VOCATIONAL
DISCERNMENT

SECULAR INSTITUTE
LAY SERVANTS OF JESUS CHRIST PRIEST

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TOPIC 8

FOLLOWING JESUS CHRIST

METHODOLOGY

Guide to study the texts personally:

1. Read the text and underline the ideas you want to highlight or the doubts that arise. Take note of them.
2. Bring to prayer the underlined ideas that you would highlight and the doubts about the text. Explain what calls you feel God is making to you for your daily life.
3. What commitment emerges from these calls? How can you bring them to life? Where do you find resistance?

Presentation of the questions worked on to the person in charge of the formation process.

FOLLOWING JESUS CHRIST

JOHN PAUL II GENERAL AUDIENCE
(Wednesday, September 6, 2000)

1. The encounter with Christ radically changes a person's life, impels him to metanoia or profound conversion of mind and heart, and establishes a communion of life that is transformed into discipleship. In the Gospels, following is expressed in two attitudes: the first consists in "accompanying" Christ (akoloutheîn); the second, in "walking behind" him, who guides, following his footsteps and his direction (érchesthai opíso). Thus, the figure of the disciple is born, which is realized in different ways. There are those who follow in a still generic and often superficial way, like the crowd (cf. Mk 3:7; 5:24; Mt 8:1. 10; 14, 13; 19, 2; 20, 29). There are sinners (cf. Mk 2:14-15); many times mention is made of women who, with their concrete service, sustain the mission of Jesus (cf. Lk 8:2-3; Mk 15:41). Some receive a specific call from Christ and, among them, a particular position is occupied by the Twelve.

The typology of those called is therefore very varied: people dedicated to fishing and collecting taxes, honest and sinners, married and single, poor and rich, like Joseph of Arimathea (cf. Jn 19:38), men and women. There is even the Zealot Simon (cf. Lk 6:15), that is, a member of the anti-Roman revolutionary opposition. There are also those who reject the invitation, such as the rich young man, who, on hearing Christ's demanding words, was saddened and went away in sorrow, "because he was very rich" (Mk 10:22).

2. The conditions for following the same path as Jesus are few, but fundamental. As we have heard in the Gospel passage we have just read, it is necessary to leave the past behind, to break with it in a deci-

sive way and to realize a metanoia in the profound sense of the term: a change of mentality and of life. The path that Christ proposes is narrow, it demands sacrifice and the total gift of self: "Whoever wants to come with me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me" (Mk 8:34). It is a journey that knows the thorns of trials and persecutions: "If they persecute me, they will persecute you also" (Jn 15:20). It is a journey that transforms them into missionaries and witnesses of the word of Christ, but it requires of the apostles that "they take nothing for the journey: ... neither bread nor saddlebag nor small change in the girdle" (Mk 6:8; cf. Mt 10:9-10).

3. Thus, tracking is not a comfortable journey on a flat path. Moments of discouragement can also arise, to the point that, in one circumstance, "many of his disciples turned back and did not go with him again" (Jn 6:66), that is, with Jesus, who was forced to ask the Twelve a decisive question: "Do you also want to go away?" (Jn 6:67). In another circumstance, when Peter rebels at the prospect of the cross, Jesus sharply rebukes him with words that, according to a nuance of the original text, could be an invitation to "withdraw from his sight," after having rejected the goal of the cross: "Get out of my sight, Satan! You think like men, not like God" (Mk 8:33).

Although Peter always runs the risk of betraying, in the end he will follow his Master and Lord with the most generous love. In fact, on the shores of the Lake of Tiberias, Peter will make his profession of love: "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you." And Jesus will announce to him "the kind of death with which he was going to glorify God", repeating twice: "Follow me" (Jn 21:17). 19. 22).

Discipleship is expressed in a special way in the beloved disciple, who enters into intimacy with Christ, from whom he receives his Mo-

ther as a gift and whom he recognizes once he has risen (cf. Jn 13:23-26; 18:15-16; 19:26-27; 20:2-8; 21:2). 7. 20-24).

