

The problem of distractions – Mt 22, 1-14

I was recently talking to a student who was at a Christian camp in Europe and he told me that this camp changed his life, combining challenging sports and games with bible reflections, testimonies and worship. I could tell in his words and in his eyes that was telling the truth, that he is passionate for Christ. And one of the keys to that change was that they had none of the habitual distractions: no tv, no cell phones, no ipod, no internet, no bars, just them, Christ, and the wilderness. And in that experience he realized how big and obstacle all these things are in your way to Christ. He said: I don't want Jesus to be just one aspect of my life, I want Him to be the center. It was wonderful to listen to him, with such a deep faith.

This relates to our parable today, let's analyze it for a moment. The parable is always a comparison of something supernatural and mysterious for us with something that is more familiar: a wedding banquet in this case. Many students and former students are getting married these days, and, of course, it is an honor to be invited. Not to be invited, or to reject an invitation, can mean an offense. In this case, the great banquet symbolizes Christ's redemption. It is a "great" banquet because "in him generous redemption is to be found" (Ps 129:7). The Lord calls each person to enter this banquet, that is, to receive His salvation, the infinite merits of Christ. So that each one of us can say after St. Paul: "He loved me and gave himself up for me" (Gal 2:20).

Yet, it is surprising to hear the replies to the invitations. Everyone who has been invited declines. And some of the reasons for not going seem reasonable: they have to go to the farm, and to the business... The version of the same parable that St. Luke tells is even more detailed in this aspect. Those invited decline in a very polite way: "Please, accept my apologies. I have bought a piece of land and must go and see it." "I have just married and so am unable to go."

We may understand the rage of the king with those who killed his messengers. Those could almost be considered people starting a revolt against the king. But why the anger against those who were occupied in other things? To understand this, we must keep in mind that the banquet is the eternal salvation of each person. It is that which, if we lose or postpone, means to lose the whole point of life.

This parable invites us to think along these lines: the excuses offered by those invited are genuine excuses (in other words, they are not telling lies); the things that take up their time are good things. And yet it is true that they are neglecting the most important thing in order to do less important things; it is still true they have compromised and have rashly put at risk their eternal salvation, which is represented in the parable as the great banquet. And that is precisely what the parable is trying to denounce—the danger that lies in all good things when we get so caught up in them that we go farther and farther away from God; the danger that good things, when not used in the right way, at the right time, and to the right degree, will lead us to give up our duties of piety and our apostolic

commitments, thus endangering our friendship and union with God and, as time goes by, maybe losing completely any sense of God.

Think of the passion with which many times we get involved in a career or a business, in politics, in social events, the arts or simply in entertainment. Or think of the time and passion that we may be dedicating to sports, or to tv, to facebook, to gardening, to decorating our house, to getting music or downloads for my mp3 player or ipod. We all know that there is nothing wrong in these things. Many of them can be very good. The problem is when we get engaged in them in such a way that we do not know how to make them useful to our salvation. We fall victims of good things.

It is what happened to this young man in the camp. He realized he had been neglecting prayer, sacraments, the Scriptures, his relationship with God. But he also was surprised to realize that in the camp he had a lot of fun, he made friends, he played sports... That God was not against the many good things he had, only against his idolizing them, his using them to an extent that they would become a little god for him.

We all may feel attacked by this simple temptation: to relegate to the very last place the duties of our Christian life, and to attend to them when we have “time” and when we “feel like it.” It may happen that the great warnings of the Gospel (“Only one thing is necessary . . .”; “What does it profit a man . . .?”; “Be watchful . . .”; etc.) carry little or no weight when we have to make decisions or in the way we approach our problems.

1.- What are the ‘good things’ that may be a danger for me, a danger because of the excessive expectations and energy I place on them? We don’t need to give them up, but to refocus, to give them their proper place. Perhaps by putting them aside for a day or two, so we learn how to manage them: ok, no tv this weekend. Mon-Tue are no internet days so I can connect more with my family... or I can pray more, or read, or visit with friends. When one attains this balance, one realizes that Christ doesn’t take away anything good, but brings all good things of life to its plenitude.

2.- Examination of conscience... As Christians, we should reflect carefully, every night, on things pertaining our last end that we may have omitted or neglected during the day—not to get depressed about it but to help recover lost ground. Think of the great promise, the amazing banquet! “What a good business life is: by sacrificing petty things, momentary impulses, I can gain everything, heaven, glory, God, more than I could even take in!”

May we make the resolution of this young faith-filled man our own: I don’t want Jesus to be just one aspect of my life, I want Him to be the center.