

1. March 2022

Giving up everything for the sake of Jesus

Mk 10: 28-31

Peter took this up. 'Look,' he said to him, 'we have left everything and followed you.' Jesus said, 'In truth I tell you, there is no one who has left house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children or land for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times as much, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and land - and persecutions too - now in this present time and, in the world to come, eternal life. Many who are first will be last, and the last, first.'

The disciples left everything to follow Jesus. As the Gospels tell us, they left their nets and even left their father behind to answer the call (Mt 4:18-22). It was Jesus who called them, and this is the condition of every authentic vocation. This is why the Lord says: *"You did not choose me, but I chose you"* (Jn 15:16).

To abandon everything and to leave one's accustomed environment in order to serve the Kingdom of God undividedly is certainly a special calling. We encounter here an unconditionality that might frighten some. But this unconditionality is part of our faith, if we consider that one can go so far as to suffer martyrdom for its sake, as happened to all the apostles (except St. John) in the faithful following of their Master, who willingly suffered death for our sake.

The answer Jesus gives to Peter corresponds to this unconditionality of the call in all its consequences: *"There is no one who has left house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children or land for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times as much"*. It is important to emphasise that Jesus says: *"for my sake and for the gospel"*. It is not about irresponsible neglect of various obligations, but about unconditional listening to the call of Jesus. He opens our life to a new dimension!

With these words, the Lord gives us to understand how much God values man's response to his call, which is an expression of great love. But He also shows us how infinitely valuable it is for man to follow His call. People who seriously and unconditionally place themselves at God's disposal are a great treasure for God and for mankind. That is why the Lord speaks of the "hundredfold" that they will receive in return, which certainly indicates that He will reward them infinitely for the great love they have shown Him.

But He adds a further phrase: *"You receive...houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and land - and persecutions too - now in this present time and, in the world*

to come, eternal life".

We can understand this statement better if we consider these other words of the Lord: *"Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother"* (Mt 12:50). Whoever takes the step that the Lord invites him to take, finds a new family. All the love he has received until then from his loved ones will be surpassed by the love he will now receive from those who do the will of our Father.

And it really happens like that! People who try to do the Father's will recognise each other wherever they are. There is a familiarity between them which is not determined by the ties of blood, but is the work of the Spirit of God. But since the bond between them is given by faith, which is always exposed to persecution, the Lord says in this same context that this family is received in the midst of persecution.

With good reason, the Church has always held these vocations in high esteem, even if they are rather few in relation to the whole of humanity. In our time, in the modern world, the sensitivity to perceive and follow such a call seems to be lost.

The world offers all the possibilities for personal fulfilment and not infrequently faith has weakened. On God's part, the call is certainly still addressed to mankind, for the great task of bringing redemption to the ends of the earth has not yet been completed. And for this the Lord would like to have people who are willing to leave the world and what they love most behind for the sake of the Gospel, in order to have greater freedom to work for the Kingdom of God.

Those who have received this call and try to live it with all their heart will be able to testify to the inner beauty of this path. Nothing is left for the Lord without Him giving it back a hundredfold! Today's Gospel testifies to this.

But the most wonderful thing on this path is to be able to be ever closer to the Lord, for He invites those who are called to a special friendship with Him (cf. Jn 15:15). He entrusts His desires to them and they become collaborators in His plan of salvation.

Undoubtedly, God can be served in many ways and every baptised person is called to holiness and to work together for the Kingdom of God. But we have to be very attentive to hear if God is calling us to a way of life that implies leaving everything behind to be with Him. If we perceive such a call, we should not hesitate but examine it sincerely. If God is calling us in this way, it is a sign of great love. And, as St. Teresa of Avila says: "God alone is enough".

When we follow the call, we can experience the inner joy of being close to Him and of being fruitful for the Kingdom of God.