

***"I no longer find anything in books,
if not in the Gospel.
This book is enough for me."***

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux

Pre-Eucharist Reflection

AS WE PREPARE to celebrate the Eucharist, let us permit ourselves a little 'statio' on the threshold. Since listening to the Word is never – for anyone – a matter of course. To make it possible, we are asked to stand on the threshold. We are asked to gather from dispersion the thoughts of the mind and the feelings of the heart, to rediscover in them an open question, indeed an invocation. Only in this way will it be possible to hear the Word, the delivery of the body and blood of Jesus, the Son.

The words of Jesus, the words all of the Holy Scriptures are our "mother tongue". And yet there is always a need to regain possession of that language. Such a need is signaled precisely by Jesus' supreme gesture.

The parable of the two sons, among Jesus' last (only Matthew records it), illustrates the supreme, regal confidence and at the same time the meekness with which Jesus justifies to

his critics the transcendent authority that animates him.

"What do you think?" (Mt 21:28): the captivating opening captures us too—and pulls us in. The question is crucial, using all the revelatory contribution of the parable of two sons, and a father who links his passion for his beloved vineyard to their consent. "What do you think?": participation in this Synod Assembly, with its tensions and hopes, and openness to the possible and the impossible, commits us to answering this question. The Lord's vineyard is at stake, which awaits the contribution of each and every person.

In today's Gospel, we are at the juncture of the revelation of the unprecedented, inconceivable novelty of God in Jesus, who enters regally, humbly and meekly, as the Authority recognized by the population of the poor. Even the procession sets out from the depths of perdition—"the tax collectors and the harlots" (21:32), says Jesus. The unfathomable authority of the meekness that converts the heart, even of the marginality considered "shameful".

Again, a vineyard (Is 5:1-7)—a symbol of the beloved world (Jn 3:16), for which the Creator always works (cf. Jn 5:17). His delight, which His hand has planted (Ps 80:15).

"Son, today, go and work in my vineyard!" – says the Lord to us – "Go into this field into which I have

lavished all my care, tenderness, hope, tears, and also all my ‘indignation’ at its ruinous, even scandalous fruitlessness” —and what else could a synodal path be? Only the acknowledgement that “I have laboured in vain...for nothing” (Is 49:4)?

In the parable, hope comes from the son who says no. From the son who there and then does not go into the vineyard, as he does not feel like it — In a few lines we sense the entire tangle of movements of the characters’ souls. We do not know how long the son’s reluctance lasts (: “but then”) — we can intuit a whole process. And in that “but then” we can thus also see all the complex stages of the process of the synodal church, beyond the superficial yes and no.

The rebellious son reconsiders—undergoing intense inner work. He has intercepted his father’s silent disappointment; experience matures in him that makes him question himself, in travail: he “repents” (*metameletheis*—a very rare verb in the New Testament). It is a question of changing the way of feeling, of changing the orientation of deep feeling, of vital interests, of motivating aspirations. Indeed, more than a change of thought, this repentance is a sorrow, allowing oneself to be moved by the paternal solicitude made one’s own—that is, by the passion that moves the father to the solemn sending of his son into the vineyard. Finally, the meek and disarming

discretion of the father’s love moves the reluctant son and converts him. Behold the authority of meekness! [Matthew will use that same verb — very rare — only to narrate about Judas who repents of his bargaining, of his vain strategy, by taking the money back to the priests in the temple (Mt 27:3). Which makes one think].

We are not alone. The tax collectors and harlots, Jesus says “go before you”. Being preceded is an enlightening experience that the disciples will always have to learn, in order to enter into the newness of the Pasch. After having foreseen this (Mt 26:32), the risen Jesus again calls the twelve: I will go “before you to Galilee” (Mt 28:7). But here, forerunners of his footsteps are, paradoxically, tax collectors and harlots; it is they who open the way. Witnesses of the grace that always precedes all. Little Teresa, seated with liberated joy at the table of sinners, accompanies us.

As in the beginning (Gen 2:1-21): Rahab precedes the generation of Jesus in the flesh (Mt 1:5), so too today - in this Universal Assembly of the Synod - others open the way for us. And we must perceive the expectation and revelatory power of this presence that urges us on, and opens the way for us.

The benevolence of the Father — not without amiable irony — knows these “wiles”. The Holy Scriptures are an

unceasing revelation of this. The way of justice is always different from our ways (Is 55:8-9). Its way is open to surrender to gratuitous love, to the authority of meekness. So, the synodal path too calls for conversion. It calls for the maturation of a new readiness to serve in the beloved vineyard, in the footsteps of the meek Lord.

“You, on the other hand, seeing”, says Jesus, “you have not even converted to believe him!” Christian authority – even that of bishops, but any authority in the church – does not consist in enjoying special lights, extraordinary vibrations, leadership qualities, or anything else. It consists in being attuned again and again – thanks to the Eucharist – to the authority of Jesus and, in his light, to know reality and consequently to recognize honestly when we have taken a wrong turn. This, the sinners and tax collectors,

bereft of religious power and the last among us, have recognized—and teach us.

We will have to rediscover the blessing of being, in a certain way, preceded by them in the synodal process, with their expectations and questions, anxieties and complaints. The road is open. Let us be on our way! The hardness of that face is carved with humility and meekness of heart, which the continuation of the journey will fully reveal. With no stone on which to lay one’s head, with no safe exit.

What unites us synodally here and today is – can we say it? – our gaze fixed on Jesus, the human face of the faithful God, the foundation stone and gushing spring in the desert. A gaze that reconfigures the vision of others, of history, of the world. A steadfast hope.

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