

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(Romans 12:1-2 / Matthew 16:21-27)
03.09.2017
The perfect thing to do...

After Adam and Eve ate the fruit (Gn 3:13) and after Cain murdered Abel (Gn 4:10), God asked the same question: "What have you done?"

What we have done and what we are doing matters to God! In fact it matters so much that, in the Gospel we have just heard, Jesus declares: "The Son of Man will reward each one according to his behaviour".

For his part, in our first reading from the letter to the Romans, St Paul warns us that we are supposed to discover "what is the perfect thing to do".

To reflect on our behaviour, on what we are doing, is important because on the judgement day we will not come with our lofty and pious thoughts, with our good intentions but with what we have actually and concretely done or failed to do. Intentions and thoughts are important, yet ultimately "the Son of Man will reward each one according to his behaviour".

According to St Paul, we have the choice to behave either according to the new mind we have received from Christ or according to the world. While the new mind leads to self-giving, the mind of the world produces self-centredness.

The Christian existence is an existence for others. The call to discipleship means more than an invitation to walk behind Jesus and to accompany him in his journeys. Discipleship involves fellowship; at its deepest level discipleship means to do for others what Christ did for us, and this includes to live and to die for others. Just as Jesus made himself a servant of all, so his disciples should do the same. Disciples should make their lives, which have been given to them by Jesus, a gift to others.

Here the parable of the talents (Mt 25:14-30) is particularly relevant because, ultimately the question is: "What have we done with what was given to us?"

The challenge for you and me is not to put ourselves under pressure to do things we cannot do but to be courageous enough to do what we can. We are not all equipped for the same work, we do not all have the same abilities. What the Lord expects of us is not to do great things but to do the small things which are part of our daily lives with humility and generosity.

In our families, communities and countries, there are things that we can do in order to heal wounds, restore relationships, foster respect for one another and so bear witness to Christ's active presence in our lives and in the world. God heard the cry of his people (cf. Ex 3:7). We are supposed to do likewise. Where there is violence, bigotry, sectarianism, discrimination, hunger, thirst, and poverty, as Christians, it is our duty to say something and above all to do something.

Too often, we speak a lot, we remain at the level of ideas and good intentions. We do not really deal with reality in a concrete and practical way. It may be that we are afraid of getting dirty or of making mistakes. The reality is that life is often messy, it is challenging and demanding. In our need for security we may be tempted to do nothing, to settle into a kind of clean and safe neutrality. We may believe that as long as we are law-abiding citizens and weekly communicants we have ticked all the boxes necessary for salvation.

The parable of the rich young man teaches us that there is always something more to do. After having done everything right, the young man still asks: "What good deed must I do to have eternal life?" (Mt 19:16). Jesus' answer indicates him the perfect thing to do: "Go, sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, then come, follow me" (v. 21).

Moreover, in his own person, Jesus did not deal with an ideal humanity, keeping his hands clean. From his birth in a manger to his death on a cross, Jesus meets us where we are, in the limitations and the reality of our messy and sinful lives. Jesus' motivation for being put to death was love, for him there was no greater love than to lay down his life for us (cf. Jn 15:13).

For our part, the sure way to offer our bodies "as a holy sacrifice, pleasing to God" is to love our brothers and sisters to the point of giving our lives for them.

Our readings today remind us that love is not first a feeling, but an act of obedience to God's will, a commitment to imitate Christ and a personal decision to follow him wherever he goes and to do whatever he wants us to do. Christian love is concrete and incarnated, it compels us to do something. It deals with flesh and body, with society and politics, with everything which concerns humanity, all men, women and children.

According to St Matthew (25:31-46), on judgement day, Christ will consider what we did very concretely for those who were thirsty, hungry, stranger, poor, sick and in prison. This is a list which is still relevant for us today, and yet we could add: men and women suffering from discrimination because of their race, religion or sexual orientation, so many people victims of slavery, single parents and children deprived of proper education or medical care. At the end we will hear the Lord tell us: "Just as you did it – or did not do it – to the least of these, you did it – or you did not do it – to me" (v. 40.45).

In all the areas of our personal lives, in the decisions we have to make in our families and communities, may our behaviour be informed by the Gospel and may the Lord give us the wisdom to know what must be done and the courage to do it.