

TU ES CHRISTUS

A Homily for the Twenty-fourth Sunday of the Year (B)

St. Paul's Parish, Gävle, Sweden.

Texts: Is. 50:5-9; Ps. 114; James 2:14-18; Mark 8:27-35

“You are the Christ.” My dear brothers and sisters, the faith in Christ which Peter professed is the same faith of all the apostles and the faith of all the true followers of Christ at that time and at this time and all the time. The disciples knew what people thought about their Lord. But they did not follow him because they believed that he was John the Baptist or Elijah or one of the prophets. By Peter's profession we know that they followed him because they believed that he is the Christ.

The Lord was happy that his followers knew who he is. But to help them to ground their faith in him, he began to teach them that being Christ the Saviour meant that he must suffer grievously and die for the sins of humanity in order that by his rising from the dead the sinful humanity might be freed from slavery and be given a new dignity as sons and daughters of God. This was very important for the apostles and all the disciples who heard those words from the Lord. It has been important for all the followers of Christ down through the centuries. It is equally important for us who are hearing these words now. This explains why the Lord rebuked Peter in very strong terms when he misunderstood the fact that being “Christ” means being the Saviour who was destined to suffer and die and rise from the dead in order to save the world from eternal damnation.

With Peter we say to the Lord, “You are the Christ”. And to Peter and all of us, the Lord says, “I have called you to be Christians. And if you really

want to be my followers, you have to imitate me: you have to go in my footsteps”. There is no other way. He commands us to follow him in complete obedience. This complete obedience means that we take up our crosses and follow him who first took up his cross and went before us. What does this entail? St Augustine captures it well: ***It is a tonic that a sick man would not dare to taste if the physician has not drunk it first in his presence.*** How can we do this? The Apostle Peter who professed his faith in Christ teaches us:

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps.

‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’

When he was insulted, he returned no insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten; instead, he handed himself over to the one who judges justly.

He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed

(1 Peter 2: 21-24).

When we listen to the First Reading, we agree that the Lord Jesus perfectly fulfilled the words of that prophecy. He was obedient to his Father unto death. To imitate Christ means that we have to open our hearts and minds so that his Spirit will live in us. We have to renounce our wills and let his will be done in our lives, in little and in great things. We have also to break with any relationship and any habit that is not in consonance with his will. We have to die to all forms selfishness so that the generosity of Christ will take root in us. We have to accept suffering and pain, persecution and, if need be, death for the sake of Christ.

Another way of expressing the same thing is that we have been called by Christ to be people of faith in God. For when we believe in God, we trust him and we do his will. We love him above all things and do his will in all things. We love all people because they are his children. We imitate God who loves everyone not because they merit his love but because his love for humanity is unconditional. This means that faith and love are like the two sides of a coin. Faith is

expressed in love; love is faith in action. Through my act of love, my faith is shown. Faith that is not expressed in acts of active love for the neighbour – that is, all who are in need – is no faith at all. It is always *fides et caritas* – faith and charity *or rather - fides in caritate* – faith expressed in charity. The love of God in Christ is the pattern of the love that we are commanded to have for others. We see that the Lord who taught the crowds about true faith in the true God “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). He teaches us by his own example that faith without active love for the needy is dead and true love without faith in the true God is not possible. Our faith in Christ gives birth to freedom in our lives: freedom from selfishness and freedom to love the neighbour. St James’s teaching on faith and good works is well known. Those who try to oppose it contradict themselves. How can we claim to have faith in God who is love if we lack love in us? Charity or good deed is the fruit of deep faith. For it is from the heart full of loving faith that the abundant fruits of generosity flourish.

*“This is my commandment: love one another as I love you.
No one has greater love than this,
to lay down one's life for one's friends” (John 15: 12-13).*

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