

How to Build

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"Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock." Matthew VII, 24

Thus finishes the "Sermon on the Mount", the long address Matthew puts in Jesus' mouth. As with the teachings in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, here, too, the conclusion is an invitation to put what we hear into practice. And one of the greatest deficiencies of our times is, indeed, our incapacity to translate into concreteness of life what we hear or say. Lack of commitment and a poor sense of responsibility are rampant. Ours seems to be a generation of heedless listeners and distracted onlookers, who are prepared to make a charitable effort of attention even if only for the sake of pleasantness and good manners, but nothing more than that. That is why noses are turned up at the Gospel, because it asks an act of awareness of us; it asks us to decide, to accept, to get involved; it demands conversion that does not consist in our saying we are Christians or in calling out, "Lord, Lord," but in doing the will of God. The Sermon on the Mount is the quintessence of this will: the attitude we assume when faced with Jesus, His teaching, His example, the call not to fill our mouths with His name but to believe in Him and to really make Him the Lord of our life, means accepting or rejecting the salvation God offers us.

Our life is like a building. Each one of us builds his own house, be it a small bedsit or a large palatial house, poor or luxurious, and he uses the means, the opportunity and the materials that are available to him. And each of us does his best: what is built is the fruit of constancy and fatigue. If we look at the houses around us we are often beguiled by the imposing appearance of some, the sturdiness of their walls, the great value of the materials used, and we are prone to giving wrong judgments concerning their solidity. The two houses in this brief parable are presented in symmetry: They appear to be absolutely iden-

tical. Their foundations are the same, too: We are not told that the second house is without any. But Jesus emphasizes that the important thing is the ground they are built on, where one sets up one's abode. However solid its appearance, the house built on sandy terrain is at risk.

There may descend on every house, indeed, on the lives of each one of us, problems which bring about a crisis in our existence: economic difficulties, floods, unemployment, illness, spiritual crises, divisions within the family, pain and mourning. The difference between the two ways of approaching our existence emerges at moments such as these. A person, who has based his life on money, important relationships, power or appearance, cannot withstand the impact of the elements. Only an existence based on Jesus Christ, the rock of salvation, the true foundation of our life, is able to pass these tests. But this figure takes us beyond earthly existence, and it reminds us that our lives will in any case be weighed up one day. "Every man's work shall be made manifest," writes Paul to the Corinthians. If he builds upon the true foundation (Christ Jesus) his work may either withstand or turn out to be lacking in substance, "but he himself shall be saved." So the choice of ground to build on is not something of little or no account. If you realize you have built your house upon sand, think. You still have time to abandon it and to build another – small and humble though it may be on account of poor materials and waning strength – or else to rent just a bedsit: but choose the right place, choose Christ, the rock of ages.

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