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

Blessed Jacques Ghazir Haddad, Capuchin priest; Saint Anthelm of Belley, Carthusian monk and bishop

1Kgs 19:16b, 19-21; Ps 16; Gal 5:1, 13-18; Lk 9:51-62

*You are my inheritance, O Lord*

**COMMENTARY**

*Patience and Determination in Mission*

This Sunday’s Gospel places before us the image of Christ the Master who with concrete actions and precise words imparts to his followers two valuable lessons on the way of mission for the Kingdom of God. These are patience in the face of people’s misunderstanding and determination to carry out the divine plan entrusted to them. All this happens in a peculiar setting of the beginning of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem, where he will carry out his mission for the salvation of the world.

*1. Jesus’ resoluteness*

The first sentence we have heard in today’s Gospel actually opens the entire long section describing Jesus’ final journey from Galilee to Jerusalem to bear his passion and death. Therefore, it should be noted the very solemn tone that St. Luke the evangelist wanted to give to this initial sentence, which actually sounds like a proclamation with several expressions of great spiritual theological weight to analyze.

Firstly, the temporal context. It is about the journey taken by Jesus, “When the days for Jesus’ being taken up were fulfilled.” Thus, Jesus’ entry into the final phase of His life, all oriented toward the fulfillment of God’s will, is recalled. It should be remembered that the time of mankind’s salvation history has already been fulfilled with the coming of Christ, as He Himself declared at the beginning of His public activities. However, it is now reaching its maturation, his very last days, his very last hour, in which [Jesus] would be taken up, where the Gospel expression indicates both Jesus’ elevation on the cross (the passion) and his ascension into heaven (the resurrection) (cf. Lk 24:51; Acts 1:9).

In that circumstance of final fulfillment, St. Luke emphasizes that “he [Jesus] resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem,” precisely to face the end and thus the culmination of his entire mission. The expression “resolutely determined” is a translation of the original Greek expression “putting his face,” used in the Old Testament to denote the action of an envoy with a message of divine judgment (cf. Ez 21:2-3; Nm 22:4-25). Jesus also “puts His face on it” on His way to Jerusalem to bring a message of judgment that also turns out to be a message of salvation for the people. And this always with resoluteness and firmness.

Just along this final journey, Jesus reveals at one point his heart full of zeal for the fulfillment of his mission: “I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing! There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished! (Lk 12:49-50) (the baptism to which he alludes will be precisely the immersion in blood, in death on the cross).

And in fulfilling such a divine plan, Jesus will fear nothing and no one on the way. Emblematic in this regard is the episode in which Jesus was warned “Herod wants to kill you,” to which he replies: “Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and I perform healings today and tomorrow, and on the third day I accomplish my purpose. Yet *I must continue* *on my way today, tomorrow, and the following day*, for it is impossible that a prophet should die outside of Jerusalem’” (Lk 13:32-33).

Does such resoluteness of Jesus still say something to us, his missionary disciples today?

*2. A “Masterful” Lesson of “Missionary” Patience and Magnanimity*

It is curious and significant that just when Jesus full of fervor began the journey “and he sent messengers ahead of him” (to the villages along the way), as he usually did, “to prepare for his reception,” he met with rejection: “But they [the Samaritans] would not welcome him because *the destination of his journey was Jerusalem*.” Such action on the part of the inhabitants of a village of Samaritans is entirely understandable, for there was bad blood between them and the Jews because of the enmity created over the centuries. Surprising, however, is the overly fiery and violent reaction of James and John, who propose to the Master with all “calmness”: “Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?” Perhaps not coincidentally, these two sons of Zebedee were nicknamed by Jesus himself “sons of Boanerges,” that is to say “sons of thunder” (Mk 3:17). This is the exemplary case of the regular confusion, already found in the Old Testament (as with Elijah [cf. 2Kgs 1:9-16]), between human and divine zeal, between fervor according to human thought and fervor according to the mind of God. (So much so that in some ancient manuscripts of the gospel, the content of Jesus’ rebuke is added: “You do not know what kind of spirit you have, for the Son of Man came not to destroy humanity’s life but to save men and women!”)

