

1. February 2022

Praise for faith

Mk 5:21-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered round him and he stayed by the lake. Then the president of the synagogue came up, named Jairus, and seeing him, fell at his feet and begged him earnestly, saying, 'My little daughter is desperately sick. Do come and lay your hands on her that she may be saved and may live.' Jesus went with him and a large crowd followed him; they were pressing all round him. Now there was a woman who had suffered from a haemorrhage for twelve years; after long and painful treatment under various doctors, she had spent all she had without being any the better for it; in fact, she was getting worse. She had heard about Jesus, and she came up through the crowd and touched his cloak from behind, thinking, 'If I can just touch his clothes, I shall be saved.' And at once the source of the bleeding dried up, and she felt in herself that she was cured of her complaint. And at once aware of the power that had gone out from him, Jesus turned round in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' His disciples said to him, 'You see how the crowd is pressing round you; how can you ask, "Who touched me?"' 'But he continued to look all round to see who had done it. Then the woman came forward, frightened and trembling because she knew what had happened to her, and she fell at his feet and told him the whole truth. 'My daughter,' he said, 'your faith has restored you to health; go in peace and be free of your complaint.' While he was still speaking some people arrived from the house of the president of the synagogue to say, 'Your daughter is dead; why put the Master to any further trouble?' 'But Jesus overheard what they said and he said to the president of the synagogue, 'Do not be afraid; only have faith.' And he allowed no one to go with him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. So they came to the house of the president of the synagogue, and Jesus noticed all the commotion, with people weeping and wailing unrestrainedly. He went in and said to them, 'Why all this commotion and crying? The child is not dead, but asleep.' But they ridiculed him. So he turned them all out and, taking with him the child's father and mother and his own companions, he went into the place where the child lay. And taking the child by the hand he said to her, 'Talitha kum!' which means, 'Little girl, I tell you to get up.' The little girl got up at once and began to walk about, for she was twelve years old. At once they were overcome with astonishment, and he gave them strict orders not to let anyone know about it, and told them to give her something to eat.

Today's Gospel shows us the importance of faith. Jesus himself insists on it again and again, and in many passages of Holy Scripture we are warned about the lack of faith, which hinders God's action. Let us recall, for example, last Sunday's Gospel, when Jesus arrived in Nazareth and was unable to work miracles because of the lack of faith of his fellow countrymen (Lk 4:16-30).

Today, on the other hand, we find the strong faith of Jairus and the woman with the haemorrhage. Both characters were in a situation of great need; indeed, of existential need. Full of faith, they took refuge in God, and what did the Lord do? In his goodness, he heard their cry.

In these dark times worldwide, some people are finding faith. Certainly this is one of the main reasons why God allowed the current crisis. These people, who are searching for meaning in their lives and for guidance, need to meet serious Christians who will guide them. This exhortation is addressed to all of us who know the Lord, and not only to bishops and priests.

In that sense, it is worth reflecting a little more on faith, and above all to ask the Lord to grant us a great and strong faith. Surely we do not want to be an obstacle, much less to prevent God from granting people what he has in store for them. On the contrary, we are called to cooperate in his work.

"Anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists", says the Letter to the Hebrews (11:6), which describes faith as *"prove the existence of realities that are unseen."* (11:1). In our earthly life, faith is the great light that enables us to recognise God. In eternity we will behold Him in His glory. Even if here on earth we can only see Him "as in a mirror, dimly", and have to wait until we reach heaven to behold Him "face to face" (1 Cor 13:12), faith is the light that enlightens us and brings us closer to the Lord.

However, it is important to realise that faith is not, in the first instance, about feelings and spiritual consolations. We may even be required to have a "naked faith", so to speak, or we could also call it "tested faith". It is a faith that is founded solely on the Word of God. Faith alone," writes St. John of the Cross, *"is the means of uniting the soul with God (...). Through faith, God manifests himself to the soul in a divine light that surpasses all understanding. The more faith a soul has, the more intimately united it will be with God"*. In this way, the words of the Letter of St. John become a reality: *"We have recognised for ourselves, and put our faith in, the love God has for us"* (1 Jn 4:16).

Therefore, people must be taught to interiorise the Word of God deeply, to meditate on it, to move it in their hearts like Mary (Lk 2:19), so that this holy word of the Apostle John may be fulfilled more and more and we may believe in God's love for

us.

This is the essential point, which is even more important than any consideration of faith, however precise and intelligent it may be. Faith brings us into a living relationship with God, which stands, even if everything around us is in darkness and even if our soul feels empty and dark. This is when you have to hold on to "naked faith". Feelings can easily be swayed, inner experiences called into question; faith, on the other hand, clings to the Word of God and, consequently, to God Himself. Faith leads us to believe in the authentic doctrine of the Church and to live in this truth, even if the spirit of the times moves in the opposite direction and modernism has even infiltrated the Church.

Precisely in the darkness of the present time, faith must be our guide. It gives us the certainty that God, in His Wisdom, will use all things for the good of His own (Rom 8:28). When we are threatened by measures of various kinds and at various levels, which may even lead to a conflict of conscience, we cling to God in faith.

But we should not only remain in a defensive position, but use the time to deepen our faith and to serve in evangelisation, each in our own way. In the near future I hope to address the so-called "interior apostolate" or "silent apostolate", in which every member of the faithful can play a part, even if he or she does not have many opportunities to actively pass on the faith to others.

Faith is a gift, which has been entrusted to us so that we can nurture it, deepen it and thus also make it a gift for others.