

Mass 21 January 2020 - Meeting of New Ministers and Custodes
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Today's Liturgy of the Word invites us to **reflect on two sentences**, which I consider crucial for all Christians. They are worth embracing by all of you who are called to the service of animation and government as Provincials and Custodes.

The first, from the Book of Samuel (16,7): *The Lord said to Samuel "God does not see as man sees; man looks at appearances, but the Lord looks at the heart"*. The message of David's election comforts us and makes us feel more responsible, because knowing that we are fragile and sinful, God in his goodness chooses us, and this choice will be the first step towards a new life, as happened to King David. This enables us to marvel at God because he "looks at the heart" and distances himself from our standards, which so often remain at the level of appearances. It is always necessary to give time to reach the profound truth, from the heart.

The story tells us that the seven sons of Jesse pass by and the Lord has not chosen them (cf. v.8-11). And Jesse reveals that, in fact, "There is still one left, the youngest; he is out looking after the sheep" (v.12); but because he is the youngest, he was not taken into consideration. It was pure human perception, but for God, it was appearance and not the truth. God chose the young man. Then, "Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him where he stood with his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord seized on David and stayed with him from that day on" (v.13). His whole life was the life of a man anointed by the Lord.

The story of the book of Samuel reminds us of the biblical tradition of the divine election of the least worthy and least regarded in human eyes. The Prophet seeks the one chosen by God, who in this case happens to be the young man, little appreciated by everyone. The choice of God does not depend on one's personal merits; this is the criterion that should guide our discernment.

The second, from Mark's Gospel (2:27): *"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath"*. The text presents us with a dispute in which Jesus rejects the rigid understanding that the Pharisees have of the Sabbath and insists, in the name of God, that the supreme purpose of all laws or customs established by men and women should be the common good of all.

The strict observance of the Sabbath law had become the sign of identity for the Jews. At the time of the Maccabees, this observance reached a critical point. Attacked by the Greeks, the rebels preferred to let themselves be killed, instead of transgressing the Sabbath by using weapons to defend their lives (cf. 1 Maccabees 2:32-38). Reflecting on the massacre, the Maccabean leaders concluded that they had to protect their lives, even on the Sabbath (see 1 Maccabees 2:39-41). Jesus had the same attitude and assumes the criteria of David (see Mk 2:25-26) by relativizing the law of the Sabbath in favour of life, because "the Sabbath was made for man".

The Gospel presents us with a new understanding of the Sabbath. Jesus begins a new way of life with his disciples, but he does not eliminate the celebration of the Sabbath but frees it from a legalistic interpretation. The following of Jesus implies a new attitude that always gives primacy to charity and goodness, even suffering accusations like Jesus, because whoever embraces freedom, receives criticism, as the Pharisees did for pulling the wheat ears on the Sabbath.

Let us pray, asking Jesus Christ for the grace to live our vocation and mission, confidently embracing the serene and profound gaze of God. That we may always be faithful to the Gospel, giving priority to and promoting life: that of man/brother, woman/sister, and mother earth/our common home.