

Christ is the preference

We heard the Gospel Acclamation: *Open our heart, O Lord, to accept the words of your Son!* We have listened to the gospel and now we must accept the words of Jesus – but it is not easy to let these words come into our hearts and minds. It is a temptation to shrug our shoulders and let the words go in at one ear, out at the other.

We may neglect them, because it is written *Jesus instructed the Twelve*. So, only the apostles had to listen, not we. Really? But Jesus continued: *Anyone who welcomes..., anyone who gives a cup of water...* He speaks about every member of his Church; he turns to all of us – here in St. Eugenia's and to all who follow the celebration of the eucharist in television or computer. We all must listen to the Lord.

Perhaps we will neglect the words of Jesus, because they seem too radical. Take it easy, we may say. But you cannot sit lazy in a chair and wait until the doors of God's glory open for you. To follow in the footsteps of Jesus means a radical life: effort, persistence, strength, engagement, even pains. *Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me*. So said the Lord. To be a Christian means to be wholehearted Christian, to be deeply rooted in him, which translates the word "radical". To live as everybody else, is not the way of the followers of Jesus Christ. We have countless saints as marvelous examples of Christian life.

Jesus must be our first preference. That can include martyrdom. Actual statistics inform that Christians are discriminated, persecuted and killed in 144 countries. United Nations include about 180 nations, and I no less than 144 nations Christians have to suffer – incredible! A huge crowd of martyrs, mostly by Moslem terrorists, Hindu fanatics, North Korean and other dictators. They are accused for blasphemy in Pakistan and Indonesia. They are pressed to convert to Islam. In Mexico they cannot be critical against drug gangsters. -So many forms to follow the crucified Lord. He is the first preference for these martyrs. Their decision to remain Christians in a terrible persecution is a splendid example for us all. They show us how to be radical Christians.

In Sweden there is no persecution of Christians. But often it is not easy to speak about being a Catholic or to defend Catholic principles, for example not to accept abortion and euthanasia. Then you may experience negative commentaries, hatred or contempt. There is a kind of Christophobia.

Sometimes we find, that it is not easy to be Christians in our own families. Jesus tells us in a realistic way: *Anyone who prefers father or mother, son or daughter of me is not worthy of me.* Quite many of our converts had or have problems with members of their family. They feel misunderstood in their decision to become active Catholics. They cannot speak about their truth, about their happiness to be members of the Church, about liturgy or spiritual life. To have Christ as the first priority is sometimes a cross to be taken. It is not easy to be alone, in the family, among colleagues and other students, in the neighborhood or in public.

If the Lord calls a person to follow him as a priest or a religious sister, many Catholic parents react negatively. The young Catholic, who want accept a vocation, can meet negative attitudes, for example: "You cannot leave your family! We want to become grandparents! You may remain a *normal* Catholic, don't carry your religious interest too far. Etc." The same parents can exclaim: "We need more priests, we need sisters!" but they block a religious vocation among their sons and daughters.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ! Let the Gospel Acclamation of today become our prayer: *Open our heart, O Lord, to accept the words of your Son!*

These words may sound harsh. But they are part of the Gospel, of the Good News of Jesus. He invites us to be his friends, to live with him, to walk with him, to follow him - through all problems of the life to the glory and happiness of heaven, to the eternal union with God.