

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2013

The readings of this fourth Sunday in Ordinary time talk about vocation. They show that we have received a special mission from God for the sake of his people, but each mission has its difficulties. However, whatever might be the difficulties, God is always with us to help us and strengthen us in this task.

The first reading describes the vocation of the prophet Jeremiah. It shows how God chose him when he was still in the womb of his mother. It also shows how God assured him of his presence and help, in spite of the possible difficulties he would meet in his mission.

What is behind this text is the idea that the vocation of a prophet is a mystery that only God can explain. Another idea is the truth that, though the mission of the prophet is difficult, God will never abandon him. He will support him so that the goal he is pursuing might be attained in the work of his servant.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus is confronted with the unbelief of the people of his village. First of all, the Gospel says that, although the people were impressed by Jesus' teaching, they did not give him their full approval. On the contrary, they raised questions about his origin and challenged him to perform in their midst the miracles he did in other towns.

Then, the Gospel says that, once Jesus realized their unbelief, he evoked the famous examples from the past where God had shown his mercy and bounty to foreigners who trusted the prophets Elijah and Elisha.

Finally, the Gospel talks about the reaction of the people in the synagogue, how they were unhappy and wanted to harm Jesus. But, Jesus escaped, unharmed.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing I want to highlight is the importance of opening the heart to the Lord. In fact, when I see in the Gospel the controversy between Jesus and the people of his village, I can just say that the openness of heart toward the other is the beginning of friendship.

Without opening our heart toward someone, it is very difficult to appreciate him and what he intends to tell us. It might happen that what someone says is relevant for our life and our problem, but our prejudices can prevent us to find it interesting or important.

That is exactly what happened to the people of Jesus' village. They welcomed Jesus with prejudices, because they knew him well through his family. This way of behaving teaches us that as long as we do not get over our prejudices, we will never value the others. This is true for our relationship with one another, but it is also true for our relationship with God. Everything starts with the openness of heart, confidence and trust. Without those small things, we cannot come to embrace God's salvation.

Moreover, the people from Jesus' village locked him in the box of the history of his family. They thought that, because they knew his family very well, nothing good would come out of him. But, is not this a way of denying some the possibility of growth and being different? Is this type of reasoning correct? It is as though history is irreversible. It is as though the son of a drunken sailor also will be a drunken man. It is as though a girl

from a poor family will necessarily be a poor wife. The history of people and nations has taught us that that is not always true.

The second thing I want to bring is about the importance of faith. In fact, the discussion between Jesus and the people of his village shows us what faith means. Faith is not, first of all, knowing things about God. It is not about repeating an ensemble of learned formulas. It is above all trust in God and his word. That is what was missing in the heart of the people of Jesus' village.

In fact, the people from Jesus' village did not trust him. They did not believe that in this son of the carpenter from their village, God would have spoken and revealed to the world. They lacked trust in Jesus. May be they would have liked to see with the eyes of the body how God was really present in Jesus. Perhaps, they would have liked to touch with their hands and to feel with their feelings how God was operating in Jesus.

And yet, in daily life and in many situations, there are a lot of things we do not see with our eyes and do not touch with our hands, but we believe to be true. For instance, we put our money in a bank with a firm trust that they will keep it for us. But, do we really have a guarantee that it is secure? Moreover, when somebody tells us, "I love you", we smile and feel good. But, do we see love or touch it? When that person gives us a bouquet of flowers or a kiss, the reality of love that is in his or her heart is bigger than the gift he or she gives us. The reality of love that moves that person cannot be contained in flowers or a kiss. Flowers or kiss are just an external sign of a hidden reality that goes beyond them.

In truth, it is trust that is behind all this. In that perspective, it is clear that trust, then, is the backbone of faith. But, faith without love can sometimes be cruel. That is why we understand why St Paul insists of the importance of love in our life.

In fact, without love in our hearts, our vocation as well as our gifts can easily become self-satisfaction and self-justification of our merits. We might have the gift of prophecy, but without love, it becomes a continual threat to people. We might have the gift of knowledge, but without love, it becomes an intellectual snobbery. We might have faith, but without love, it becomes empty. We might have charity, but without love, it becomes patronizing. We might give our body in sacrifice, but without love, it becomes an expression of pride.

Let us pray, then, that the Lord may help us to fulfill our vocation with joy in spite of the possible difficulties we can meet. Let us ask him to fill us with his love so that in everything we do we might follow the guidance of his Spirit and look for the good of our brothers and sisters. May God bless you all!

Jeremiah 1: 4-5, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 12: 31-13: 4-13; Luke 4: 21-30



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