



40th European Meeting of Young Adults

“Rise, let us go...”

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not what I want, but what you want.” Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.” When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

(Matthew 26:36-46)

Meditation for December (No. 5)

After celebrating a final Passover meal with his disciples, Jesus went with them to a garden nearby to wait. Already an armed crowd was on the way to arrest him. Suddenly he is gripped by sadness and anguish. “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he says to Peter and the two sons of Zebedee. He speaks as a man does with his friends, “Stay here and keep watch with me.” The one whom at his birth the Gospel called, “Emmanuel”, or “God with us”, we now see asking his companions to stay with him.

In Jesus, God comes to us. He holds out his hand to us not from above but from below. In the chapter before, Jesus spoke about how he waits for us in those who are hungry or thirsty, in strangers and the naked, in the sick and prisoners. It is in noticing those who are struggling and in paying attention to them that we encounter God.

In the garden, Jesus is in agony. He prays intensely to God the Father and asks that the cup be taken away from him. "Yet not what I want, but what you want," he says. What is this cup that he must drink? A 14th century saint and mystic who meditated often on this scene, Catherine of Sienna, said that as great as the physical suffering and solitude of Jesus no doubt was, it was not this first of all the meaning of the cup. As Catherine saw it, Jesus, in facing his death, had to accept the possibility that despite all he had done, the disciples might just scatter and go their separate ways afterward, that his life might be given in vain. To drink the cup and do the will of the Father meant taking the risk of trusting in human beings to the very end.

Among the many things the Gospel readings show us, one among them has been rather sobering, and that is just how disconcerting and unpredictable the disciples could be. To take one example, before Jesus fed the crowd, in the story we read in October, the disciples tried to have Jesus send them away! And yet, at the same time, Jesus constantly overturned situations. In the same story, when he fed the crowd, he used the food the disciples had brought and had them distribute it. But in the garden now, it is dark and Jesus is alone before his death. Resistance to him has reached a fever pitch. He will be subjected to the most ignominious of deaths. From now on he will be counted among the lowest of the low.

Jesus returns to the disciples after praying and finds them asleep. "Watch and pray," he says, "so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." We might paraphrase his words in this way. When you discover that good intentions are not enough, that you and others can be a little or even very unsteady, do not fall into temptation, that is, do not give in to fear and think that all is finished. Trust in what God has begun among human beings like yourselves. Rise, let us go and meet whoever now is on our way.

Questions for sharing in small groups

- ▶ What thoughts and feelings do the words of Jesus, "Stay here and keep watch with me," arose in me?
- ▶ What does it mean for me to follow Jesus with the trust he has in human beings?
- ▶ What helps us to renew or recover this trust when it is put to the test?