



20. August 2019
„St. Bernhard - The last step“

Mat 19, 16-23

And now a man came to him and asked, 'Master, what good deed must I do to possess eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good? There is one alone who is good. But if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.' He said, 'Which ones?' Jesus replied, 'These: You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false witness. Honour your father and your mother. You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' The young man said to him, 'I have kept all these. What more do I need to do?' Jesus said, 'If you wish to be perfect, go and sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' But when the young man heard these words he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth. Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'In truth I tell you, it is hard for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven.

This text is certainly familiar to many of us and is always waiting for an interpretation, because the rich young man, who does not take the last step to follow the Lord completely, will surely also meet us in ourselves! What does it mean to take the last step? What does it mean for me, in my specific situation?

Before that, we should consider and deepen a word of the Lord. Only one is "the good"! God alone is good in himself and the source of all good, in God alone is love in its essence, as well as truth, justice and all that has and is truly worthy! We participate in the good, depending on our receptiveness, and can thus grow in goodness and do good!

So if we want to take the last step that goes beyond keeping the commandments, we must be lovingly reminded of whom we give ourselves! Even for marriage, a good word says: "Therefore examine who binds himself forever!" One should not bind one another too quickly in the special way of marriage, but first get to know the other person more closely!

But we can do our devotion to God without any restrictions if we have recognized Him! With God there are no fluctuations, no darkness, no uncertainty, no infidelity, no time limit ...

So if Jesus invites us to all this devotion — in today's Gospel, it was the young man's ability to take the step - then he invites us to give himself to "the good", that is, to God! But nothing can please man more than to serve God completely! Anyone who follows this invitation and leaves other high goods such as family and possessions for God's sake will be rewarded by the Lord in his own way!

This text can always be understood as an invitation to go on the path of total surrender and to follow Jesus!

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, whose day of remembrance we are celebrating today, belonged to the Order of the Cistercians! He was an ardent supporter of the Order, to which he called many people! The vocation to follow Christ was a great joy for him, for he wanted nothing more than to serve him whom he had recognized as "the good one"! That is why younger believers in particular should listen carefully if the Holy Spirit calls them on such an intense path and does not allow themselves to be confused when today this path is less and less understood and there are many reservations, perhaps also in one's own family!

The total gift to God is always a love-answer, an answer to God's love and therefore a wonderful way!

But it is not only the vocation to a religious community, to a spiritual community or the priesthood that asks for the total gift to God! Even if this total gift does not lead directly to a form of life, like the above-mentioned vocations, it is a permanent invitation of the Lord to give himself completely to Him.

Hence the question to all who want to follow Jesus: What is missing for the last step? What is missing to be able to let all go completely and to leave to God's guidance? What do we hold on to, what do we build our security on, what are we still afraid of? What do we think we will lose if we give ourselves completely to the Lord?

Saint Paul, expecting the coming of Jesus soon, states in one of his letters that those who are married should live as if they were not:

"For I say to you, brethren, the time is short. Therefore, whoever has a wife should in future behave as if he had no, whoever cries, as if he were not crying, who ever rejoices, as if he is not happy, who buys, as if he were not the owner, who uses the world, as if he did not use it; for the form of this world is evaporating" (1 Cor 7:29f).

This should be a good trace of how to realize the total gift in normal life in the world! Surely it is not meant to neglect one's duties! But the inner orientation towards God can become dominant, so that everything is done with regard to Him!

The life of the Holy Family is a good example here! Surely neither the Blessed Virgin nor Saint Joseph have neglected any duty of their family life, but have lived in a total surrender to God.

The invitation of Jesus to give everything to the poor and to follow him can be answered in an appropriate way in any situation of life, whereby, as seen above, the choice of such a form of life like St. Bernhard is the whole expression of the call!

In whatever situation in life we can stand before the Lord and ask seriously: What else am I missing to surrender totally to you? If this question is asked sincerely, then the Lord will answer, as He did in the Gospel!

If we ask the Holy Spirit, we will understand the answer, and the Holy Spirit will use the Spirit of Strength to give us the courage to take the final step, or at least to try again and again!