

GOSPEL*John 1:29-34*

Seeing Jesus coming towards him, John said, 'Look, there is the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. This is the one I spoke of when I said: A man is coming after me who ranks before me because he existed before me. I did not know him myself, and yet it was to reveal him to Israel that I came baptising with water.' John also declared, 'I saw the Spirit coming down on him from heaven like a dove and resting on him. I did not know him myself, but he who sent me to baptise with water had said to me, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and rest is the one who is going to baptise with the Holy Spirit." Yes, I have seen and I am the witness that he is the Chosen One of God.'

REFLECTION OF POPE FRANCIS*15 January, 2023*

The Gospel of today's liturgy (cf. Jn 1:29-34) recounts John the Baptist's testimony on Jesus, after having baptised him in the river Jordan. He says: "This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me'" (v. 30).

This declaration, this witness, reveals John's spirit of service. He was sent to prepare the way for the Messiah, and had done so without sparing himself. Humanly speaking, one would think that he would be given a "prize", a prominent place in Jesus' public life. But no. Having accomplished his mission, John knows how to step aside, he withdraws from the scene to make way for Jesus. He has seen the Spirit descend upon him (cf. vv. 33-34), he has indicated him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and now he in turn humbly listens. He goes from prophet to disciple. He preached to the people, gathered disciples and trained them for a long time. Yet he does not bind anyone to himself. And this is difficult, but it is the sign of the true educator: not binding people to oneself. John does this: he sets his disciples in Jesus' footsteps. He is not interested in having a following for himself, in gaining prestige and success, but rather bears witness and then takes a step back, so that many would have the joy of meeting Jesus. We can say: he opens the door, then he leaves.

With this spirit of service, with his capacity to give way to Jesus, John the Baptist teaches us an important thing: freedom from attachments. Yes, because it is easy to become attached to roles and positions, to the need to be esteemed, recognised and rewarded. And this, although natural, is not a good thing, because service involves gratuitousness, taking care of others without benefit for oneself, without ulterior motives, without expecting something in return. It is good for us, too, to cultivate, like John, the virtue of setting ourselves aside at the right moment, bearing witness that the point of reference of life is Jesus. To step aside, to learn to take one's leave: I have completed this mission, I have had this meeting, I will step aside and leave room for the Lord. To learn to step aside, not to take something for ourselves in exchange.

Let us think of how important this is for a priest, who is called to preach and celebrate, not out of self-importance or interest, but to accompany others to Jesus. Let us think of how important this is for parents, who raise their children with many sacrifices, but then have to leave them free to take their own path in work, in marriage, in life. It is good and right that parents continue to assure their presence, saying to their children, "We will not leave you by yourselves", but with discretion, without intrusiveness. The freedom to grow. And the same applies to other spheres, such as friendships, life as a couple, community life. Freeing oneself from attachments to one's own ego and knowing how to step aside come at a cost, but are very important. This is the decisive step in order to grow in the spirit of service, without looking for something in return.

Brothers, sisters, let us try to ask ourselves: are we capable of making space for others? Of listening to them, of leaving them free, of not binding them to ourselves, demanding recognition? And also of letting them speak at times. Not saying, "But you know nothing!". Letting them speak, making space for others. Do we attract others to Jesus, or to ourselves? And furthermore, following John's example: do we know how to rejoice in the fact that people take their own path and follow their calling, even if this entails some detachment from us? Do we rejoice in their achievements, with sincerity and without envy? This is letting others grow.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: What stands out to you about John the Baptist's attitude of stepping aside once Jesus begins his ministry? Why do you think it can be so hard for people — especially leaders, parents, or mentors — to “let go” after investing so much in others?



Heart: How do you feel when someone else receives recognition or takes your place in something you've helped build?



Hands: What might “making space for the Lord” look like in your life this week — in your home, workplace, or ministry? How can we, as a community, practice service that points people to Jesus rather than to ourselves?

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 (for example, “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Offer 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 praying the 'Glory Be'.