

17. October 2019

**„Our homeland is in heaven“
St. Ignatius of Antioch**

Phil 3, 17- 4,1

Brothers, be united in imitating me. Keep your eyes fixed on those who act according to the example you have from me. For there are so many people of whom I have often warned you, and now I warn you again with tears in my eyes, who behave like the enemies of Christ's cross. They are destined to be lost; their god is the stomach; they glory in what they should think shameful, since their minds are set on earthly things. But our homeland is in heaven and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transfigure the wretched body of ours into the mould of his glorious body, through the working of the power which he has, even to bring all things under his mastery.

How important it is to have good examples knows everyone who has met such people. They can give you a help for the whole of life. It is particularly important for young people, because they are looking for their identity and are easily seductive to emulate those who may be particularly impressing, but who do not convey much or even lead on the wrong path in terms of the true values of life.

Ideally, it is your own parents. which have a deep imprint as good examples, the teacher, the priest. But we know very well that good examples are very important, but they do not exist too often. Unfortunately, it can also happen that those we consider to be good examples then reveal great weaknesses and then one might turn away with disappointment.

The church in Phillippi had real examples with the Apostle Paul and those who lived like him, in which the Lord glorified himself. But this was obviously not enough to lead the whole community on the right path. Many, the Apostle says, have departed and now live as enemies of Christ.

How can it be that one deviates from the path in such a way that one can even become the enemy of the Cross?

Perhaps those people started well with following Christ, were even enthusiastic and willing to do anything for the Lord.

But then one has weakened to the length of time with his spiritual life, reduced prayer, engaged too much in the curls of this world, no longer cooperated in his deeper conversion of the heart. Then the seduction came to sin, and there had been no strong resistance, perhaps even seeking compromises with sin, perhaps also misadvised by those who, instead of helping to overcome sin, trivialise it.

Certainly those who become enemies of the Cross have forgotten that their home is in heaven, that time here on earth is the time that we have to spend in great vigilance. With the decline in spiritual life and the failure to take appropriate steps on the path of following Christ, comes the inner boredom, the disinterest. Religious life no longer attracts so much. You've heard it all and it's always the same!

While someone who pays attention to his spiritual path also knows such droughts and feelings, but knows that he must not reduce his spiritual life, the one who is in danger of turning away from God is hardly in a position to resist against those tendencies. Now those other interests and bonds that the Apostle mentions are now in the forehand and takes the place instead of the longing for heaven.

The path to the abyss continues unless there is a reversal. It may now happen that prayer, the words of God, the whole religious attraction becomes indifferent, even one begins to reject it, one may even fight against it. The grace of God, which can no longer penetrate, strengthen and lift, is increasingly weaker to receive and one is surrendered to ones inclinations. The devil does the rest to keep one in sin.

From this background it becomes clear why the Apostle admonished to remain in communion with the Lord. The danger of apostasy is great if we do not stick to the Lord and let him raise us again and again and cultivate intimate community.

It should be remembered that the inclination to sin, to slipping, to the worldly, to evil exists in us as a burden and acts as if by itself. The care of the spiritual life in contrast is in need of our attention, vigilance, perseverance, seriousness.

What is said here on the individual level also applies to the Church as a whole. She, too, must be vigilant, that she does not gets involved too much in worldly things. If this would happen, than the spiritual things are more in the background, secular and political issues too much in the foreground. That would be a bad developpement.

Let us take as an example the Saints and the Lord Himself, those who have gone their way to the end. With them we are certainly in the right place. If we have good living examples, then we can thank the Lord and imitate the good that we discover.

But let us not idealize them, because they too have yet to stay true to their path to the end.