

24th Sunday of the Year B

*Faith is like that:
if good works do not go with it,
it is quite dead. (Jm 2:17)*



First Reading

Isaiah 50:5-9

The Lord has opened my ear. For my part, I made no resistance, neither did I turn away. I offered my back to those who struck me, my cheeks to those who tore at my beard; I did not cover my face against insult and spittle. The Lord comes to my help, so that I am untouched by the insults. So, too, I set my face like flint; I know I shall not be shamed. My vindicator is here at hand. Does anyone start proceedings against me? Then let us go to court together. Who thinks he has a case against me? Let him approach me. The Lord is coming to my help, who dare condemn me?

Second Reading

James 2:14-18

Take the case, my brothers and sisters, of someone who has never done a single good act but claims that he has faith. Will that faith save him? If one of the brothers or one of the sisters is in need of clothes and has not enough food to live on, and one of you says to them, "I wish you well; keep yourself warm and eat plenty", without giving them these bare necessities of life, then what good is that? Faith is like that: if good works do not go with it, it is quite dead.

This is the way to talk to people of that kind: "You say you have faith and I have good deeds; I will prove to you that I have faith by showing you my good deeds – now you prove to me that you have faith without any good deeds to show."

Jesus and his disciples left for the villages round Caesarea Philippi. On the way he put this question to his disciples, "Who do people say I am?" And they told him. "John the Baptist," they said, "others Elijah; others again, one of the prophets." "But you," he asked, "who do you say I am?" Peter spoke up and said to him, "You are the Christ." And he gave them strict orders not to tell anyone about him.

And he began to teach them that the Son of Man was destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and to be put to death, and after three days to rise again; and he said all this quite openly. Then, taking him aside, Peter started to remonstrate with him. But, turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said to him, "Get behind me, Satan! Because the way you think is not God's way but man's."

He called the people and his disciples to him and said, "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and 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."

Meditation

Who is Jesus? Already in Jesus' lifetime people asked themselves many questions about him. Some, although they were astonished by the authority of his words, said: "It is the carpenter's son." Others saw in him a traitor, a rebel, even one possessed by a demon. Still others considered him a prophet. For Peter, it is clear. Jesus is the Messiah. He will be the liberator, the saviour of Israel. Even acknowledging him as Messiah, they misunderstood the type of liberation brought. When Jesus reveals to his disciples that his destiny leads to the cross, Peter rebels, immediately drawing down upon himself a severe reprimand: "Your idea of the Messiah is that of human beings, not that of God!" Jesus is not the political Messiah they are awaiting. One cannot contain him in human ideologies.

Today, what are they saying about Jesus? Is he a sort of Gandhi, a Martin Luther King, Jr., a Che Guevara, the first of the Marxists, a "superstar"? To limit ourselves to what "they" are saying about Jesus is to condemn ourselves to constant confusion. To touch the truth of his mystery, we must accept the personal question he asks us: "Who do you say that I am?"

An accumulation of facts about him will never replace a personal knowledge of Jesus and his cross. The cross is the moment of truth for the Christian. It is the test which verifies whether we are truly disciples of the Messiah, unexpectedly hidden behind the features of a suffering servant. To share life with the one we love, is the logic of friendship. It is to this vocation of friendship that Jesus summons us.