

Homily

Mons. Mario MAULION - Argentine Catholic Action

Luján, Sunday September 14th 1997

We celebrate the Triumph of the Cross.

The Cross identifies Christ. And the Christian faithful as well. When we make the Sign of the Cross we want to show it as our identifying mark. We contemplate the Cross to see who Jesus is and how our personal identity as Christians is.

It is both His and our identity document, since it summarizes His History and that of every Christian. For Him it was not only what happened at the end of His human journey, unconnected from His former life, but where He culminates and from where He projects Himself triumphantly forever, for all those who go through life FOLLOWING HIM, "taking on the Cross".

The way of the Cross is inevitably painful. But the Cross does not end into destruction, but rather in God's new prodigy, which changes death into the New Life, the New Man, the New Creation. This Newness in History is presented to us by the Liturgy of the Word. It presents us first a situation of the Jewish people, and then Jesus.

1. The present time is somber, dry, tiring. The glorious and desired destiny ("The Promised Land") is an uncertain future. The people are living for a "today" in which everything is desolate. All the complaining about the prodigious food that was formerly received with joy and gratitude now turns it into something nauseating; the complaining changes into murmuring. The people neither appreciate nor accept the promise made by God, neither His recent prodigies nor the food that accompanied them all along. The "present" is seen only as tedious and tiring, and the effort along the way turns into something that destroys the incipient unity of that people marching on to freedom. And the future vanishes from their consciences. They do not believe in God, and reproach Him for their situation, rebelling against Him. Then the serpents appear and start a dramatic process of destruction, which begins to devastate the community. Only then the people become aware of their sin and its consequences. They return to God, who once again faithful to His promise gives them a new proof of His redeeming will. A bronze serpent is proposed as a sign of salvation; to look at it is enough to overcome death.

The sacred text emphasizes that salvation is a personal matter; each one of those who were bitten is saved when he looks at the bronze serpent.

2. Jesus takes this fact as a reference point to explain Nicodemus the task entrusted to him by the Father. He remarks that He will be "raised" like the snake. He does not talk now about looking at Him, but instead about believing in Him. And the result will be the salvation. The whole history of Jesus is the expression of the Father's love. He completely delivers the Son because He loves the world. The Father "gives His Son up". The Son deprives himself of His divine condition and takes that of a slave on "becoming one among many". The whole process of salvation is achieved through the gift of God who empties Himself because He intends to save the man. Through this completely lowering of Himself, the Son reaches death "like every human being". These words, brief and cold though exact, do not reflect the intensity of what was Jesus' life. He experienced in His life the whole range of human feelings. Only those who in silence let themselves be guided by the Spirit are able to catch a glimpse of the dramatic experience of His heart. "To believe in Him" is to begin to have His feelings, and to awake to measure, little by little, the depth of the Love of the Father and the Son.

3. The Son lowers himself up to the darkness of the human condition, death; but that is only a part of His journey. In this way the "exaltation", the "elevation" is coming true; the "elevation" towards the Absolute Power - which surpasses any other power - that really saves man, each and every believer.

Thus it is again emphasized, in a quite new dimension, the personal nature of salvation. The faith of everyman in Jesus, as an answer to God's initiative ("He loved me and gave Himself for me") is what allows to close the journey of salvation. It is true that salvation has a communitarian dimension. Nevertheless, it is primarily and necessarily personal: it is the

Person of Jesus who hugs that of the believer. And so, Jesus "believed" by the believer, rescues him from any other created power, since Jesus was constituted as the only " Lord to the glory of God the Father."

4. Throughout Jesus' history, "lowering-elevation", His Mother is present. She, in the faith, reproduces along her Son the same journey and, because she is a slave, God - with Jesus - raises her to make her "Lady", our Lady. Since then, the christian way has a strong marian touch. The exalted Cross is imbued with Mary's love, strength and motherly faithfulness. God wants salvation to have also the feminine touch that is transmitted through Mary.

5.1. Our culture, which makes people go with the flow in many aspects, deteriorates in practice the value of the real person, the individual, who turns more and more insignificant. When the person is no longer up to the globalizing rythm, she is really left out and even destroyed. Christ's way is just the opposite, and the Christian's way must be so as well. His main criterion, as Cardinal Martini points it out, is the "One's pastoral action". "One" missed sheep, "one" coin. He dialogues with "one man": Nicodemus. With "one woman": the Samaritan. On the cross, He pays attention and saves the first who is "one": the Good Thief. The Christian is always individualized: from the Baptism: I baptize you") up to his definitive salvation ("enter in your Lord's joy").

In every pastoral and evangelizing action it is essential to pay attention to the concrete and individual person. Jesus makes every man be saved from being caught into the flow that leaves him out and destroys him. Then, which is our pastoral proposal in front of the subjugating globalization?

5.2. But the man is not just an individual. He is communitarian by his own nature. Jesus makes us part of His body. Every Sacrament - Jesus' unseen and undeniable active presence - is communitarian: it is given in the Church and is an entrance to her. The unity - ecclesial communion- is Jesus's intention when he talks with the Father ("let them be one like us"), and is His order to the Apostles and to all of us ("love each other as I loved you"). Which is then our proposal in front of the painful and scandalizing sight of Christians' lack of unity? This lack of unity has macrodimensions: the Christian Churches. But it has also domestic dimensions: in the family, in the community, in the parish, in the diocese, in the inner part of the relationships between people. Only through the Cross we find the way to communion - Jesus prays and gathers everything - when we take it as a content of prayer and as an inevitable task.

5.3. The Church is not for itself. Christ came just to give His life for the world. God loves the world, not because of its goodness, but because it may become good, it may be saved. The believer is called to look at the world with God's eyes. God always looks at it as His work that He wants to save, in spite of all its negative things. This is why He lowers Himself and gives Himself "for the life of the world". And the believer, with a clear look that prevents him from camouflaging with the world, is called to give himself "taking on the Cross", in order to save it, to give it the real sense that it is waiting for, since it withdrew from God and chose to leave Him out.

How to achieve this clearness and how to give ourselves effectively?

6. These and other connected questions must worry our conscience. The answers - both personal and communitarian - shall be achieved, little by little, as we let the Spirit lead us "to the full knowledge of the Truth" and when Jesus' Word and Sacrament will "burn our hearts" , as He did with the disciples of Emmaus.

Let the Holy Virgin, whorshipped here by the argentinians, as Mother of the people, accompany us as a model of the Disciple and as the one who intercedes before her Son.

She accompanies us, with Jesus, in taking on the cross, which always raises us from darkness to Light, from death to Life, from sin to Grace.

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Christ, the one Saviour yesterday, today and for ever
IN DIALOGUE WITH GOD, IN THE CHURCH, WITH THE WORLD AND THE CULTURES