

Gospel text

John 14: 15-21

15 If you love me, you will follow my precepts. 16 And I will pray to the Father and he will give you another Supporter to support you and remain with you constantly, 17 the spirit of truth that the world cannot receive, just as it is unable to perceive and know him. You, on the other hand, you know him, because he remains with you and will live in you in the future. 18 I will not leave you as orphans, for I will come back to you shortly. 19 A little while longer, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me, because I am alive and you also will be alive. 20 That day, you will discover the communion that I have with the Father and the mutual communion that we have, you and me. 21 He who imbues himself with my precepts and follows them is the one who truly loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I in turn will love him and I will make him personally feel my presence.

Gospel commentary - Homily

Mourning that is the source of life

Life is a mystery, in the sense that it raises questions that do not get answers. Take for example the famous tsunami of Southeast Asia which razed entire regions and left more than 150,000 dead at the end of 2004. Beyond the spontaneous movement to help disaster victims, we are aware of the immense fragility of our world which could disappear instantly and we can ask ourselves, "Why did God create a world so unstable, so imperfect? Why does He not protect us more? And besides, does He really care of what is happening to us?" Suddenly, the earth loses its familiar and warm side. Do not tell me: "But it is not God who creates disasters!" Of course not, otherwise He would be sadistic. But He wanted a world where it was possible.

It is in this context that I read again the Gospel of this Sunday. It is an extract from Jesus' long farewell speech. This excerpt can be summed up as follows: "by my death, I will no longer be among you, but you will not feel like an orphan insofar as you continue to open yourself to the spirit of truth and love that has marked my life; then you will experience a form of presence that will be the source of life in you". How does such an affirmation touch you?

A first reaction that I sometimes have to face with such passages from the evangelist John is to say: this figure of Jesus was drawn by a small insider group tightly bonded to one another, but it is completely disconnected from the reality we live in. Can such a Gospel even push people to take refuge in an inner world, where one is never disappointed, where there is never a catastrophe, to the detriment of an insertion in the real world?

The biggest mistake we make when faced with this passage from John is to imagine that it is enough to withdraw into our inner world to experience the presence of Jesus. Yet the condition is clear: "If you keep my precepts." And we know that the precepts come down to love. In other words, it is only by going through this long journey of learning to love as Jesus did, it is only by taking the same road as his that we can experience his presence.

It reminds me of this text of a man read in the newspaper. His father, whom he loved very much and who was a true mentor to him, died while he was still young. When he died, he had promised to communicate with him from the afterlife. But nothing happened. However, one day he took the toolbox that his father had left him, and when he had in his hand the mason's trowel, he felt like a shiver, and the desire to continue his work. It was not the desired communication. But perhaps something much more important.

The Gospel text ends with what seems like the ultimate gift: "I will manifest myself to him." So take a look around you: for how many people does this constitute the desired gift, the most precious good? This is probably a bit why the evangelist talks about the world that sees nothing. Because just as one must have loved a spouse, a relative or a friend to desire his presence beyond death, so it is with Jesus. "If you love me ..." said Jesus. Yet there is an even more important reality here.

What helps us go through a grievance period? What helps us go through a tragic death or a catastrophe that destroys our world? As we know, mourning can destroy us, as it can give birth to something else. We need a person who listens to our tears, who is not afraid of our cries and our revolts, who shows total solidarity and, at the same time, who invites us to get back on track and follow him on the way of life. No idea can play this role. And it is this role that the evangelist makes Jesus play.

The tsunami highlights by magnifying it an element of our reality. This element has the capacity to destroy us completely or to give birth to something else. It is this birth to something else that Jesus tells us. Let's not forget it. This time of Easter during which this Gospel is read and where one sings "Hallelujah" is a time of mourning, because it follows the tragic death of Jesus. But this mourning has become for many a source of life.

-André Gilbert, Gatineau, January 2005