

Usque ad Sanguinem

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Heb 12:1-4 / Lk 12:49-53
Ave Maria Catholic Church, August 14th, 2022 – Fr. David M Vidal

Today's reading of the letter to the Hebrews encourages us to "*persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus,*" (Heb. 12: 1-2).

That we are in a race, there is no doubt! In this life, we constantly search for happiness. We also know that our hearts are not satisfied with just any kind of happiness, but they look for happiness without end. Unending happiness receives a name, and it is "heaven," the place of holiness and happiness.

The letter to the Hebrews exhorts us to persevere in this race while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus.

We must fix our eyes on Jesus!

We must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus because the imitation of Christ is the substance of holiness for us. We must place before the eyes of our souls our divine model: Christ Jesus, true God and true man.

There is no other name by which we can obtain eternal happiness.

The restoration of humanity to a life of holiness and happiness is the work that Christ came to accomplish here on earth. The name of Jesus is not without meaning. His name signifies his special mission of salvation: the redemption of humanity. "*You will call his name Jesus,*" the angel said to St. Joseph, "*for He will save His people from their sins,*" (Mt 1:21).

Then, we must fix our eyes on Jesus. It is not enough to look at Jesus occasionally. Nor does it suffice to get a glimpse of him. We must fix our eyes on our Lord with intensity and contemplate his person, his life, and his actions. How are we going to love him if we do not know him? How will we know him if we do not fix our eyes on him? If you want to love Jesus, fix your eyes on him. Without this first step, you cannot start the race.

However, someone can object: Even if we fix our eyes on Jesus, can we hope to reproduce his features and share his life? Can we find the strength to follow him and live a blessed life? The answer is clear: this is exact for which Jesus came to us.

The desire to reproduce this high ideal of blessedness is neither pride nor presumption. It is a response to Christ's own desire: "*I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!*" (Lk. 12: 49). This is what we heard today in the gospel. Jesus

came to set the earth on fire. Are we going to settle for a few mere sparks? Our lives must blaze with Jesus's fire.

And this is the fire of love that comes from Jesus. Even though he foresaw all the humiliations, all the sufferings of his passion and death, he freely accepted all, from the depth of his heart, out of love for his Father and for us.

And Christ kept intact that fire throughout his life. The hour of his sacrifice was always present to him. He awaited it with great desire. He called it "*his hour*" (John 13:1) as if it were the only hour that counted for him. That is what we heard in today's gospel: "*There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!*" (Lk 12: 50).

He willed it and did it! By his offering on the cross, the salvation of humanity was accomplished, and eternal happiness is offered to us.

Therefore, if "*God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son*" (John 3:16); if he "*has delivered us from the powers of darkness, and has brought us into the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins,*" (Col 1: 13-14), how can we say that holiness is not for us? Jesus came to us for that very reason. He came to bring fire, and we should be blazing!

A Cloud of Witnesses

Now, the letter to the Hebrews tells us today that we are "*surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,*" (Heb 12: 1).¹

The witnesses are those holy men and women, those martyrs who followed Jesus after fixing their eyes on him. Let us look at them. They had limitations and challenges, wounds and miseries, but they also fixed their eyes on Jesus with "*a determined determination,*" (St. Teresa of Jesus).

Sometimes, we are complacent with our shortcomings. We are quick to excuse ourselves. We pat ourselves on the back for "trying our best." Today's reading of the letter to the Hebrews does not lower the bar of our moral behavior. It does not say, "try your best," "do what you can," or even worse, "live with it."

The author of the letter to the Hebrews says something that sounds like an alarm: "*In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood,*" (Heb 12: 4).

What demanding words! These words should be present in the coat of arms of any Christian: "*Usque ad Sanguinem*" – to the point of shedding blood.

This is more than “try your best.” This places us on another level of moral behavior. It puts us on the level of martyrs who preferred to shed their blood rather than commit a sin. As we read the story of the martyrs, we learn that they could have saved their earthly lives by betraying God and their conscience. However, they were ready to resist to the point of shedding blood.

Final Question: Why should we resist evil to the point of shedding blood? The letter to the Hebrews gives us the answer. We must resist temptations and sin to the point of shedding blood because “*without holiness, no one will see the Lord,*” (Heb 12:14). You cannot say it more clearly.

Let us run our race with confidence! In Christ, the victory is ours! We must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, and our faith will be perfected. Amen