

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

(Wisdom 7:7-13 / Mark 10:17-30)

11.10.2015

*Discipleship*

“Jesus was setting out on a journey...”

These simple words mean far more than what we think! It would be too simplistic to consider them as just giving us passing information about what Jesus did on that particular day. With these words, the evangelist draws attention to an essential aspect of our Christian identity: to be a Christian is to be a pilgrim, we are a people on a journey.

The first Christians were very deeply aware of their Jewish heritage and their belonging to a pilgrim people. The Acts of the Apostles remind us that the followers of Jesus were known as those who belonged to the Way (Ac 19:23; 22:4). For them and for us Christianity is not – should not be – first about living in our head and in a settlement but living on our feet and engaged on a journey. The call to follow the Lord does not mean: “Come, follow me to a house where we will sit down together and relax” but “Come, walk in my footsteps, follow me”.

Obviously we are not supposed to walk without support and guidance, and we are not meant to be aimless wanderers. The Lord gives us his Spirit, the Scriptures, the Church, the Sacraments as lights and guides for our path. These means should allow us to remain rooted in Christ and always ready to follow him wherever he goes.

This image of the pilgrim people is important because it reminds us that we cannot be satisfied with the present situation of our lives and of the world. We are meant to long for a more just and peaceful world; we are meant to expect our lives to be more unified and functioning at a deeper level.

We have to give thanks for what we have and what we already experience and yet, in some way, we have to acknowledge and to keep alive in our hearts a holy restlessness. At a personal level and at the level of our societies, we need to long for more.

Over and over again we need to come back to the Lord in order to be more faithful to our mission. This daily journey back to greater fidelity to the Gospel, to what is really essential is the sign of a living faith and of true discipleship.

In order to engage ourselves on this faith journey, there are at least three things which are absolutely necessary: the first two are courage and trust.

I suppose that none of us remembers when he or she walked for the first time. However we have all seen children coming up to and going through this daring experience. The progress from crawling to walking requires from children and act courage and trust. In fact, most of the time, the first steps of children are not a long pilgrimage but just a courageous leap into their parents' arms.

Courage and trust were lacking in the young man of our Gospel reading. Courage and trust are sometimes lacking in our personal lives and in the lives of our Christian communities. There is need for courage and trust in order to step into uncharted territories, to risk everything for the sake of the Gospel, for what Pope Francis called “the folly of the gratuitousness of Jesus' paschal love” (Homily 04.10.2015).

As a pilgrim people we are not a despondent mass of human beings, fearfully plodding down a muddy track. Clinging to Christ, and to him alone, finding courage and trust in his caring presence, we walk steadfastly in his ways. Attentive to the promptings of the Spirit, whose mission is to lead and guide us, we do not despair because of our mistakes but humbly learn from them.

Instead of relying on the Lord, the young man chose to cling to his riches. Here it must be clear that the expression “he was a man of great wealth” encompasses all that the young man possessed: money, intelligence, knowledge, certitudes and convictions... all the good things that gave him identity and confidence.

The problem is that all his wealth ended up preventing him from following the Lord, from growing in true human and spiritual maturity. Sadly he was not able to take the risk to let go of everything.

Strangely enough we could say that the young man did not say or do anything wrong, but when he was offered the opportunity to go for more, he opted for less. Instead of going deeper he remained at the surface of life. He preferred the secure status of a spectator to the status of travelling companion.

And here comes a third word: along with courage and trust, discipleship also requires of us detachment. Our lives are a long journey punctuated by many detachments until the ultimate detachment when we will have no choice but to let go of everything, including our lives as we know them. And on that day courage and trust will be needed as well.

In the meantime, the school of discipleship in which we are all enrolled by our baptism gives us many small occasions to practice courage, trust and detachment.

Some time ago, Pope Francis declared: “We are pilgrims. Are we watching or are we closed? Are we vigilant or are we safe and secure in an inn, no longer wanting to continue on? Are we pilgrims or are we wandering?” (Homily 23.12.2013)

A fearful and cluttered Christianity cannot accomplish its mission; it is unable to move the mountains of selfishness and greed within us and around us, it is unable to proclaim a message of freedom and life.

The society in which we live is very different from the one some may have known 50 years ago. Recently our world, our families and communities have experienced great changes and challenges.

Is it better or worse? Who can answer such a question? What matters is that we believe that God is present here and now as he has always been.

We may not see it, we may even have some doubts about it, but the truth is that God is faithful to his promises and his Spirit is at work in us and around us.

Let us pray that our bishops gathered together in Rome, and all of us here in this country, may welcome the stranger who joins us on the way and who speaks to us a “timeless word forever new” (Stanbrook Hymnal 61). Moved by the Spirit of courage, trust and detachment, may we be “like sparks among the straw running to set the universe ablaze” with Christ's love (Id.)