

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2022

The readings of this fourth Sunday talk about God's call and its demands. They show that we all have received a special mission from God, even if it turns out that we are not always aware of it. They also show that, though each mission has its difficulties, God does not abandon his servants. He helps them, strengthens them and protects them.

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 linked to his mission.

What is behind this text is the idea that we are known to God and each one in a very particular way. Another idea is that only God can shed light on the vocation of each one of us. The last idea is related to the truth that whatever might be the difficulties we can have in our vocation, God will protect us and defend us.

This text allows us to understand the point of 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 with his teaching, they did not give him their full approval. It also says that they raised questions about his origin and challenged him to perform miracles in their midst.

Then, the Gospel gives the reaction of Jesus who pointed out their unbelief by evoking God's generosity toward foreigners at the time of Elijah and Elisha. The Gospel ends with the unhappy reaction of the people who wanted to harm Jesus and of his escape.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the importance of the dispositions of heart. What do I mean by that? Let me explain. When I see the controversy between Jesus and the people of his village in today's Gospel, I am inclined to sustain that the dispositions of the heart play a big role in the establishment of a relationship with people.

Why? Because, when there is no openness of heart toward someone, it becomes very difficult to appreciate him, to listen to him and, by way of consequence, to have any friendship with him. It might even happen that what someone says might be relevant for our life, but because of prejudices, we can be prevented from finding it interesting or important.

That is exactly what happened to the people of Jesus' village. They welcomed him with prejudices, because they knew him well through his family. This way of acting teaches us that as long as we do not get over our prejudices and keep a positive attitude toward people, we will never value them. 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 establish a true relationship with God.

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 him the possibility of growth and being different? It is as though history is irreversible. It is as though the son of a drunken sailor will also 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 it is not always true.

In other words, in order to build a relationship with people, we have to start by trusting them. Without trust and good dispositions of heart, any relationship becomes difficult. That is why faith means first of all trust in God and his word. Of course, knowing the things of God is

important. Of course, knowing the creed and all the formulas we repeat in the Mass is important. But, all that has to be preceded by our full trust in God and his word. That is what was missing in the hearts 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. Maybe 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 secured? 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 reduced to 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 on 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: 31-13:13; Luke 4: 21-30



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