

27. June 2024

The last step

Mt 19:16-22

Reading for the memorial of Saint Emma of Gurk

At that time someone came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." He said to him, "Which?" And Jesus said, "You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to him, "All these I have observed; what do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.

Many of us are probably familiar with this Gospel passage, but it is necessary to take it up again and again in our lives, because perhaps we find ourselves in the position of this "rich young man" who did not take the final step to follow the Lord completely. What does it mean to take the final step? What does it mean for me, in the concrete situation in which I find myself?

Before entering into this theme, let us meditate on these words of the Lord: "*One there is who is good*" - He says to the young man - God is the only one who is good in Himself; He alone is the source of all good; only in God can we find love in its essence, as well as truth, justice and everything that is truly valuable! To the extent that we are receptive, we can participate in the good, grow in it and do good.

Then, if we want to take the final step that goes beyond the fulfilment of the commandments, we must always keep in mind, with a loving gaze, the One to whom we want to give ourselves.

With regard to marriage, a German proverb says: "Therefore, examine well the one who binds himself forever". Indeed, one should not rush into the special bond of marriage, but first get to know the other person better.

On the other hand, once we have come to know God, we can give ourselves to Him

without reservation. In God there is no variability or hesitation, no darkness, no infidelity, no time constraints....

So when Jesus invites us to this total abandonment, to leave behind what is still holding us back, which in the case of the rich young man was his material possessions, He invites us to abandon ourselves to the One who is good, to God. Nothing can make a person happier than to serve the Lord completely. Whoever accepts this invitation, leaving behind other possessions for the sake of God, will receive the Lord's reward according to His measure.

This Gospel passage can always be understood as an invitation to set out on the path of total surrender and unconditional following of Jesus. Total surrender to God is always an act of love, a response to God's love, and therefore it will always be a wonderful journey.

But it is not only religious or priestly vocations that require this total surrender to God.

This question is addressed to all those who wish to follow Jesus: What does it take to make the final step? What does it take to be totally detached and to give ourselves to God's guidance? What are we still clinging to, what are we still building our security on, what are we still afraid of? What do we think we have to lose by giving ourselves completely to the Lord?

St Paul, looking forward to the imminent return of Jesus, admonished in one of his letters that those who are married should live as if they were not married: *"I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away"* (1 Cor 7:29-31).

This could be a good guideline on how to live total surrender even in normal life in the world. Certainly, St Paul was not talking about neglecting the duties of the state. But the inner focus on God can become so intense that one is ready to do anything for Him.

In whatever situation we find ourselves, we can come before the Lord like the rich young man and ask Him: What do I still lack? If we ask this question sincerely, the Lord will answer us, as He did in this Gospel passage.

If we ask the Holy Spirit, He will make the answer clear to us and, with His gift of fortitude, He will give us the strength to take the last step, or at least to try again and again.