

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time - A

Isaiah 49:3, 5-6; 1 Corinthians 1:1-3; John. 1:29-34

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Brothers and sisters, this second Sunday of Ordinary Time is in connection with the Epiphany and the Feast of the Baptism of Jesus. The Gospel again speaks to us of the manifestation of Jesus. The Evangelist John, unlike the other three, does not describe the event, but proposes to us the *witness* of John the Baptist. He was the first witness of Christ. God had called him and prepared him for this. The Baptist cannot hold back the urgent desire to bear witness to Jesus and declares: “I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God” (v. 34).

John saw something shocking, that is, the beloved Son of God in solidarity with sinners; and the Holy Spirit made him understand this. In fact, while in all religions it is man who offers and sacrifices something to God, in the event of Jesus, it is God Who offers His Son for the salvation of humanity. John manifests his astonishment and his consent through a meaningful expression that we repeat each time in the Mass: “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (v. 29).

John the Baptist’s testimony on Jesus, after having baptized him in the river Jordan, says: “This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of 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, recognized and rewarded. And this, although natural, is not a good thing, because service involves, taking care of others without benefit for oneself, without ulterior motives, without expecting something in return.

It is good for us, also, **to cultivate**, like John, the virtue of setting ourselves **aside**, bearing witness that the point of reference of life **is Jesus**. To step aside, to learn to take one's leave: I have completed my mission. It is important for a priest, who is called to preach and celebrate, not out of self-importance or interest, but to accompany others to Jesus. This is also important 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 being intrusive. 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 pivotal step in order to grow in the spirit of service, without looking for something in return.

Brothers, sisters, 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. Attract others to Jesus, not 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.

Let us ask Mary, the servant of the Lord, to help us to be free from attachments, to make space for the Lord and to give space to others.