

21. May 2024

Serving God and man

Mk 9:30-37

At that time, Jesus and his disciples went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he would not have any one know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise." But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to ask him. And they came to Caper'na-um; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" But they were silent; for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest. And he sat down and called the twelve; and he said to them, "If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." And he took a child, and put him in the midst of them; and taking him in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

This teaching of our Lord - that whoever wants to be the greatest must be the servant of all - certainly delights our spirit and we have no difficulty in agreeing with it. But its concrete application requires a long journey and the inner transformation of our heart. It is also necessary to have a proper understanding of what this teaching means.

It cannot be a false servility that puts oneself at the service of others in order to be loved by them, to avoid problems, or out of a false permissiveness. Rather, it is about imitating God's way, becoming more and more like Him in the way of following the Lord.

In His greatness, God has lowered Himself to us, to humanity, to become one of us and to redeem humanity. This is an act of the highest dignity, because He does it out of true love, and we too are called to this school of love! It is important to be clear about this distinction in the way we are to serve, because true humility ennobles man, while false humility denigrates him and deprives him of his freedom.

So it is about love and seeing in that love the person who needs our help. We will learn to see them with God's eyes and to act from that perspective. God's eyes look at the

person with kindness and mercy, without losing sight of the dimension of truth. What does he really need? What is useful for his eternal salvation? How can we help him reach his eternal goal, beyond his needs on the natural level?

Then we must acquire that attitude of service which comes from our relationship with God. The more we grow in love and give room to the Holy Spirit within us, the more we can develop this supernatural attitude of service. This in no way excludes the natural inclination we may have to serve, but it includes it. However, natural dispositions need to be purified because they are often associated with natural weaknesses, such as seeking praise and recognition, expecting reward and thanks, etc.

As we practise the supernatural attitude of service, we will become more and more purified, and we will learn to serve without expecting thanks from people; to serve in a growing spirit of unselfish love, which can go as far as serving one's own enemies.

There is a final aspect of service which the Lord shows us in the last sentence of today's Gospel and which also appears in the discourse on the Last Judgement (cf. Mt 25:31-46): Service to the poor and the weak is a service to God Himself, especially when it concerns people who have nothing to give in return. This service ennobles us and, if we understand it well, we will see that it is a great honour to serve the Lord in this way. He Himself gives us the opportunity to put His Word into practice, to become servants of all and to welcome God Himself.