

The preeminence of Christ

The knowledge and personal adhesion to Jesus Christ...

In my opinion there is a text in the Gospel that well expresses the situation of many of today's young people; that's the text of the "young rich man" (Mt 19,16-22). It shows a young man in search, who asks himself about the meaning of life, who longs for the fullness of life and whose faith brings him to feel the insufficiency of the present time: "What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" (Mt 19, 16).

He needs a "teacher", someone to guide him and give him signs along the way, and in Jesus he looks just for this. "Good teacher" (Mt 19,16). And Jesus in turn asks him a question, he answers with a "Why...?" (Mt 19,17) in order to let the young man go into the innerness himself, let him take consciousness of his own research and words. It's a request to go deeper. And Jesus sends him back to the Torah, to the revelation of his divine will, recalling in particular, among the "ten words" (because such they are, more than "commandments") those that deal with the relationship with the next, with the others, letting them culminate in the command of love: "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Mt 19,19) because the entire Scripture tends to love, to raise people who can love (see Rom 13,8-10).

And at this point I must warn young people of a temptation which nowadays even priests and men of the Church make themselves a party: the one that in the name of love's supremacy, interpreted in the more performative sense as a do-good-for-others, plays down the Scripture and therefore the foundations of the Gospel, the supremacy of faith, the knowledge and the personal adhesion to Jesus Christ before the urgency of acting and operating; thus considering Christianity in a philanthropic way that finds in Jesus a teacher of moral values. Moreover, it's often answered back, isn't it the Gospel itself that states that the final judgement will tend to the performative love, to have given or not a glass of water to a thirsty man? It refers to Matthew, in his text about the Last Judgement (Mt 25,31-46). And we think we've closed the match, forgetting that the text itself disavows each presumption of whom feels certain of having done good: "Lord when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you a drink?" (Mt 25,44). Whereas those who had never claimed to serve Christ are commended!

There's more. In this way we escape the edification of our own being, as capable of love, deceiving ourselves that "love" is a natural ability we can activate at our will. But if love is commanded ("Love!") it requires asceticism, apprenticeship; if it's addressed to others and the Lord ("Love your neighbour... Love the Lord, your God!") it requires the others and the Lord outbreak and attention; if it's a way of loving our neighbours like ourselves ("Love your neighbour as yourself") it requires consciousness of ourselves; if it's love as Christ loved us ("... that you love one another just like I have loved you" John 13,34) it requires consciousness and personal adhesion to Jesus, the Lord. It's not a matter of becoming philanthropists or social operators, but men and women capable of loving, who tend to make their relationships a masterpiece of love, certain that the meaning and the taste of life is only found in love. But love must be learnt, refined, increased, purified, regulated. Even the sentimental and affective relations - and I'm considering here the second aspect of the topic of love - , that are so important for the young man who is living the discovery of the other, the body, the sexuality, can't respond only to spontaneity and impulsiveness.

The great poet R. M. Rilke wrote in a letter to a young man: *"There is nothing harder than loving each other. It's a work, a daily work and young people are not trained at all for this difficulty of love; conventions tried to make this extreme and complex relation an easy and light one, as if it was within everyone's reach. It's not like this. Love is a difficult thing, more difficult than others: actually in the other conflicts the nature itself incites the being to concentrate with all its forces, while the glorification of love incites to completely indulge. Human relations, essential elements of life, are the reality more changeable among all; and lovers are just those beings whose relations don't know two identical moments. Similar relations can begin only between beings extremely rich, already regulated, concentrated: they can only reunite two singular, and in the meanwhile huge and deep worlds. Young people can't make sure of such relations; but if they understand well their life they can slowly rise toward happiness and get ready for love. If they love, they can't forget that they are debutants, apprentices in love; they must learn the love and, as in every study, this requires calm, patience and concentration. Who loves must try to behave as if he was in front of a great task; remaining often alone, going down himself, concentrating, holding himself in the palm of his hand; he must work; he must become something"* (Letter to Friedrich, April 29th, 1904).

Thus, coming back to our Gospel, Jesus, after indicating a way of human growth in light of the divine revelation, a regulation of relations that meet the needs of the alliance with the only God, reveals the supremacy of Christ upon the young man's entire life. It is this young man who professes to have always observed the commandments, to have met the needs of the alliance and yet continuing searching, waiting, to whom Jesus turns his gaze of love (Mk 10,21 Jesus looking at him loved him); a gaze of election, that reveals a lack, a deep poverty that still remains in him: "One thing you lack. Go, sell whatever you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven; and come, follow me, taking up the cross"(Mk 10,21).

Finally, beyond the obedience to the commandments and the creation of a system for human relations there is the absoluteness of Christ. Certainly, it's important to know ourselves, but it's not the aim. The aim is reaching the maturity that allows us to deny ourselves, with total freedom and love, in order to follow Christ and nothing else, without predetermining the way and the services.

The Christianity that the young man meets today is more structured as a way of good deeds, with a strong accent on voluntary service, solidarity, social and charitable engagements, dedication to the last, the new poor... and so he runs the risk of introducing himself like a pre-packed product who predetermines ways and contents, leaving no space for the exigent freedom of the Lord that can call a young man to follow him without knowing where he will lead him and what he will have to do. Instead, it's only in this last way that Christianity is saved in its poetic dimension, of creativity and gratuitousness and it reveals itself to the young man as an adventure of life entirely, not a limited experience, as an engagement for a brief period (i.e., 2 years of voluntary service...).

May the young man find the courage to resist the temptations of certainty, not only those that derives from possessing and that leave sadness ("He went away sad for he was one who had great possessions", Mt 19,22), but also those of doing certain things that leave you incomplete, lacking and unsatisfied ("All these things I have observed from my youth. What do I still lack?" Mt 19,20). May find the courage to be loved and meet love with love, with a love that is not content with temporary gifts, but that involves the entire existence in a radical way.