



19. September 2021

Serving God and mankind

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 first should be the servant of all - certainly delights our spirit and we have no difficulty in agreeing with it. But its concrete application requires a long journey and demands the inner transformation of our person. Moreover, the meaning of this teaching must be properly understood.

It cannot be a false servility, which puts oneself at the service of others in order to be loved by them, or to avoid problems, or out of a misunderstood docility. Rather, it is a matter of imitating God's way, of becoming more and more like Him on the path of following Christ.

In an act of true greatness, God lowered himself to us, men, to become one of us and to redeem humanity (cf. Phil 2,6-8). This is an act of supreme dignity, because it is motivated by true love, and we too are called to this school of love! It is important to be very clear about this distinction with regard to the way in which we are to serve, because true humility ennobles the person, while false humility demeans him and does not allow him to be free.

It is about love, then, and seeing in this love the person who needs our help. We learn to look at them with God's sight and to act in accordance with this perspective. God's gaze looks at the person with kindness and mercy, without losing sight of the dimension of truth. What does he really need? What is of use to him for his eternal salvation? How can we help him to reach his eternal goal, beyond his needs on the natural level?

Then we have to develop an attitude of service, which arises from our relationship with God. The more we grow in love and give space to the Holy Spirit within us, the more we can develop this supernatural attitude of service. This in no way excludes the natural disposition we may have for service, but includes it in this attitude which is to embrace the whole person. In fact, natural dispositions are often still related to the natural weaknesses attached to us: seeking praise and recognition, expecting reward and gratitude....

On the other hand, if we exercise the supernatural attitude of service, we will become more and more purified, and we will learn to serve without expecting thanks from people; to serve more and more in a spirit of selfless love....

There is one more aspect of service, which the Lord presents to us in the last sentence of today's Gospel and which also appears in the discourse of the Last Judgement (cf. Mt 25:31-46): Service to the poor and weak, especially when they can give us nothing in return, is a service to God Himself. This service ennobles the soul and, if we understand it correctly, we will see that it is a great honour to be able to serve the Lord in this way.

He Himself gives us the opportunity to put His Word into practice, becoming servants of all and thus welcoming God Himself.