

BENET 2023 – Rio de Janeiro

Homily for 13 October – Father Julian at Mosteiro Sao Bento

Last week I was travelling with two colleagues and our students to Tuscany in Italy. We enjoyed it very much to spend an evening in a pizzeria nearby and to be served by friendly waitresses and waiters. In our days here in Rio we will also be served in a restaurant and we will be very happy about it. Who would even have the idea of changing roles with the waiters and prefer to serve instead of sitting comfortably at the tables?

We fully understand the image of the gospel we have just heard, because we can often experience the same situation: not only in a restaurant, but also when we are invited by friends or even in our monasteries where monks and nuns have to wait on our sisters and brothers as part of our monastic routines. We would probably all agree and confirm that we prefer sitting at the tables and being served instead of fulfilling the duty of serving.

But looking at today's periscope we realise that the topic is different. Jesus criticises the competition among his disciples. It is obvious that he does not criticise being served every now and then and even enjoying it. He draws our attention to an inner attitude: Whenever I put myself above others and make them serve me, because I think I am superior, this attitude becomes very dangerous. This is the beginning of arrogance, vanity, narcissism, selfishness, recklessness or oppression. It is an attitude that depreciates, excludes and suppresses, an attitude that destroys a community, abuses a position of power and pushes through one's own interests, often using violence. It is an attitude that leads to conflicts or even wars, which we unfortunately have to experience in the middle of Europe right now.

Jesus does not only criticise such an attitude, he very clearly rejects it. "I am among you as a person who serves."

Following his example we should try everything to let our attitude be based on humility, compassion, empathy, readiness to help, generosity and modesty. Not only Jesus points out that this is the only human and worth copying. Our Father Benedict also describes such an attitude in his rule which makes living together in a community possible.

In the prologue to his rule we hear the question of a prophet: Lord, who is allowed to live in your tent, who is allowed to stay on your holy mountain? Jesus's answer is: who leads an immaculate life and does what is right, who says the truth from the bottom of his heart and who does not slander anybody; a person who does not harm his friend or defame his neighbour. And the following lines say: These human beings fear the Lord and do not become arrogant, because they stick to what is good; instead they know the good happens through God and not because of their own abilities. They praise the Lord who acts in them and they join the prophet's words: Do not honour us, o Lord, but your name."

Even Paul the Apostle has not claimed his own merit for his preaching, saying: Through God's grace I am what I am."

Saint Benedict shares the attitude that Jesus demands from us in today's gospel. We have to acknowledge that our skills do not work because of our own abilities. However, God is the one who acts in us, who motivates us, gives us the power to fulfil the tasks we are given. Through God's grace I am what I am.

Such an insight draws a very clear frontier line against any kind of arrogance or pretension.

We should give our students this inner attitude of serving each other and humility, the courage to serve for their lives, especially in a world which functions very differently and suggests too often that it is important to assert oneself or use one's elbows in order to make progress in their lives.

Jesus Christ has gone this way very consistently until the humility of the cross. He has shown us the highest form of serving in his crucifixion. Shouldn't we accept all the numerous tiny crosses and find the courage to serve again and again in order to show our Christian-Benedictine conviction to the world of today?

Dear sisters and brothers, the world needs our witness! And the world needs young people who put the wish of our Lord Jesus, his vision of a community into reality in our world!

As teachers we have the pleasure and the privilege to accompany them and to be role models for them.

Amen.