

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
(Wisdom 2:12.17-20 / Mark 9:30-37)
23.09.2018

Dear brothers and sisters,

In today's gospel passage, Jesus explains to his disciples what will happen to him: "He will be delivered into the hands of men; they will put him to death; and three days after he has been put to death he will rise again."

Some scholars think that these verses were added by the Christian community, after the Resurrection, at the time of the redaction of the gospel, because it would not have been possible for Jesus, if He was well and truly a human being, to know the future, and therefore to have been able to foretell what would happen to Him with such precision. In fact, things are not as simple as that.

Jesus was a human being like you and me, but, truth be told, Jesus was much more than we are. For example, we know that Jesus was put to the test in the same way as ourselves, but, unlike us, He did not sin (cf. Heb 4:15). Or again we know from the gospel that "the crowd was trying to touch Jesus because a power came out of Him that cured them all" (Luke 6:19). This kind of thing does not happen to us! These examples show that indeed Jesus was more than we are.

Yes, Jesus was a human being, the son of Mary, but He was also the Son of God. He was divine. For that reason, Jesus knew what would happen to Him: his passion, death and resurrection. The fact that Jesus might have known what would happen to Him does not mean that He lived through his passion "as if", without actually suffering too much for he had the knowledge of a happy outcome to the horrendous steps he had to traverse. No, Jesus lived through all the drama of his passion and death as a human being. His foreknowledge did not suppress the unimaginable moral and physical suffering he endured.

Perhaps Jesus' foreknowledge was the fruit of his familiarity with the Sacred Scriptures. In Luke's gospel, we read how on the Road to Emmaus "the Risen Lord explained to the disciples the passages throughout the Scriptures that were about himself. Sometimes we lament the fact that the passages the Risen Lord referred to on that occasion are not named, book, chapter and verse. But we can imagine that the reading from the book of Wisdom we have heard this morning was one of the passages the Risen Christ referred to.

In this text, you remember, it is question of "a virtuous man also called God's son. His opponents don't like him because he annoys them and opposes their way of life, he reproaches them for their sins against the Law and he accuses them of sins against their upbringing". So, this virtuous man will be "tested with cruelty and with torture" by godless people who "will condemn him to a shameful death". "They shall explore this gentleness of his and put his endurance to the proof, since God will rescue Him – or so He claims". If Jesus knew this text, and He probably did know it, there is no doubt that it would have helped him decipher his destiny; Jesus could not but put together this description of the virtuous man and his own life. Jesus was meeting with constant

opposition; no doubt He understood that He would finish like the virtuous man of the book of Wisdom.

Just after Jesus had explained to his disciples what will happen to him – his passion, death and resurrection – the same disciples were arguing which of them was the greatest. It was as if the disciples were not getting the message and were caught up in their own little, self-serving, self-interested world.

It is not so much what will happen to Him that Jesus has to share with his disciples, but to tell what needs to happen with them. The disciples need to change their attitude, their minds and hearts.

The disciples want to be the greatest. This is not necessarily a wrong or unhealthy desire. All depends of the kind of greatness they are looking for.

If the disciples are looking for power, domination, control, promotion or independence, they are seeking the wrong kinds of greatness.

On the contrary, Jesus invites his disciples – and we are part of them – to look for and choose the spirit of service. Such is the greatness they must look for. Jesus tells his disciples: “If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all”. This is the way that Jesus followed. This is the way that the disciples should follow, the way that we should follow. Jesus came into the world not to be served, but to serve. We have to follow his example. We are called to serve and not to be served. We are called to show respect to others, to look after their basic needs and to help them grow. We are called to give our life for them.

If we want to be the greatest, we have to become like a child. A child is someone who relies on his parents for all his needs. If we want to be the greatest in God’s eyes we have to consent to rely on God for everything in the way a child relies on his parents for everything; we have to renounce our independence, our autonomy; we have to renounce acting as if we were God. So often, we think that we know everything and are self-sufficient.

At the time of Jesus the disciples were arguing which of them was the greatest. If we look at the Church today, we discover that nothing has really changed. We still believe in the paschal mystery, in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus for our salvation. But we are all tempted by the desire to have the first place, by the desire to be the greatest. We are all tempted by the evil of careerism, the desire to serve ourselves, our own ambition, our own ego instead of serving our neighbour, those who are in need, the poor. We are all tempted to fall into the evil of clericalism.

You notice, that I have said we are **all** tempted to fall into clericalism and not only the Church’s ministers. Clericalism is not only the sickness of the ministers of the Church who want the first place, the power, the control; it is also the sickness of the laity who have made idols of their priests, ‘little gods’, putting them on a pedestal, elevating them into some semi-divine level!

I remember twenty years ago a nun criticizing me because I had said in a homily that I was not perfect... Don’t say that, she told me: people will not understand; people will be shocked. Sorry

sister, but that's the reality. By repeating again and again that the priest is right, it is no surprise that blood has rushed to the heads of some of them; no surprise that clericalism has led some ministers to abuse power, to abuse others' conscience and also led to sexual abuse.

Both clerics and laity have their share of responsibility in the sickness of clericalism that is rocking the boat of the Church today. We are all invited to a serious examination of conscience. We are invited to discover that the Church is not an organisation which operates on two levels; clergy on one and laity on the other, those who have the power and those who obey. Rather the Church is a body made of all the baptised persons, among whom some have been chosen to serve and help their brothers and sisters, and not to lord it over them. This is the model of a synodal Church, brought into light by the Council Vatican II. This is the model of the Church preached and advocated by Pope Francis. A synodal Church is a Church made of all the baptised, inhabited by the Holy Spirit, and "walking together" (this is the meaning of the Greek word "sun-odos, synod"), all the baptised – laity and clergy – listening to one another, under the discernment and guidance of the bishop. Such is the mystery of the Church to which we belong.

May the Holy Spirit enlighten the Church today! May the Holy Spirit enlighten each one of us who are the Church!