

To approach the Word with a docile and prayerful heart

Homily, 17 October 2019 – Piotr Szyszeń SDS

[translation]

Thursday of the Twenty-eighth Week in Ordinary Time (I)
[Rom 3, 21-30a; Ps 129, 1-2.3-4.5; Lk 11, 47-54]

At the end of our retreat, when we are about to cross the threshold of everyday life, Jesus leaves us with a warning: „Woe to you, (...), that you have remained with the key of knowledge; you did not enter and those who entered you blocked their way!” (Lk 11, 52). I hold at this „key of knowledge”, „key of science” or „key of knowledge”. And this last and the most literal translation „the key of knowledge” moves me a lot, because it contains the noun „gnosis” („knowledge”) derived from the verb „ginoskein” („to know”) so close to each Salvatorian.

Let us get some help using a comment from St. Augustine¹. In explaining this passage, the Bishop of Hippo first quotes Jesus' words to the Pharisees: „you do not know my Father nor me; neither do you have the word of God that remains among you” (Jn 8:19; also Jn 5:38). Then he adds: „This, in fact, does not contradict what he said: ‘You keep the key to science; and you have not entered and you have closed the way to those who were entering’ (Lk 11, 52)”. And at the end St. Augustine offers this comment: „Indeed, they did not have the word of God in themselves, but they did have it in the books they read. Because, if they had had it in themselves, they would also enter and allow others to enter”. St. Augustine offers us this intuition because allowing God's Word to enter and dwell in us is the condition to enter and dwell in the kingdom of God.

What, then, is the drama of those who „have stayed” with the key to knowledge? The drama is that they grabbed this key and did not use it either in their favour nor in favour of others. They have grabbed and kept the key, but the doors of Holy Scripture and above all the doors of their hearts remained closed. That is why the Word of God that „dwells” in the Holy Scriptures could not get out of the books and enter, and „dwell” in their hearts. And St. Augustine gives a diagnosis: they have the Word of God in the books they read, yes; but they don't have it in themselves. This symptom of illness the Bishop of Hippo calls it „superficiality.” We see it in their way of life. They do not enter the path of conversion, which is essential, but they deal with more or less external things, for example how to build monuments to the prophets. Not entering means remaining on the surface of Holy Scripture and life. „Not to enter is not to understand” - Saint Augustine said. In an opposite way, entering means „not to be content with the superficiality of the letter, but to get inside of your intelligence”. What happens in the life of a superficial person in the reading of the Bible? He reads and not understanding quickly forgets the Word. He, on the one hand, does not see the connection between his life and the biblical stories; on the other hand, he does not allow the Word of God to enter into his heart, Who is the only one capable of showing and establishing this connection between our life and this Word.

Pope Francis can help us here. In his Apostolic Exhortation „Evangelii gaudium” he reminds us that it is not enough to know the linguistic or exegetical aspect of the Word of God, although it is necessary. Each preacher „needs to approach the Word with a docile and prayerful heart, so that it can penetrate deeply into his thoughts and feelings” and engender within him a new mentality (see also: John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation „Pastores dabo vobis”, 26). If we approach the Word of God with a docile heart, it will be able not only to enter our life, but to penetrate the depths of our heart and our life. And this allows us to know the Word of God in the biblical sense, that is, to experience its healing and saving action. This attitude of openness allows us and helps us to bring the Word to our people. Pope Francis reminds us that the biblical readings „will resonate in all their brilliance in the hearts of the faithful if they have first done so in the heart of their pastor” (EG 149), but we first have to accept being hurt by that Word that will hurt the others (cf. EG 150). If we allow the Word to enter our hearts, it will enter in one way or another into the hearts of our brothers or sisters in faith. If we accept to be wounded by the sword, which is the Word of God (Heb 4:12), it will also touch in a diagnostic and therapeutic way others. „If we have a lively desire to be the first to hear the word which we must preach, this will surely be communicated to God's faithful people” (EG 149).

¹ http://www.augustinus.it/spagnolo/contro_avversario/contro_avversario_2_libro.htm

Let us ask today for ourselves and for our people the grace to approach the Word every day with a docile heart, in an attitude of openness. Let us ask Mary, the Mother of the Saviour, the grace to keep and meditate in our hearts all the words of God and his mysterious actions in our lives (Lk 2, 19), sometimes difficult to understand.

