

OCTOBER 12, 2019

Saturday of the 27th Week of Ordinary Time

Weekday

Jl 4:12-21

Ps 97:1-2,5-6,11-12

Lk 11:27-28

In today's brief Gospel reading, we hear the word "blessed." It refers to a state of spiritual well-being, in which true joy is experienced in the soul, but it can also be used to mean "respected" or "revered." So, who are the people who deserve to be called "blessed"? Jesus' response is clear and direct: "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it" (Lk 11:28). These words open the way for a profound reflection on our Christian missionary vocation. The deeper meaning of listening to the word of God is revealed to us through an extraordinary image offered by some Old Testament prophets. Ezekiel is ordered: "Eat what you find here: eat this scroll.... So, I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat" (Ez 3:1-2). Jeremiah says: "When I found your words, I devoured them; your words were my joy, the happiness of my heart" (Jer 15:16).

Authentic listening to the word of God means "eating it," meditating upon it, dwelling in it, taking it to heart. This allows it to take root in our heart, to grow in our consciousness, to challenge our values and attitudes. Our life and the love of God intertwine. This requires constant abandonment to God, which is neither simple nor automatic. The prophetic eating of the word of God refers to the eating of the Eucharistic banquet.

The second part of Jesus' warning focuses on living the word of God. This requires a firm commitment to put it into practice, to observe its commands, to put God's love into action concretely, to translate the message of God into everyday life. Although this task has a personal dimension, it also involves a strong social commitment. How do we show that we really listened to the word of God and responded with faith? We can take inspiration from St. James who

says, “I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works” (Jas 2:18), and we can add, and I will show that I have listened to the word of God.

In recent times, the Popes have underlined the importance of integrating “hearing” the word of God and “putting it into practice”; we must be “hearers” and “doers” at the same time. Evangelization requires both contemplation and concrete action. We should recall the challenge presented by Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (EN 41).

A careful examination of the New Testament reveals that the first person to receive the honour of being called “blessed” is none other than Mary herself. Luke, describing the scene of Mary’s visit to Elizabeth (1:41-45), notes that “Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, ‘Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.... Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.’” Mary is blessed precisely because she believes. She believes in the word of God spoken through the angel. She believes and offers her unconditional fiat to the Lord.

It is clear that the words of Jesus refer to the Virgin Mary. Verses 27 and 28 are a clear allusion to his Mother, as an indisputable example of this attitude that a disciple must have of welcoming the Word (see Lk 2:16-21), since just a few verses earlier, the Gospel of Luke says that Mary “kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart” (Lk 2:19). “Keeping” here means preserving, protecting, guarding in memory, and always involves attention and responsibility. But the Virgin Mary, besides “keeping” these things, meditates on them in her heart; that is, she tries to grasp the true meaning of what is happening.

Today’s Gospel should not be interpreted as a repudiation of the mother of Jesus; rather, it stresses that attention to the word of God, by reason of faith, is more important than a biological relationship with Jesus. This same affirmation is found in other Gospel passages (see Mt 12:48, Mk 3:33, and Lk 8:21) in which Jesus asks, “Who is my mother and who are my brothers?” Jesus is clearly indicating the importance of receiving and obeying the word of God. A passage from the Second Vatican Council’s *Lumen Gentium* observes, “In the course of

her Son's preaching she received the words whereby in extolling a kingdom beyond the calculations and bonds of flesh and blood, He declared blessed those who heard and kept the word of God, as she was faithfully doing. After this manner the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross, where she stood, in keeping with the divine plan" (LG, 58).

The image of Mary as a faithful disciple who lives a pilgrimage of faith engages the sensibility of modern people and the understanding of the Church in its call to discipleship. Pope Francis writes in *Evangelii Gaudium*, twice quoting John Paul II's Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*: "Mary is the woman of faith, who lives and advances in faith, and 'her exceptional pilgrimage of faith represents a constant point of reference for the Church.' Mary let herself be guided by the Holy Spirit on a journey of faith towards a destiny of service and fruitfulness. Today we look to her and ask her to help us proclaim the message of salvation to all and to enable new disciples to become evangelizers in turn.... 'This is the way that Mary, for many years, lived in intimacy with the mystery of her Son, and went forward in her pilgrimage of faith'" (EG 287).

We know that a necessary and even indispensable part of sharing the word as Good News is to provide information. But it is not the first thing, or even the most important thing. Sharing the word primarily consists not in speaking, but in giving witness. Luke presents this conviction in a very coherent way in the story in which John the Baptist sends two of his disciples to ask Jesus if he is the Messiah (see Lk 7:18ff.). Jesus, instead of giving an answer, offers irrefutable proof, pointing to the consequences of the coming of the kingdom of God. The Gospel says, following the question: "At that time he cured many of their diseases, sufferings, and evil spirits; he also granted sight to many who were blind" (Lk 7:21). The deepest goodness of the Good News that Jesus Christ brought is not at the level of what can be said theoretically, but in the existential consequences. The word, then, needs disciples who, like the Blessed Virgin, want to listen to it with openness and live it with generosity.