

Homily – 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Feast of Saint Thérèse the Little Flower – October 1, 2023

In today's readings we see a good summary of the Lord's invitation for us to share in his mission. The message is as simple and bright as our Little Flower. No one is saved alone, as it is quite obvious in Saint Thérèse of Lisieux's family. Salvation is not a selfish project. It is God's work, in which we are given to participate through solidarity. Our good works follow God's mercy.

Sinners may even precede the formalist self-righteous on the path to salvation. In the gospel, a son says yes and then does not go to work in the vineyard. The other son says he will not, but then he reconsiders his father's words and goes to work. What matters are the works, the actual commitment, which is often made after heartfelt repentance. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux knew that she was capable of doing no good work without the Lord's mercy.

I know, she said, "that Jesus has forgiven me more than the Magdalene, since he has forgiven me in advance, preventing me from falling." In an earlier chapter of Matthew's gospel we hear the Lord say: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven." (Mt 7:21).

The first reading, from the prophet Ezekiel, is part of a shift in the moral tradition of the people of Israel. Personal responsibility must supersede collective accountability, for the whole people to move

forward. It is true that there is always a collective responsibility. When there is a social situation of injustice and evil, which affects some more than others, this collective responsibility must be considered. But personal responsibility shows that God has made us morally free to decide.

It is true that the situation of the catastrophe of the Babylonian exile was the responsibility of the ancestors, of those who did not want to listen to the word of God through the prophets. The people must accept this history with all its consequences. However, looking at the present, each one of those who listen to Ezekiel must also take personal responsibility as an act of solidarity for all. The future is built from that personal option to open oneself to God's mercy.

In the beautiful hymn we heard in the second reading, from Saint Paul's letter to the Philippians, we are reminded of how our Lord knows how to give his life for us. No lord, no god of this world does that. The Lord begins a journey that many live in their humanity, in their unworthiness, in their nothingness. He has undertaken that destiny too, as an unavoidable option. He stands in solidarity with suffering humanity, so He strips himself of his rights.

He marks an opposite itinerary to that of men who seek to divinize themselves. God, who became Man, approaches man to allow man to be united to God. The Lord sets the example. The way to the Resurrection has no shortcuts. We must share in the Lord's

suffering. Man's failure is turned into God's victory for the salvation of mankind. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux's fidelity to the Lord enabled her, as Pope Francis says, to fully realize her vocation, her "little way", her life project, a path accessible to all: that of holiness in daily life. Such is the work of God's mercy.

As the Church offers the worthy sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Father, let us give thanks for 150 years of life of our Little Flower; 24 on earth, and now 126 in heaven. We do not need to wish her a happy birthday to heaven because she is there. May she, and Our Lady of Guadalupe, intercede for us.