

Matthew 16: 21-27

21 From that time on Jesus began to tell his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem where he would suffer greatly from the elders, high priests and Bible scholars, would be killed, but would be raised on the 3rd day. 22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, "But God is with you, master! This will certainly not happen to you!" 23 Jesus turned around and said to Peter, "Go away, Satan! You create obstacles for me, because your way of seeing things does not correspond to that of God, but that of men". 24 Then, addressing his disciples, he said: "If anyone wants to become my disciple, let him forget himself, take up his own cross and walk with me. 25 For if a person seeks to keep his existence as it is today, he will end up losing it. On the other hand, a person who, inspired by me, agreed to let go of the existence that was his, will find it. 26 For what is the use of winning the whole universe if it is at the cost of one's own life; or again, what can one give in exchange to recover the existence that was his. 27 Also, the new Adam must come with all the quality of the extraordinary being of his Father, accompanied by the messengers of God, and at that time he will give to each according to his deeds.

Gospel commentary - Homily

Controlling everything, and so losing everything

I don't know anyone who would make this Sunday's Gospel his favorite quote, a quote he would repeat regularly, as if to taste the strength of its wisdom: "to suffer", "to be killed", "to take up his cross", "lose his life", "receive according to his deeds". All the ingredients are there to revive a Christianity that we were happy to leave behind in the 1960s. Unless you are a masochist, you cannot desire such a path again.

And yet, wouldn't this passage contain the secret for an extraordinary destiny, for a real life in all that it can give? Our images of self-flagellation, of diminished life and bread of misery are they not totally false? Wouldn't slogans like "we must make sacrifices" completely miss what Jesus said? First of all, what does "deny yourself", "take up the cross", "lose your life" mean?

It seems to me that the most fruitful way to understand the challenges of Jesus is that of our need to control, control our life, control our environment. You know that, with the sexual impulses, this is one of the great needs that inhabit us. It is even at the source of the progress of our world: succeeding in controlling the hostile forces, succeeding in controlling our sources of supplies, succeeding in controlling what will be tomorrow. A company that does not control its inputs and outputs wouldn't stand the test of time. Yet is there not here a pitfall for our humanity?

Everyone could do the exercise of naming what they control or what they would like to control. Who would not want to exercise absolute control over his work, over his employment. Aren't unions born out of this need? But what happens when this need for control, either on the employer side or on the union side, becomes an absolute in itself? There is no more evolution, no more novelty, no more listening to original ideas, no more adaptation to new market conditions, no more questioning of current practices, even no more calling for new people's skills. Control that had become the main and absolute goal will not only kill the company, but also kill all the staff.

As parents we would like to control the destiny of our children, and this for their good. As we see big, as we want a fabulous destiny for them, as we would especially not want them to know the difficulties that we went through, we try to show them the way to follow, to protect them from all evils. The problem is when this desire, healthy in itself, freezes in exercise of control. I remember the tragic fate of Quebec filmmaker Claude Jutra. The day after he obtained his medical degree, he said to his father who was a doctor: "Here is my medical degree, take it, that's what you wanted, you got it. Now, goodbye!" He then turned to his career as a filmmaker, before falling victim to Alzheimer's. The father had control over his son, he lost everything.

When I lose control of a reality, I feel like I'm dying. In the political world, there are image makers who exercise absolute control over what is said and written about a character. Losing this control implies the death of the character.

By definition, the controller wants to keep what exists, and thereby want to prevent new realities from occurring. There is a dialectic between the control of things and the truth of things. Let's go back to Jesus. The mention of the tragic fate that awaits him is only a way of saying, "I want to remain faithful to my truth and to the reality of things, even if it means that I lose control over the fate of my life". Because he didn't try to control everything on his way, he let life happen. Planning your life is one thing, controlling it is another. There is like a seed of death in control.

The challenge of my life is to accept to let myself be "burned" by the words of my children, my colleagues, my spouse, the media, anything that may contain a vein of truth, and that implies accepting not to control them, this implies "forgetting oneself", "surrendering one's life". This is my current meditation, this is what our society and the whole Church should meditate on. It is the condition to let happen an overabundant life that one does not suspect.