4. The ultimate goal of the follow-up is glory. The way consists in the "imitation of Christ", who lived in love and died for love on the cross. The disciple "must, so to speak, enter into Christ with his whole being, he must 'appropriate' and assimilate the whole reality of the Incarnation and the Redemption in order to find himself" (Redemptor Hominis, n. 10). Christ must enter into his ego in order to free it from selfishness and pride, as St Ambrose says in this regard: "Let Christ enter your soul and let Jesus dwell in your thoughts, so that he may close all spaces for sin in the sacred tent of virtue" (Commentary on Psalm 118:26).

5. The Cross, therefore, a sign of love and total self-giving, is the emblem of the disciple called to be configured to the glorious Christ. A Father of the Church of the East, who is also an inspired poet, Romans the Melodic, challenges the disciple with these words: "You possess the cross as a staff; support your youth in it. Take it to your prayer, take it to the common table, carry it to your bed, and everywhere else as your title of glory. (...) Say to your husband who has now joined you, 'I lie at your feet.' Give, in your great mercy, peace to your universe; to your Churches, your help; to the pastors, solicitude; to the flock, concord, so that we may all, always, sing our resurrection" (Hymn 52 "To the newly baptized", stanzas 19 and 22).

Pope Francis highlights another characteristic of following Jesus Christ that has a lot to do with our charism: service. And he does so when commenting on a text from the Gospel of Mark:

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

The Gospel of today's liturgy (Mk 9:30-37) tells us that, on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus' disciples were arguing about who "was the greatest among them" (v. 34). Then Jesus spoke to them in a forceful way, which also applies to us today: "If anyone wants to be first, let him be last of all and servant of all" (v. 35). If you want to be first, you have to go to the back of the line, be last, and serve everyone. With this lapidary phrase, the Lord inaugurates an inversion: he overturns the criteria that mark what really counts. A person's value no longer depends on the role they play, the success they have, the work they do, the money they have in the bank; No, it does not depend on that; greatness and success, in God's eyes, have another standard: they are measured by service. Not because of what you have, but because of what you give. Do you want to stand out? Serves. This is the way.

Today the word "service" seems a little faded, worn out by use. But in the Gospel it has a precise and concrete meaning. To serve is not an expression of courtesy: it is to do as Jesus, who, summing up his life in a few words, said that he had come "not to be served, but to serve" (Mk 10:45). Thus says the Lord. Therefore, if we want to follow Jesus, we must follow the path that he himself has traced, the path of service. Our faithfulness to the Lord depends on our willingness to serve. And this is difficult, we know, because "it tastes like a cross". But as we grow in care and availability toward others, we become freer inside, more like Jesus. The more we serve, the more we feel God's presence. Above all, when we serve those who have nothing to give back to us, the poor, embracing their difficulties and needs with tender compassion: and there we discover that in turn we are loved and embraced by God.

Precisely to illustrate this, Jesus, after having spoken of the primacy of service, makes a gesture. We have seen that Jesus' gestures are stronger than the words he uses. And what is the gesture? He takes

a child and places him in the midst of the disciples, in the center, in the most important place (cf. v. 36). The child, in the Gospel, symbolizes not so much innocence as smallness. Because the little ones, like children, depend on others, on adults, they need to receive. Jesus embraces this child and says that whoever receives a little one, a child, receives him (cf. v. 37). This is, first of all, who to serve: those who need to receive and have nothing to give back. Serve those who need to receive and have nothing to give back. By welcoming those who are on the margins, neglected, we welcome Jesus, because He is there. And in a little one, in a poor person whom we serve, we too receive God's tender embrace.

Dear brothers and sisters, challenged by the Gospel, let us ask ourselves: am I, who follow Jesus, interested in the most abandoned? Or, like the disciples that day, do I seek personal gratification? Do I understand life as a competition to make a place for myself at the expense of others, or do I believe that excelling is serving? And, concretely: do I dedicate time to some "little one", to a person who does not have the means to reciprocate? Do I take care of someone who can't return the favor, or just my family and friends? These are questions that we can ask ourselves.

May the Virgin Mary, humble servant of the Lord, help us to understand that serving does not diminish us, but makes us grow. And that there is more joy in giving than in receiving (cf. Acts 20:35).