

Gospel text

Matthew 11: 25-30

25 At that time Jesus spoke: "I give you thanks, Father, Lord of the universe, that the mystery of the kingdom, invisible to the religious elite, is accessible to simple people. 26 Yes, Father, all this corresponds to your benevolent attitude. 27 All that I know comes from my Father, and no one knows the son deeply except the Father, and no one knows the Father deeply except the son and the one to whom the son shares what he knows. 28 Come to me, all those who feel crushed by the various religious and social rules, for I will give you rest. 29 Accept my demands and put yourselves in my school, for I am meek and unpretentious, and your beings will find rest in me. 30 For my demands and my requests are pleasant and light."

Gospel commentary - Homily

How to "see" Jesus?

In the spring of 2023, 109 people, including several children, were discovered dead in a Kenyan forest. They are said to have died of hunger. The authorities accuse Pastor Paul Nthenghe Mackenzie and Pastor Ezekiel Otero of having pushed the followers of their International Good News Church to fast "to meet Jesus". All this is horrible, as well as being aberrant, of course. How can anyone imagine that an encounter with Jesus could be "forced"? Isn't this all related to that other illusion concerning what some Christians call the "beatific vision", where we imagine that when we die we will immediately see God as we would see the famous French king Louis XIV on his golden throne?

This is the question addressed in today's gospel, which begins with Jesus praying to his Father that his message about the coming of the kingdom of God in particular has been received by those considered insignificant. Indeed, the Greek term translated "little children" refers to infants from birth to two years of age. In the first century, these beings had no social value and were considered insignificant. It is of course an image that Matthew uses to designate the disciples who welcomed Jesus and his message. But why do we call them *thy way*, as opposed to the wise and intelligent, a likely reference to the scribes and Pharisees, those Bible scholars and law fanatics? What exactly is at stake here?

When one becomes a specialist in religious things, when one becomes a hero of religious practices, the temptation is great to feel that one owns God. And this feeling of "power" over God is catastrophic. Not only does it block any spiritual evolution, but it leads to a desire to control those who are seeking God. This was the tragedy of the scribes and the Pharisees, and it is the temptation of "church people" and all those who claim to be "gurus". This was the attitude of these two Kenyan pastors. On the other hand, the little child possesses nothing, he has only his body, he has everything to receive. This was the attitude of the disciples who welcomed Jesus. But let us note that it was first of all the attitude of Jesus himself, because, he says, "he received everything from his Father". When a being has the feeling of having everything to receive, he is able to receive.

The second part of the gospel on the demands of Jesus does not seem clearly linked to the first part. It is, however, the logical continuation of it: "Come to me all you who feel crushed by religious obligations". By religious obligations, one can think in Judaism not only of the Torah, but of the 613 commandments that were linked to it; one can think of the Sharia in Islam; in the Catholic Church, one can think of all the required, recommended and forbidden practices. What is the purpose of these rules? Is it not to get closer to God, to do his will, to enter in some way into his intimacy? But what does Jesus say? Rather, choose my yoke, i.e. my requirements". To describe these demands, Matthew gives us two Greek terms, the first one means what is advantageous, which our bibles translate as easy, and which I prefer to translate as beneficial or pleasant, and the second one means: light, i.e. containing few demands, which can in fact be summarized as unconditional love. These demands are linked to the very person of Jesus who describes himself as "meek and humble of heart", i.e. someone without pretension, who accepts the bumps of life without retaliating aggressively and without resorting to power, but only to love, ready to give his life.

But the most important thing is that these light requirements are linked to the words of Jesus: "No one knows the Father in depth except the son, and to whom the son would like to reveal him". In a word, one can only know the Father and the Son by living these "light" requirements of unconditional love. It is a knowledge by connaturality, i.e. we know the other only by walking in his shoes. We know Jesus only by learning to love as he loved, and through this we come to know the Father. Life teaches us that we can only know a father or a mother by becoming a parent ourselves. It is the same with this mystery called God.

We can now measure the illusion of wanting to "see" Jesus. The vision does not deliver any knowledge. And even if science were to progress so far that it could give us a physical portrait of Jesus, we would learn nothing. What is essential is invisible to the eye. We can only enter the mystery by living it, and this mystery is not on the side of omnipotence, because it is accessible to those who do not know what power is.

-André Gilbert, Gatineau, May 2023