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ST. BENEDICT

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, March 21st, 2025)

Quid ergo erit nobis?
What therefore shall we have?
(Mt 19:27)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,

THE QUESTION PETER asks Jesus invites us during this Jubilee year to walk on a path of hope. This path began with a call, the Lord's call. To the call succeeds a twofold answer: to forsake everything, and to follow Jesus. Last comes Peter's question: "What then shall we have?"

Let us examine each of these steps.

The call. Doubtless Peter remembers his first encounter with the Lord. Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee. Simon and Andrew are casting their nets into the sea. "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men."^a

a. Mk 1:17.

Not much farther, the same calling is addressed to James and John. Then comes the turn of Levi and the others.

The apostles' answer is swift. Immediately Peter and Andrew leave their nets and follow the Lord. James and John leave their father and his hired men. Levi, the tax-collector, does the same. It seems so simple to forsake everything and follow Christ. And the apostles do this in such a radical way. It is thus understandable that a few months later, once the first days' enthusiasm has vanished,

when a rich young man comes and asks the Lord what he should do to obtain eternal life, and finally throws in the sponge, Peter daringly asks, “What then shall we have?” For they indeed did forsake everything!

The answer can be summed up in a single word: communion. Communion with Christ during the life on earth, and communion during eternity. Such is the reward. Such is the treasure the Lord has prepared for us.

Christ’s closeness with His disciples after the Resurrection is a clear confirmation:

Going therefore, teach ye all nations: baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.^b

b. *Mt* 28:19-20.

St. Mark confirms: “But they going forth preached everywhere: the Lord working withal, and confirming the Word with signs that followed.”^c In the last chapter of the Gospel of St. John, Jesus renews His call to follow Him in a very special context. Jesus has indeed just asked three times Simon: “Simon, son of John, dost thou love me?”^d

c. *Mk* 16:20.

d. *Jn* 21:16.

This question might surprise us. The apostles have been following the Lord for three years, and suddenly the Lord’s question seems to bring them back, so to speak, to square one!

“Amen, amen, I say to thee, When thou wast younger, thou didst gird thyself and didst walk where thou wouldst. But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee and lead thee whither thou wouldst not.” And this He said, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when He had said this, He saith to him: “Follow me.”^e

e. *vv.* 18-19.

And a few verses later, Jesus will repeat this request: “Follow thou me.”^f

f. *v.* 22.

Wouldn’t then there be several ways of following Jesus? One might follow Him materially, as the disciples did

during the public life, as these crowds who saw in Him a great thaumaturge, and were hoping to see a miracle, a mere glance from the Lord, or even benefit from one of those miracles. Weren't they all pilgrims of hope, following Jesus?

However, the Lord does seem to invite His disciples to purify the reasons of their hope. We can, and we should, persevere following the Lord even though He should be leading us towards where we would not go.

The fact that the apostles, who had followed the Lord during His public life, have for most of them forsaken Him during the redoubtable hours of the Passion, is for them a humiliation, and for us a warning.

As the Lord is preparing to leave His own, the apostles should from now on learn to follow the Lord merely because He is the Lord. The cross may be heavy to bear, harsh to embrace. Yet, is it permissible to refuse it, whereas the Lord Himself is offering it?

Such is the step St. Peter should now take, a step that will enable him to love his Lord in truth, to follow Him, and to become the shepherd of His sheep, to be truly “a fisherman of men.”

This purification of hope is essential as the Church, and the world, our communities, our families, all of which are made up of men, are crossing, or are likely to cross, periods of deep crisis. If we hope only when we see or live what we like, day after day, year after year, disillusionment, then despair, will engulf us.

On the opposite, if our hope is in the communion with the Lord, then, everywhere He is, there will our hope be. Isn't that what St. Benedict is expecting from his monks, when he asks the elder to verify whether the novice “truly seeks God.”^g Would we dare doubt it? He who truly seeks God, finds Him. Then will life find its true worth.

g. Rule, ch. 58.

Next March 25th, on the feast of the Annunciation, it will be the thirtieth anniversary of the publication by Pope St. John Paul II of the encyclical *Evangelium vitæ*. Have we paid sufficient attention to the first words of this encyclical, *Evangelium vitæ*, “the Gospel of life”, or also “*the good news*

of life”? Whereas for many the conception of a child, the prolongation of a life deemed to be useless, seem to be bad news, the Church strongly reaffirms that each life is a good news, a path of hope, in the expectation of the face to face of eternity. Human dignity is based on the fact that man has been created in the image of God, and is called to take part in His life by becoming an ever more faithful image of Christ.

As a conclusion let us quote from this encyclical:

Mary is a living word of comfort for the Church in her struggle against death. Showing us her Son, she assures us that in Him the forces of death have already been defeated: “Death with life contended: combat strangely ended! Life’s own Champion, slain, yet lives to reign.”^h

h. Evangelium vitae,
n. 105.

Amen.

