

21. February 2022

Aspects of faith

Mk 9:14-29

As they were rejoining the disciples they saw a large crowd round them and some scribes arguing with them. At once, when they saw him, the whole crowd were struck with amazement and ran to greet him. And he asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" A man answered him from the crowd, "Master, I have brought my son to you; there is a spirit of dumbness in him, and when it takes hold of him it throws him to the ground, and he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and goes rigid. And I asked your disciples to drive it out and they were unable to." In reply he said to them, "Faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me." They brought the boy to him, and at once the spirit of dumbness threw the boy into convulsions, and he fell to the ground and lay writhing there, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?" "From childhood", he said, "and it has often thrown him into fire and into water, in order to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us." "If you can?" retorted Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who has faith." At once the father of the boy cried out, "I have faith. Help my lack of faith!" And when Jesus saw that a crowd was gathering, he rebuked the unclean spirit. "Deaf and dumb spirit," he said, "I command you: come out of him and never enter him again." Then it threw the boy into violent convulsions and came out shouting, and the boy lay there so like a corpse that most of them said, "He is dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him up, and he was able to stand. When he had gone indoors, his disciples asked him when they were by themselves, "Why were we unable to drive it out?" He answered, "This is the kind that can be driven out only by prayer."

Today's text speaks to us again about faith. We hear words from the mouth of Jesus that we are not used to. He seems to react with indignation to people's unbelief: *"Faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you?"*

This is not the only occasion when Jesus rebukes the disciples' lack of faith! He is evidently displeased to see that people do not properly accept the offer of faith and that, as a result, things do not happen that could happen if they would only believe.

"How much longer must I put up with you?" -this sorrowful exclamation of Jesus gives us an idea of the torment He suffers within Himself when men do not believe. It is like standing before closed doors, which do not allow God's grace to act. It is a terrible suffering, for no one knows the consequences of unbelief as He does. He does not even suffer for Himself, but for the people, for their salvation, for their lack of faith...

Today's Gospel tells us about a possessed boy, whom the disciples do not succeed in liberating. It is in this context that the moving encounter between Jesus and the boy's father takes place. Since the disciples had not been able to cast out the demon, the boy's father, probably shaken by this, approaches Jesus already with some doubt: *"If you can do anything, have pity on us and help us."* Jesus' answer is crystal clear: *"If you can? (...) Everything is possible for one who has faith!"*

Here we come to the core of today's meditation: faith can move mountains, says the Lord (Mt 17:20). Faith unleashes God's action! We must always keep this in mind. And even more: God wants to act, He wants to illuminate our personal lives and the lives of all nations with His light, He wants to bring the work of redemption to the whole world, He wants to grant man all the good that He has prepared for him. However, He is hindered by our lack of faith, by our sceptical attitude, by the attachments that prevent us from letting go and clinging completely to God. All this the Lord has to face up to! Therefore, as if sighing from the depths of His being, He exclaims: *"Oh, Faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you?"*

The boy's father reacts rightly, *"I have faith. Help my lack of faith!"*

With his words, this man teaches us the way to deal with our lack of faith. It is about making a decision of the will: we want to believe, and then we beg the Lord to help our unbelief. We can be sure that God will listen to such a sincere request, especially if we ourselves begin to suffer under our lack of faith.

We need faith, and, in a way, we can also say that the Lord needs our faith. We need it urgently, to be able to recognise God in the midst of this world, to let ourselves be saved by Him and to accept all the offers of His grace; to learn to see the world from God's perspective, to act according to His will and thus become witnesses of His presence.

God, for His part, needs our faith in order to manifest Himself in our lives, so that His goodness and love for mankind may shine through our witness, so that others may also find their way back to the Father's House.