

**OCTOBER 11, 2019**

Friday of the 27th Week of Ordinary Time

Optional Memorial of St. John XXIII

Jl 1:13-15; 2:1-2

Ps 9:2-3,6,16,8-9

Lk 11:15-26

Today's Gospel sheds light on the theme of our relationship with God and introduces a double conviction: first, that neutrality is impossible, and second, that there are no definitive states in the life of a disciple, except fidelity to God.

One's relationship with God is manifested in the rejection of and victory over evil. The Gospel links the previous theme of prayer (see Lk 11:1-13) with the activity of Jesus as exorcist. In the previous passage, he taught us to pray for the coming of the kingdom of God; now Jesus says that kingdom is already coming and that a key sign of this is the casting out of demons. The most interesting thing is that following the previous verses' emphasis on Jesus' relationship with the Father, now his adversaries misrepresent what he said earlier and accuse Jesus of acting in collusion with Beelzebul (see Lk 11:15). However, the Gospel continues to affirm that Jesus, because of his profound communion with God, is able to curtail and eradicate the evil that exists in people and among them.

Neutrality is not possible. Faced with the hope of a real diminishment and vanquishing of evil, no one can be neutral, because, as Jesus says, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters" (Lk 11:23). In our commitment to make the kingdom of God present, therefore, we must make the decision to be on the side of Jesus, to gather with him; because not to do good in the way of Jesus means that one is already allowing, in a certain sense, evil. There are no definitive states in the fight against evil except in the paschal victory of Jesus over death. For disciples, the fundamental condition for being able to join in the building of the kingdom is the conviction that in the pilgrimage of earthly life there are no definitive states. To explain this concept, Luke introduces the story we find in verses 24 through 26. Here it

becomes clear, for example, that the transformation of reality takes place not simply by doing something good, but by doing good consistently; conforming oneself is a way to allow evil to grow. Indeed, when the unclean spirit returns, that person becomes worse than before, because he believed he was freed forever.

The missionary disciple must, like Jesus, be involved in the struggle against evil. This should be one of our main concerns, because it genuinely demonstrates our filial relationship with God and our communion with Jesus. Curiously, however, being witnesses demands that disciples confront their own humanity. On the one hand, they must be aware of being able, by virtue of grace and effort, to participate in the Lord's mission (see Lk 9:1-6; 10:1-16). But along with these great possibilities, disciples must also be aware of their limitations: they are represented in the person of Peter, as sinners (see Lk 5:8), or even as people who are vulnerable to the blasphemous criticism of the religious leaders. It is being with Jesus, belonging to him, that determines and supports our struggle against every form of evil.

We can say, then, that Luke is not afraid of reality. In his depiction of the disciples, he emphasizes their virtue and commitment, but also their weaknesses and failures. The evangelist, but above all the Lord Jesus, know that our greatness lies in our recognition of this limitation, because every disciple must understand that he will always be growing; he will never achieve, at least in the present life, definitive victories. The missionary disciple will always live in the gerund: converting, engaging, learning. It is precisely when we try to live in the participle – converted, committed, educated – that we begin to be full of ourselves, eager to save ourselves.