

20. February 2021

“Seeking the lost with the Lord”

Lk 5:27-32

When he went out after this, he noticed a tax collector, Levi by name, sitting at the tax office, and said to him, 'Follow me.' And leaving everything Levi got up and followed him. In his honour Levi held a great reception in his house, and with them at table was a large gathering of tax collectors and others. The Pharisees and their scribes complained to his disciples and said, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?' Jesus said to them in reply, 'It is not those that are well who need the doctor, but the sick. I have come to call not the upright but sinners to repentance.'

It was not easy for the Pharisees to understand that Jesus ate with sinners. In the Old Testament, people stayed away from them in order not to partake in their sins, perhaps also in order not to be negatively influenced. This may be understandable and we can see that in this passage Jesus does not criticise the Pharisees and scribes, as he often did when hypocrisy and wrong attitudes in their religiosity became apparent (cf. e.g. Mt 23:13-32).

But Jesus opens a new perspective. The focus is now not on separating from the sinners, but on healing them. With Jesus comes a special grace for all people, which is now also to reach them. He cares more for sinners and erring than for those who already know the way.

He also wants to convey this to those who are called to join him in the future in calling the lost, the spiritually ill, the sinners.

God is so full of love and justice that we can never grasp this enough. Again and again we will discover new sides of him or discover them more deeply. And one of the most wonderful sides is his mercy.

God does not look at those who are far away from him with a punishing gaze and turn away from them. If that were the case, we would all be lost!

No, he looks at them with the loving gaze of a father and tries everything to lead these people, who are called to live as his children, home to him. This is what Jesus

means when He says: *“I have come to call not the upright but sinners to repentance.”*

How far does Jesus go to meet us?

There is no limit on his part. We can see this in his suffering and death for us. We could say in our language: He gives everything, nothing stops Him from offering us His love. God can be in His love with a person for a whole life, and accompany and call him until the hour of death. And if the person still responds to God's grace in his last hour, calls upon God sincerely, God will save him.

However, there is a limit from man. If he could respond to God's invitation, but willingly closes himself off to it, then we set limits for God. God then stands before the closed door of our heart and we do not let Him in!

What does this mean for us and our service in the kingdom of God?

First of all, we need to internalise this attitude of the Lord. Perhaps it is easier for mothers and fathers to understand when their own children go down paths that lead away from God and one can see how it all plays out in the life of the child. How much a Saint Monica prayed and probably sacrificed for her son Augustine. God heard her prayers and she was able to experience her son's conversion before she died.

If a human mother struggles for her son in this way, how much more will God do so!

We should ask God for this zeal for the salvation of souls! If it is not given to us in our lives to look directly for people outside our field of vision, then we can pray for them.

Perhaps we should imagine the person we love the most. Let us assume that he would stray from his path or that he has not even found it yet! We see him in his misery and we would know how he could get out of his misery if he listened to the voice of God. Then we would turn to God and ask what we can do to save him. And we would understand from God: Pray, pray, pray! Would we do it? Certainly!

So we can ask the Lord to give his quality of love and longing for his children, his perseverance!

Perhaps we can let the Lord's words, which he says to the Pharisees and scribes, enter more deeply into us and, especially in this Lenten season, take people or even a person who is far from God especially into our prayer and follow him in prayer! It does not have to be someone we know personally! We can also ask God to place someone special on our praying heart.

It certainly pleases the Lord when we look out for sinners and the sick with Him in this way. And we can be sure that He will not forget us through this service to others, but will draw us deeper into His heart and friendship!

Today I would like to remind you that tomorrow is the worldwide day of prayer of many Jews for the coming of the Messiah. Since many of them have not yet recognised the true Messiah, we cannot exclude the possibility that they will identify the figure of a possible Antichrist as the Messiah. It is all the more important that we unite ourselves spiritually with this prayer and ask the Lord for the enlightenment and conversion of Israel. Only the knowledge of the true Messiah will serve Israel so that they will come home after such a long time. Since only the Holy Spirit can bring this about, I suggest that we pray an Our Father, 10 Hail Marys and a Gloria Patri, meditating on the third glorious mystery: the Descent of the Holy Spirit.