

Pastor's letter

November 08, 2009

Dear parishioner,

We have almost arrived at the end of the liturgical year. Next Sunday is the XXXIII Sunday in ordinary time, followed by the XXXIV Sunday in which we celebrate the end of the liturgical year and the feast of Christ, King of the Universe.

Once more our Church presents us a passage of the Gospel that under certain aspects is upsetting, in the sense that it changes the way we view material things. Jesus tells his disciples, "Beware of the scribes..." People see the scribes and say, "They are saints, they are good religious people!" Jesus says, "False and hypocrites!" Other people see a poor widow and say, "That woman is nothing!" Jesus says, "That is what I am looking for here - a sincere person!"

Before looking at the message that Jesus brings us in this Sunday's Gospel, I would like to provide you with some historical background. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, (the city which will condemn Him to death), He went to the Temple of Jerusalem with His disciples.

Perhaps not everyone knows that the first Temple of Jerusalem was built by King Solomon to guard "the Ark of the Covenant" in the 10th century BC. It was completely destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar II in 586 BC. They resumed the construction in 536 BC. and finished it in 515 BC. Later, it was enlarged by Herod the Great in 19 BC. and finished in 64 AD. (Let's hope we don't wait that long for our Church to be built). The Temple was destroyed in 70 AD. Today there exists only the Western Wall, called the Wailing Wall.

Having ended the historical note we now return to reflect on the message that Jesus is trying to convey to us in the Gospel.

I see this passage as conveying two images, the first one being "negative", in which Jesus describes us not as His followers; the second being "positive", in which an exemplary ideal of a Christian is proposed. In the first image Jesus tells His disciples that they must not resemble the scribes, whom He calls arrogant teachers of the law. Jesus sees in them three serious defects or faults. The first one is **vanity**, they "... *who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at the banquets.*" (Mk. 12, 38-39) As certain individuals in our times who believe themselves to be lords of the world, but who in the eyes of God are less than nothing. The second defect that He notes in them is **avarice** "*They devour widows' houses...*" (Mk. 12, 39), exploiting their simplicity and generosity. Keep in mind that a widow in Israel at that epoch belonged to the poorest and most defenseless

category, poor like orphans. The scribes only thought about their own affairs plundering the most defenseless people. The third defect is their **hypocrisy** “...*for the sake of appearance say long prayers.*” (Mk. 12, 39) Jesus sees in the scribes a double aspect of lie, they beg God and at the same time they abuse the poor people; the second lie is that they say they love God but in reality they love only themselves and their vainglory.

The second image, the “positive” one, described by the Lord is all contained in the humble, simple and poor offering that the widow brings to the Temple. The widow is not in the same social and economic condition as the scribes, she gives only two small coins. Between us, she could have kept one small coin. She then would have had the possibility of purchasing something to eat and it would not have made a great difference in the collection of the Temple.

In my opinion Jesus doesn't care about the quantity of our donation but he does care about its quality. It is the way we give not how much we give that is important. According to Jesus this aspect of donating is important because the way we give reveals our hidden love for Him. God doesn't want things from us; God wants us. This is the great teaching that today Jesus offers us, to learn and reflect on why we give.

Jesus notices that there exist two forms of giving, the rich and the poor, but the difference is not between the rich and the poor. The great difference then personally is in how much of myself I have put in the gift. In other words, how I live the gift, both towards God and to others; the value of my life depends on the way I give it. In human optics the materiality of the gift is what counts. In God's optics the quantity of the gift is measured in how much I have put of myself in that gift.

Jesus proposes this example to make us understand that between these two types of people, the rich scribes and the poor widow, there is not only an economic difference, but an internal difference. For example, when Jesus chose His disciples He didn't choose them according to their social position. It would have been more logical to choose the priests, the rich ones of His time, the wise. Instead Jesus chose people intellectually poor, at times tough and obstinate (for example, Saint Peter), because He was interested in having people who would be able to give all of themselves to Him and others. For Jesus it is not a matter of a bank account, but of the heart. To love God means to give all of ourselves without expecting anything in return. We often say that to love means to give, and it is true, but in reality what do we give? Perhaps it is not true that when we give some money, we give superfluously? When we give of our time, do we not make a personal sacrifice of our self? We ask the Lord to learn from the poor widow in today's Gospel, we ask the gift of a poor, but rich heart of generosity, because generosity is silent, generosity is caring, generosity is humble.

Peace, Father Luciano