

REFLECTION FOR THE TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

This Sunday's readings pose the question: *Who is Christ for us? Which Savior do we believe in?*

In the Gospel, Jesus asks his disciples: "*Who do people say that I am?*" The disciple's answer: some say that you are "*John the Baptist; others Elijah; others again, one of the prophets*". They all recognize that Jesus Christ is a special Rabbi (Teacher), so much so that they think he is a prophet who has come back from the dead. But they are unable to perceive Jesus Christ as himself.

So Jesus addresses the disciples directly: "*who do you say that I am?*" Peter (always Peter as the first of the disciples) replies: "*You are the Christ*". Peter truly discovers who Jesus is: he is the awaited Messiah, he is the Savior of humanity, he is our Redeemer who has come to us to free us from the clutches of sin and death and bring us back to God. Jesus approves of Peter's answer, recommending that they tell no one.

In the meantime, he goes on to tell them what was going to happen to him: "*the Son of Man was destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, to be put to death and after three days to rise again*". Now when Peter told him that he was the Messiah, it was not this kind of Messiah that he wanted, but a powerful Messiah, who would restore David's throne, expel the Romans from the land of Israel, show his power. So Peter ends up telling Jesus not to say those things. And Jesus ends up rebuking Peter by telling him that he did not understand the things of God, but only the things of men. He added: "*If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself, take up his cross and follow me. For 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 about us? Which Christ do we believe in? Do we too want a powerful, strong Christ who heals us from our illnesses, frees us from our pain and ailments, gives us prosperity and goods? Today, many are proclaiming this Christ, a Christ of miracles, who solves our problems, a Christ-“aspirin”. This is not the Christ of the Gospel. In the Gospel, Christ presents himself as Savior, but through the way of the cross, the way of love. Not by promising riches and power, but by asking us to live in love, to carry our own cross, because He is with us. He walks with us on the paths of self-giving, of solidarity, of care for our brothers and sisters, with His love. He doesn't promise us that he will cure us of our illnesses, make us win Euromillions, free us from our enemies, give us a life of money, health, fame, and

power. Instead he will be with us, carrying our cross along with us and in the end, he will welcome us into his eternal Kingdom, so that we can live with him forever.

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah already speaks of a character who, in his faithfulness to God, is persecuted, mistreated, but endures in faithfulness because he knows that God will not abandon him. He places his strength and hope in the Lord. Jesus Christ identifies with this "Servant of the Lord". He, too, turned his back on those who scourged him, his face to those who beat him, but he remained faithful on his way to death -- death on a cross. It is this Jesus who tells us from the top of the cross, condensing all that we have heard as: I am your God; I am your Lord who gave my life for you. Take up your cross without fear, and follow me, believe in me, and you will find life! Do not look for me in promises of miracles and prosperity, but look for me in the poor brother, in the sick, in the abandoned. That is where I am. If you love me, by loving your brother, you will find Life forever.

That is why, in the second reading, St. James insists that we make charity towards our brother the affirmation of our faith as Christians. Let us love one another; let us care for one another; and we will truly be living out our faith in Christ.

HAVE A GOOD SUNDAY!

Amen.