

2019.12.22 Homily for Advent4-A7

In the past few weeks I discerned that God our Father deeply desires that all of us listen to Him and hear what He says. Then last week I was hearing God telling us that we should listen to and hear His teaching. Then I realised through the readings of last week that He wants to teach us His ways, and when I read today's readings I realised that to learn His ways we have to obey Him in faith.

I learned about the obedience of faith last year when someone accused me of being divisive, because I restarted the Polish Masses in Torry. I tried to explain to this person that there is a large population of Polish people in Torry, and therefore as the local parish priest I have a pastoral responsibility for them, and also there was always a Polish Mass in Torry until the Polish priest was sent to another Diocese. If I can celebrate Mass and look after their pastoral needs why I, the local priest, should not look after them! But he just didn't want to listen, which bothered me for a while. Then I remembered that it is more important what God the Father thinks about our actions than whether people like it or not, and therefore we should obey Him in faith. The most important thing is that I feel at peace inside and I have received a lot more support from the Polish community than what I have ever given them. God is immensely good and blesses us when we obey Him in faith.

St. Paul in his letter to the Christians in Rome writes that he was sent to preach the obedience of faith (Rom 1:5). To obey in faith means to obey God even when you know you will not be popular or you have to face difficulties. Obedience in faith is a decision based on love and trust in God and on the willingness to do His will and not other peoples' will. In today's readings we hear about two people: Ahaz, in the first reading, who did not obey the word of God through Isaiah, and Joseph in the Gospel reading who obeyed God's word through the angel in his dream.

Ahaz was asked by God to request a sign that God is with him, because Israel was in danger of being attacked by foreign nations, but Ahaz didn't want to hear about God's offer of help. The Lord promised to protect His people, but for that Ahaz had to show first that he trusted the God of Israel. He didn't believe that God could do anything in this situation, so that's why He didn't want a sign from God. He wanted to rely merely on His own army and resources. He also worried very much about his own reputation: what if he relies on God and loses the war!

On the other hand Joseph was a wonderful example of obedience of faith. Initially he was also worried about his reputation, but when the angel spoke to Him in his dream He believed God's message and obeyed. Joseph immediately took Mary home as His wife and didn't bother anymore about his own reputation. My experience and Joseph's example reminded me of what Jesus said: you cannot serve two masters, the world and God (cf. Mt 6:24).

Now, how is this all relevant to you? Perhaps sometimes you are worried about what people think about you in daily life, at your workplace or at school, if you follow God's will and try to live according to your faith. Notice what the Lord tells us through the Psalm: 'do not desire worthless things; ie. do not desire popularity. 'Only the person with a clean hands and pure heart, who does not desire worthless things will climb the mountain of the Lord.' What is the mountain of the Lord? It is the way to Heaven. Only you can climb that mountain, you can't do it for others who do not want to. The climbing of the mountain is our journey in faith to the Lord, and a symbol of our spiritual ascent. That climbing is not easy, because it sometimes requires ignoring the expectations of people who want to drag you down the hill spiritually, and sometimes the only thing left to motivate you to keep going is your faith, but if you persevere in faith you will progress higher, closer to the Lord, you will see and hear God better and you will see yourself , your true self more truly. In him we find ourselves. So do not sell your soul in exchange for popularity, but save it through obedience in faith.