

14th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME YEAR A 2020 (Mt 11:25-30)

Reflection

Fr Tao Pham

There are three things I would like to reflect in the Gospel today.

Firstly, Jesus reveals the Father to us

Jesus knows the Father in a way no one else knows him. Because he knows the Father he is able to reveal him to us. You could say that was the reason he came on earth. Jesus revealed God as a loving and compassionate Father. A God who is passionately interested in us. A God whose concern is not to judge and condemn, but to heal and to save.

Simple people are often nearer to God than clever people. Many of the so-called wise people rejected Jesus, whereas the simple people accepted him. This caused Jesus to say, 'I bless you, Father of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children.' Jesus is not condemning intellectual power, but intellectual pride is a dangerous thing. And it is not stupidity that enables God to come in; it is humility.

Rational argument is not a sufficient condition for acquiring faith, or - more accurately - receiving it. Experience constantly shows us how the mere force of argument is never enough by itself to convert someone to Christian faith. Faith depends on things that go beyond reason. There is need of an interior divine illumination. Some great thinkers have managed to reason their way towards faith in God. But just as often, the sharpness of a good brain led many others away.

Because of the coming of Jesus we no longer see God as someone remote. We are people for whom God is a mystery but no stranger. We see God as someone who is very close to us, who knows each of us and is concerned about each of us, because we are his children. To know God in this way, and to have a close and loving relationship with him, should be a cause of great joy to us. God is like a spring within us from which we can drink and refresh ourselves.

Secondly, Gentleness and Humility

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Learn of me for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls'. Humility and gentleness are two beautiful virtues, but they don't seem to make much sense in today's competitive world.

Take gentleness. There is a belief that if you want to get on in life you have to be hard, because if you're gentle, people will walk all over you. Gentleness tends to be equated with timidity, passivity, and weakness. Gentleness is not a form of weakness. It is a form of strength. Jesus was gentle. He was especially gentle towards the weak and the wounded (Mt 12:20). But this doesn't mean that he was weak. He was strong. And when the occasion demanded it he could be very assertive - as when he drove the traders out of the Temple.

Nothing is so strong as gentleness, and nothing so gentle as real strength. It takes a strong, self-confident person to be gentle. A gentle person knows that growth results, not from forcing, but from nurturing, if you love, you are gentle. And there are certain tasks that only gentleness can accomplish. 'A gentle person treads lightly, listens carefully, looks tenderly, and touches with reverence' (Henri Nouwen).

And take humility. Unfortunately, like gentleness, humility is a misunderstood virtue. It is seen as weakness. Humility is not a form of weakness. It is a form of strength. It doesn't mean we have to demean ourselves. It means that we recognise our true greatness, while acknowledging from whom it comes. Humility is the soil in which all other virtues flourish.

To the gentle and the humble Jesus promises peace of soul. If we were gentler in our dealings with one another, we would have more peace in our homes and in the world. And if we were more humble, we would have more peace within ourselves and with others. Those who are proud and insensitive make life burdensome for themselves and for others. Those who are gentle and humble make life less burdensome for themselves and others. St Seraphim says, 'Acquire inner peace, and a multitude of people will find salvation near you.'

Thirdly, Lightening burdens

'Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.' These are some of the loveliest words in the Gospel. And they have great relevance for us. Nowadays many people live very pressurised lives. Stress has become a big factor in modern life.

During the 30 years he spent at Nazareth, Jesus lived among the ordinary people. He knew at firsthand how burdensome life was for them. Consequently, he had sympathy for ordinary people and wanted to lighten their burdens. Hence, his invitation: 'Come to me, all you who labour...'. Many people accepted that invitation, and came to him with their burdens of sickness and misery. All had their burdens lightened as a result of meeting him. His mere presence could bring peace to an anguished soul.

We should accept his invitation and come to him with our burdens. Some of our burdens may be baggage, which we could and should let go of. There is a Zen story about an old man going on a spiritual journey with a heavy bag on his back. On his deathbed he passes on the bag to his disciple. When the disciple opens the bag he finds that it is empty. Yet he wonders why it weighed so much. And the old man says, 'It is the weight of everything in my life that I did not need to carry.'

Jesus doesn't promise that we will have no burdens. Some burdens we just have to bear. But the Lord does give us the strength to carry them. When we trust in God, another power becomes available to us, namely, the power of God. In the lovely words of Isaiah: 'Those who hope in the Lord renew their strength, they put out wings like eagles. They run and do not grow weary, walk and never tire.' (Is 40:31)

Religion should not make life more burdensome for us. Quite the opposite. If Jesus placed any burden on us at all, it was that of loving one another. But in exhorting us to love one another, he is not laying a burden on us. His is inviting us to open our hearts, and to open our hearts is to begin to live.

Love can make a burden light and a sacrifice sweet. A woman who is deprived of food for a day can barely last out till the end of it. But a mother, who gives up food for a day so that her children may have something to eat, hardly notices it.

Let us reflect three things which I mentioned above and try to find out good lessons to learn and put them in our daily practice. Amen.

Please keep praying and asking God to stop the pandemic as soon as possible and then we will meet each other face to face.

Have a great week to everyone.

God bless you and be with you always.

Fr Tao Pham