



The Holy See

ORDINARY PUBLIC CONSISTORY FOR THE CREATION OF NEW CARDINALS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

*Saint Peter's Basilica
Saturday, 28 November 2020*

[Multimedia]

Jesus and his disciples were on the road. *The road* is the setting for the scene just recounted by the Evangelist Mark (10:32-45). It is always the setting, too, for the Church's journey: the road of life and history, which is salvation history insofar as it is travelled *with Christ* and leads to his paschal mystery. Jerusalem always lies ahead of us. The cross and the resurrection are part of our history; they are our "today" but also and always the goal of our journey.

This Gospel passage has often accompanied consistories for the creation of new Cardinals. It is not merely a "backdrop" but also a "road sign" for us who today are journeying together with Jesus. For he is our strength, who gives meaning to our lives and our ministry.

Consequently, dear brothers, we need carefully to consider the words we have just heard.

Mark emphasizes that, on the road, the disciples were "amazed" and "afraid" (v. 32). Why? Because they knew what was ahead of them in Jerusalem. They not only had a sense of it; they knew well what was ahead, because, more than once, Jesus had already spoken to them openly about it. The Lord knew what his followers were experiencing, nor was he indifferent to it. Jesus never abandons his friends; he never neglects them. Even when it seems that he is going his own way, he is always doing so *for our sake*. All that he does, he does for us and for our salvation. In the specific case of the Twelve, he did this *to prepare them* for the trials to come, so that they could be *with him*, now and especially later, when he would no longer be in their midst. So that that they could always be *with him, on his road*.

Knowing that the hearts of his disciples were troubled, Jesus “once more” called the Twelve and told them “what was to happen to him” (v. 32). We have just heard it ourselves: the third announcement of his passion, death and resurrection. This is *the road taken by the Son of God*. The road taken by *the Servant of the Lord*. Jesus *identifies* himself with this road, so much so that he himself *is* the road. “I am the way” (*Jn* 14:6), he says. *This way*, and none other.

At this point, a sudden shift takes place, which enables Jesus to reveal to James and John – but really to all the Apostles, and to us – the fate in store for them. Let us imagine the scene: after once again explaining what will happen to him in Jerusalem, Jesus looks the Twelve squarely in the eye, as if to say: “Is this clear?” Then he resumes his journey, walking ahead of the group. Two of his disciples break away from the others: James and John. They approach Jesus and tell him what they want: “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory” (v. 37). They want to take *a different road*. Not Jesus’ road, but a different one. The road of those who, perhaps even without realizing it, “use” the Lord for their own advancement. Those who – as Saint Paul says – look to their own interests and not those of Christ (cf. *Phil* 2:21). Saint Augustine speaks of this in his magnificent sermon on shepherds (No. 46). A sermon we always benefit from rereading in the Office of Readings.

Jesus listens to James and John. He does not get upset or angry. His patience is indeed infinite, also towards us. He tells the two: “You do not know what you are asking” (v. 38). In a way, he excuses them, while at the same time reproaching them: “You do not realize that you have gone *off the road*”. Immediately after this, the other ten apostles will show by their indignant reaction to the sons of Zebedee how much *all of them* were tempted to go *off the road*.

Dear brothers, all of us love Jesus, all of us want to follow him, yet we must always be careful to remain *on the road*. For our bodies can be with him, but our hearts can wander far afield and so lead us *off the road*. We can think of so many kinds of corruption in the priestly life. The scarlet of a Cardinal’s robes, which is the colour of blood, can, for a worldly spirit, become the colour of a secular “eminence”. In that case, you will no longer be a shepherd who is close to his people. You will simply think that you are an “eminence”. Once you feel that way, you are already off the road.

In this passage of the Gospel, we are always struck by the *sharp contrast between Jesus and his disciples*. Jesus is aware of this; he knows it and he accepts it. Yet the contrast is still there: Jesus is *on* the road, while they are *off* the road. Two roads that cannot meet. Only the Lord, through his cross and resurrection, can save his straying friends who risk getting lost. It is for them, as well as for all the others, that Jesus is journeying to Jerusalem. For them, and for everyone, will he let his body be broken and his blood shed. For them, and for all, will he rise from the dead, and forgive and transform them by the gift of the Spirit. He will at last put them back *on his road*.

Saint Mark – like Matthew and Luke – included this story in his Gospel because it contains a saving truth necessary for the Church in every age. Even though the Twelve come off badly, this

text entered the canon of Scripture because it *reveals the truth* about Jesus and about us. For us too, in our day, it is a message of salvation. We too, Pope and Cardinals, must always see ourselves reflected in this word of truth. It is a sharpened sword; it cuts, it proves painful, but it also heals, liberates and converts us. For conversion means precisely this: that we pass from being *off the road* to journeying *on God's road*.

May the Holy Spirit give us this grace, today and for ever.