

## **OCTOBER 31, 2019 Thursday of the 30th Week of Ordinary Time Weekday**

Rom 8:31b-39

Ps 109:21-22,26-27,30-31

Lk 13:31-35

As we approach the end of the liturgical year, the word of God accompanies us in the ascent of Jesus to Jerusalem, where the Lord will celebrate his “exodus,” that is, the Paschal Mystery of his death and resurrection. He had already encountered and bravely overcome many obstacles and dangers along the way, from the attempt of his fellow citizens of Nazareth to push him down from the top of the hill to the threat of death by Herod Antipas. Being sought by Herod in Galilee is just another persecution, and it will not be the last. Knowing that something even more terrible is waiting for him further on, in the holy city, confirming the sad tradition of the impiety of Jerusalem, Jesus does not turn away. No threat can prevent him from moving forward to face the appointed day or make his determination falter in carrying out the plan of salvation that the Father entrusted to him.

Many prophets and righteous men had already denounced in Samaria and Jerusalem the sins and crimes of the political and religious authorities of Israel. Almost all those who were sent suffered persecution and death. The murder of John the Baptist was only the latest in a long series of crimes committed.

Jesus does not need revelations or extraordinary visions to know what would happen if he interfered with the powerful of the city of Jerusalem, the city of the Lord God, the great King; the city that belonged to him by right, as the Alleluia verse proclaims: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord” (Lk 19:38). He came in peace, full of maternal tenderness to gather and save his children, like a hen protects its nest under its wings. He came to forgive and save his people, despite the many sin of the past. All that is needed from them, and from all of us, is the fruit of a sincere conversion – the practice of faith in God and justice.

But what if the conversion does not happen? What if he were rejected and persecuted like the prophets? And if his audacity would lead to stoning or death on a cross, would it be worth it? Why should anyone take this risk and put his life in the hands of notoriously corrupt and cruel men? The apostle Paul has only one answer: because of the power of his love for us. Everything, absolutely

everything that God could have done to show us his love, he did by sending us his Son. How can we still doubt God's saving love, after all that his Son has done for us sinners?

The Book of Wisdom already prophesied the final victory of the righteous for the love of God and of his eternal fidelity, saying: "If to others, indeed, they seem punished, yet is their hope full of immortality" (Wis 3:4). What the sage proclaimed is that the righteous who undergo trials are found worthy of God because they trust in his love until the end, until death. Therefore, it is not in earthly prosperity or in being spared from tribulation that divine blessing and reward is manifested, but in the glory of eternal life, which is received by not having doubted his love and his promises, even in the most difficult trials.

Now that this experience has received confirmation and has become a reality in Christ, Paul cannot contain the voice of the Spirit that cries in his heart, raising his song of praise to the unspeakable mystery of God's love for us. His hymn, full of intense lyricism, which we hear in the first reading, is perhaps the most poetic synthesis of the Gospel of God, the Gospel of his Son, the Gospel of Christ, the Good News announced by the Apostle to all, Jews and pagans, with unswerving determination and untiring dedication, so that everyone can be fruitful in salvation through the obedience of faith. This hymn provides Paul's answer to Jesus' question to the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Jesus is the Son of God who gave himself for all of us, the living proof, eternally shining, of the incorruptible love of God the Father for all of us, for all of humanity, and for all of creation.

Pope Francis writes:

*This transmission of the faith, the heart of the Church's mission, comes about by the infectiousness of love, where joy and enthusiasm become the expression of a newfound meaning and fulfilment in life. The spread of the faith "by attraction" calls for hearts that are open and expanded by love. It is not possible to place limits on love, for love is strong as death (cf. Song 8:6). And that expansion generates encounter, witness, proclamation; it generates sharing in charity with all those far from the faith, indifferent to it and perhaps even hostile and opposed to it. Human, cultural and religious settings still foreign to the Gospel of Jesus and to the sacramental presence of the Church represent the extreme peripheries, the "ends of the earth", to which, ever since the first Easter, Jesus' missionary disciples have been sent, with the certainty that their Lord is always with them (cf. Mt 28:20; Acts 1:8). This is what we call the missio ad gentes. The*

*most desolate periphery of all is where mankind, in need of Christ, remains indifferent to the faith or shows hatred for the fullness of life in God. All material and spiritual poverty, every form of discrimination against our brothers and sisters, is always a consequence of the rejection of God and his love. (Message for World Mission Day 2018)*

Christ is the love that dwells forever in us and awakens those who sleep in the sleep of death, the love that is with us from the beginning of our story until the end of time and beyond, that descends into the depths and enters the heavens, that saves us from all fear and slavery and from every enemy and oppressor, that liberates us in the glory of life in communion. He is the love that strengthens us, makes us confident, audacious, invincible, not only towards human and visible enemies, but also before invisible spirits, because God is with us. The accusation against us has been withdrawn; sin has been forgiven; love has conquered hatred; injustice has been defeated. Affliction and anguish have received their consolation; the abyss has been leveled and the heights have descended towards us; death has given way to life and time has opened its doors to eternity. In his Son Jesus, the love and fidelity of the God of life have been demonstrated. Now, nothing and nobody can ever separate us from this Love. The time has also come for us to raise our voices with joy, saying, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" – he who comes for our salvation.