

First Sunday of Lent C/2010

We like people who have strong convictions. Convictions are an expression of principles that provide someone with guidelines for his life. Like human convictions, the confession of faith and the profession of faith play a big role in human life. They define the identity of an individual; they give to others an idea of what he stands for, and provide him with a motivation to act on him and on his immediate environment. All the readings of this first Sunday of Lent talk about the importance of the conviction of beliefs and the profession of faith.

In the first reading of Deuteronomy, Israel looks back to its history and makes a confession of faith by thanking God for what he has done for them. The people confess that their ancestors were nomad, but God in his bounty has given them a land as he brought them out of Egypt, a house of slavery. In that perspective, Moses recommends them to adore God and to be grateful to him by offering him the first fruit of their products.

What Moses recommends the Israelites to do is inspiring to us today. We all come from different personal and familial backgrounds, some of which were modest and sometimes poor. In spite all that, however, we have become, thanks to God, important people and respectable citizens.

To recognize such a truth compels us to confess that, without God's blessing upon us, we would not have been what we are today. It is also to recognize that without God's hand upon us, our family would not have been what it is. In the same way, it is also to recognize that without God's grace we would not survive difficulties and hardships we go through in our life. To confess such a truth, finally, compels us to offer to God the fruit of our work in gratitude for everything we have received from him.

Confession of faith, says St Paul in the second reading, leads to salvation. However, this confession should be preceded by faith in the resurrection of Jesus. The confession of faith, in fact, is a proclamation with our mouth and an exterior witness of the truth of salvation we believe in and hold in our hearts as true. *"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved".*

How do we come to believe and to be saved? – By listening to the word of Jesus proclaimed by the Church and by letting it transform our lives. Whoever believes in the word of Jesus and acts on it in his life will never be put to shame. That word is addressed to anyone among the Greeks and gentiles so that whoever accepts Jesus may not perish, but have eternal life. That word is near you as you listen to it now so that you keep it in your heart and proclaim it with your mouth. That word is given so that it transforms your heart and your life for the salvation Jesus intends for you.

The word of God is a powerful tool of our salvation. It defines our identity; it provides us with convictions of faith, and gives us strength to triumph over our enemy, the devil. As we heard in the Gospel, it is with the word of God that Jesus has triumphed in his temptation and affirmed his allegiance to the Father.

The temptations of Jesus, indeed, are a summary of all the temptations someone can have in his life, namely the temptations of the search for abundance, power, and security. The temptations

bring to our awareness the fact that Jesus has been tempted all his life long in his humanity, but in all that he remained faithful to his Father. Such a victory he achieves in his faithfulness to the word of his Father.

The background of Jesus' temptation is the life of Israel in the desert. Like the people of Israel who lived 40 years in the desert, Jesus stayed 40 days in the desert, without eating and drinking, before being tested. While Israel, pushed by hunger and thirst, rebelled against God, Jesus remained faithful to his commitments.

The questions the temptations raise are these: Is it possible to have nothing, to be hungry and needy, and to remain faithful to God? Jesus answers yes; because "one does not live on bread alone". Whenever we forget the power of the word of God and think that to be in abundance is all we need, we succumb to the temptation of transforming stone into bread. Remember these words of Jesus: "Do not set your hearts on things to eat and to drink...set your hearts first on the kingdom of God and these he will give you as well" (Luke 12, 29).

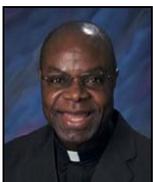
Second. Is it possible to be powerless and still be faithful to God? Jesus answers yes, because "You shall worship the Lord, Your God, and him alone shall you serve". When we compete as rivals on issues, rather than collaborate and seek common ground, and when we fight for supremacy or vainglory, we succumb to the temptation of glory and possession. Remember these words of Jesus: "Anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant" (Mt. 20, 24).

Third. Is it possible to be frightened in our physical and material security and remain loyal to God? Jesus answers yes; because the Father who loves us so much can protect us from any harm, in his love and mercy. Remember these words of St Paul: "No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us!" (Romans 8, 37).

As we enter Lent, we are reminded that our lives are crossed by many temptations from inside and outside. We can triumph over them only if we are faithful to the word of God and invoke Jesus Christ. The temptations from our culture and society are such that we need a deep wisdom and guidance in order to overcome them.

Let us turn to Jesus in prayer, fasting and conversion of heart so that he sustains us. The time of Lent is an opportunity that God gives us to approach him in transforming our lives and paying our allegiance to Jesus. In Lent we need to come closer to Jesus, to examine our lifestyle, and to hear his words with freshness of heart. The word of God is eternal, capable of helping us to attain this goal. Let us set a goal in this first week of Lent that can draw us closer to God. Let us ask Jesus to convert our hearts and our lives through the listening of his word. God bless you all!

Deuteronomy 26, 4-10; Romans 10, 8-13; Luke 4, 1-13



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