

Who I Am & What I Own

"Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it."

Gospel: Mark 8:34-9:1 :*And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.*

Sermon

In this Gospel passage the word soul is repeated many times. At one moment, we hear Jesus asking us to lose our soul, and another time to save it. We need to be careful to discern two meanings that the word "soul" carries in this passage. In order to clarify the meanings and His intentions, the Lord Jesus speaks about the same

meaning in different places explaining his words and commandments. It is clear that in every place, the Lord speaks about the two opposing meanings of the soul. First, the soul that we need to deny and lose, the one that is ashamed of Him. Second, the soul that we need to save by carrying the Cross, and is more precious than the whole world, and cannot be ransomed, and the one that witnesses and is remembered in His Father's glory.

The first meaning of the soul, in which Jesus asks us to lose it, deals with caring for ourselves, amassing wealth and fulfilling the passions of the soul, and the like, that we look to care for ourselves, forgetting about Jesus and others. It is clear that the soul which Jesus asks us to save is our self and true life, of which the whole world will not be worthy. So we have to discern between that which is for our soul and that which is our soul

Many philosophies give a different interpretation of existence. One says, "I think therefore I am..." And the philosophy of our age, the consumer philosophy says I own therefore I am. I have good health, therefore I am, because sickness is something from nonexistence. Do I have money? Then I am powerful and I exist, because poverty is forgetfulness and nonexistence.

Do I have children? Then I can continue my existence. Do I have a social position? Then I exist.

To win the world, I have to run after supplying myself with these essentials for life. Today's man fights nonexistence by owning. He feels secure by having health, glory and great storage rooms.

Existence is life, and securing the soul means assuring its existence. This consumer philosophy was mentioned in the Gospel, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years" (Luke 12:19). The Lord named this philosophy as a foolish one.

The Gospel is clear in saying that the soul is not fulfilled by fulfilling its desires, and that our self is different from our belongings. "I am" is different from "I have."

"I have" is an assurance for man's life who seeks to care for and save his soul even if this was at the expense of "who I am." In this way, he runs to win the world thinking that by owning the world, he will secure his life. He sells his soul as a ransom and becomes ashamed of the Lord's words and the faith to gain a position or money or to own more.

"Who am I" is the philosophy of the man who loves Jesus and knows that He is the "Son" and not a merchant. He is the inheritor and not the worker. "Who Am I" is the philosophy and the faith of the Christian who denies any position, selfish interest or the whole world to win his soul and not lose his identity.

The father who sends his son to work at an early age has sold his sons and gained much money, but he lost himself as "being a father."

The mother who sells her daughter to gain something from the world, has lost herself "being a mother." There is the politician who buys and sells on the expense of his principles. Such a person gains things for himself but loses himself. The Ambassador who goes to a

foreign land to buy and sell as if he was one of those foreigners, and builds houses on a land which he will forsake has gained for himself only to find he has lost his true self.

Man is who he is and not what he has.

The second meaning of the soul: "Who Am I." This is the philosophy of the Christian who believes in the wisdom of the serpents, as St. John Chrysostom explains. This wisdom is not that the serpent is always careful and tries to defend itself very vigorously. The wisdom of the serpent is that it knows where its life is exactly. When it is attacked, it gives all its body, but hides its head.

The Christian is like a wise merchant sailing on troubled waters. Whenever the storm is hard, he needs to throw out all his cargo in order to survive with the ship.

What benefits man if he carries all the goods of the world and loses his life. What does it benefit a man if he secures everything for his life and loses his soul?

The Gospel clarifies exactly that I exist not when I own or when I think, but when I carry the Cross and deny what is mine. I deny even a material gain if the latter makes me ashamed of Christ. I exist when I follow Christ.

"I am who follows Jesus." This is the only life assurance I have when I am a witness of and faithful to Him, when I am His Ambassador. For me the world is a place for preaching and not for commercializing. The assurance of my life is the Cross and not the devious

ways of the world. And my identity and soul cannot be ransomed by anything earthly.

Whoever wants to save his life "through what he has" shall lose it, and whoever loses what he has for Christ and the Gospel shall save it.

Amen.