

8th Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2011

Each one of us would like to be care-free. However, in spite of all our good will, we cannot help taking care of the bills or of the house, and even of ourselves. The readings of this Sunday remind us that, as hard as we might work in order to succeed, whatever we might do in our endeavor in this life, we should never forget God's providence, because in the end, it is God who takes care of us.

In the first reading, Isaiah recalls the reality of the faithfulness of God who can never depart from us, whatever might be the circumstances of our life. In fact, as they were in exile in Babylon, the Hebrews came to believe that God had abandoned them to their sad fate and without consolation.

It was at that time that Isaiah stood up in order to give them assurance, courage and hope. He tells them that God cannot forget the city which is engraved in his divine hands and so is ever before him. God is like a mother full of love and tenderness for the children of her womb. Even if it might happen that a mother forgets her children, that will never be the case with God. He will never forsake the Holy City and its inhabitants.

All this helps us understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus invites us to trust in God's providence. First of all, Jesus claims that no servant can serve two masters at the same time. We really need to understand what Jesus means with these words and their implication for our relationship to God.

For our modern world, indeed, a person can have two jobs or more, according to his/her needs or vision. That being the case, he/she can have certain hours where he/she works outside the home and some others he/she stays home or spends the time for himself/herself. In the ancient world that was totally impossible, because a servant – we could well translate from Greek as slave -, had no right at all. He/she was totally dependent on his/her master. The master was his/her owner and the servant had no moment of his/her own.

In that logic, when Jesus says no servant can serve two masters, he wants to tell us that our relationship to God should be of total and complete dependence upon him. God should be the undisputable master of our lives. For our own life, we cannot say that we are Christians and live up to the Christian standards at some hours of the day and at others we are off duty. That is why, for Jesus, it is impossible to serve God and the material possessions at the same time.

If that is the case, how shall we behave in life? For Jesus, we should be trustful, serene and confident in God. Why shall we do so? Because life itself is the greatest gift we have received from God and not something we have earned. In that sense, if God has given us life, we can trust him for the things which are necessary to support life.

In other words, if God has given us life, he will certainly provide for our needs in order to sustain that life. If he has given us the body, he will certainly provide for our needs for clothes in order to protect that body. The logic behind this argument is very simple and indisputable: if by any chance someone gives us a gift beyond price, it is absolutely clear that that same person, because of his/her kindness and generosity, can give us also much

less costly gifts. Once more, we are on trustful ground, where we are called to deepen our relationship of dependence upon God and count seriously on his providence, even where we have to work hard in order to succeed.

In order to prove the strength of his arguments, Jesus gives the example of the birds of the sky and the flowers of the field which live a happy life and without worries when it is about food or clothes. In fact, the point Jesus makes is not that the birds do not work, because we have seen them building nests with ingenuity and assiduity. Rather, the point is that they do not worry and are happy.

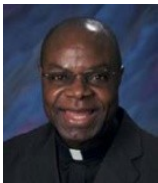
The same is true with the flowers of the field that the heat of summer and the cold of winter can easily kill. When we look at them, we are totally delighted as they are beautifully well dressed with different colors and various leaves. At times their scent is so fragrant that we like to keep them in our homes in order to enjoy them. For Jesus, if God is able to give such beauty and perfume to short-lived flowers, how much more will he give us his living creatures? How much more will he care for us?

In the end, it comes to just one point: trust in God. That is all we need. Worry is useless, because by worrying we cannot add the shortest span to our lives. By worrying, we prolong our distrust in God like the pagans who do not believe.

Is there any way we can defeat the worries? Yes. First, we have to concentrate on God's kingdom and the acceptance of his will. It does not mean that we have to cross our arms and let the manna come from heaven. On the contrary, we have to do what we should do according to our abilities and skills and the remaining we give to God.

Second, we have to fix our thoughts and hearts on what is happening to us today. We have to take each day as it comes and fulfill each duty as it is required of us without fear of tomorrow. As good stewards of God's mysteries, let us give our past to God's mercy, our present to his love and our future to his providence. Let us learn to pray and to laugh, because the worry that wears out the mind wears out the body along with it. Let us ask the Lord for the courage to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness so that he gives us everything else besides. May God bless you!

Isaiah 49, 14-15; 1 Corinthians 4, 1-5; Matthew 6, 24-34



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