

Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent

Gospel text (Mt 20:17-28): As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve [disciples] aside by themselves, and said to them on the way, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee approached him with her sons and did him homage, wishing to ask him for something. He said to her, “What do you wish?” She answered him, “Command that these two sons of mine sit, one at your right and the other at your left, in your kingdom.” Jesus said in reply, “You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?” They said to him, “We can.” He replied, “My cup you will indeed drink, but to sit at my right and at my left [, this] is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.”

When the ten heard this, they became indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus summoned them and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

“Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant”

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Today, the Church, in this Lenten time —inspired by the Holy Spirit— proposes a text where Jesus suggests to His disciples —and, accordingly, to all of us— a change in mentality. Today, Jesus changes the human and earthly mentality of His disciples and opens up a new horizon of understanding concerning a new style of life for His followers.

We have a natural tendency towards a desire to dominate or subjugate things and people, to command and to order, to have things done as per our wishes, to have others accept our status, our position. But, now, Jesus is proposing to us just the opposite: “whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant” (Mt 20:26-27). “Servant”, “slave”: we cannot just take these words at their face value! We have heard them hundreds of times, sure, but now we must be able to assimilate the reality of what they actually mean, and confront it with our attitude and behavior.

The II Vatican Council asserts that “man cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.” We may be under the impression we are giving away life, but, in fact, we are retrieving it. He who does not live to serve does not serve to live. And, in this attitude Christ should be our perfect model —Jesus is fully man—, inasmuch as “the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mt 20:28).

Being a servant, being a slave, as Jesus asks us, is impossible for us. It falls short of our weak will: so we are to implore, to hope for and to profoundly wish these gifts are granted to us. Lent and its Lenten practices —fasting, charity and prayer— remind us that to receive these gifts we have to prepare ourselves adequately.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

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“O surpassing loving-kindness! Christ received nails in His undefiled hands and feet, and suffered anguish; while on me without pain or toil by the fellowship of His suffering He freely bestows salvation.” (Saint Cyril of Jerusalem)

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“The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk.” (Francis)

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“Jesus accepted Peter's profession of faith, which acknowledged him to be the Messiah, by announcing the imminent Passion of the Son of Man. He unveiled the authentic content of his messianic kingship both in the transcendent identity of the Son of Man ‘who came down from heaven’ (Jn 3,13), and in his redemptive mission as the suffering Servant: ‘The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’ (Mt 20:28). Hence the true meaning of his kingship is revealed only when he is raised high on the cross.” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, N° 440)