

Gospel text

Luke 17: 11-19

11 While they were on their way to Jerusalem, it happened that Jesus had to go through the region between Samaria and Galilee. 12 And he entered into some village, and behold, ten lepers went out to meet him. They stopped at a distance. 13 Then they lifted up their voices to say, "Master Jesus, have mercy on us. 14 When Jesus saw them, he said to them, "Go, show yourself to the priests". While they were on their way, they were healed. 15 And one of them, perceiving that he was healed, set a new direction to his life to go to Jesus, recognizing the extraordinary quality of God. 16 He threw himself on the ground at his feet and expressed his gratitude to him. Now this man was Samaritan. 17 Jesus responded by saying, "Were not all ten healed? Where are the other nine? 18 How is it possible that no one can be found to take a new position in life and to celebrate the extraordinary quality of God, if not this stranger?" 19 Then Jesus said to the man, "Get up and get going". It is faith that brought you this liberation".

Gospel commentary - Homily

Living is always getting up

AIDS has many faces. There is one known in developed countries where, despite its tragic side, the disease is nevertheless circumscribed and partly controlled by drugs. But there is one face found in the poor regions of the earth, as in Khayelitsha, this township of Cape Town, South Africa. Last year, there was a real slaughter of people who died of measles because AIDS is a deficiency of the immune system. In the midst of all this horror, a breeze of life: a South African and a French created ZipZap Circus School, a social circus school created in 1992, at the very end of the apartheid regime, to bring young people closer to all colors and all origins. This school has also partnered with Doctors Without Borders to set up special activities for HIV-positive children in Khayelitsha, so that twice a week 25 HIV-positive children aged 4 to 16 are expected: it's not only drugs and treatment that matter, you have to put a little joy in the lives of these children. And especially breaking down discrimination and isolation, which is as serious as the illness itself. Church people are not immune to such an attitude: a pastor, who had refused the children his church for circus activities, finally let them use the parking lot.

It is such a context that can help us look at this day's Gospel from a particular angle. The story concerns ten lepers. The parallel between leprosy and AIDS is easy to establish: because both diseases were wrongly considered infectious and isolated the sick. You have certainly noticed that the lepers of the Gospel stood at a distance. In fact, they were forced to wear bells to warn people they were approaching. They are, in a way, the AIDS patients of the time. And like any AIDS sufferer, they ask the same thing to Jesus who has the reputation of having the gift of healing: take pity on our situation, heal us and break our isolation, allow us to reintegrate society. You know the rest. Jesus asked them to go and see the priests, because only a priest had the authority to recognize that a leper was really healed. This request of Jesus assumes that they will be healed on the way, and the lepers seem to believe in his word. So far we have a typical miracle story where after describing the illness and the call for healing, it presents a Jesus who heals with a word and heals people who believe in this word. What is different is the ending: one of the ten healed lepers "came back by giving glory to God with a full voice", according to the usual translations, but which I prefer to translate by: "he took a new position in life to go to Jesus by celebrating the quality of being extraordinary of God. And Jesus asks the question: why did one out of ten react like this?

Let us take away immediately a false track that I have seen so often exploited in homilies. The question of Jesus does not concern a lack of recognition, as if Jesus was offended that they did not say thank you or that they did not say thank you to God. It's not a Gospel about good manners. The stakes are much bigger, more serious.

What happened to one of the ten lepers? One could answer: a religious experience. Because to sing the praises of God thus, he had to realize that his healing was the work of God, and more precisely he had to feel wrapped by an intense love of God for him, and he in tears of joy to the point that his life is completely changed. From now on he will radiate this love. Life is now wonderful, that's why he sings. Returning to Jesus and throwing himself at his feet, expresses his desire to walk in his wake, to live his teaching. When Jesus said to him, "Get up and get going". He finds himself saying to him: Be a being standing, and be what you have discovered. The true miracle is not healing, but the transformation of this man.

A great mystery remains: why him, why not others? The Gospel refers to him as a Samaritan, i.e. someone who was considered a schismatic in the eyes of the Jews, because they did not accept the whole Bible and rejected the temple of Jerusalem; it is as if we are speaking today of a Muslim in a Christian country. There is of course the mystery of human freedom. But we know from experience that it is after experiencing the disease that we appreciate the happiness of health. We must have accepted the suffering of motherhood to be able to cry with joy in front of a newborn baby. We must have lived the visit of a cancer to discover the extraordinary gift of each passing second. It's as if learning to live was somehow learning to get up from something. And this is where I have to make a decision: do I accept in total faith to open myself to the call to live, rather than remain a prisoner of my night? Or to return to ZipZap Circus School, are we ready to transform the lives of children with AIDS? Mysteriously, faith is the path to liberation. Do we have this faith?