

Gospel text

Matthew 11: 2-11

2 When John heard in prison about the messiah's actions, John sent him through his disciples 3 this message: "Are you the expected messiah or is someone else to be hoped for?" 4 Jesus then offered them this answer: "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 the blind recover their sight, the paralyzed walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor receive a good news. 6 Finally, bravo anyone for whom I will not be an obstacle to believe". 7 As the disciples of John set out again, Jesus began to speak to the crowds of John, "Who did you go to see in the desert? Someone who looks like a reed flapping in the wind? 8 Tell me, who did you go to see? A man who would have dressed in silky clothes? But you know that people who wear silky clothes end up in kings' castles. 9 So tell me, who did you go to see? A prophet? Truly, I assure you, and much more than just a prophet. 10 For it is of him that this scripture is all about:

Notice my messenger that I send before you,
He will open a path for you.

11 Truly, I assure you, among the people who came into the world there is no one who is greater than John the Baptist. Yet the smallest in the domain of God is greater than him.

Gospel commentary - Homily

What to expect from life?

A few years ago, a mother, Cynthia, gave birth to a little boy, but received this diagnosis from the doctor: "Your baby is suffering from an intellectual disability. His mental age can never exceed that of a 12 year old child". This mother, what dream can she have for her child? Meanwhile, soldiers from our country are sent on a mission to Afghanistan in the hope of establishing peace and certain human values that are considered fundamental. Result: several dead and the fear of getting bogged down in a quagmire. These two real events that I have just mentioned put our dreams to the test and ask the question: what exactly can we expect from life?

It is a similar question posed by the Gospel narrative: "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect another?" In other words, is it really through you that God meets our expectations, or should we turn elsewhere? If we feel the need to ask the question, it is because Jesus does not match the idea of the messiah that one had imagined. We can relate ourself to that question! Think of all these messiahs sought to resolve our economic and political crises. We still hope that these messiahs will tear us away from the painful sides of life. What about Jesus?

In our narrative, Jesus makes this astonishing remark: "And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me!", which I have translated: "bravo anyone for whom I will not be an obstacle to believe". How can Jesus be an obstacle to someone's faith? If God had left it to us to design the messiah, we would not have created a craftsman who is neither priest nor intellectual, working peacefully in his shop in Nazareth, scratching his fingers more than once. If God had left it to us to design the messiah, we would have made him someone who would suddenly end this world of misery and finally create perfect humanity. None of this has happened. This is a finding that can be an obstacle to faith.

Let us listen to what Jesus said to the disciples of John the Baptist, which I sum up like this: "I went to meet people who had all kinds of disabilities or were destitute, I healed many, but above all I gave them hope and they started walking again". Basically, Jesus does not say that infirmity, violence or poverty will no longer exist, but he says that a mysterious energy lives in him that allows him to contribute to the transformation of others so that they find life where they are. This energy is in everyone. When he says that the smallest in the Kingdom is greater than John the Baptist, he simply says that every believer has by his faith a transforming power that no great man in this world can match.

Let's go back to Cynthia, mentioned at the very beginning. She will fight with other parents so that students with disabilities have a place with other students, to give them a sense of belonging to the school. Of course, her child will not be able to attend regular classes. But her strength was to recognize the capacities and limits of her child, and through that to offer him the tools that would make him more resourceful, so that today he has a small job and does volunteer work. Meanwhile, my daughter, victim of a fall on a staircase and ending up at an orthopedic clinic, meets a nursing soldier in orthopedic training: the latter tells her that he found life in Afghanistan when mingling with soldiers and civilians, and he only dreams of going back. What then is this mysterious force which inhabits certain people, which transcends religions, and of which Jesus speaks?

The narrative of this Sunday leaves us with a question: what messiah are we waiting for? If we know how to open ourselves to reality as it is, including shattered dreams, we will have taken a first step. The second step will be to open ourselves up to the mysterious force that lives in us, and that inhabited Jesus, in order to give birth to life when we are tempted to do nothing and let death to have the best of ourself. This is what incarnation means. Jesus didn't remove suffering. He gave us a way to cope with. This is the type of messiah that is proposed to us, and that we celebrate at Christmas. Is it also our messiah?