

Homily of Father Adriano Bregolin February 27, 2014

Dear Confreres,

Today's Gospel offers us a reflection that is in line with the theme of our General Chapter, viz. ***the radical nature of the Gospel way of life***. As a matter of fact, what the Lord tells his disciples is an invitation to them to embark on the path of "*following the Master*" with full awareness and in a radical way. To be more precise, Jesus tries to make them understand how necessary it is to be faithful disciples of his own person, viz. disciples of the Lord.

Some points for reflection

At Jesus' time, the teachers of the law, using the full weight of their authority and the threat of excommunication (cf Jn 9: 22; 12:42), sought to prevent the simple people from following Jesus. The Gospel speaks of scandal, which is all that prevents someone from following God and so attaining his salvation. The man who leads others away from putting their faith in Jesus deserves, as Jesus says, to be thrown into the deep sea with a great millstone around his neck. It were better for him to die rather than make even a single person lose his faith.

Phrases of this kind are not to be taken as direct and immediate pronouncements of condemnation, but rather as expressions that help us to understand better the evil nature of such actions.

When applying these words of Jesus in the matter of scandals, the Christian community did not intend to apply them only to children but to all the faithful of the community who were being tempted to renounce their faith. It is always an extremely serious matter to jeopardize or destroy the faith in the hearts of simple people.

The series of phrases concerning bodily limbs which become occasions for a moral downfall shows how radical are Jesus' demands from an ethical point of view. For him, salvation is a matter of such grave concern that one must make every effort to enter the kingdom of God (cf Lk 13: 24). When our eternal salvation is at stake, one cannot be satisfied with half-measures.

"Not to enter into life" or *"not to enter the Kingdom of God"* means a failure with regard to the ultimate purpose of life, viz. not entering into God's eternal life: it is a total failure of a person's existence; it is like becoming "garbage" which is thrown into a dump and burnt because it is useless, burdensome and foul-smelling.

There is here a pressing invitation to discover the absolute importance of following Jesus in order not to incur the irreparable loss of the gift of the present and future life.

"You are the salt of the earth". As in Mt 5: 13, this saying is addressed to the disciples; they must purify the world without letting themselves be contaminated by it. Salt, therefore, must be interpreted as a symbol of everything that is opposed to the spirit of the world and instead as something that fosters peace in the community, that is, a spirit of service, a

caring for others, mutual esteem, a renunciation of one's self and of one's desire for greatness and power. All this is proposed to the disciples after the second announcement of the Passion and the Resurrection.

There is a great coherence between what Jesus reveals about his passion and what he asks of the Twelve. Christian morality must never be taught for its own sake but as a way of sharing in Jesus' style of life.

"Be at peace with one another". This is an allusion to the dispute (Mk 9: 33-34) that gave rise to the entire second part of Mark's chapter 9. Brotherly love excludes attitudes of rivalry in serving the Gospel.

Application to our life

The first rule of a Christian community is mutual help: for this reason, our Salesian community must be a place of welcome, sharing and brotherly love. We believe in the importance of the figure of the superior who is a sign of the Lord present among us; but the relationships among ourselves cannot simply be juridical or hierarchical. The witness aspect of our brotherhood embraces all aspects of our fraternal and personal relationships. If our community is to be a prophecy of fraternity, it must be a place of self-giving and real communion.

To be true disciples of our Master, the foundation and the logic of our life cannot be anything else but service! This is why our community must give the first place (among our confreres, and still more among those for whom we work) to those who are poor, viz. to those who are weak, helpless and fragile in their life and faith. Charity and mercy, peace and mutual edification have far greater value than theoretical "truths" for which we sometimes sacrifice people.

The only truth that matters is a concrete love, and service is the choice and attitude which helps it to grow.

It is obvious that our witness and our living as disciples are directed towards the "little ones" who are the ones to whom our mission is directed, viz. the young. They take in our own way of being and assume or reject our convictions.

We must avoid scandal, which is not necessarily an improper conduct but also a lack of commitment and growth, a laziness in carrying out the mission and a coldness in our relationships... All these attitudes show that our spirit is drained and our vocation is no longer a dynamic reality but simply an event of the past. All these things inhibit and sterilize our fraternal communication and make our proclamation of the faith hollow. Woe to us if this should happen!

Let us ask the Lord for the grace to adhere to his Word with our life and to announce his Word with a concrete love lived as a prophecy of brotherhood in the service of the mission.

Father Adriano Bregolin