



MEETING OF RELIGIOUS BROTHERS

READINGS:

Acts 2, 42-47

Gospel of Matthew 23.8 -11

The word "Eucharist" takes on special resonance for those of us who are gathered here today. To the Thanksgiving to the Father for celebrating and participating in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus, we add another reason that awakens in you and in those of us who are present here a deep sense of gratitude. We would like to thank God for calling you to live the radical following of Jesus through the charism of brotherhood. We want to give thanks to God for you and for thousands of your brothers who bear witness in many parts of the world that God is Father and calls us to be and to live as brothers. Thanks to you, brotherhood becomes a gift to the world through the exercise of the charism of each of your Institutes.

After a month of living and reflecting together, you want to say thanks to the Lord and we are glad to join you in your Magnificat. We recognize with you this gift of God and pray for this to be a gift for the whole Church and for humanity.

The Word of God which has just been proclaimed will help us to live more deeply this time. The words of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel have to be understood in the context of the controversy that Jesus himself holds with some Pharisees and teachers of the law in the preceding chapters.

At the end of chapter 21 and the beginning 22, we find three parables that deal with the same theme: how we live our relationship with God and, from it, our relationship with our brothers.

Mt 21:28-32: Two brothers respond to the request of their father to go to work in the fields. There is the one who says YES, but does not go, and the one who says NO, but he goes. Jesus tells us that the answer to the Father's invitation goes beyond words and is verified in accomplishing his will in daily life.

Mt 21.33 to 44: The wicked tenants who refused to pay what they owed and even killed the messenger sent by the owner of the vineyard. The desire to possess and own that which is not ours, breeds violence and destroys the foundation upon which relationships should be built between people. The gospel tells us that the chief priests and the Pharisees perfectly understood that Jesus was speaking of them.

Mt 22:1-14: The wedding banquet to which the invited guests did not go and others who were not invited took their place. To take part in the banquet of the Kingdom means giving up other things and assuming that the most important thing is just to share the banquet with the Lord and the other guests.

The reaction of those who felt their attitudes and behaviours condemned by these parables was immediate. Matthew tells us that they agreed on finding grounds of accusation and laid plans to trap him in his words.

Mt 22.15 to 22: the payment of tribute to Caesar.

Mt 22.23 to 33: the resurrection of the dead

Mt 22:34-40: the question about the most important commandment of the law and the authority of the Messiah.

Jesus criticized harshly these attitudes and this way of relating, showing attachment to power and desire to dominate, and made a new proposal: **Brotherhood**. That's the sense of the text we have heard. See that, bearing in mind the context, the words of Jesus come to a yet larger significance.

The big challenge, the big question is "living like brothers." This is the path that leads us to a real experience of God. And at the same time this is also the result of a profound experience of God.

There is only one Father, we are his joyful children and therefore brothers. We cannot feel loved by God without feeling ourselves called to love our brothers. Understanding the Father's love opens a wide horizon of brotherhood in our lives. Being children of God, the only one whom we can call Father, and living as brothers, is the great vocation of every human being.

There is only one Master and Lord, Jesus Christ, and we are all his disciples: brothers in discipleship, following Jesus. In Jesus' community no one is allowed to take his place. Whoever considers himself capable of teaching must listen over and over to the teachings of the one and only Master and should realize that only through experiencing the gift of brotherhood can we understand his words and his project. In experiencing brotherly love the Word bears life for all of us.

There is only one Spirit who unites us all making us sharers in the divine life and fills our hearts with the love and passion of the Father, that same passion manifested in the life and work of Jesus. We are brothers and we share the same life and the same passion expressed in our commitment to share with everybody the gift that we have received.

The experience of God leads us to experience a deep brotherhood. And, at the same time, the experience of brotherhood leads us to share in the life of God. The mystery of love of the Trinity creates in us a profound dynamic of communion and mission.

The last remarks of Jesus, in Matthew's text, call to service and humility and cannot be taken as a strategy to "score points". It would be hypocritical, as Jesus criticized the Pharisees and teachers of the law with harsh words. Being brothers means rejoicing in the joy of the other members of the family and knowing that our lives take their sense from serving others.

Being brothers is an exciting and joyful mission. The testimony of brotherhood that religious are called to offer, is a clear sign of the new relations that arise between individuals and peoples when Jesus and his Kingdom occupy the centre of our hearts and projects.

Matthew had already hinted to us in chapter 18 about the features that should guide any relationship between members of the community of the Kingdom. When asked who is the greatest, he called a child and placed him in the centre of the community. Only the community that puts the little ones in the centre can understand the dynamics of the Kingdom and become a sign of its presence.

But, it should be clear that brotherhood, even being a joyful and rewarding experience, cannot be, in any way, either selfish or self-referential. Brotherly love, when born of a profound experience of God, is always centripetal. It is verified and manifested by a commitment to create brotherhood in the world. It refers to the mission entrusted by God to humanity to care for creation and build a history of fraternity and solidarity in the concrete history of people. Each one will bring the gift of the charism he has received, but the main orientation is based on the experience of the Father's love that makes us brothers.

The first reading, from the Acts of the Apostles tells us how to concretely embody these ideals in the life of the Christian community. To maintain alive fraternal communion these points should be taken into account:

- The common prayer that comes from listening to the Word of God that allows us to tune with the same Spirit that animated the life and action of Jesus;
- The memory of the Passover of the Lord that calls us to a fraternal agape and makes us partakers of this Mystery;
- The willingness to share the gifts that each possesses to enrich with them our community life.

This is a powerful call that attracts people eager to experience brotherhood. Such a testimony "makes miracles", as it is able to heal the many wounds inflicted by selfishness and the desire to dominate and possess, that destroy relationships between people, and to provoke a sincere desire to create solidarity and fraternity, which open new ground in the history of mankind.

Consecrated life is missionary, primarily, for its witness to life. Charism is a gift that grows as it is shared and that enables us to put ourselves at the service of the Church and humanity. We must be ever vigilant so that our lives, our works and our institutions are clear signs of the love of God who loves us all as brothers, especially close to those who find it more difficult to live the experience of fraternity because they are excluded by a social structure, often very far from the evangelical ideals. This should be the first step of the "new evangelization" and you have an important mission in this regard.

Let's offer the Lord a sincere desire to live as brothers and to be a leaven of brotherhood in each one of the places where we are sent.