**NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR C)**

Saint Sixtus II, Pope, and Companions, Martyrs; Blessed Edmund Bojanowski, layman founder

Wis 18:6-9; Ps 33; Heb 11:1-2,8-19; Lk 12:32-48

*Blessed the people the Lord has chosen to be his own*

**COMMENTARY**

*For the disciple’s life wisdom in waiting for Christ*

The teaching of the today’s Gospel continues the instruction in recent Sundays, that is, the sapiential perspective of the Christian life such wisdom means knowing how to become “rich in what matters to God” rather than for oneself or before others. It is about constantly orienting oneself to God in life. Jesus now highlights some concrete fundamental attitudes for his disciples, who are called to become wiser and wiser in life in order to transmit divine wisdom to others.

*1. “Do not be afraid” and “sell”: the courage of the disciples of the kingdom*

In the first place, Jesus addresses his disciples directly to exhort them to radically abandon all possessions in view of a greater good: the kingdom of God: “Sell your belongings and give alms.” It is a question of insisting on the absolute priority of the kingdom and of its coming, which Jesus had taught his disciples to pray for in the *Our Father*. Immediately before this passage in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus recommended, “Seek his kingdom, and these other things [of daily life] will be given you besides.” (Lk 12:31).

The reason of this radical action (giving everything in alms) is exquisitely sapiential, as Jesus explains later in today's Gospel. It is a question of obtaining (thanks to almsgiving) “money bags that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can reach nor moth destroy,” along the lines of the instructions of the biblical-Jewish sages (cf., e.g., Tb 4:8-11). It is actually a “sacred trade”, to use the “profane” expression of the market! The thought follows the logic of the twin parables that Jesus told about the reality of the kingdom like a treasure buried and like pearl of great price (cf. Mt 13:44-45): whoever found it, “goes and sells all that he has and buys it. “ (Mt 13:46). Therefore, to the rich young man who asked how to inherit eternal life, Jesus recommended keeping the commandments of God and added a particular “thing”: “You are lacking in one thing. Go, *sell what you have, and give to [the] poor and you will have treasure in heaven*; then come, follow me” (Mk 10:21; Lk 18:22).

However, despite the logic of the argument, not everyone was capable of making such a radical change of mentality for the Kingdom: making oneself poor, making oneself little to enter the Kingdom. Therefore, for those who do (and will do) it, there is reserved a particular exhortation of Jesus. For the first generations of Christians, this represented a sweet and moving blessing (as well as for every new Christian community born in the mission territories at any time). “Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.” Yes, it needs an “inspired” and “enlightened” courage to abandon everything for the Kingdom of God; this involves a courageous step out of oneself and of every visible earthly material bond in order to abandon oneself totally to God with faith and filial trust, following the example of the illustrious fathers and mothers of the faith of the Chosen People (exalted in the second reading). Indeed, Jesus concludes with wise words, “where your treasure is, there also will your heart be,” which sound today as a warning to all his disciples. Ultimately, it is a wisdom coming from above that the world does not understand. Indeed, this radical abandonment of earthly goods for the kingdom by the disciples of Christ will be seen as foolishness on the part of the world, just like Christ with the mystery of his cross: foolishness for the world but it is the wisdom of God.

*2. “Gird your loins”: being prepared for a new Passover, the Lord's return*

Always from a wisdom perspective, the second attitude required of the disciples is that of being ready for the return of Christ, their teacher and Lord. This request seems almost “inappropriate” to make during the holidays and therefore a time for rest and relax for many. However, it is always the word of salvation which God gives to each of us, in order to remind us of the truth and wisdom of life: we must always be vigilant in every moment of life to be always ready for the encounter with the glorious Lord, because we do not know “nor neither the day nor the hour “(Mt 25:13). It is not a question of living constantly in anxiety, in fear of the unknown, but wisely according to the word of God that enlightens.

In this regard, the wise readiness recommended by Jesus is illustrated with the image of “loins girded” and “lamps lighted”, which refers to the experience of the night of the exodus from Egypt in the history of Israel, when the people were asked to eat the Passover “with your loins girt, sandals on your feet and your staff in hand”, ready for departure (Ex 12:11). This is the experience of the “night of liberation”, “awaiting the salvation of the righteous”, as we read in the subsequent reflection in the book of Wisdom (in the first reading). In this way, the wise expectation of Jesus’ disciples for his return will always have a joyful paschal character, in view of the definitive liberation from all evil, due to which they still succumb, and above all in view of the perfect and happy communion with their Master and Lord who will offer them everything. This is the point that Jesus wanted to underline with a hyperbolic, surreal image, that is to say, which never happens down here, but only up there: “he [the master] will gird himself, have them recline at table, and proceed to wait on them.” (Lk 12:37).

*3. “Who, then, is the faithful and prudent steward?” The special call to wisdom for “responsible” disciples*

Finally, provoked by Peter's question (“Lord, is this parable meant for us or for everyone?”), Jesus wanted to underline the special vocation to wisdom for the disciples who are “responsible” or “in charge” of the communities. Here, the evangelist Luke uses the title “Lord” for Jesus precisely to exalt his divine authority and to accentuate the importance of his teaching. However, it is curious that Jesus answered Peter's question not with a yes or no, but with a counter-question that makes the interlocutors reflect: “Who, then, is the faithful and prudent steward whom the master will put in charge of his servants to distribute the food allowance at the proper time?” This “question for question” manner brings us back into the atmosphere of the school with Jesus the teacher, with the usual style of biblical-Jewish sages.

