

Scripture Reading

A Reading from the Gospel according to Matthew (Matthew 16:21-23)

From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to You!" Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns". The Gospel of the Lord. R. Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection – False mercy: putting human concerns above God's will and laws

God's mercy is reserved only for the repentant. Calling on God's mercy does not exempt one from following His commandments. Repentance of sins is so important, it is Christ's first and last subject. *From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (Matthew 4:17). And that repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His Name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47).* No one is saved by good works alone. If one can be saved by good works alone, one would have no need of a Saviour. Repentance is necessary for our salvation.

Once we place human concerns above God's will and laws, we jeopardise our salvation which is won at high price by our Lord Jesus Christ. In our modern society, there are many evils appearing as good and desirable to the unformed conscience. "Freedom", "human rights" and "choice" have often been evoked as justification for immoral acts such as abortion, euthanasia and homosexual acts. When the existence of God and His divine laws are rejected or denied, it is extremely difficult to discern the immorality of such acts. Thus, our human society will go on deteriorating in the moral sense till the day when it finally awakes to the truth of the existence of God and His laws which command us to a way of life that will lead to holiness required for those who want to enter the Kingdom of God.

Christ reacts harshly as He wants us to be very vigilant against evil posing as good. By external appearances, St Peter would seem to be very concerned for Jesus. In fact, it would probably be true to say St Peter really cared for Jesus in his own way. This in itself is good but when it is placed on top of God's will, it becomes an evil for those around. Some physical comfort is to be exchanged for eternal salvation! Of course, St Peter, being rash and unthinking, would never have dreamt that his little act of kindness would potentially have such a horrendous effect. This is because as Christ has said: *you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns (cf. Matthew 16:23).* How many times have we misled those around us with our advice which takes account of human concerns but forgets God's will?

In this age of sentimentality it is a great inclination to please people but not God. Pleasing people is good in itself but when it comes at the expense of standing outside the divine truths of God, it becomes an obstacle to our salvation and that of those around us. A remark aimed at pleasing people of different religion goes something like this: "All religions are the same." It is a falsehood but used by many people with an intention to please others. If all religions are the same, we do not need to believe in Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Saviour.

What is the remedy for false mercy? To be on the true path, we need to put God and His laws first above all things. Instead of trying to please people, we should conscientiously try pleasing God. This is what God commands us to do. *Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind (Matthew 22:37).* Once we put God first, we can be assured that we will be more likely to practise true mercy to our neighbours, and be more discerning against evil posing as good.

Conversation with Jesus: Precious Lord, You are the eternal truth. Outside of You and everything that You stand for, nothing is true in eternity. You are the Saviour of the world. Outside of You there is no salvation, only condemnation. You are mercy itself but You demand our repentance in order that our hearts be opened to receive Your mercy. Help us always walk on the true path of Your teachings and commandments so that we can show true mercy to others. Bestow upon us the gift of discernment which is a gift of the Holy Spirit that will reveal to us the true worth of earthly things and deeds. Help us to be vigilant against evil posing as good. May we never place human concerns above God's will and laws in any situation that may need our advice or help. Mary, Mother of Salvation, pray for us. Thank You, Jesus. Praise You, Jesus.