

25. July 2024

Feast of of Saint James the Apostle
“Service is the true greatness”

Mt 20:20-28

Then came to him the mother of the sons of Zebedee with her sons, adoring and asking something of him. Who said to her: What wilt thou? She saith to him: Say that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left, in thy kingdom. And Jesus answering, said: You know not what you ask. Can you drink the chalice that I shall drink? They say to him: We can. He saith to them: My chalice indeed you shall drink; but to sit on my right or left hand, is not mine to give to you, but to them for whom it is prepared by my Father. And the ten hearing it, were moved with indignation against the two brethren. But Jesus called them to him, and said: You know that the princes of the Gentiles lord it over them; and they that are the greater, exercise power upon them. It shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be the greater among you, let him be your minister: And he that will be first among you, shall be your servant. Even as the Son of man is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a redemption for many.

Who will sit at the right hand and left hand of Jesus in His Kingdom? It is a question we cannot answer, and the Lord could not meet the request of the mother of the sons of Zebedee, wanting her sons to occupy those places.

It is not for us to enter into questions that are reserved to the Father, as is the time of Christ's Second Coming on the clouds of heaven (cf. Mt 24:36). In the Acts of the Apostles we read: *"They asked him, saying: Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? But he said to them: It is not for you to know the times or moments, which the Father hath put in his own power"* (Acts 1:6-7).

And the Book of Sirach tells us: *"Seek not the things that are too high for thee, and search not into things above thy ability: but the things that God hath commanded thee, think on them always, and in many of his works be not curious. For it is not necessary for thee to see with thy eyes those things that are hid"* (Si 3:21-23a).

So let us focus on what Jesus asks of us and try to put it into practice. In this regard, today's gospel gives us a clear instruction: *"And he that will be first among you, shall be your servant."*

No doubt this exhortation of Jesus is in context with the request presented to Him by the mother of the sons of Zebedee, seeking honours for her sons and hoping that they would be counted among the greatest in the Kingdom of God. But these words are valid for all times and in all circumstances: a person's greatness lies in acting like the Son of Man, who puts his or her life at the service of the Kingdom of God and mankind.

This lesson leads us to look away from ourselves, guarding ourselves against the temptation to take the limelight and to want to be the centre of attention. If what we do is done in service to others, without expecting reward or recognition from those who see it, then we enter into the mystery of divine love. The reward and gratitude for our service is reserved for us in heaven!

It is worth clarifying that this way of serving must first be learned, for its goal is a totally selfless service, service in self-forgetfulness. On our way of following Christ, we are offered valuable help to achieve this way of serving.

From the word of Jesus, we know that He wanted to be so closely united to man that whatever good we do to a person, we do to Him. *"Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me"* (Mt 25:40).

We can then show Jesus our love also in our service to our brothers and sisters, and this is another motivation for us to do our service willingly! In this way, the greatness of serving will shine even more brightly, and this greatness will exalt us, even if this is not our claim. Thus these words of St. Augustine are fulfilled: "True greatness lies in submitting to the greatness of God, for in this way we have a share in it". If we do not submit ourselves to God, we remain in the limitation of our creaturely condition, and we remain bound by selfishness. Thus the humble are exalted; the proud are humbled.

This is what happens with service. It makes us great insofar as it makes us Christ-like, insofar as His way of acting can grow and mature in us.