

GOSPEL

Mark 9:30-37

After leaving the mountain Jesus and his disciples made their way through Galilee; and he did not want anyone to know, because he was instructing his disciples; he was telling them, 'The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men; they will put him to death; and three days after he has been put to death he will rise again.' But they did not understand what he said and were afraid to ask him.

They came to Capernaum, and when he was in the house he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the road?' They said nothing because they had been arguing which of them was the greatest. So he sat down, called the Twelve to him and said, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all.' He then took a little child, set him in front of them, put his arms round him, and said to them, 'Anyone who welcomes one of these little children in my name, welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'

HOMILY OF ST JOHN PAUL II

18 September 1994

1. *"If anyone wants to be first, he must be last of all and servant of all"* (Mk 9:35).

The words of Jesus, in the Gospel passage just proclaimed, trace the royal path of a holy "ambition", which is proper to those who know and love God: it is the path of a spiritual primacy, which paradoxically is achieved by putting oneself in last place, that of *generous and unreserved service*, following the very example of Jesus, who came to serve, and not to be served.

The disciples, who along the road to Capernaum were arguing about "who was the greatest" (Mk 9:34), had understood very little about him. The apostle James speaks effectively of this very human ambition, pointing to it as the origin of the "wars and quarrels" that devastate society: "You desire and cannot possess, and you kill; you envy and cannot obtain, and you fight and wage war!" (James 4:2). It is the spectacle of a world dominated "by passions that war" in the members and heart of man. How realistic

this message is when we look at today's society! The dispute reported in the Gospel passage warns us that even among the children of the Church the gnawing woodworm of pride, perhaps disguised, and of unconfessed ambitions can creep in, which disturb the work of God. In the face of such temptation, the word of Jesus is categorical, and must be taken seriously: "whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all!".

2. *"Servant of all"*. To serve is to imitate Christ, who gave himself in sacrifice for us. To serve is to live in a relationship of concrete solidarity with our brothers, especially the poorest. To serve is to love generously and freely, without expecting anything in return.

If the Church wants to be a sign of hope for society today, it must deeply live the logic of service. Today's world - wrote my venerated predecessor Paul VI - "listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers" (Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 41). This is especially true in the service of charity, which, practiced generously, is the main road to evangelization, as the theme chosen by the Italian Bishops for the pastoral guidelines of the 1990s reminds us (cf. CEI, *Evangelization and Witness to Charity*, n. 9).

We must be *true witnesses of charity*, and be so everywhere: in families, in parishes, in places of study and work. This is what you, dear faithful of Lecce, try to do with generosity, showing yourselves attentive to the weakest groups of the population. Continue on this path with ever renewed impetus. There is more than ever a need for such commitment in a society that still records so many forms of poverty, material and spiritual, old and new.

A culture of solidarity is necessary. Parents and educators in particular should commit themselves to *forming the young generations in the spirit of service*, openness, dialogue, and overcoming every selfish and hedonistic temptation. Nothing is as meritorious as this far-reaching educational work, to be achieved, before words, with constant and convincing example.

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3. There is, then, a special service that believers are called to render to society. It is a question of infusing into it that *supplement of soul* which allows contemporary man, confused by many appeals, *not to lose the fundamental values of the spirit*.

The apostle James reminded us of the characteristics of the “wisdom that comes from above”: it is “peaceful, gentle, easy to please, full of mercy” (James 3:17). The testimony of such wisdom cannot fail to induce those who have received it to look “upwards”. And today many feel the powerful call of God. In the fog that often envelops humanity, one feels the need for divine light, which Christians are called to bear witness to in a very special way. They must be men of the supernatural, and they will be so in an ever more credible way, if they are able to combine contemplation and action in a balanced synthesis, demonstrating with facts *how much faith can contribute* to the very construction of a world worthy of man.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: What makes someone a true witness of charity (love)?



Heart: Where in your life do you find it most difficult to be a true witness of charity? Why?



Hands: “Do not waste time bothering whether you ‘love’ your neighbor; act as if you did. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him” (CS Lewis). Thinking of someone specific you find difficult to love in your life, what steps could you take this week to “act as if you did”?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (for example, “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the ‘Glory Be’.