

17 August 2026, Monday of the 20th week

Ezechiel 24l 15-24; Matt 19, 16-22

Homily

In the Prologue to his Rule, St Benedict, in a symbolic scene, describes God passing by in the public square and asking: *'Who is the one who desires life?'* The monk for whom Benedict wrote his Rule is obviously the one who answers: *'It's me! And at the end of the Rule, at the conclusion of chapter 72, which is the last written by Benedict (chapter 73 having been written earlier as the conclusion of the Rule in its first form), he recommends that we 'prefer nothing at all to Christ; may he lead us all together to eternal life'.*

There is something similar in the Gospel we have just read. The man who spoke to Jesus asked him a truly important question that is in the heart of every human being: *'How can I possess eternal life?'*

Jesus reminds him of the central core of the Law. Let's note in passing that He leaves out the first precepts of the Decalogue that relate to God and quotes only those that relate to our neighbour, thus making it very clear that the eternal life that interests Him is not an afterlife that we could win by the merits of our actions, but rather the *'reign of God'* begun here below in justice and charity. The man seemed a little stung by Jesus' answer and, like a good Pharisee, added: *'I have done all this since I was young'.* -- I have kept the whole Law. I have a good conscience. And he also adds what is probably a rather rhetorical question: *'What else is there for me to do? This legalistic attitude is castigated by Jesus, who adds: 'You lack only one thing: go, sell everything you have, give it to the poor... then come and follow me'.*

Eternal life is a gift from God. However, to receive this gift, we must create a void within ourselves that yearns to be filled. The Jewish historian Josephus tells how the Roman general Pompey, after capturing Jerusalem in 63 BC, wandered into the Temple's Holy of Holies with his aides and found nothing, absolutely nothing. This was the Jewish way of imagining the ineffable nature of Yahweh. In the same way, mystics have always considered this emptiness, this *'nada'* (nothing), as a necessary condition for being transformed into God, for being saved.

Jesus repeated this message on other occasions, using many figures of speech: *'Amen, Amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much*

fruit'.

When Jesus, on his way to Jerusalem, says to the aspiring disciple: *'Come and follow me'*, he is inviting him to share in this paschal mystery. But this presupposes the renunciation of all attachments and desires. He had told the other disciples earlier: no gold, silver or copper in your belts, no bag for the day, no change of tunic, no sandals, no staff.

This account tells the story of Jesus calling a man. He always calls everyone by their own name. Each of us has to discover exactly what our personal call is. But because we are all called to salvation, we are also all called to achieve some form of genuine detachment of heart.

We must first remember that, at this very moment in the Gospel, Jesus is encountering more and more unbelief and opposition from the Jews, and that he is on his way to Jerusalem where he will be put to death, as he has already announced on more than one occasion. We need to remember this to understand what his invitation means: *'Come and follow me'*.

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