

Monday of the Third Week of Advent

Gospel text (Mt 21:23-27): When he had come into the temple area, the chief priests and the elders of the people approached him as he was teaching and said, “By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?” Jesus said to them in reply, “I shall ask you one question, and if you answer it for me, then I shall tell you by what authority I do these things. Where was John’s baptism from? Was it of heavenly or of human origin?” They discussed this among themselves and said, “If we say ‘Of heavenly origin,’ he will say to us, ‘Then why did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ we fear the crowd, for they all regard John as a prophet.” So they said to Jesus in reply, “We do not know.” He himself said to them, “Neither shall I tell you by what authority I do these things.

“What authority have you to act like this? Who gave you authority to do all this?”

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Today, the Gospel looks at two aspects of Jesus' personality: His shrewdness and His authority. Let's take His shrewdness first: He knows the heart of man deeply, He knows the inner life of all those who approach Him. And when the High Priests and the authorities are sent to maliciously ask Him: “By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?” (Mt 21:23), Jesus, who knows their falseness, replies with another question: “Where was John’s baptism from? Was it of heavenly or of human origin?” (Mt 21:25). They do not know what to answer, because if they say that it came from God, they would be in contradiction with themselves for not having believed it, and if they say that it came from men they would be up against the people, who saw John as a prophet. They find themselves painted into a corner. Cunningly, with a simple question, Jesus has exposed their hypocrisy; He has given them the truth. And the truth is always uncomfortable; it can knock one off balance.

We should have the shrewdness of Jesus, to knock that which is a lie off its kilter. So many times the sons of darkness use all their astuteness to achieve more money, more power and more prestige; while we sons of light seem to have our astuteness and imagination somewhat asleep. Just in the same way that a worldly man uses his imagination to serve his interest, we Christians have to use our talents to serve God and the Gospel. For example: when one is before a person who speaks ill of the Church (as often happens), do we know how to respond with a reply that stops them in their tracks. Or, in a work environment, with a colleague who lives only for him and “doesn’t give a damn”, do we know how to return good for evil? If we love him as Jesus did, our presence will be “uncomfortable” for him.

Jesus exercised his authority because of the deep knowledge He had of people and of situations. We are also called to have this authority. It is a gift that comes from above. The more we try to put everything in its place —the small things of every day— the more we will know how to deal with different people and different situations, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “The chief priests and the scribes were afraid of the people, of the truth. An indication of their flight was the fear of their hearts.” (Saint Augustine)
- “Never condemn. If you want to condemn, condemn yourself. I ask the Lord for the grace that our heart may be bright with the truth, big-hearted with people, merciful.” (Francis)
- “In Jesus, the same Word of God that had resounded on Mount Sinai to give the written Law to Moses, made itself heard anew on the Mount of the Beatitudes. Jesus did not abolish the Law but fulfilled it by giving its ultimate interpretation in a divine way: ‘You have heard that it was said to the men of old... But I say to you...’ (Mt 5:33-34). With this same divine authority, he disavowed certain human traditions (Mk 7:8) of the Pharisees that were ‘making void the word of God’ (Mk 7:13)” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, N° 581)