

26TH Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2008

We all have heard children as well as adults say, “it is not my fault; it is all her/his fault. I did not do that; he/she did it”. Even those who go to jail for evident crimes they have committed, pretend that it was not all their fault. Behind this word “it is not my fault” lies a hidden truth, namely that we, human beings, only with difficulty accept the responsibility of our mistakes and demeanors. Today’s readings invite us to reflect on this reality by showing us that the possibility of conversion follows in our lives only when we fully accept the responsibility of our acts before God.

The first reading is related to the situation of Israel in exile in Babylon. In this difficult situation, Israel is convinced that God has punished them for the faults of their ancestors, that they pay for the things they have not done. Consequently, God is unfair in treating them in such a way. As a response, God reacts through the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel by showing them that they are wrong. Even though collective responsibility exists, it cannot diminish the importance of personal responsibility.

It is not God who is unfair when the people abandon the right way in which they have to walk and commit iniquities. They die because of their bad deeds and not because of God’s responsibility. If then the people want to live, they have to turn away from sin and to abandon their wickedness.

The first thing we learn from this text is that human freedom implies full responsibility for what we do and should do. At the beginning of every mass the prayer of “Confiteor” reminds us of that responsibility: “I have sinned through my own fault, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do”. It is only when we do not project our guilt on someone else and assume honestly the outcome of our acts that God can forgive us and we can ourselves change. The mechanism of scapegoat and the habit of easy excuses is dangerous for our spiritual growth. It leads us to end up by being convinced that we can remain as we are, without even trying to change, because we will easily say “I did not do anything wrong”.

A second thing we learn is that the conversion of heart is a primordial step in the normalization of our relationship with God and our reconciliation with our brothers and sisters. Conversion means to leave sins behind, to be obedient to God and to do his will. The question of obedience and of doing God’s will is exemplified in today’s Gospel in the parable of the two sons.

The first son says “no” to the request of his father, but afterwards he changed his mind and went. The second says “yes”, but afterwards he does not fulfill his pledge to help him. In fact, Jesus is right to ask which of the two has done the will of his father.

The historical context of this parable refers to the history of salvation. The Jews have been the first to hear the word of God and to accept his Covenant. However, instead of being faithful to God, they abandoned his ways and did continually what was unlawful to the Lord. The pagans, on the contrary, although they first rejected God’s Covenant, once they heard the word of Jesus changed their lives and believed in God. Such people like the tax collectors and prostitutes have the right to enter God’s

kingdom at the exclusion of the first comers who do not care about God's Covenant and law.

In that sense, the parable is first of all a warning against complacency and revolt against God from the believers. It is also an expression of how people react to God's message. It shows that there are two types of people before the word of God: those who say "yes" and, then, fail to fulfill their commitment. And those who first say no, and, then, when touched by God's grace, repent and come to the obedience of faith.

The parable contrasts also two main attitudes we find among the Christians, namely the formalism of the Jews who criticize Jesus for his openness to the tax collectors and the repentance, characteristic of the sinners. Formalism in religion can sometimes be a cover-up for genuine love and commitment. At times we act like the first son who says "no", then comes back to God. Some others act like the second son who says "yes" and, then does not do anything. The right attitude would be that of always doing the will of God in our lives and being among those for whom faith and practice meet together.

Another thing the parable teaches us is that a promise, even beautiful as it might be, can never replace our acts, and fine words are never a substitute for deeds. The son who said he would go help his father was certainly courteous. But courtesy that does not get beyond words is in some way hypocrisy. Jesus teaches that being Christian is first of all being able to be obedient and act accordingly and not simply a matter of promise.

Christ himself is a living example of obedience and faithfulness to God until death on the cross. That is what St Paul reveals in the letter to the Philippians. First of all, St Paul insists on the importance of unity that should bind us together as a Christian community. What kills unity are selfish ambition and the pursuit of vainglory. It is impossible to walk in disunity with other people and in unity with Christ. The relationship we have with Christ should reflect in our relationship with others.

The great characteristics of Jesus' life were humility, obedience and self-renunciation. If so, humility, obedience and renunciation should be also the hallmarks of any Christian who wants to be faithful to Jesus. Selfishness, self-seeking and self ambition destroy our likeness to Christ and our fellowship with others. It is only when we act in that way that we can give glory to the Father as Jesus did in his own life. Let us pray then that God may guide us to accept our accountability as Christians. Let us ask him to give us the courage to follow the example of Christ in our own lives. God bless you all!

Ezekiel 18, 25-28; Philippians 2, 1-11; Matthew 21, 28-32



Homily Date: September 28, 2008

© 2008 – Father Felicien Ilunga Mbala

Contact: www.mbala.org

Document Name: 20080928homily.pdf