sins and restore us to life.
Keep us safe in your love.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 16,24-28

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. 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 anyone gain by winning the whole world and forfeiting his life? Or what can anyone 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 then he will reward each one according to his behaviour. In truth I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming with his kingdom.'

3) Reflection

- The five verses of today's Gospel continue with the words of Jesus to Peter which we meditated on yesterday. Jesus does not hide nor lessen the demands of discipleship. He does not allow Peter to take the initiative and puts him in his place: "Far from me!" Today's Gospel makes explicit these demands for all of us;

- Matthew 16, 24: "Take up his cross and follow me". Jesus draws the conclusions which are valid even until now: "If anyone wants to follow me, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me". At that time, the cross was the death sentence which the Roman Empire inflicted on marginalized persons and bandits. To take up the cross and carry it behind Jesus was the same as to accept to be marginalized by the unjust system which legitimized injustice. The Cross is not fatalism, nor exigency from the Father. The Cross is the consequence of the commitment freely taken up by Jesus to reveal the Good News that God is Father and that, therefore, we all have to be accepted and treated as brothers and sisters. Because of this revolutionary announcement, Jesus was persecuted and he was not afraid to give his life. Nobody has greater love than this: to give one's life for his friends (Jn 15, 13). The witness of Paul in the letter to the Galatians indicates the concrete significance and importance of all this: "But as for me, it is out of the question that I should boast at all, except of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world". (Ga 6, 14). And he ends by referring to the marks of the tortures which he suffered: "After this, let no one trouble me, I carry branded on my body the marks of Jesus" (Ga 6, 17).

- Matthew 16, 25-26: "Anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it". These two verses make explicit universal human values which confirm the experience of many Christians and non Christians. To save one's life, to lose one's life, to find one's life. The experience of many is the following: Anyone who is always seeking goods and riches is never satisfied. Anyone who gives himself to others, forgetting himself, experiences a great happiness. This is the experience of the mothers who give themselves, and of so many people who do not think of self but think of others. Many do this and live in this way almost out of instinct, as something which comes from the bottom of the heart. Others act in this way because they have had a painful experience of frustration which has led them to change attitude. Jesus is right in saying: "Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it". The reason is important: "For my sake", or like Mark says: "For the sake of the Gospel" (Mk 8, 35). And he ends saying: "What, then will anyone gain by winning the whole world and forfeiting his life? Or what can anyone offer in exchange for his life?" This last phrase recalls the Psalm where it is said that no one is capable of paying the ransom for his life: "But no one can ever redeem himself or pay his own ransom to God; the price for himself is too high, it can never be that he will live on for ever and avoid the sight of the abyss" (Ps 49, 8-10).

- Matthew 16, 27-28: The Son of Man is going to come in the glory of the Father and he will reward each one according to his behaviour. These two verses refer to the hope regarding the coming of the Son of Man in the last times, as judge of humanity, as he is presented in the vision of the Prophet Daniel (Dn 7, 13-14). The first verse says: "The Son of Man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his angels and will reward each one according to his behaviour". (Mt 16, 27). This phrase speaks about the justice of the Judge. Each one will receive according to his own behaviour. The second verse says: "There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming with his kingdom". (Mt 16, 28). This phrase is an advertisement to help to perceive the coming of Jesus, the Judge of the actions of life. Some thought that Jesus would have come afterwards (1 Th 4, 15-18). But in fact, Jesus was already present in persons, especially in the poor. But they did not perceive this, Jesus himself had said: "Every time that you have helped the poor, the sick, the homeless, the prisoner, the pilgrim, you helped me, it was me!" (cfr. Mt 25, 34-45).

4) Personal questions

- Anyone who loses his life will find it. What experience do I have regarding this?
- The words of Paul: "As for me, instead, there is no other glory than the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified for me and I for the world". Do I have the courage to repeat these words in my life?

5) Concluding Prayer

Proclaim with me the greatness of Yahweh,
let us acclaim his name together.
I seek Yahweh and he answers me,

frees me from all my fears. (Ps 34, 3-4)