

23. February 2025

THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN  
“True brotherhood”

Jn 13:31-38

*When Judas had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified; if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow afterward.” Peter said to him, “Lord, why cannot I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the cock will not crow, till you have denied me three times.*

Jesus remains faithful until death to the mission that God, our Father, entrusted to Him. His perfect surrender to the will of the Father glorifies the Father, and the Father, in turn, glorifies the Son.

We will find no greater love than the love between God the Father and His Son, who is the Holy Spirit Himself. It is this love that is able to transform the grim event of the betrayal of the Son of God and integrate it into the divine plan of salvation.

The betrayer has already set out to betray Jesus in exchange for thirty pieces of silver. Jesus, on the other hand, prepares His disciples for His death, which is imminent. They will not yet be able to follow Him to this death on the cross. He alone will suffer it to redeem mankind.

The Lord gives a new commandment to His disciples. He has revealed to them the love of the Father and now shows them how they are to live it also among themselves. This is the way we are called to live with one another on earth, thus bearing witness to God's love as true brothers and sisters in Christ. Later it will be said of the early Christians:

‘See how they love one another’ (Tertullian, 2nd century), and this love will be recognised as an identifying characteristic.

It is not about the brotherhood of men by virtue of their common nature. It is not enough to create a peaceful world. Even if there is good will, people often succumb to their evil inclinations, their unconverted hearts and their confusion. This is evident when we look at the often desolate state of the world today.

Jesus, on the other hand, offers us a brotherhood by virtue of the grace and love bestowed on us by the Son of God. This fraternity demands that people keep God's commandments, accept the salvation He offers us in His Son and follow in His footsteps. In this way, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we become capable of true love, as Jesus Himself loved us. In this way a world redeemed by God can come into being. The conditions are given, but their realisation depends on an authentic and authoritative evangelisation and on the witness of fraternal love in Christ that must accompany the proclamation.

In Peter we can see how weak the love of the disciples still was, even though they followed the Lord wholeheartedly. Peter did not like Jesus' statement that he could not yet follow Him, and assured Him that he was even ready to give his life for Him. No doubt he meant it, but his love was not yet strong enough. It did not yet possess the solidity that only the gift of fortitude, one of the marvellous gifts of the Holy Spirit, can give.

‘Lord, why can I not follow you now?’ In this question one can read in Peter's heart his desire to remain close to his Lord. Nothing in the world was to separate him from Jesus, even if it meant giving his own life.

But Jesus sees the situation realistically. He knows that the love of His disciples is not yet strong enough. Even so, He comforts and guides Peter by saying: *‘You will follow me later’*.

Peter will remember this later. For now, he has to face Jesus' sad declaration: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, the cock will not crow, till you have denied me three times.”*

It was only a few hours before that which Jesus foretold was fulfilled. Now it becomes even more precious every hour that remains for the disciples to listen attentively to Jesus, giving them instructions before His death, which extend through them to all those who will follow Him down the centuries. These are words of life of inestimable value, as is every word that comes from the mouth of Jesus to the world. Blessed is the one who is not scandalised by Him and listens to and carries out His words! And if at any time we succumb to our weakness and do not immediately follow our Lord and Master, we can remember Peter, get up again and go on. The Lord is always ready to forgive if we ask Him. And if we have missed opportunities to show the Lord the love we had declared to Him, let us remember that, after His resurrection, Jesus gave Peter the opportunity to declare His love to him again and then entrusted him with a great mission. Jesus had not ceased to trust him!