

26th Sunday of Ordinary Time (B)  
(Numbers 11:25-29 / Mark 9:38-43. 45. 47-48)  
26.09.2021

May all of them might become prophets

Dear brothers and sisters,

The spiritual life – I mean life in the Spirit or human life inspired by the Holy Spirit- is not something static; it is not a repetition of the same thing over and over again; on the contrary spiritual life is something alive which develops and evolves... The spiritual life is not a kind of religious conservatism or fundamentalism; our spiritual life has nothing to do with the atmosphere of a museum; our spiritual life is about life. What Saint John Henri Newman wrote about the development of Christian doctrine can be applied to the spiritual life: “To live is to change; and to be perfect is to have changed often”.

We have a good example of what the spiritual life is all about in today’s first reading from the Book of Numbers. We heard that the Spirit which had hitherto fallen only upon Moses was one day divided among seventy elders so that Moses could share the burden of his prophetic ministry with them. Then, we were told the mysterious episode with Eldad and Medad who had not gone around the Tent with the seventy others to receive a share of Moses’ Spirit but who nevertheless received the Spirit. This episode provoked some jealousy among the people. Moses, instead of entering into this debate, expressed the wish that the whole people share in the gift of the Spirit so that all of them might become prophets. In this example, we can see the development of the life of the Holy Spirit in God’s people and the often unexpected changes the Spirit brings.

The good news, dear brothers and sisters, is that the wish of Moses has become reality with the coming of Jesus into the world. All those who were baptised in Christ have received the Holy Spirit and by the same token are prophets! We have received the Holy Spirit on the day of our baptism and there is a prophetic dimension to each one of our lives!

One of the consequences of the gift of the Holy Spirit to all – laity and ordained ministers – is that God’s will is not only revealed to and transmitted by the hierarchy of the Church but also revealed to all those who were baptised into Christ and who, ever since their baptism, are inhabited by the Holy Spirit. This is the theological justification of the traditional “synodal way”, the synodal process which Pope Francis is trying to revive in the Church of our day.

The whole Church is a people of priests, kings and prophets called “to walk together”. This is the meaning of the word “Synod”, from the Greek sun-odos, together on the way!  
All the baptised have received the Holy Spirit which inspires them and guides them. Some of them, the bishops, have received a special ministry of discernment and unity in the midst of the People of God.

Being inhabited by the Holy Spirit, each one of us has special duties to fulfil.

Our first duty is to listen to one another in order to learn from one another God's will for the Church and for the world today. Pope Francis recently reminded us that "a synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening is more than simply hearing". Listening is about learning from what we listen to. It is about consenting to be changed by what we listen to. We have not only to listen to God's word in the Sacred Scriptures, to meditate upon it, and keep their message in our hearts without forgetting to put it into practice, but we have also to listen to our Christian brothers and sisters, and even all men and women of our time: They all have something to say to us which comes from God. Listening, which is more than hearing, is to learn, and in this context to learn from God through one another.

Journeying together, laity and ordained ministers, implies a second duty, the duty to desire and even to will to be converted by our listening to the word of God and to God's Holy Spirit who is present in each of our lives. The call to conversion is at the heart of the proclamation made by Jesus: "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 4, 17).

True listening requires from us that we will to be converted, that we want to change, and that we are open to dialogue with all. To really listen is to engage ourselves to grow in the way of freedom.

The goal of listening and conversion is communion. This is the third duty which we have to fulfil. Communion is the ultimate criterion for discernment by which the synodal way is verified. The success of the synodal process does not reside in the fact that my way will become the way for all to follow, but in the communion of the people of God as together they follow the way discerned by the bishop, even when this way is not the one they themselves would have chosen. The synodal way consists in walking and doing God's will together, preferring God's will to our own will and respecting points of view different to our own. To do this requires of us both humility and courage. This can be costly at certain hours. This is the price to pay for unity!

May the Lord give us all listening and humble hearts!