

Pastor's letter

September 27, 2009

Dear parishioner,

Do you remember last Sunday's Gospel when Jesus was crossing Galilee with His disciples? In today's Gospel, Jesus is also with His disciples crossing Galilee.

During their journey something happens that should cause us to reflect.

There is a man that heals people and casts away demons in the name of Jesus. The disciples of Jesus see the man and try to stop him from doing that, because, they say, "He is not of ours." However Jesus responds, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me." In other words, he who does good comes from the Good even if he is not of ours, of our group or of our religion.

A really interesting thing had just happened earlier on. (Mk. 9,18) The disciples of Jesus had not succeeded in sending away a demon from a little boy. Can you understand? Jealousy and envy are really ugly features. We try to imagine the thoughts running through the minds of the disciples. "Us, that we are the preferred disciples of Jesus have not succeeded in sending away the demon from a boy and this person that nobody knows, yes he does!"

How many people today still protest and say: "We go to Church every Sunday, we don't steal, we don't kill, we respect all the Commandments, and God loves us the same way as He does a criminal?" "It is not right!" Dear parishioners, this Gospel is terrible, it causes a crisis in the way we think.

I would not want to put myself in the way of criticism, but sometimes it is good to be the conscience of what we are and what we were.

Until a short while ago we used to say, "Out of the Church there is no salvation." Only those who belonged to the Church had the possibility to be saved; only those who were baptized.

The Church quoted the evangelical passage; "Anyone who is not with me is against me" (Mt. 12,30); but in Mark's Gospel Jesus says, "Anyone who is not against us is for us." (Mk. 9,40) Perhaps, we should see some things of the present with the experience of the past.

As you might have already guessed, in this letter, I would like to deal with the theme of Ecumenism.

A point both difficult and delicate, that for some still remains a great taboo.

This walk of ecumenism in our Church began with the Pope Pius XII and continued with Pope John XXIII. This idea of ecumenism started in 1910 with the Protestant Church.

The Ecumenism foresees the appointment of communion, meeting and sharing

with all the Christian Churches and other religious confessions. The purpose of such communion is to foster dialogue and mutual respect, to find common positive elements in every religion, aiming at everything that guarantees unity and cooperation, rather than distance and the disunity. Collaborating together for peace and justice in the contemporary world is their goal.

Ecumenism doesn't mean that all will become one group, with an only religion. On the contrary, every Church maintains its own autonomy and identity, but it shares with other religions its own resources, valorizing points of encounters rather than those of separation.

Returning to the Gospel, we see Jesus abolishing the criterion, "He is not of ours." Jesus doesn't look to whom he belongs (apostle or not apostle; Jew or not a Jew); instead, He is interested in what a person does and what a person is in his deepest being.

Jesus goes on to say "Even if he is not of ours, but did these things, obviously he belongs to us." He doesn't belong to our group but the Spirit is ours. God and the Spirit are One.

A question that comes to mind might be such a one as this. "Is it possible to be united with Jesus and be out of the Church?" Personally, I believe that if somebody is out of the Church it doesn't mean that he is out of God's Grace. Whoever seeks the truth and lives in love, he comes from God. God is in every person. God is also within those who are not Christian. Whoever does good things comes from God.

There is not only one way to live. There is not only one way of being religious, of being saved or reaching God. A lot of ways do exist. What counts is not if "they are ours", but that they are full of truth and love.

God is beyond human thinking. God raises Christians also among them that are not Christians: Gandhi, M.L. King, Edith Stein. Saint Thomas said: "From whatever part truth comes it is originated from the Holy Spirit." In other words, our personal way to live and to interpret the servant around us, is only our point of view, only ours. We cannot say that all other points of view are wrong, simply that they are not as ours.

With humility we must learn to listen to each other, to understand each other, to approach each other with respect.

The word religion derives from the Latin "religio" that it means "to tie, to tie together with the divinity." Therefore, religion really should help us in this, to tie together all of us, and together to understand what divides us.

At the end of our life we won't be judged on our cultural or religious upbringing, but on the Good and the Love that we succeed in sharing with others.

Peace, Father Luciano