

26. June 2021

“One Word from You Will Suffice”

Mt 8:5-17

When he went into Capernaum a centurion came up and pleaded with him. 'Sir,' he said, 'my servant is lying at home paralysed and in great pain. 'Jesus said to him, 'I will come myself and cure him. 'The centurion replied, 'Sir, I am not worthy to have you under my roof; just give the word and my servant will be cured. For I am under authority myself and have soldiers under me; and I say to one man, "Go," and he goes; to another, "Come here," and he comes; to my servant, "Do this," and he does it.' When Jesus heard this he was astonished and said to those following him, 'In truth I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found faith as great as this. And I tell you that many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of Heaven; but the children of the kingdom will be thrown out into the darkness outside, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. And to the centurion Jesus said, 'Go back, then; let this be done for you, as your faith demands.' And the servant was cured at that moment.'

And going into Peter's house Jesus found Peter's mother-in-law in bed and feverish. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to serve him. That evening they brought him many who were possessed by devils. He drove out the spirits with a command and cured all who were sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: He himself bore our sicknesses away and carried our diseases.

“I have not found such great faith in anyone in Israel”. The Lord did not want to leave such faith unanswered, even though the centurion did not belong to the people of Israel, and Jesus knew that he had been sent first to the lost sheep of Israel (*cf. Mt 15:24*). This centurion, instead, was part of the Roman occupation, which was viewed by the Israelites rather with hostility. But Jesus noticed the heart and the extraordinary faith of this man. The Roman Catholic Church has adopted the centurion's statement in its liturgy, only slightly modified, and in the traditional rite it is even repeated three times before receiving Holy Communion: *“Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.”*

What is so extraordinary about the centurion's faith that Jesus praises it in front of the crowd?

First of all, there is an attitude of humility. He is aware that there is an abysmal difference between him and Jesus. In no way does he stand proudly as a Roman,

demanding healing from the Lord as if it were his right. Rather, he comes forward and intercedes for someone else, for his sick servant. If we assume that he did not do this out of self-interest, we see that he really cared for his servant. Certainly in many Roman households the situation was different, where slaves were a possession that was simply discarded once they could no longer fulfil their function. But the fact that the centurion went on the way because of his servant and the severe pain he was in indicates that he had a different attitude.

Based on his own experience as a leader, who gives orders that must be carried out, he can understand the authority and power of Jesus. Thus, he knew what would happen if Jesus uttered a single word. It was not even necessary for the Lord Himself to come to his house... One word would be enough!

And indeed, his request was heard: *“Jesus said to the centurion, ‘Go, let it be done to you as you have believed. And in that hour the servant was healed.’”*

This is truly exemplary faith, which has as its foundation humility, loving concern for the other and the firm conviction that the Lord can heal!

But also for yet another reason the centurion's example is important. In the context of this event, Jesus makes an important statement about what will happen in the future: *“In truth I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found faith as great as this. And I tell you that many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of Heaven; but the children of the kingdom will be thrown out into the darkness outside, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.”*

This centurion is a sign of the conversion of the gentiles.

In fact, through faith in the Son, God grants people direct access to him. The Lord's message does not remain only with the lost sheep of Israel; it extends to all humanity, which is also invited to enter the house of the heavenly Father.

At the end of the text, we see Jesus again serving the possessed and the sick. All who trustingly come to him can experience his loving help. On the other hand, the evil spirits that torture men are cast out through His Word.

The example of the Roman centurion invites us to ask the Lord for strong faith, and to turn to Him in this faith, especially to intercede for others. And today's Gospel also exhorts us to carry out the service of healing and deliverance, if it has been entrusted to us.