

## The Pleasurable or the Wearisome?!

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**Gospel:** Mark 10:32-45. *"And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, Saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again. And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. "*

"Behold, we go up to Jerusalem..."

From this Gospel passage, we can see that the Lord wanted to unveil this great difference between His mind and the mind of the world, the way of His disciples and the ways of the world. The masters of the world dominate, but the first among the disciples serve. These differences are not just distinct characteristics, but rather totally opposite poles. The words of the Lord change words and expressions like "be served" to "serve;" Masters to servants; and first to last.

Since the mind of Christ is truthful, than its opposite, the mind of the world, is of course sinful. In the language of the Holy Scriptures, sin is more than just doing something wrong or some mistakes. There are many lapses we fall into while struggling on the way of the Lord. Sin, however, has a larger meaning. It is going in the wrong direction, or missing the mark. It is the wrong relationship between God and us, and not a wrong towards this relationship. For sin is a wrong understanding of God and a wrong attitude towards Him and the neighbor. For example, the sin toward God is to see Him different than what He is, and to impose on Him a relationship that does not please Him. It is sin to put God in the accusing cell, for example, and call him a judge, or an uncaring person about us, or a cause for evil, while He is indeed the opposite of all this. He is loving and caring. He is a true Father. It is sin to corrupt our relationship with Him. It is also a sin towards ourselves if we define ourselves as opposite to who we truly are, leading ourselves far from our purpose, that is from

happiness. Our sin toward ourselves is that we go after pleasure that drops us in pain, and that we run with this pleasure on paths leading us to everything but peace.

St. Maximos the Confessor asks us to distinguish between real pleasure and real pain, and to know what is really pleasurable and what is wearisome. The sin we commit toward ourself is that we deceive ourself, taking our being to quick pleasures and entertainment, thinking that this is the true pleasure. Later on we discover that the only thing left from these kinds of pleasures is distress. Our sin than is that we accept something pleasurable and deceiving, and we fall in trouble. This is the mind of the world. He runs after cheap and easy pleasures. St. Isaac the Syrian advises us to love hardship. This is opposite to the mind of the world that advises us to love entertainment and rest...

This in essence is sin. This is the continuous human temptation that the Lord conquered when he spoke to His Father saying: "Let Thy will be, and not mine," and he accepted the Cup that was His. Christ understood very well that the way to the Heavenly Jerusalem, His destination, had to pass through the Gologtha of the earthly Jerusalem. Peter tried once to forbid Him to go on this destination, and Jesus admonished Him, saying: "Get behind me Satan." The glory does not come from pleasure, but the true pleasure and the true glory come from the labor of virtues and the cross of sacrifice. "The servant of the Lord" is the Master of Masters and the King of Kings. His sufferings are His glory. The devil tried from the beginning to offer Him the entire world just to convince Him not to enter His sufferings, saying: "Worship me and I will give you all the kingdoms of the world..." This is always the devil's

hook to hunt us. But Jesus always calls us to the holy way, the way of sufferings and sacrifice, instead of laxity and selfishness... Upon the event of the Transfiguration, the disciples themselves desired the heavenly glories and honor, but the Lord told them that from the mountain of Transfiguration He will direct himself to the Mount of Golgotha. In the Gospel passage we just heard, James and John fell into this temptation. They sought glory without going through sacrifices, sufferings and death.

The way of the Resurrection passes through the Cross. And the true pleasure is the one coming from the labor of virtues. The sign of victory at the day of the resurrection is held by the wood of the Cross itself. The sin of man and his continuous temptation is that he takes earthly pleasures that are easily accessible to him, instead of laboring for the desired grace and blessings.

But sin has no real basis. It is deceptively baseless. For when an honest man takes sin and tastes its passing pleasure, he immediately discovers that it is deceiving. Man is a being that loves eternal and long lasting paths and hates the dead end roads. It is true to a great degree that "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28 AV) Yes, everything, even sin. Discovering this is easy for every honest person, and it is sufficient to lead him to the right way of Jerusalem. Isn't this the way of repentance? The true pleasure is the fruits of the Holy Spirit, and the joys are the tears of hope in repentance.

This is exactly what happened to Saint Mary of Egypt who we remember today, the fifth Sunday of Lent, before we go to Jerusalem on the sixth Sunday. This

woman deeply sunk into the abyss of pleasures. But sin is not the food of man, and its is baseless. This Egyptian far transgressed, but she arrived to a dead end. Only after she lived, as the Tradition says, forty years in the desert, the road was endless. Only virtue starts and last eternally, for the pleasure resulting from it is true.

Behold, we are going to Jerusalem. We have to truly prepare to pass through the earthly Jerusalem and the path of sufferings, in order to reach the glorious Resurrection. Our contemplation in the example of Saint Mary of Egypt and our reflection on the human temptation that befell James and John call us to wage a spiritual war of sacrifices in the remaining time of Lent. Resurrection is only possible for the crucified. The Cross is the glory. Is there a glory for the Christian greater than participating in the suffering of His Master?

The Holy Week is near, and our call to the labor of virtues, to the struggle, asceticism, love, and his clearer

Truly, what is pleasurable in the mind of the world is wearisome, and what is wearisome in the mind of Christ is truly joyful and pleasurable.

Amen.