

Gospel text

Luke 23: 35-43

35 While the people stood there, watching, the rulers ridiculed him, saying, "He saved the others, let him now save himself, if he really is the messiah of God, the one that He really chose". 36 The soldiers also mocked him as they approached to present him with vinegar, 37 saying, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." 38 In fact, we had placed a sign above him saying, "This is the King of the Jews."

39 One of the criminals who were hanging on the cross shouted at him with insults saying, "Are not you really the messiah? So save yourself, and us too". But the other replied with rebukes, declaring, "Do you have no respect for God when you suffer the same pain? 41 For us, it's really deserved, because we live the consequences of our actions; but he did not do anything wrong. 42 And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your domain. 43 Jesus retorted, "Truly, I say to you, you will be with me today in paradise."

Gospel commentary - Homily

In order to keep to believing in the human being

In July, the cycling Tour of France has its apotheosis with the arrival of runners in Paris, Champs Elysées. Not that this is the most important moment. The decisive moments were played in the Alps and the Pyrenees. But the arrival in Paris comes to crown the champion. There is something similar in the feast of Christ the King: even though Easter is the summit of the liturgy, the celebration of this Sunday wants to somehow "crown its champion". However, the Gospel of this day is so marked by violence that we must take a break to understand who our "champion" is.

Violence is omnipresent. There is of course the crucifixion of Jesus. But that's not what I want to draw attention to. First there is this mute crowd watching the scene without understanding. This is one of the great violence that we see in our life, a subtle violence, but very real. We can talk about people who are not interested in the great questions of life. But it becomes more dramatic when they are parents who do not understand what is happening to their children, social groups who do not understand what is happening in other groups, leaders who do not understand the situation in their homeland or in their area of influence in the world.

Then there is the politico-religious elite who makes fun of Jesus. You may have already experienced mockery. What is often the result of mockery, if not the destruction of the ideas and behavior of a person, and often the person himself? Cases of teenagers who started shooting in the school in recent years were people who were mocked for stuttering or shyness as an example: the violence of the rifle is the mirror of another violence.

Then there are various forms of political forces represented by the soldiers, who mocked him, approaching to present him with vinegar. The Greek term translated as "mock" expresses something more rustic and more violent than mockery. Actually they offered him a very low quality wine, a vinous beverage produced by adding water to grape pomace, in order to get him in shape. I find the situation eminently sad every time I see mean public servants playing with their authority at the expense of others. The violence of little people over other little people is unique: it seeks to perpetuate the philosophy of life as a prison, as a stifling environment and the impossibility (or ridiculousness) of any liberation. "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

Finally, there is the revolt of those who are "in the shit": one of the criminals hanging on the cross was insulting him. I remember one day a van of prisoners stopped at a traffic light, from which came out suddenly through the screened window a spit that was just missing the beautiful shoes of a well-dressed lady who was waiting at the corner of the street ; who could say the hatred that there was in this spit?

When we look at it all as one block, we feel so helpless and discouraged that we either want to flee or to join ourself in this concert of violence! Yet the attitude of Jesus does not correspond to our usual behaviors. Unfortunately, by cutting the story, the liturgy removed the verse from the beginning which gives it its full meaning, "Father, forgive them: they do not know what they are doing." Warning! Do not misunderstand the meaning of "forgive". It's not a matter of using the sponge, the good-natured spirit that lets everything go. To forgive is to believe that the heart can be truly transformed. In other words, despite all this violence that is unleashed, Jesus keeps believing in the human being. The evidence, one of the malefactors is converted, changes his attitude: "Jesus, remember me, when you come into your domain"

The kingship of Jesus was to keep believing in the human being, at the moment when despair was justified. It is this faith that allows us today to say, "Jesus, remember us and our world at the beginning of the second millennium".