



Balta Lelija

25. July 2022

Feast of Saint James the Apostle
Service is the true greatness

Mt 20:20-28

In these days the mother of Zebedee's sons came with her sons to make Jesus a request and bowed low; and he said to her, 'What is it you want?' She said to him, 'Promise that these two sons of mine may sit one at your right hand and the other at your left in your kingdom.' Jesus answered, 'You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?' They replied, 'We can.' He said to them, 'Very well; you shall drink my cup, but as for seats at my right hand and my left, these are not mine to grant; they belong to those to whom they have been allotted by my Father.' When the other ten heard this they were indignant with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that among the gentiles the rulers lord it over them, and great men make their authority felt. Among you this is not to happen. No; anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

Who will sit at the right hand and left hand of Jesus in his Kingdom? It is a question which is not for us to answer, and the Lord could not respond to the request of the mother of the sons of Zebedee that they should occupy those places of honour.

It is not for us to enter into questions which are reserved to the Heavenly Father, such as the exact time of Christ's Second Coming in glory (cf. Mt 24:36). In the Acts of the Apostles the Lord gives us a clear statement on this: "*When they were gathered together, [the disciples] they asked him, 'Lord, has the time come for you to restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know times or dates that the Father has decided by his own authority'*" (Acts 1:6-7).

The Book of Sirach also gives us an important teaching: "*Do not try to understand things that are too difficult for you, or try to discover what is beyond your powers. Concentrate on what has been assigned you, you have no need to worry over mysteries. Do not meddle with matters that are beyond you*" (Si 3:21-23a).

So let us focus on what Jesus wants from us and try to put it into practice. In today's gospel, He gives us a clear instruction: *"Anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave"*

No doubt this exhortation of Jesus is in context with the request addressed to Him by the mother of the sons of Zebedee, who sought honour for them and hoped that they would be counted among the greatest in the Kingdom of God. But the Lord's answer applies to all times and all circumstances: the greatness of man consists in his acting like the Son of Man and putting his life at the concrete service of the Kingdom of God and of people.

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

It must certainly be added that this attitude of service must be learned progressively, for its lofty goal is to arrive at totally selfless service, service in self-forgetfulness. On our way of following Christ, we are offered valuable help that can lead us to this form of service.

From the words of Jesus Himself, we know that He is so closely united to man that whatever good we do to a person, we do to Him: *"In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me"* (Mt 25:40). We can then show our love for Jesus in a special way in our service to our brothers and sisters. This is a further motivation 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. In this way, the words of St. Augustine become a reality: *"True greatness lies in submitting ourselves to the greatness of God, because in this way we participate in it. If we do not submit ourselves to God, we remain in the limitation of our creaturely condition, bound also by selfishness. In this way, the humble are exalted; the proud, on the other hand, are humiliated"*.

This is what happens with service. It exalts us in the sense that we imitate Christ, in that his way and manner of acting can grow and mature in us.