

2nd August - Homily

The precious pearl

Mt 13:45-46

Proximity to the prevailing values in society

As religious, we all share values, ways of life, mentality, ways of feeling of the consumer society to which we belong, more than we imagine or are willing to accept. Among young people this awareness is clearer. This is how the Instruction *Starting Afresh* from Christ expresses itself: "Alongside the vital impulse, capable of witness and self-giving up to martyrdom, consecrated life also knows the pitfall of mediocrity in the spiritual life, of progressive bourgeoisification and consumerist mentality. The complex management of the works, although required by the new social needs and by the regulations of the States, together with the temptation of efficiency and activism, risks obscuring the evangelical originality and weakening the spiritual motivations. The prevalence of personal projects over community ones can profoundly affect the communion of fraternity".

There is a form of following Christ which is a reflection of the Western style of life. And I'm not referring to the search for comfort, but to a concept of consecrated life closely attached to the values of this consumer society: one's own fulfilment, being emotionally satisfied, immediate success, the realization of one's desires and projects.

There are many young religious who have this framework of values as a criterion of reference and vocational discernment. Indeed it often seems that they find themselves in the consecrated life because they think it is the best way to obtain them. For them there is no substantial change of life and an identification with the ultimate values, those concerning the Lord Jesus and his Gospel; such values simply do not exist as such, more than a way of life it becomes a reason to talk about it.

Hence the difficulty of accepting the cross; and this will eventually present itself in the life of the disciple. Hence the devaluation and almost visceral rejection of everything that could refer to renunciation and mortification. Then one looks for a gratifying pastoral care; study is seen not as a function of qualification for the mission but as a means of personal success; any activity, whether it has to do with the hidden and humble life or with routine and effort, is rejected.

Renunciation formation

This is why today we must speak of a reality which in our time, more than any other, means "rowing against the tide": formation in renunciation. Paradoxically said, we must foster the experience of renunciation. This is not a return to the past, in which that exercise paradoxically had a totally formal character: the important thing was to learn to give up, to "temper the will". Instead, it is essential to rediscover the human and Christian value of authentic renunciation, to live an enriching experience of it, which is assumed in a positive way and does not lead to frustration and neurosis.

In the small evangelical parable of the merchant in precious pearls (Mt 13,45-46) there are some excellent elements that allow us to trace the "phenomenology of renunciation":

- Precious pearls are renounced ("the merchant goes and sells what he has"), not because they are false: they are authentic and have so far constituted the merchant's treasure. It is enough to think about the three fundamental values of human life: freedom, the value which makes human all what we do, but which also includes the right to self-fulfilment, to self-determination; sexuality, which is not only the question of use of the sex as such, but also the way we interact with others and express our affection; the right to possess and dispose of it.

- Authentic pearls are given up, with pain and at the same time with joy, because 'the' definitive pearl has been found, the one that has captured the merchant's gaze and heart: and he understands that he cannot acquire it if he does not sell those. If our consecrated life, centered on following and imitating Jesus, is not fascinating, the requested renunciation becomes unjust and dehumanizing.

The joy of owning the 'precious pearl' does not completely eliminate the fear that it is not genuine: if it is false, my decision was wrong and I have ruined my life. This 'risk' in Christian life and, even more, in consecrated life, is a direct consequence of faith: only in faith does our life have meaning: if what we believe in is not true, "we are the most unhappy of all men", paraphrasing St. Paul (cf. 1Cor 15:19). The day in which, regarding every aspect of consecrated life, I can say, "my life is fully satisfactory, even if what I believe in is not true", we are transforming our charism into an NGO, with the aggravating circumstance that entails incomprehensible to its members.

The Treasure of the Heart

Speaking in evangelical terms, the following question could be asked: "Where is your heart?" Where is your real treasure? (cf. Lk 12:34). Because where our treasure is, there is our heart!

Jesus' teaching is illuminating and fundamental: the kingdom of God and all that it entails requires complete and unconditional dedication to his cause. This Kingdom, in fact, is not something, but Someone; it is having found the person of Jesus. For this reason, this choice must be made promptly and with joy by the one who has understood the value of the kingdom of God, by the one who has encountered Jesus. And the joy is so deep and heartfelt that it makes it possible to sell every other good, in order to reach the desired purpose, that is, to possess such a pearl, for which whatever other good else loses its value and no effort is excessive.

This makes our consecrated life very precious, because it speaks not so much of those precious human values we have renounced (our freedom, the vocation to marriage, the right to possess), but of the pearl of incalculable value we have encountered: Jesus and his obedient, poor and chaste style of life!