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## Father Cantalamessa on Power

### Pontifical Household Preacher Comments on Sunday's Readings

ROME, OCT. 20, 2006 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of a commentary by the Pontifical Household preacher, Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa, on this Sunday's liturgical readings.

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The Great Exercise Power

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

Isaiah 53:2a.,3a.,10-11; Hebrews 4:14-16; Mark 10:35-45

After the Gospel on riches, this Sunday's Gospel gives us Christ's judgment on another of the great idols of the world: power.

Power, like money, is not intrinsically evil. God describes himself as "the Omnipotent" and Scripture says "power belongs to God" (Psalm 62:11).

However, given that man had abused the power granted to him, transforming it into control by the strongest and oppression of the weakest, what did God do?

To give us an example, God stripped himself of his omnipotence; from being "omnipotent," he made himself "impotent."

He "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:7). He transformed power into service. The first reading of the day contains a prophetic description of this "impotent" Savior. "He grew up like a sapling before him, like a shoot from the parched earth. ... He was spurned and avoided by men, a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity."

Thus a new power is revealed, that of the cross: "Rather, God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise" (1 Corinthians 1:27). In the Magnificat, Mary sings in advance this silent revolution brought by the coming of Christ: "He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones" (Luke 1:52).

Who is accused under this denunciation of power? Only dictators and tyrants? Would that it were so! It would refer, in this case, to exceptions. Instead, it affects us all. Power has infinite ramifications, it gets in everywhere, as certain sands of the Sahara when the sirocco wind blows. It even gets into the Church.

The problem of power, therefore, is not posed only in the political realm. If we stay in that realm, we do no more than join the group of those who are always ready to strike others' breast for their own faults. It is easy to denounce collective faults, or those of the past; it is far more difficult when it comes to personal and present faults.

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Mary says that God "dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart; he has thrown down the rulers from their thrones" (Luke 1:51ff.). She singles out implicitly a precise area in which the "will to power" must be combated: our own hearts.

Our minds -- the thoughts of the heart -- can become a kind of throne on which we sit to dictate laws and thunder against those who do not submit to us. We are, at least in our wishes if not in deeds, the "mighty on thrones."

Sadly, in the family itself it is possible that our innate will to power and abuse might manifest itself, causing constant suffering to those who are victims of it, which is often -- not always -- the woman.

What does the Gospel oppose to power? Service: a power for others, not over others!

Power confers authority, but service confers something more, authority that means respect, esteem, a true ascendancy over others. The Gospel also opposes power with nonviolence, that is, power of another kind, moral, not physical power.

Jesus said that he could have asked the Father for twelve legions of angels to defeat his enemies who were just about to crucify him (Matthew 26:53), but he preferred to pray for them. And it was in this way that he achieved victory.

Service is not always expressed, however, in silence and submission to power. Sometimes it can impel one to raise one's voice against power and its abuses. This is what Jesus did. In his life he experienced the abuse of the political and religious power of the time. That is why he is close to all those -- in any environment (the family, community, civil society) -- who go through the experience of an evil and tyrannical power.

With his help it is possible not "to be overcome by evil," as he was not -- more than that, to "overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

[Translation by ZENIT]

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Correction: Last week's commentary by Father Cantalamessa should have read: "However, it is clear that today almsgiving and charity is no longer the only way to use wealth for the common good, or perhaps the most advisable." The word "only" was inadvertently omitted from the English translation. We apologize for the error.

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