

3. September 2022

Invested by mercy in the service of God

2 Cor 4:1-2.5-7

Reading for the memorial of St. Gregory the Great

Such by God's mercy is our ministry, and therefore we do not waver but have renounced all shameful secrecy. It is not our way to be devious, or to falsify the word of God; instead, in God's sight we commend ourselves to every human being with a conscience by showing the truth openly. It is not ourselves that we are proclaiming, but Christ Jesus as the Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. It is God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' that has shone into our hearts to enlighten them with the knowledge of God's glory, the glory on the face of Christ. But we hold this treasure in pots of earthenware, so that the immensity of the power is God's and not our own.

When we talk about the mission of proclaiming the gospel, we usually think of it as a task that God entrusts to us, as the "missionary mandate". In today's reading, we hear a new concept that invites us to reflect on this mission entrusted to us. St. Paul points out that he was invested with the apostolic ministry out of mercy. In using this term, the Apostle to the Gentiles certainly has in mind his own conversion and the special circumstances of his vocation. Thus he understands how merciful God was to him in delivering him from the blindness in which he persecuted the Christians and in investing him with the ministry of apostle.

But it is not only by looking at the life of St. Paul that we can understand how appropriate it is to speak of "mercy" in context with the mission entrusted to us... Today the Lord gives us to understand that, in fulfilling our task of proclaiming the Gospel, his mercy is made effective. Not only do we become servants of this mercy, bringing it to others through our words and our witness of life, but the call itself flows from God's mercy.

In fact, we are so weak and by ourselves unable to proclaim the Gospel properly. If it were not for God shining his light in our hearts, how often we would end up falsifying the Word of God or our personal interests would intrude into the mission! If it requires God's grace to accept the Gospel message, how much more to remain faithful to it! But

even though we are "earthen vessels", God entrusts us with this great treasure and even makes use of our fragility.

By entrusting us with such a ministry, the Lord wants to honour us and make us co-operators of his love. In this way, he awakens in us the deepest meaning of our earthly life. Could there be anything nobler for us, poor and limited creatures, than to serve God? Does he not take pity on our unworthiness and inability by raising us to such a ministry? *"The Lord has looked upon the humiliation of his servant"* (Lk 1:48) - Mary exclaims as she becomes aware of the uniqueness of her vocation as the Mother of the Lord.

Moved by his mercy, God not only invites his limited creature to become a recipient of his goodness; he also calls her to make this goodness known to others. If we understand this and thus find an answer to our deep longing to have true meaning in life and to bear fruit, then our hearts will be filled with such gratitude that we will not faint nor will our zeal in service to God be extinguished. Then we will not focus on the efforts involved, nor dwell on the fragility of our "earthen vessels"; but simply want to always reciprocate God's great mercy to us. It would break our hearts if we were to negligently or through our own fault to fail in our task; and we would be deeply ashamed if, out of human respects, we were to omit to proclaim the truth openly.

Thus, the concept of being "mercifully endowed with the apostolic ministry" reveals yet another aspect of God's love: in everything we are children of His compassion. God has omitted nothing to honour and elevate His children. His mercy surpasses all expectations, to the point of making us sharers in his innermost longing and search, inviting us to call his children home and to proclaim salvation in Christ to them. Only God's infinite mercy can reveal this reality to us in depth!