Poor Jesus who had to follow these “desperate” cases of his disciples! Not only at that time, but also today! And the lesson He imparted to them on that occasion has remained valid through time: “Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they journeyed to another village.” A “masterful” lesson of “missionary” patience and magnanimity! As a true man of God, missionary and face of divine mercy, Jesus behaved with meekness, understanding, and with all respect for these inhabitants’ journey toward faith in Him. I would really like to see, indeed contemplate for a long time, the divine face of Jesus at that moment (and the face of the two disciples “sons of thunder” in which I find myself, sometimes impatient and even vengeful in the face of rejection by others in the mission!). O Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make our hearts like yours, all burning for the divine mission but always kind and full of understanding for those who reject us and are not ready or willing to accept the good news of God’s love in Christ.

*3. True Determination Unavoidable for Following Jesus in Mission*

After the contrast between Jesus’ meek zeal and the disciples’ all-too-human zeal, the explicit explanation follows on the true determination in mission for those who want to follow Jesus on the journey in this final time. In a triptych of conversations along the way, Jesus highlights three characteristics of true determination for the journey of divine mission.

Firstly, for those who offer to follow him wherever he goes, Jesus immediately specifies in a folksy sapiential style their precarious situation: “Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head.” It is the implicit invitation to take the journey with him who has nothing, no support or material security.

Secondly, it was Jesus Himself who called one of his potential followers who, surprised by that invitation, asked to “let me go first and bury my father.” In all likelihood, the man did not receive the news of his father’s disappearance at the same time as the call. The request made to Jesus rather implies some time to fully carry out the task of honoring the mother and father according to the commandment of the Decalogue, taking care of them until death and burial. And Jesus’ negative answer must have surprised all the listeners: “Let the dead bury their dead. But you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Metaphorically and with a play on words, the Master of Nazareth emphasizes the urgency of the journey of proclaiming the kingdom of God, which He does and now invites his potential followers to do, leaving “the [spiritual] dead [of the world]” to bury “their [physical] dead.”

This urgency is accentuated even more in the third and final teaching on determination to follow Jesus in mission. In the moment of call, there is not even space and time to return home for a moment of leave-taking, otherwise legitimate, with parents and relatives: “No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.” Still emerging is the prospect of the kingdom of God, which must now occupy the first place in the life of every called and consecrated person of God, as it did in the life of Jesus, for now as never before, “the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near!”

May the teaching and example of Jesus today particularly enlighten us and sustain us in our journey as missionary disciples! May his Spirit kindle and rekindle in us the desire and true and holy determination to also begin the journey with Jesus on the path of joyful proclamation of the kingdom of God despite rejection and misunderstanding! And may Mary, Mother of Christ and Mother of his disciples, intercede for us in the mission! Amen.

*Useful points to consider:*

Pope Francis, ***Angelus***, Saint Peter’s Square, Sunday, 30 June 2013

Jerusalem is the final destination where Jesus, at his last Passover, must die and rise again and thus bring his mission of salvation to fulfilment.

From that moment, after that “firm decision” Jesus aimed straight for his goal and in addition said clearly to the people he met and who asked to follow him what the conditions were: to have no permanent dwelling place; to know how to be detached from human affections and not to give in to nostalgia for the past.

Jesus, however, also told his disciples to precede him on the way to Jerusalem and to announce his arrival, but not to impose anything: if the disciples did not find a readiness to welcome him, they should go ahead, they should move on. Jesus never imposes, Jesus is humble, Jesus invites. If you want to, come. The humility of Jesus is like this: he is always inviting but never imposing.

[…]

The Son of God made man, and at a certain point he made the firm decision to go up to Jerusalem for the last time; it was a decision taken in his conscience, but not alone: together with the Father, in full union with him! He decided out of obedience to the Father and in profound and intimate listening to his will. For this reason, moreover, his decision was firm, because it was made together with the Father. In the Father Jesus found the strength and light for his journey.

Pope Francis, ***Angelus***, Saint Peter’s Square, Sunday, 30 June 2019

Evangelist presents us three characters — three cases of vocation, we could say — that shed light on what is required of those who wish to follow Jesus to the end, completely. […]

In order to follow Jesus, the Church is itinerant, acts promptly, quickly and decisively. The value of these conditions set by Jesus — *itinerancy, promptness and decision* — does not lie in a series of saying ‘no’ to the good and important things in life. Rather, the emphasis is placed on the main objective: to become a disciple of Christ! A free and conscious choice, made out of love, to reciprocate the invaluable grace of God, and not made as a way to promote oneself. This is sad! Woe to those who think about following Jesus for their own advantage, that is, to further their career, to feel important or to acquire a position of prestige. Jesus wants us to be passionate about him and about the Gospel. A heartfelt passion which translates into concrete gestures of proximity, of closeness to the brothers and sisters most in need of welcome and care. Precisely as he himself lived.