

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2019

The readings of this Sunday talk about the suffering of the servant of God. They show that the commitment to the cause of God's kingdom sometimes brings conflict and opposition. They invite us to remain faithful to God in spite of the possible suffering that can occur on our way.

The first reading describes the persecution of the prophet Jeremiah. It highlights the action of his enemies who wanted him to be put to death and the reasons why they wanted so. It also shows the consent of the king Zedekiah to their demand and the result of that action. Finally, it shows the escape of Jeremiah from death, thanks to the intervention of one of the court officials.

What is behind this text is the idea that to speak on behalf of God is a risky business. Another idea is the truth that whatever might be the level of threat and the amount of suffering the servant of God can go through, God eventually saves him.

This text allows us to understand the stakes of today's Gospel as Jesus warns his disciples about the coming conflict and opposition. First of all, the Gospel starts with Jesus' declaration that he has come in order to set the earth on fire. Then, it reports the words of Jesus affirming that there is a special baptism with which he will be baptized and he is expecting it with longing and anguish.

After that, Jesus affirms that he has not come in order to establish peace on earth, but rather division. Finally, it shows how, because of Jesus, the members of one family will be opposed and divided one against another.

What do we learn from these readings? Today I want to talk about the conflict born of faith. What do I mean by that? Let me explain. In fact, to be a disciple of Jesus is a big honor, because it is a participation in the mission the Father gave to Jesus.

Chapter four of the Gospel of Luke, indeed, defines that mission as that of bringing glad tidings to the poor, proclaiming liberty to the captives, healing the sick and offering freedom to the oppressed. If I could use a modern way of speaking, I would simply say, that "the mission is that of making a difference in the lives of people".

If that is true, it means that anytime we stand as disciples of Jesus, we have to make a difference in the lives of those we meet. It means also that because we continue the mission of Jesus, we have become the hands with which God touches people, the eyes with which God looks at people and the mouth with which God speaks to people. "

The problem, however, is that, those we meet do not always share our conviction of faith; they do not always have the same vision of things as we do. Sometimes, they can feel that anytime we attempt to approach them, there is a kind of intrusion in their private life, especially when the questions under consideration are personal and they do not want to share them with a stranger. The result of such a process can at times lead to a conflict.

It is that type of conflict we see in the case of Jeremiah. In fact people to whom he was talking were unhappy with him. That is why they wanted him dead rather than alive. On the other hand, the experience of conflict can become on the part of the disciple a time of reappraisal of one's convictions and vision of things. The results of the reappraisal

can sometimes lead to discouragement, the abandonment of one's convictions of life; the dropping of one's vision of things in order to avoid conflicts.

With all that in mind, we understand why the letter to the Hebrews praises those numerous witnesses who, in spite of suffering endured, have remained faithful to their mission. For that reason, they have become our models. Those models do not stand alone, but rather walk in the footsteps of Jesus who was the first to bear the cross for our sake, but won the victory. Like him, the disciples have to run the race with their eyes fixed on Jesus who endured such an opposition from his enemies.

That is why we have to understand that to be a true disciple of Jesus is a risky business. In other words, once we believe in Jesus, we put ourselves in the situation of possible conflicts, especially with those who do not share our convictions. This has happened many times in human history and will happen again. For that reason, we have always to remember that faith is a challenging business. It challenges us as individuals so that we adapt our life to the criteria of God's kingdom. It challenges also people around us who do not see things with the same vision as we do.

For that reason, Jesus considers his coming into the world as the bringing of the fire. He comes to purify the world of its sins, and build it anew. He comes to shake up the life of people so that they abandon their past and turn to God. As everybody is shaken up, there is more tension than peace.

It is for that reason also that Jesus speaks of disputes and oppositions even with the close members of our families. In practice, it means that when we meet opposition or division, we should not be surprised. However, in spite of possible conflicts born out of faith, we should always be respectful of the members of our family who do not share our convictions. We should love them as Jesus did with us regardless of our sins. That is the only way we can live together and grow in our own faith.

This week let us set a goal of praying for all those who, for one reason or another, have abandoned the Church and her teachings. Let us pray in particular for the parents who suffer because their children have abandoned the Church and do not share with them the same convictions of faith anymore, especially those things they taught them in their youth and upbringing. Let us pray for ourselves so that our eyes might always be fixed on Jesus, the master of our faith, in everything we do. May God bless you all!

Jeremiah 38: 4-6, 8-10; Hebrews 12: 1-4; Luke 12: 49-53



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