

2. July 2023

The dignity of the call

Mt 10:37-42

At that time, Jesus said to his disciples: 'No one who prefers father or mother to me is worthy of me. No one who prefers son or daughter to me is worthy of me. Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me. Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. 'Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 'Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will have a prophet's reward; and anyone who welcomes an upright person because he is upright will have the reward of an upright person. 'If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not go without his reward.'

These words of Jesus are not so easy to understand, let alone to put into practice: "*No one who prefers father or mother to me is worthy of me*". In this context, I am reminded of an encounter we had many years ago in Lithuania, where we were invited to give a concert in a school. After the concert there was a meeting with the teachers, where we talked about various religious issues. I told them about our way of following Christ, where we tried to leave everything behind to give God the first place in our life. Then a teacher replied: "But the most important thing is the family!" I refuted her statement, and then it became even clearer to me the depth of Jesus' call and the extent to which He takes His disciples out of the world to enable them to respond unreservedly to God's love by giving Him the first place in their lives.

Clearly this affirmation of the Lord does not represent a contempt for the family. The family is a great good, which in our time must be especially protected, when other forms of life are presented that claim to be equal to it. But what the Lord wants to tell us is that not even such a great good as the family can stand in the way of the call or be placed in first place. If all good things come to us from God, they cannot be placed above Him.

This is the basic message of today's Gospel in its various statements: nothing can come before God. The Lord's call comes first, and to follow it wholeheartedly is what befits the dignity of the one who calls and the one who is called.

The question we must ask ourselves again and again is whether we really intend to respond fully to His call and whether God takes first place in our life to such an extent that all other things are ordered below Him. Putting this into practice will take effort and will involve the respective inner steps to leave certain habits behind, not to avoid difficulties, to let go of disordered relationships, in order to follow the Lord unreservedly.

However, the Lord does not ask of us things that are beyond our capacity. If, for example, we are called to put family ties on the back burner, then He Himself will give us the grace to do so. If we are called to accept a certain cross, we can count on His help to do so.

Imagine, for example, a practising Jew having an encounter with Jesus. For him to follow the Lord would mean leaving his entire social environment behind and being treated as an outsider or even as an apostate by his own family. Such a situation is humanly impossible to bear. However, the love that attracts him is even stronger than human relationships. By virtue of this love, he will be able to take whatever steps he has to take to correspond to the dignity of the call. He will have to cling to this love, to abandon himself to it, to lean upon it, and to cultivate it as his greatest treasure.

This is the secret by which many people become capable of making enormous efforts for God's sake, of enduring great suffering and of assuming apparent disadvantages. As long as the love of God is not a latent reality in our lives, certain words of Jesus may seem unattainable or too demanding. The same can happen when we read certain lives of saints, in which it seems impossible to imitate all that they did and endured, and we may even become discouraged when we realise our own weakness and indecision.

However, through prayer we can ask God for the grace to love Him above all things and to recognise that it is a gift to be able to follow Him undividedly. Again and again we can present to Him our limited capacity to love, our cold hearts, our attachments and all that we still put before the Lord.

If we do so with sincerity, God's love can more easily penetrate our hearts, making us better able to respond to His call. Let us pay attention to the steps the Lord invites us to take. They may be very small steps, but they are important for us. In this way, God's grace will guide us until our heart belongs to Him completely. Then Jesus' words will no longer frighten us or make us worried, because we will realise that God always wants to give us the best. If He invites us to leave everything behind in

order to serve Him, it is a special invitation of His love, so that we may find the treasure He has prepared for us.