

25. February 2020

“Service to God and men”

Mk 9:30-37

After leaving that place they made their way through Galilee; and he did not want anyone to know, because he was instructing his disciples; he was telling them, “The Son of man will be delivered into the power of men; they will put him to death; and three days after he has been put to death he will rise again.” But they did not understand what he said and were afraid to ask him. They came to Capernaum, and when he got into the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” They said nothing, because on the road they had been arguing which of them was the greatest. So he sat down, called the Twelve to him and said, “If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all.” He then took a little child whom he set among them and embraced, and he said to them, “Anyone who welcomes a little child such as this in my name, welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me, welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

This lesson of our Lord, that he who wants to be the greatest should be the servant of all, certainly gladdens our minds and we can easily agree with it! But the concrete realisation of the Word of the Lord requires a long journey and the inner transformation of our person. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand adequately what this teaching means.

It cannot be a false servility, put at the service of others in order to be loved by them, or to avoid having problems, or moved by an erroneous condescension. Rather, it is a matter of imitating God's way, of becoming more and more like him in following the Lord.

God has bowed down to us human beings in true greatness in order to become one of us and to redeem us. This is an act of highest dignity, because it is done out of true love, and we too are called to this school of love! It is important to be very clear about this differentiation with regard to the way we are to serve, because true humility ennobles the person; while false humility brings him down and makes him unfree.

It is a question, then, of love, and of seeing in this love the person who needs our help. We will learn to look at them with God's eyes and to act according to this perspective. The eyes of God look at the person with goodness and mercy, without losing sight of the dimension of truth. What does he really need? What is it that serves him for his eternal salvation? How can we help him to reach his eternal goal, beyond his needs on the natural plane?

Then, we must grow in an attitude of service, which arises from a relationship with God. The more we grow in love and give space to the Holy Spirit within us, the more we can unfold in us this supernatural attitude of service. This does not in any way rule out the natural disposition we may have to serve, but rather includes it. In fact, natural dispositions are often connected to natural weaknesses, such as: seeking praise and recognition, expecting reward and thanks.

On the other hand, if we exercise the supernatural attitude of service, we will be purified more and more, and we will learn to serve without expecting people's gratitude; to serve in a growing spirit of selfless love, which can go so far as to serve even one's enemies.

There is one last aspect about service, which the Lord shows us in the final sentence of today's Gospel and which also appears in the speech of the Last Judgment (cf. Mt 25:31-46): Service to the poor and the weak is a service to God himself, especially when we are dealing with people who cannot give us anything in return. This service ennobles the soul and, if we understand it correctly, we will see that it is a great honor to be able to serve the Lord in this way. He Himself gives us the opportunity to put His Word into practice by making us the servants of all and by welcoming God Himself.