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OCTOBER 14, 2019

Monday of the 28th Week of Ordinary Time

*Optional Memorial of St. Callistus I*

Rom 1:1-7

Ps 98:1-4

Lk 11:29-32

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The Liturgy of the Word today focuses on the power of the proclamation of the Gospel. The proclaimed word of God is pregnant with salvation; we must be willing to welcome it and to listen to it. Listening is the Gospel, which recalls the invitational Psalm: “Oh, that today you would hear his voice: / Do not harden your hearts” (Ps 95:8).

In the first reading, Paul presents himself and his apostolate to the believers of Rome, a community he didn't establish, but which he deeply cherishes and wishes to ask for help in carrying out his project of evangelizing Spain. To make himself better known there and establish a good spiritual understanding with this community that he has not yet met in person, the Apostle stops to talk about his ministry and his call. His service to Christ and his apostolate with the Gentiles are rooted in the extraordinary mystery of the election in virtue of which Christ Jesus designated him to proclaim the Gospel of God. Paul's service is based on the word of Christ, nourished by the word of Christ, and communicates the word of Christ. His life is Christocentric. The opening lines of the letter depict the dynamism of God's salvation, which turns from particularism to universality: in Christ salvation no longer has privileged recipients, but is addressed to everyone, even to those who are far away.

The Gospel reading speaks to us of strangers and their relationship with God. The Master is surrounded by the crowds who crowd in upon him, and

he denounces a deforming attitude that degrades the experience of faith: the spasmodic search for signs. The generation Jesus addresses is “evil” (Lk 11:29) because it continually asks for external demonstrations, as if to shut God and his saving will within the narrow parameters of an automatic, magical, cause-and-effect relationship that is regulated and controlled by human power.

Jesus does not want to give a sign, except that of Jonah. The book of Jonah is found in the Old Testament between the prophetic and the sapiential books. It is the account of a prophet who is sent to preach outside Israel, in Nineveh, capital of the Assyrians, who were bitter enemies of the covenant: truly foreigners in every sense and those are “far off” *par excellence*. This unexpected mission teaches Jonah about God’s ardent desire to call those who are distant, to announce his forgiveness to the unbelievers, to save them through penance and conversion. Rebellious and reluctant before the divine Word, Jonah becomes a sign of saving action for the Ninevites.

The Son of Man, too, becomes a sign for his generation, the only credible sign. Already in the synagogue of Nazareth (see Lk 4:25-27), Jesus had recalled that God sent his prophets Elijah and Elisha to bring healing not only to non-Jews, but even to pagans. Now he shows that his coming is intended to bring salvation not only to Israel, but to everyone. Through his Son made flesh, God opens up the exclusive election of Israel to all the world. With the eloquent sign of his own humanity, Jesus, in whom God became one with every person, calls us to a true conversion of mentality, a new heart willing to hear and accept the divine logic that wants all people to be saved. Jesus shows to his generation, to his own people, that the Queen of Sheba, though pagan, recognized in the wisdom of King Solomon the traces of the love of the Lord, and that the Ninevites, those strangers and hardened sinners, faced with an oracle of misfortune pronounced by the prophet Jonah, seized the invitation to conversion.

The people of God, on the other hand, resists the coming of its Lord, and this will be judged by those who are far off, by that “non-People” rep-

resented by the Queen of the South and the Ninevites. One sees here the tragedy of Israel's failure to listen, its refusal to recognize the presence of God, the favorable time of salvation, the visit of the Lord (see Lk 19:44, Rom 9-11). The special election of Israel and God's promises to his people do not create exclusive superiority and privileges. The logic of divine election consists in the historical concreteness of salvation and in its vicarious representativeness of all those who, in their own humanity, share the same origin and the same creational destiny.

Jonah, whose experience of burial in the belly of the whale is a clear reference to the Passover of Jesus, represents the effective opening of the mission to salvation for all, which is found in the Church, in its universality, and in its sacramentality. Thanks to the death and resurrection of Jesus, the chosen people and the pagans become one redeemed people (see Eph 2:11-19) which in baptism is united with the Passover of the Lord (see Rom 6). Their presence in the world participating in the mission of Jesus is a visible and effective sign of salvation taking place today in the hearts of people, without discrimination or refusal on the part of God. His Church, the universal sacrament of salvation, in a permanent state of mission, is sent to everyone, calling together everyone to Christ. In persecution it relives the redemptive passion of its Lord; in being received it experiences the effectiveness of his Easter; and in the baptismal growth of its children it sees the generous fruitfulness of the mercy and forgiveness of its Lord, Master, and Spouse, Jesus Christ.