

8. January 2025

Biblical meditations

THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

"The vocation of the first disciples"

Jn 1:35-42

*The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples; and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying; and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).*

The first disciples to follow Jesus, Andrew and Peter, were those who heard the testimony of the one who had been their teacher until then: John the Baptist. They had been prepared by the way of conversion that he had taught them, and they evidently looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. This attitude of expectation was probably widespread among the Jewish believers of that time, so they understood John's allusion to the "Lamb of God" and followed Him. The Baptist had led them to the threshold, and Jesus took them with Him so that they could "see where He lived". And what they saw was enough for them never again to turn away from the Lord and follow Him even to death. They had found the one they had been waiting for: the Messiah of Israel.

Simon Peter, Andrew's brother, would later answer the Lord's question as to whether they too would leave Him after so many others had forsaken Him: "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God*" (Jn 6:68-69).

Having recognised the Messiah, they had only one option: to become His disciples and follow Him to the end. That was the debt they owed to the truth they had come to know! The same is true today: When a person recognises Jesus as the Messiah and understands that He is the Son of God who came to redeem mankind, he cannot choose any other way unless he closes himself to the truth. It is a light given by God Himself, and if we follow the truth, we become disciples of the Lord.

By following what we have come to know as truth, we make use of the freedom with which God has endowed His rational creatures in the way He has chosen. In this way we awaken to the great dignity of the human condition, which consists in the capacity to discern truth and to place ourselves at its service.

This is what the disciples did. They remained faithful to the Lord despite temptations and weaknesses. Despite the fact that Peter, who had been called "Kefas" - rock - by Jesus, denied him three times, the Lord gave him a special mission in the plan of salvation. It is unfortunate that one of the Twelve betrayed Him, which is a constant warning to us, showing us that even if we have recognised Jesus, we can turn away from Him if we do not follow Him wholeheartedly on the path of discipleship. Not to mention the terrible fall of Lucifer, who, having been one of the highest angels, is now the great enemy of God and, together with his minions, tries to lead people away from Him.

The disciple wants to imitate his Master in everything. He loves him and knows that he is loved and called by him. Later, Jesus will say to His disciples: *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide"* (Jn 15:16).

This is a crucial sentence for discipleship: It is Jesus Himself who chooses us, it is He who looks for His disciples and assigns them the tasks He has planned for them. He wants them to bear fruit, fruit for His Kingdom.

On our way of following Christ, it can happen that we get tired, that we fall into temptation, or that we suffer so much from our weaknesses that we think we can no longer go on. It is then that we must turn our gaze to the Lord. Just as He made His first disciples capable of remaining faithful to Him until death, so He will give us the

grace to respond to His call. He, our Lord, has chosen us and He knows why. There is no need to question us, because it is His choice.

What we have to do, on our part, is to pay attention to the indications of our Master and to His manifold teachings, to let His Word dwell in us and to try to make use of all that He offers us on the way to eternity for our salvation and for fruitfulness in His Kingdom.

Where shall we go? -we can repeat with St Peter. As disciples of the Lord, we want nothing more than to follow Him. With John the Baptist we can exclaim: "*This is the Lamb of God*", and with the Apostle Andrew: "*We have found the Messiah*", and with Peter: "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Mt 16:16). And so it is!