**FRIDAY JULY 1 – XIII WEEK O.T. [B]**

**Go and learn the meaning of the words, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."**

**Today the Gospel begins as follows: “As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post. He said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.” Matthew is tax collector, namely a public sinner. If Jesus calls a sinner to follow him, it means that for the other sinners, too, there is hope. They are not damned people, people without hope. Jesus opens the gates of the reign of God to them, too, the gates of hope, the gates of Light. Eternal life is for them, too.**

**With prophets, the Lord had always opened the gates of hope to every sinners. It is enough to recall what the prophet Ezekiel revealed to his people: “If the wicked man turns away from all the sins he committed, if he keeps all my statutes and does what is right and just, he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of the crimes he committed shall be remembered against him; he shall live because of the virtue he has practiced. Do I indeed derive any pleasure from the death of the wicked? says the Lord GOD. Do I not rather rejoice when he turns from his evil way that he may live? And if the virtuous man turns from the path of virtue to do evil, the same kind of abominable things that the wicked man does, can he do this and still live? None of his virtuous deeds shall be remembered, because he has broken faith and committed sin; because of this, he shall die. Turn and be converted from all your crimes, that they may be no cause of guilt for you. Cast away from you all the crimes you have committed, and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies, says the Lord GOD. Return and live!” (cf. Ez 18, 1-18) For the Pharisees, this Word of the Lord was cancelled. They were the just ones and they always remained just even if they had transgressed all the commandments of the Law of the Lord. The others were sinners and they remained sinners in eternity, even if a great conversion had occurred in them. This happens when the Word of the Lord is trampled.**

**Knowing that Jesus did not close the gates of hope and light, but he opened them wide, many sinners came to the house of Matthew and sat at the table with Jesus. For the Pharisees, the deed of Jesus was a great scandal. A man considered just, holy, perfect in everything can never tarnish eating with sinners. Sinners eat with sinners and never the righteous, never the saints, never a Pharisee, never an observant of the Law. To these accusations, Jesus does not reply quoting the prophet Ezekiel. It would be an openly dispute. With the Pharisees, Jesus must be wiser than serpents and harmless as doves. For this reason, he lets himself be helped by the prophet Hosea: "Come, let us return to the LORD, For it is he who has rent, but he will heal us; he has struck us, but he will bind our wounds. He will revive us after two days; on the third day he will raise us up, to live in his presence. Let us know, let us strive to know the LORD; as certain as the dawn is his coming, and his judgment shines forth like the light of day! He will come to us like the rain, like spring rain that waters the earth." What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your piety is like a morning cloud, like the dew that early passes away. For this reason I smote them through the prophets, I slew them by the words of my mouth; For it is love that I desire, not sacrifice, and knowledge of God rather than holocausts. (Hs, 6, 1-6) The Word of the prophet is of a most pure light. Firstly, there is a strong invitation to return to the Lord. The gates of conversion and repentance are open. One can convert. Better, we are all called to conversion. One can leave sin. Moreover, everyone must be of encouragement and incitation for each other. To the Lord does one returns together. Whoever decides to return must call each of his brother to return with him. One does not return alone.**

**The Pharisees were the devotees of the religion of sacrifices and offers to the Lord in his holy temple. Jesus says to them – always quoting the prophecy of Hosea - that his Father does not want this religion made of chants, sounds, offers, sacrifices and things like these. He wants the religion of love and knowledge of the Lord. Let us read Isaiah and we will understand what Jesus is saying to them: “What care I for the number of your sacrifices? says the LORD. I have had enough of whole-burnt rams and fat of fatlings; In the blood of calves, lambs and goats I find no pleasure. When you come in to visit me, who asks these things of you? Trample my courts no more! Bring no more worthless offerings; your incense is loathsome to me. New moon and sabbath, calling of assemblies, octaves with wickedness: these I cannot bear. Your new moons and festivals I detest; they weigh me down, I tire of the load. When you spread out your hands, I close my eyes to you; Though you pray the more, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood! Wash yourselves clean! Put away your misdeeds from before my eyes; cease doing evil; learn to do good. Make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow. Come now, let us set things right, says the LORD: Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow; Though they be crimson red, they may become white as wool. If you are willing, and obey, you shall eat the good things of the land; But if you refuse and resist, the sword shall consume you: for the mouth of the LORD has spoken! (Is 1, 11-20) When, in the Holy Scripture, one speaks about love and knowledge of the Lord, one must always remember that love and knowledge are fruit of the perfect obedience to the Word of the Lord. Where the Lord is darkened, altered, modified, interpreted according to the human traditions, there is neither love nor knowledge there. The one who obeys his Word loves and knows the Lord. Whoever observes the Word loves and knows the true devotion. He loves men and knows them according to truth that walks with them showing with words and his life his perfect knowledge of the Lord. Now the Lord does not want the death of the sinner, but that he is converted and lives. But if God wants him to be converted and live, the instrument, the way, the word, the example so that every sinner is converted is the one who already believes in God, knows him, loves him in the greatest faithfulness to his divine Word.**

**Let us read the text of Mt 9,9-13**

**As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post. He said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples. The Pharisees saw this and said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" He heard this and said, "Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. Go and learn the meaning of the words, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."**

**The declaration of truth of a false and deceitful religion does not make it true. But not even the declaration of falsity of the purest and holiest religion makes it false. Declaring that God does not exist does not make God not existent. But also declaring that a non-God exists does not make this non-God a true God. All declarations are fruit of man’s heart; they are the mirror of his soul. Jesus is declared sinner since he eats and welcomes sinners. This declaration is the mirror that makes us see the hate they have against the others. The Pharisees do not love, they do not love each other either. Every Pharisee loves himself ad no one else. He walks with the other since he needs the other one endorse his falsity and lie. They have also declared Jesus declared a demoniac. But this declaration, too, does nothing except revealing the miserable state of their religion, incapable to make them discern who comes from God and who, instead, comes from the world or from Satan. The evil declares Christ evil. Sinner declares Christ sinner. Blasphemer declares Christ a blasphemer. The one who fell into the coils of Satan declares Christ a conquered, the one wrapped in the net of Satan. Christ Jesus knows that, he knows the heart of Pharisees ad walks through his path. Mother of God let we never declare true the false and false the true, the things of God things of men and the things of men things of God.**