

## SUNDAY IN THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

Gospel: Luke 2: 33-40

We must contradict neither the truths, nor  
the precepts, nor the counsels of the Gospel

### 5.1 First Point

Today's Gospel relates that Saint Simeon, after blessing Jesus' father and mother in the temple, told Mary, his mother, that this Child had come for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel.<sup>65</sup> Many would profit by his death, while many others, lacking fidelity to the grace which the Redeemer would merit for them, would make of this very grace the occasion of their damnation. This saintly old man then added that Jesus Christ would be a sign of contradiction for all people.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, there were many who contradicted his conduct during his life.

Even among Christians there are still many who every day contradict his teaching and his maxims. Some show little respect for the decisions of the Church. Others, at times, presume to argue about predestination and grace — topics on which those who are not learned should never utter a single word, because these matters are beyond their understanding. If someone raises such subjects with you, your reply should simply be a general statement, I believe what the Church believes.

Let us do the same concerning a number of other questions relating to doctrine which our minds simply cannot fully grasp. We should remember the words of the Wise Man in Ecclesiasticus: Be not concerned over things that are above you.<sup>67</sup> Let us leave to the learned all these learned disputes; let us leave to them the task of refuting heresies and of silencing heretics.

Let us teach only the common doctrine of Jesus Christ and make it our practice to abide in all things by what the Church teaches to the faithful in the catechisms approved by her, that is, those composed or adopted by the bishops who are united to the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Let us never take the liberty of dogmatizing on religious controversies.

### 5.2 Second Point

There is no less danger in contradicting the moral teachings of Jesus Christ than in rejecting his doctrine, for usually what causes the loss of faith is disorder in moral behavior. Jesus did not come so much to teach us the holy truths of Christian morality as to engage us to practice them faithfully. Still, it is common enough to see Christians, and even members of religious communities, who do not accept these practical truths and who contradict them in their hearts, sometimes even in their external conduct, as when someone tells them that on Judgment Day they will have to account for a useless word;<sup>68</sup> that we must pray without ceasing;<sup>69</sup> that we must enter heaven through the narrow gate;<sup>70</sup> that Jesus Christ has said unless you do penance you will all likewise perish;<sup>71</sup> that, consequently, it is an indispensable obligation to put these maxims into practice if we wish to be saved; that there is a command addressed to them to love their enemies, to do good to those who hate them, to pray to God for those who persecute them and calumniate them so that they may be truly the children of their Father who is in heaven, who makes his sun rise on the good and the wicked alike.<sup>72</sup>

How many are there who believe that these teachings are merely counsels of perfection? Yet Jesus Christ taught that they were necessary practices and the way to achieve salvation. Take care not to fall into this gross error, which might lead you astray from the true path to heaven.

### 5.3 Third Point

It is not enough for us to avoid contradicting the moral precepts of the Gospel. Saint Paul says that he will show us an even more perfect, more excellent way<sup>73</sup> to which Jesus Christ calls us, which he has illustrated for us by his own example. If anyone wishes to follow me, says Our Lord, let him renounce himself<sup>74</sup> — that is, let him renounce his own spirit and his own will — let him carry his cross daily, and follow me. Who, indeed, does not contradict this divine saying of Jesus Christ, our Master, if not in word at least in heart?

How many would agree with this thought of Saint Bernard, that light and frivolous words in the mouth of a secular person may be only playful chatter, but that in the mouth of a person consecrated to God, they are blasphemies? How many take to heart the words of Saint Dorotheus: “Let us be faithful in the slightest matters lest they lead to regrettable consequences and unfortunate results”? To how many do not these words of Jesus Christ seem harsh: Blessed are the poor in spirit;<sup>75</sup> it is harder for a rich man to enter heaven than for a camel to pass through a needle’s eye.<sup>76</sup>

For us, let us probe the depths of our heart. Is it truly penetrated with what Jesus Christ said: Blessed will you be when people falsely say all sorts of evil against you<sup>77</sup>? How many there are who violate rules on many points, as though they were obliged to observe only the rules which they find convenient? Such persons soon fall into disorderly living, for as Saint Dorotheus remarks, as soon as one begins to say, “What does it matter if I say this word, what harm is there if I eat this morsel, what crime do I commit in doing this or that?,” one ends up smothering all remorse of conscience even on the most essential points.

Let us fear that we will be lost if we attach ourselves to maxims that lead to laxity, for we are people God has called to live according to the perfection of the Gospel.

65 Lk 2:34

66Ibid.

67 Sir 3:22

68 Mt 12:36

69 Lk 18:1

70 Mt 7:13

71 Lk 13:5

72 Mt 5:44-45

73 1 Cor 12:31

74 Lk 9:23

75 Mt 5:3

76 Mt 19:23-24

77 Mt 5:11