

First Sunday of Lent

In the MO there is a scene that has always attracted me, and I was reminded of it over this days as I was walking across the courtyard at Valdocco. It is the one where Don Bosco tells us about end of his long, hard wanderings with the Oratory in tow without knowing where he could take his boys next Sunday...*"I withdrew to one side, and as I walked alone I began to cry, perhaps for the first time. As I walked I looked up to heaven and cried out, "My God, why don't you show me where you want me to gather these children? Oh, let me know! Oh, show me what I must do!"*".

I remembered this story while reading the Gospel for this first Sunday in Lent. It was not easy for Jesus to remain faithful to the mission entrusted to him by the Father, without deviating from His will. The Gospels recall his inner struggle and the trials he had to overcome throughout his life, sometimes with his disciples and at other times alone with himself, in long nights of prayer. Juanjo spoke of this in some of his talks to us during the Retreat.

In his Gospel Matthew describes how the teachers of the law plied him with malicious questions so they could get him to submit to the established order, forgetting the Spirit who had often led him to act against the practices of the time.

The Pharisees were asking him to stop alleviating the sufferings of the people and do something more spectacular, "a sign from heaven", by which God would confirm him before them all.

Temptations also came from the disciples he loved most: James and John asked him to forget the little least in the kingdom, and think more about giving them positions of power and honour.

Peter confronted him because he was putting his life at risk and could end up being executed.

Jesus suffered and his disciples also suffered. Nothing was easy nor was it clear. In seeking to do God's will, everyone had to overcome various trials and temptations. A few hours before being detained by the security forces from the Temple, Jesus had told them: *"You are the men who have stood by me faithfully in my trials"* (Lc 22,28).

The account of Jesus' temptations, bring together and sum up the temptations he had to overcome throughout his life. Although moved by the Spirit he had received in the Jordan, nothing freed him from being attracted to false messianic ways of thinking.

Should he think of his own interests or listen to the Father's will?

Should he use his power as the Messiah, or put himself at the service of those who needed him?

Should he seek his own glory or manifest God's mercy for those who suffer?

Should he avoid risks and the crucifixion, or get on with his mission, trusting in the Father?

This account of Jesus' temptations was selected by the Evangelists to encourage and support his followers.

In his Lenten Message the Pope points in this direction... *"Jesus' wealth is that of his boundless confidence in God the Father, his constant trust, his desire always and only to do the Father's will and give glory to him. Jesus is rich in the same way as a child who feels loved and who loves its parents, without doubting their love and tenderness for an instant"*.

From the beginning of Lent we are invited as a Church and a Congregation to discover what in us leads us away from following Jesus in full freedom, to put ourselves in a position to listen to God, as Jesus did, after living in the desert, to respond faithfully to the mission his Father had entrusted to him.

The desert is the essential place for experiencing God and noting the Good News in Galilee. It is what DB experienced in discovering God's will in asking him to bring God's love to his boys.

This is what we are seeking; and the Church asks it of us; it is what our confreres are in expectation of and what our boys are asking of us – Salesians who are faithful to God and the Gospel, committed body and soul to the mission God has entrusted us with.

In his letter of convocation of GC27, on 8 April 2012, Easter Sunday, the Rector Major added a detail that encourages us in this task: *"From this moment we entrust ourselves to the Spirit of the Risen Christ so that he may enlighten and accompany us, and to Mary Help of Christians so that she may be our teacher and guide"*.

Happy Lenten journey, then, dear confreres, as we move towards Easter.

Fr. Félix Urra Mendía
SBI Provincial