

3. December 2022

The received mission

1 Cor 9:16-19.22-23

Reading corresponding to the memorial of St Francis Xavier

"In fact, preaching the gospel gives me nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion and I should be in trouble if I failed to do it. If I did it on my own initiative I would deserve a reward; but if I do it under compulsion I am simply accepting a task entrusted to me. What reward do I have, then? That in my preaching I offer the gospel free of charge to avoid using the rights which the gospel allows me. So though I was not a slave to any human being, I put myself in slavery to all people, to win as many as I could. To the weak, I made myself weak, to win the weak. I accommodated myself to people in all kinds of different situations, so that by all possible means I might bring some to salvation. All this I do for the sake of the gospel, that I may share its benefits with others."

The Apostle acts on behalf of the Lord... What an essential statement! He who has received a mission from the Lord will not question at every crossroads whether or not he desires that which awaits him. He has already given his "yes" to God, and has thus placed himself completely at His service. He no longer belongs to himself, but only to the Lord. It is certainly in this perspective that we must understand St. Paul's statement that he is "under the duty" to preach the Gospel... He is only fulfilling the commission he has received! If you like, it can be said that this mission entrusted to him rules over him, so that all his thoughts and all his inner strength are focused on fulfilling the mission. And he places himself totally under it!

The supreme and unsurpassed model in this is the Lord Himself. Jesus came to fulfil the Will of the Father (cf. Jn 6:38). In everything and at every moment He carried out His mission, and He did it out of love for the Father and out of love for us.

It is the same for the Apostle Paul... From the moment he had the vision of the Lord (Acts 9:1-19), he lived in the mission he had received. His will is, so to speak, bound to the Lord; his freedom has already been completely given to Him, and everything else is a consequence of it.

Certainly this was also the attitude of the great Jesuit missionary St. Francis Xavier, whom we commemorate on this day. A life like that of this heroic saint can bear abundant fruit.

Since the freedom of having given oneself completely to the Lord and being under a "duty to be fulfilled" remains in place, it is possible for a St. Paul or other missionaries to become "slaves" of all. This means that they could see every situation from the perspective of how to win more people for the Gospel. From this dedication, they knew how to find the means God had given them to reach hearts, because there was no way too long, no cross too heavy, no task too great... It was the Lord himself who worked in them!

How beautiful it is to admire these great apostles! But beyond admiration, their life of dedication becomes a call to us... What is the mission that has been entrusted to me? What is essential in my life? Is my life already so clearly directed? Do I already belong to God in the same way as I see it in a Saint Paul? Or do I still waver, am I still not fully decided, am I still attached to various things...? Have I given all my freedom to God?

The season of Advent invites us to contemplate more deeply God's self-giving: *"Who, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped. But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like a human being"* (Phil 2:6-7). God himself gives us an example of perfect love. He made Himself all things to all people, in order to win us over with His love. If we imitate His self-giving, our life will become more and more clearly a mission: to proclaim God's love and to be totally at His service.