

Gospel text

Luke 17: 5-10

5 Then the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase faith in us". 6 The Lord answers them, "If you have faith at this time as big as a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree: uproot yourself and plant yourself in the sea, and it would have listened to you.

7 Who among you, having a servant who plows the fields and grazes the animals, will tell him when he returns from the fields, 'Quickly go for dinner'? 8 Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something so that I may eat, and after having having girded yourself about, you will serve me until I have finished eating and drinking, and afterwards you will eat and drink your turn?' 9 Should he express gratitude to his servant because he did what was in the order of things? 10 In the same way, you too, when you have done all that was in the order of things, say, 'We are not indispensable servants, we did only what we had to do'."

Gospel commentary - Homily

To stay young forever

The evangelical text proposed for Sunday's liturgy contains elements that are difficult to accept and can easily put us off. Let us begin with the story of this servant who has no gratitude to receive from his master for having done his work well, for it was part of the order of things; it is thus intended to affirm that a Christian is not doing something exceptional by his faithful life and should not expect the recognition of God. One way to tame such a harsh statement is to listen to saint Paul: "To proclaim the Gospel indeed is not for me a title of glory; it is a necessity that falls to me ... If I had the initiative of this task, I would be entitled to a reward; if I do not have it, it is a charge entrusted to me" (1 Corinthians 9: 16-17). Thus, the Christian life is not a personal achievement, but the openness and fidelity to a stream that has its source in God; our reward is what this current produces in us.

Let's come to the question of faith that begins today's text. The role Jesus assigns to faith continues to intrigue me: why such a fundamental role? And the image used by our passage has something excessive: a mulberry tree that uproots itself and will be planted in the sea. To have known the cultural world of the Middle East, I know that this text should not be read literally. But the idea is that faith has the power to shatter the order of things and open up to a new world. How is it possible?

It all begins with a request from the disciples, "Increase faith in us!" Unfortunately, the liturgical text does not give the context of their request. Previously, Jesus said, "And if seven times in the day he sins against you and seven times he comes back to you, saying, 'I repent', you will forgive him". Why do the disciples then start talking about faith? But this is it, everything depends on faith, on the belief that people can change and will change, that what is part of our humanity is greater than what we see. Let's put the demand of the disciples back in our context, for instance the insoluble conflict between Israelis and Palestinians where, of course, everyone is right; these incessant conflicts which starve the poorest countries and keep whole populations homeless; all these ghettos that reveal what is the worst in the human heart; the scavengers who profit from the misfortune of others; in all these situations, each one could graft his own dramas on a reduced scale. Tell me, what does it mean exactly, "If seven times a day your brother sins against you and say to you, 'I repent', you will forgive him?" Yes, increase faith in me, Lord. For to forgive means to believe that a relationship imbued with life and love can resume.

In a few words, let's say it: without faith, there is no future for our humanity. Karl Marx had spoken of religion as opium of the people. I say: only faith enables our humanity to be on the move. Only faith allows me not to be paralyzed by what I see. Only faith allows me to overcome my fears. I have personally reached the age when people ask the question, "What will be my life when I won't be able to work anymore? What if my savings were not enough?" Without faith, one may want to look stupidly for security wall to wall, in defiance of solidarity.

Some identify faith with an obstinacy to believe that everything will be fine despite the denials of reality. I maintain that it is quite the opposite. It is faith that allows us to welcome events as a word and makes it change our mind, just as it is faith that makes us act, in the hope that life can come from death. It is faith that leads us to look at the next day as a dawn, not as a twilight. It is faith that keeps us always young.

It is very likely that I would not be a believer without welcoming Jesus and his testimony in my life. When he speaks of faith and the role that it plays, he speaks of his own experience. It is this faith that has enabled him to put human beings back on their feet. It is this faith that allowed him to face death as he did. Ultimately, the resurrection is the result of faith. That's why it's so fundamental every single day of our life.