

16. February 2023

To trust the ways of God

Mk 8:27-33

At that time Jesus and his disciples left for the villages round Caesarea Philippi. On the way he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say I am?' And they told him, 'John the Baptist, others Elijah, others again, one of the prophets.' But you,' he asked them, 'who do you say I am?' Peter spoke up and said to him, 'You are the Christ.' And he gave them strict orders not to tell anyone about him. Then he began to teach them that the Son of man was destined to suffer grievously, and to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and to be put to death, and after three days to rise again; and he said all this quite openly. Then, taking him aside, Peter tried to rebuke him. But, turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said to him, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are thinking not as God thinks, but as human beings do.'

Jesus asks the disciples a decisive question: Did the people recognise Him as the Messiah? Their answers show that the people had perceived that a strong presence of God was at work in Jesus, as it was also the case with the prophet Elijah and John the Baptist. But they still lacked the decisive dimension. This is the one that Peter pronounces, certainly also on behalf of the other disciples: "*You are the Christ*". In Matthew's Gospel the affirmation complements: "*You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God*" (Mt 16:16).

With this profession of faith, a Jew of that time entered a new dimension. The awaited Messiah is the Saviour of Israel and of all mankind. God's promise has been fulfilled. The search and the waiting have come to an end; and the time of fulfilment has begun, which begins with the incarnation of Christ and will last until His Second Coming.

The way to God is now accessible, because Jesus, who says of Himself that He is the Way (cf. Jn 14:6), opened it once and for all through His Passion, Death and Resurrection, inviting us into communion with God.

At that time, the disciples could not know this in its full magnitude. They would first have to witness the later stages of the Lord's work and they would still need the descent of the Holy Spirit, who would open their eyes and make them understand all that Jesus had said and done (cf. Jn 14:26).

So, having recognised the Messiah was not yet all; this profession of faith introduced them to the way of following the Lord, just as it does all of us. Peter had to see this with sorrow in his following of the Lord. One of these moments is related to us in today's passage.

After the profession of faith, Jesus began to speak openly to them about how he would continue His way. He spoke to them of His Passion, His Death and His Resurrection, that is, of the whole way that He, as Messiah, would have to go in order to redeem mankind.

Peter listened to what his Master would have to suffer.... The text tells us that he then began to rebuke the Lord. Perhaps it was a mixture of compassion and fear; perhaps he even felt that the profession of faith he had just made gave him the authority to rebuke Him....

But Jesus sternly corrected him, for He saw that through Peter it was Satan who wanted to prevent Him from carrying out His mission, standing between His will and that of the Father. Jesus corrected Peter in the presence of the other disciples, and thus gave them all an important lesson: We men must not stand in the way of the Lord. Peter had not simply supported Him with his silence and understanding, as the Mother of the Lord would later do in the Stations of the Cross. No! Whatever his motivation, Peter intended to hold the Lord back.

All of us who are on the path of following Christ must remain in an attitude of listening to the Lord. This also applies to those who have been walking with Him for many years and have been able to enter into a very trusting friendship with Jesus. We will never be able to understand all His ways, especially not those that involve suffering. This is what happened to Peter!

When we are faced with those ways of the Lord that are beyond our understanding, we are called to step back and put our trust in God. It is He, in His Wisdom, who will

guide everything. He, in His Omniscience, can include in His plan all those things that we do not know. It is better that we do not pretend to understand everything from our human way of thinking and acting, for interference on our part could even be a door for Satan, as we see in today's text.

Let us seek always to aspire to what God wants, and in humility worship His Wisdom, especially when we do not - or do not yet - understand things.