Furthermore, the language of Jesus’ counter-question and of his subsequent teaching reveals itself to be exquisitely sapiential, and the whole (words and expressions) recalls the biblical reflection on the story of Joseph the Patriarch (cf. Ps 105; Gen 39-41): “He [God] had sent a man ahead of them, Joseph, sold as a *slave*. (…) He [the Pharaoh] made him lord over his household, ruler over all his possessions, / To instruct his princes as he desired, to teach his elders wisdom.” (Ps 105:17,21-22). From this biblical-literary context, it is clear that the steward of Jesus' parable must be not only faithful [trustworthy], but also wise [prudent], because it alludes to the figure of the patriarch whose task was not so much to manage material goods as transmitting wisdom to his subjects (cf. Ps 105,22). This ideal vision of a good steward-administrator is also reflected in the description of typical actions of the “efficient wife” in Pr 31:10-31: “She rises while it is still night, / and distributes food to her household, / a portion to her maidservants. (...) She opens her mouth in wisdom; / kindly instruction is on her tongue.” (vv.15, 26).

In this perspective, the action “to distribute (the) food allowance at the proper time” that Jesus recommends to the steward, mentioned in the parable, refers to a “complete” care not only for material but also spiritual food. Thus, the watchfulness of that servant, at the head of the others in the house of the Lord, takes concrete form in diligently procuring “food” for the servants, which means also and above all the teaching of wisdom. It is a question of the particular vocation for the disciples that the Lord has placed “in charge of his servants” in the communities. They are called to be wise in keeping watch, faithfully fulfilling the commitment entrusted to them by the Lord. On the other hand, they are required to always grow in divine wisdom in order to be able to provide others with all the teaching they have received from the divine Master, because, as Jesus himself pointed out, “Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.” This will be their special mission, mindful of what the risen Lord has recommended to all his disciples: “Go, therefore, and *make disciples of all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*.” (Mt 28:19-20).

Therefore we pray that the Lord will grant us constant growth in wisdom, so that we may be always courageous to abandon earthly things to embrace God’s kingdom, so that we may be always vigilant and ready for the joyful encounter with the Lord on his return, and so that we may, in the meantime, collaborate ever more faithfully with the Lord, each according to his/her own vocation, in giving everyone the necessary food that leads to eternal life. Amen.

*Useful points to consider:*

**John Paul II**, Address to the Bishops of Scandinavia on Their «*Ad Limina Apostolorum Visit*», Saturday, 19 April 1997

6. *I believe the catholic Church*. With regard to the number of members of your particular Churches, small in comparison to the overall population, you may sometimes feel tempted to ask yourselves the troubling question: “Are we an insignificant worm?” (cf. Is 41:14). Above all, are we “Catholics” in the full sense of the term? I can share these sentiments and thoughts, and, dear Brothers, I say to you what Jesus said to those of his young followers who were discouraged: “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Lk 12:32). With these words, he did not want them merely to wait for the world to come, but also to focus on the present: “Behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (Lk 17:21). God’s kingdom is already in your midst in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Even if your particular Churches are widely scattered and few in number, Jesus Christ is present in them through your service as Bishops. “Where Christ Jesus is, there is the Catholic Church” (Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Smyrn*., 8, 2). She possesses “in herself the totality and fullness of the means of salvation” (*Ad gentes*, n. 6): the correct and complete profession of faith, the full expression of sacramental life and ordained ministry in the apostolic succession. In this basic sense, the Church was already catholic on the day of Pentecost and will remain so until the day when Christ, as Head of the Body of the Church, will come to all fullness (cf. Eph 1:22-23).

**John Paul II**, Message for the **World Mission Sunday 1995**

2. *Courage, do not be afraid, proclaim that Jesus is the Lord: "And there is salvation in no one else!"* (Acts 4:12). […]

*Dear missionaries,* with deep affection and gratitude I address *you* first of all, and in particular, those who are suffering for the name of Jesus.

Tell everyone that "true liberation consists in opening oneself to the love of Christ. In him, and only in him, are we set free from all alienation and doubt, from slavery to the power of sin and death" (*Redemptoris missio,* n. 11). […]

Your special vocation *ad gentes* and *ad vitam* retains all its validity: it represents the paradigm of the whole Church's missionary commitment, which is always in need of a radical and total gift of self, of new and ardent impulses. You have dedicated your life to God in order to witness among the nations to the risen Lord: do not let yourselves be discouraged by doubt, difficulty, rejection, persecution; revive the grace of your special vocation and continue without faltering along the path you have taken with so much faith and generosity (cf. *Redemptoris missio,* n. 66).

3. I address this same exhortation to the *Churches of ancient and of recent foundation, to their Bishops* "consecrated not for one Diocese alone, but for the salvation of the whole world" (*Ad gentes* n. 38), often tried by a lack of vocations and means. In a singular way I address *those Christian communities in minority situations.*

Listening again to the words of the Master: "Fear not little flock, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Lk 12:32), let faith in the one Redeemer shine forth, give a reason for the hope that is in you and bear witness to the love with which, in Jesus Christ, you have been inwardly renewed. […]

4. The courageous proclamation of the Gospel is especially entrusted *to you, young people.* In Manila I reminded you that the Lord "will make many demands on you. He will require the fullest commitment of your whole being to the spreading of the Gospel and to the service of his People. But do not be afraid! His demands are also the measure of his love for each of you personally" (Homily during Mass with International Youth Forum 13 January 1995; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 18 January 1995, p. 3). Do not let yourselves be saddened or impoverished by turning in on yourselves; open your minds and hearts to the boundless horizons of missionary activity. Do not be afraid! If the Lord calls you to leave your own country and go to other peoples, other cultures, other ecclesial communities, respond generously to his invitation. I wish to repeat once again: "Come with me into the third millennium to save the world!" (cf. ibid).