

Third Sunday in OT A/2019

The readings of this Sunday talk about God's salvation and the choice of the first disciples. They show us that to be a disciple is to participate in the ministry and the mission of Jesus. They invite us to continue the mission of the disciples by our commitment in the life of the Church and for the salvation of our fellows.

The first reading describes the prophecy of Isaiah about the future of Israel. It shows how the people who were living in gloom and distress have been visited by God. It also shows how God brought them a joy incomparable to that of the farmers when they harvest and the soldiers when they return from war.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is the master of the rise and the fall of the nations. There is also the idea that whatever might be the suffering of his people, God ends up by visiting them and bringing them consolation. The last idea is relative to the truth that God is the joy of his people.

This text allows us to understand the point today's Gospel as Jesus chooses his first disciples. First of all, the Gospel starts with the mention of the arrest of John the Baptist and his imprisonment. Then, it talks about the moving out of Jesus from Nazareth to Galilee where he started his ministry.

After that, the Gospel gives the content of the preaching of Jesus how it was about the repentance and the proximity of the kingdom of heaven. The Gospel ends with the choice of the first disciples and Jesus' journey around Galilee in preaching and curing the sick.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? Today I want to talk about the vocation to discipleship. What do I mean by that? Let me start with this anecdote. When I visited the Holy Land for the first time, at my return, some people asked me what part of the country I found very interesting. Without any hesitation I said that, though the whole country is historic and interesting, I was really touched by the Sea of Galilee.

Why? Because it was obvious to me that Galilee is a silent witness of the history of salvation. In fact, it was from there that everything started and the small movement initiated by Jesus galvanized the whole Israel to the point of becoming the widespread world Church we have today. And it was from there that Jesus chose his first disciples, as we heard in the Gospel.

However, when we look at those who were chosen, we realized that they were very simple and ordinary people, that is, mere fishers. And yet, in spite of that simplicity, Jesus chose them to be his companions in the mission and to share with him the burden and the joy of his ministry. That is why he tells them: "I will make you fishers of men".

I have reflected a lot on the identity of those disciples and what I have found is what I want to share with you. First, if those people were really ordinary guys and yet Jesus chose them for the very important mission of the salvation, it means that, though those God calls are very ordinary people, like you and me, they are nevertheless called to accomplish extraordinary things.

That is why we have to understand that if God calls us to work for him or for his church, it is not necessarily because we are the best among our peers, but rather, because, in spite of our human weaknesses, he wants us to be his coworkers. In that sense, the best we can do is to be humble. If then, extraordinary things can be accomplished by our hands, we need to be aware that they are not of our making, but the outcome of the grace of God who works within us and has already preceded us in the field.

This element of God's grace removes any fear we might have because we are unworthy. In other words, what is important is not who we are as individuals, but what we can become under Jesus' guidance when we accept his call. It was like that the simple fishers became important witnesses of Jesus' teaching and signs and, eventually, repeated the same thing as he did.

Second. Though our call is different from one individual to another and, according to the circumstances of life, we all, however, participate in the same mission, namely that of bringing the Good News of salvation to our brothers and sisters. In that sense, what is important are not the circumstances surrounding our vocation, as different as they might be, but the mission given to us through that vocation.

In that sense, my vocation is really the response I gave to the call I heard from God, but it is a call for a mission that transcends my own individuality. In other words, by being called and by responding positively, I am just an instrument that God wants to use for the salvation of my fellows. Therefore, I have no reason for boasting, because all glory can be given only to God who has chosen me and not to me as an individual. That is why the Motto of many Saints has been always "Sola Gloria Dei": for the glory of God.

Finlay, for the disciple to succeed in the mission, he must change his life. That is the reason why the Gospel insists on the necessity of change by saying that those Jesus called were fishers, but he wanted them to become fishers of men. In other words, he invited them to cease being workers of fish and become fishers of men.

This element of change is constitutive of Christian life and is at the heart of what it means to be Christian. Without a permanent desire to change and reform our life in order to adjust it to the values of God's Kingdom, it is very difficult to be a good Christian and a disciple of Jesus. That is the reason why Jesus opens his public ministry with this invitation: "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand". What all that literally means is reform your life; let it be transformed so that you are able to welcome the Kingdom of God in your life.

Let us, then, pray that God may help us to trust him and respond favorably to his call to serve him by serving our brothers and sisters. Let us ourselves be transformed by his word and become his docile instruments of salvation. God bless you all!

Isaiah 8: 23-9: 3; 1 Corinthians 1: 10-13, 17; Matthew 4: 12-23



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