

September 6, 2024 - Friday of the <sup>22<sup>nd</sup></sup> week, even numbered

[1 Cor 4, 1-5; Luke 5, 33-39](#)

### Homily

The Gospels of recent weeks have described the beginnings of Jesus' missionary activity. The young rabbi and his disciples were already beginning to amaze everyone. Of course, people have begun to realise that Jesus has come to bring something new. His miracles, his teaching, the power he claimed to have to forgive sins - all this was causing a stir throughout Galilee. Everyone wanted to see and hear him.

At the same time, the behaviour of Jesus and his disciples was intriguing. It was not the behaviour we would expect from men of God, from 'perfect' men. Not only did Jesus choose a publican as one of his disciples, but he even had a meal with him. In fact, he had no problem consorting with sinners. His disciples ate without the ritual washing of hands, and they did not observe fasts like the disciples of John the Baptist. It is always disturbing to see people who present themselves as witnesses of God behaving differently from what is expected of such witnesses.

So it was pointed out to Jesus: 'The disciples of John the Baptist often fast and pray, as do those of the Pharisees. *But yours eat and drink!* -- To understand Jesus' answer, we need to remember that fasting in the Old Testament was linked to the expectation of the Messiah. It expressed dissatisfaction with the present time and impatience for the coming of the Saviour. The meaning of Jesus' response is therefore very clear: **the Messiah has come**. This type of fast no longer makes sense. It's the time for festive clothes, the time for new wine.

The temptation of the disciple is to want to accept the challenge of the new while keeping the security of the past. Such an attitude, says Jesus, is like trying to sew a new piece on an old garment, or putting new wine in old wineskins. It exposes us to contradictions and inner tears. Jesus invites his disciples to take a stand and to avoid such compromises.

Paul had to face up to this problem, as he explains in his letter to the Corinthians, which we had as our first reading. He experienced a moment of choice in his life which was a moment of rupture with his past. This choice and this break were necessary in order to definitively avoid the interior tears that would be created by a compromise between the demands of the ancient Law and Christ's Law of

Love.

Several Old Testament prophets experienced similar dramas and heartbreaks after their call as prophets. Their drama is a little like ours. We want to be faithful to God, but we don't want to get rid of all our idols. We want to practise justice, but we want to succeed in business. We want to be good monks, but it's hard to give up the joy of the distractions available to us.

When, instead of choosing, we allow ourselves to be torn inwardly like the fabric on which a new piece of cloth has been sewn, we are forgetting part of this morning's Gospel -- the part where Jesus says: 'The Bridegroom will be taken away from them, so they will fast'. We live in this period of history. Fasting - or other forms of renunciation - now has the meaning of showing fidelity and constancy in love, even though we are no longer filled with the presence of the Bridegroom. *Fasting is not nostalgia for the absence of a presence. It is the joyful celebration of the presence of an absence* - an absence that is only temporary, while awaiting the eternal presence.

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