

GOSPEL

MATTHEW 10:37-42

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'Anyone who prefers father or mother to me is not worthy of me. Anyone who prefers son or daughter to me is not worthy of me. Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me. Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it.

'Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me; and those who welcome me welcome the one who sent me.

'Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will have a prophet's reward; and anyone who welcomes a holy man because he is a holy man will have a holy man's reward.

'If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, then I tell you solemnly, he will most certainly not lose his reward.'

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

Today's liturgy presents to us the last lines of the missionary discourse in Chapter 10 of the Gospel of Matthew, by which Jesus instructs the twelve apostles at the moment in which, for the first time, he sends them on mission to the villages of Galilee and Judea. In this final part, Jesus underscores two essential aspects for the life of a missionary disciple: the first, that his bond with Jesus is stronger than any other bond; the second, that the missionary brings not himself, but Jesus, and through Him the love of the heavenly Father. These two aspects are connected, because the more Jesus is at the centre of the heart and of the life of a disciple, the more this disciple is "transparent" to His presence. The two go hand in hand.

"He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me...", Jesus says. A father's affection, a mother's tenderness, the gentle friendship among brothers and sisters, all this, even while being very good and valid, cannot be placed before Christ. Not because he wants us to be heartless and ungrateful, but rather, on the contrary, because the condition of a disciple demands a priority relationship with the teacher. Any

disciple, whether a layman or laywoman, a priest or a bishop: an all-absorbing relationship. Perhaps the first question that we must ask a Christian is: "Do you meet with Jesus? Do you pray to Jesus?". The relationship. One could almost paraphrase the Book of Genesis: Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave to Jesus and the two shall become one (cf. Gen 2:24).

Those who allow themselves to be drawn into this bond of love and of life with the Lord Jesus become his representatives, his "ambassadors", above all in the way of being, of living. To the point that Jesus himself, in sending his disciples on mission, says to them: "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me". It is important that the people be able to perceive that for that disciple Jesus is truly "the Lord"; He is truly the centre of his or her life, the everything of life.

It does not matter then if, as for every human being, he or she has limitations and even makes mistakes — as long as he or she has the humility to recognize them; the important thing is that they not have a duplicitous heart — and this is dangerous. I am a Christian; I am a disciple of Jesus; I am a priest; I am a bishop, but I have a duplicitous heart. No, this is not okay. One must not have a duplicitous heart, but a simple, cohesive heart; [one must] not keep one foot in two shoes, but be honest with oneself and with others. Duplicity is not Christian. This is why Jesus prays to the Father so that the disciples may not fall prey to the worldly spirit. You are either with Jesus, with the spirit of Jesus, or you are with the spirit of the world.

Here our experience as priests teaches us something very beautiful, something very important: it is precisely this welcoming of the holy, faithful People of God; it is precisely that "cup of cold water" that the Lord speaks of today in the Gospel, given with affectionate faith, which helps you to be a good priest! There is a reciprocity in mission too: if you leave everything for Jesus, the people recognize the Lord in you; but at the same time it helps you to convert each day to him, so as to renew and purify yourself from compromises and to overcome temptations. The closer a priest is to the People of God, the closer

will he feel to Jesus, and the closer a priest is to Jesus, the closer will he feel to the People of God.

The Virgin Mary felt in the first person what it means to love Jesus by separating herself from him, giving new meaning to family ties, beginning with faith in him. With her maternal intercession, may she help us to be free and happy missionaries of the Gospel.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Pope Francis suggests that it is important that people be able to perceive that for the disciple Jesus is truly "the Lord"; He is truly the centre of his or her life, the everything of life. How do you react to this statement — is it true in your life?
- What holds you back from placing Jesus at the centre of 'everything' in your life?
- How do you experience Pope Francis' suggestion that: Perhaps the first question that we must ask a Christian is: "Do you meet with Jesus? Do you pray to Jesus?". The relationship. One could almost paraphrase the Book of Genesis: Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave to Jesus and the two shall become one

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.