

July 25: Saint James, Apostle

Gospel for July 25th, feast of Saint James, Apostle.

Gospel (*Mt 20:20-28*)

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to Jesus, with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Command that these two sons of mine may sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" They said to him,

“We are able.” He said to them, “You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.”

And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Commentary

Today's Gospel passage ends with a brief statement that sums up the meaning of our Lord's life, his way of being and living: "The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

At the same time, it tells us the meaning of our own life. We were born to serve, to give our life to others. If we do not make our life a service to others, if we fail to strive to make others happy by our presence and deeds, then our life will be empty, without meaning.

This statement comes at the end of a dialogue between Jesus and John and James, started by the mother of the two brothers. On the way to Jericho, a few days before entering Jerusalem, their mother comes up to Jesus and prostrates herself before Him, asking that her two sons may sit

at his right and left hand in his kingdom.

Jesus doesn't deny her request, nor reproach her for having asked it. Maybe because that woman and her sons are eager for glory. They seek it in an overly human way, but it is a good request. This is the wonderful thing about Jesus. He understands our desires and dreams, our plans and requests, and wants to purify them, to fill them with his own divine glory, his eternity.

Jesus tells John and James "You do not know what you are asking." You don't know what you are really asking of me, what you really desire. And Jesus begins a dialogue to help them purify their desire: "Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" Do you really want my glory? Do you want to accept what I am going to accept?

Their response reveals some presumption: "We can." But Jesus surprisingly assures them: "You will drink my cup."

Jesus sets these two brothers on the path of prayer. The important thing in our prayer is not so much what I want, but what Jesus wants from me. Jesus is concerned about us and asks: what do you want from me? He wants to lead us, starting from our own desires, to carry out his will.

Prayer is thus an encounter with Jesus that spurs us beyond ourselves. He draws us into his own Heart, into his own desires and dreams. Each day he asks us: "Do you really want to know what is in my heart, what my deepest desires are?"

And He tells us about his own desires to serve, to give his life joyfully for us, with full freedom. For freedom consists in making of one's life a gift. Only those who own something can

give it away; we are only free when we give ourselves to others, when we give them our life. Jesus' whole personality is marked by freedom. And He even gives us his own personality so that we can be free.

Those brothers will answer yes. Although later, when Jesus' hour arrives, the hour of drinking the chalice to the dregs, the hour of Gethsemane and the Cross, they will confront their own incapacity. They still have to learn that they cannot do what Jesus wants with only their own strength. They need the strength of the Risen One, which will never be lacking to them.

Jesus also speaks to us, and is happy to see our desire to be close to Him, to give our lives to Him. And He assures us that He will always be with us to enable us to drink his chalice, to enable us to truly give ourselves to those around us.

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