

21. February 2020

**“To renounce oneself”**

*Mk 8, 34- 9, 1*

*He called the people and his disciples to him and said, '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, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. What gain, then, is it for anyone to win the whole world and forfeit his life? And indeed what can anyone offer in exchange for his life? For if anyone in this sinful and adulterous generation is ashamed of me and of my words, the Son of man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.' And he said to them, 'In truth I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.'*

Today, the concept of "self-denial" is less and less understood, which introduces us to a deep sense of following the Lord. This term describes to us in a realistic way what has to happen so that God's plan can unfold in our lives.

Self-denial means that we do not seek ways to realize our own ideas and wishes. It describes the deep truth that man does not know the true way to real happiness from within himself. We are too selfconcentrated and weakened to walk safely in a supernatural light on the path of God. Generally speaking, man remains focused on himself and, with God's grace, he must learn to centre his whole heart on God. And, even if he intends not to prefer nothing to God, this does not yet mean that he will always put it into practice. Likewise, the fact that he loves a certain virtue and is attracted to it does not mean that he has already attained it.

Thus, self-denial becomes a spiritual path, which can lead to martyrdom, being able to give even one's life for the love of God. The key concept here is love!

In previous days we had heard stories of young martyrs. It was the love of Christ that moved them to remain faithful to Him in all the persecutions! In the strength of the Holy Spirit they endured everything, and their death became a witness to a love that overcomes the world.

To walk the path of self-denial means that love for Christ becomes greater than self-love. If we follow the Lord and ask Him that this happen in us and that we be

transformed by His Spirit, then a profound process of purification will begin. The Lord will make us see those points where we still possess ourselves, and, at the same time, will invite us to renounce ourselves in order to follow Him. This implies the acceptance of the cross which is on our way... We often resist this cross, but it is precisely its acceptance - which is an important step towards self-denial - that makes love for Jesus grow.

In the context of what has been said so far, we must also understand the "saving of his life" of which Jesus speaks in today's Gospel. Although these words will certainly have referred in the first instance to the concrete danger of persecution, they also have an inner meaning. Whenever we want to "save our life"; that is, seek our security not in God's Will but elsewhere, we are invited to abandon ourselves totally to God, to entrust ourselves to Him... This applies also when we run the risk of evading certain steps necessary for spiritual growth, or avoiding unavoidable conflicts; when we do not dare to confess to the Lord because we fear the consequences... In all these moments we are, so to speak, "saving our life"; and yet we will lose it. If, on the contrary, we lose that life concentrated in ourselves for the Lord's sake, then the life of grace will grow, so that "we save the supernatural life."

The careful development of our spiritual life through self-denial will enable us to remain faithful to our faith when it is attacked.

An increasing apostasy is discernible in the world and therefore a climate of rejection and even enmity towards the Christian faith is growing. In these difficult times it becomes all the more important to follow the paths of self-denial and thus the paths of a serious discipleship of Christ. The living presence of the Holy Spirit, who unfolds his gifts in us - especially the Spirit of strength - will enable us to bear good witness even in a hostile environment and strengthen us not to be ashamed of the Lord's words. In his power we will confess the Lord and hold on to him!

God will remember this and will not be ashamed of us on that Day when He will come among the holy angels with the glory of the Father!