

NOVEMBER 12 2024 FATHR GUSTAVE INEZA

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today's Gospel from Luke chapter 17 provides us with a profound lesson on humility and the nature of service in the kingdom of God. Let us open our hearts and minds to its message, as it invites us to examine our own attitudes toward our faith and our service to one another

First of all, we must not forget that the text uses the word "slave," from the Greek word "doulon," meaning "a male slave," as a noun, or "enslaved," as an adjective. The text says that an enslaved person who does what is called to do, to do their duty, should not expect to be thanked or acknowledged for his or her work.

In today's world, it is unimaginable that a Christian community listening to the treatment of enslaved people can find it acceptable for this text to make sense in our time. And we have to understand that this is a text in a context, in the context of the time of Jesus

However, that is not the focus of today's Gospel passage. In today's Gospel reading, Luke presents us a text that was, in that context, using the social hierarchy of His time to be easily understood by His audience. He cites a situation that would have seemed absurd to first-century readers. No master would eat after their servant, or slave. The disciples' response to Jesus, to Jesus' question, is obviously, "Of course not," as would have said one of my Jesuit friends in Wales.

Here, Jesus emphasizes that the disciples must act as humble slaves or servants, not in order to glorify themselves, or to win God's favor, but because He has asked them to carry out this particular task. We cannot hope to obtain God's grace simply by doing what He asks of us, any more than slaves would obtain credit by obeying their master's orders, which still does not make us slaves of God.

In our time, we understand the text differently in our context. In today's world, we could talk about serving God in our daily activities, without expecting any reward other than the certainty of God's love. God's grace is freely given to all, and that is a huge recompense. If we know that God loves us, that should prompt us to do what we do.

In this passage, Jesus tells a parable about a servant, who after working hard in the fields, returns home and continues to serve his master. At first glance, this parable might seem to suggest a harsh and ungrateful attitude. However, its true essence is to guide us toward a deeper understanding of our role as children of God in God's kingdom.

Jesus is teaching us about the nature of humility and the importance of avoiding self-righteousness. The servant in the parable does not receive thanks, because in the context of that time, performing duties was seen as a normal expectation, rather than an occasion of praise. This might sound a bit startling to us, but it is important to remember that Jesus is using this example to make a vital point about our attitude toward our service and our relationship with God.

Our actions in faith are not about earning favor or seeking recognition. Rather, they are expressions of our commitment and gratitude to God. Just as the slave fulfills his duties without expecting special reward, so should we approach our service and obedience to God. The key is not in the outward recognition or praise, but in the inward disposition of humility and faithfulness.

Humility in service means recognizing that we are not entitled to anything beyond what God has already graciously given us. It means accepting that our actions, no matter how diligent or sacrificial, are part of our response to God's love and grace. Our focus should be on fulfilling our duties with a spirit of love and devotion, rather than seeking to elevate ourselves. That would actually strip the spirit—the whole action from its spirit in the first place.

Furthermore, this humility allows us to truly live out our faith without the burdensome weight of self-importance. When we serve others, whether through acts of charity, compassion, or simple kindness, we do so not to be seen or praised, but because we are responding to the call of love that Christ has placed in our hearts.

In living out this humility, we follow the example of Christ Himself, who, despite being a Son of God, humbled Himself to serve humanity, even to the point of death on the cross. His life was a testament to the ultimate act of selflessness and humility.

Another way of approaching this passage, dear brothers and sisters, is to consider the human rights currently accepted around the world. And they may have derived from the teaching from the Catholic or other churches, or from other traditions. After several centuries, Christian ethics, and ethics from other traditions, have permeated social circles, which have come to regard human rights, not as an exceptional case to be implemented by those who wish to do so, but as a duty for all humankind.

Of course, we know that this is not reserved to our tradition, but is shared by many other traditions. It is our DNA to do good. It is our human nature to do good. We don't expect praise because every time we do good, we are doing what we were created to do. We are becoming what we were created to be. And for the same reasons, we shouldn't be surprised to see people who believe differently from us doing something good, because it is also in their DNA. It is also in their nature.

In other words, when we are asked to love one another, we are not being asked to do a special forces task. We are asked to become humans, because that is how we were created. So let us reflect on today's gospel and ask ourselves, are we serving with the humility that Christ calls us to

do? Are we performing our duties, not with the expectation of reward and recognition, but out of genuine love and devotion to God?

May we find joy in serving humbly and faithfully, always remembering that in doing so, we are merely fulfilling what is expected of us as true disciples of Christ.

Amen.