

OCTOBER 21, 2019 Monday of the 29th Week of Ordinary Time Weekday

Rom 4:20-25

Lk 1:69-75

Lk 12:13-21

The common thread in the Scripture readings for today is the great theme of life. To Abraham – at the sunset of his earthly journey, according to the story of Genesis, without hope of seeing the promise of a descendant realized – God confirms that biological barriers will not get in the way of his divine plan. Abraham and Sarah, a couple of “biological retirees” afflicted by the torment of infertility, receive Isaac, whose name literally means laughter, the joy of life. Believers who persevere in faith “against all hope” are assured of the same gift of life and joy granted to Abraham.

The apostle Paul, intending to support the doctrine of justification by faith with biblical arguments, points to the story of God’s covenant with Abraham, in which God takes the initiative and commits himself faithfully. God promises him descendants as numerous as stars of the sky, and Abraham, despite his wife being sterile, believes in the word of the Lord. And this, Paul comments, was credited to him as righteousness. The circumcision, the covenant, the Law – all this comes later, observes Paul. Ultimately, faith in God and in his word has primacy and obtains for us, freely, the promised gift, through pure and free divine goodness.

Abraham’s experience is important, since it clearly shows the gratuitousness of the spontaneous initiative of God in manifesting his mercy, without any credit previously earned by those who receive divine grace. In fact, Abraham’s story simply begins with the words: “The Lord said to Abram: Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you” (Gen 12:1-2). It mentions no good action by Abraham to suggest that he earned anything. The people of Israel did not lack the warnings of the prophets to learn to accept with faith the universal generosity of God, not as a due reward, but as the free gift of his goodness. We all must recognize that the good that happens in our life is totally and purely a gift from God; it must encourage us to reciprocate with the same generosity and love, making our actions like God’s. As for the evils, the story of Abraham shows us they have other causes: human error, lies, greed, war, or

natural calamities. God, however, always intervenes to transform these evils into their opposite and to do good for his beloved creatures.

The same theme of life is central in the Gospel reading. The context is a conflict between brothers for the division of an inheritance – a situation as old as humanity, which is confirmed in Genesis's account of the first murder, a fratricide provoked by the fact that for Cain, it is not enough to be the firstborn and to have inherited the father's trade; he is jealous of God's care for Abel. The family dynamics of conflict that develop between brothers are masterfully illustrated, in their crudeness, in the parable of the merciful father in Lk 15:11-32. In both of these stories, the woodworm that eats away at fraternal relations is greed, the desire to have everything for oneself. Here Jesus offers a bit of fundamental advice, useful guidance for anyone's life: "Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions" (Lk 12:15). Visceral attachment to money is the root of all evil (see 1 Tm 6:10). The foolishness rebuked by Jesus in today's Gospel consists precisely in this: to forget that life, in all its dimensions, is a gift. It is a grace to be shared, not squeezed for all the advantage it can yield. The fruits of the earth are a blessing from God (see Dt 28:1-14), but they can be transformed into the opposite, when one decides to seize them and control them.

The compulsive accumulation of wealth blinds a person, which is why Jesus refers to the man in his parable as a "fool." It makes us forget that just over the horizon, death is looming. Yet the Scriptures warn us:

Every man is but a breath.

Man goes about as a mere phantom;

they hurry about, although in vain;

he heaps up stores without knowing for whom. (Ps 39:6-7)

The rich man is a fool because he goes about life forgetting completely that it is a gift that can be lost at any time (see Wis 15:8). One cannot go through life fearing death, but it is equally true that those who decide to lock themselves in the cage of their own selfishness are walking dead.

"What must I do?" is a recurring question in Luke's writings (see Lk 3:10,12,14; 16:3-4; Acts 2:37; 16:30). The choice between life and death is the crossroads that each person faces. For Israel, and before Israel even for Adam, the gift of life (of the highest value) is strictly bound to obedience to God. When humanity

chooses to enjoy material things, to the exclusion of God, we condemn ourselves to flight, to exile, and finally to misery and death. "You have so many good things stored up for many years, rest, eat, drink, be merry!" (Lk 12:19). In themselves, material goods, starting from creation itself, are an abundant table prepared by God for the benefit of people. The problem arises when the people, who should be wise administrators of these gifts, make presume the right to be exclusive and excluding masters of these gifts. We live in an age that is crippled by anxiety. The problem is that anxiety over what will happen does not prevent tomorrow's pain, but only robs us of today's happiness. The concerns of this world are listed in detail in the Sermon on the Mount (see Mt 5-7). "I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat [or drink], or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?... But seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil" (Mt 6:25,33-34). Only faith as eternal life provides the proper measure to everything, to our time, to our relationships.