

2. December 2019

“Faith as the centurion!”

Mt 8,5-11

When he went into Capernaum a centurion came up and pleaded with him. 'Sir,' he said, 'my servant is lying at home paralysed and in great pain.' Jesus said to him, 'I will come myself and cure him.' The centurion replied, 'Sir, I am not worthy to have you under my roof; just give the word and my servant will be cured. For I am under authority myself and have soldiers under me; and I say to one man, "Go," and he goes; to another, "Come here," and he comes; to my servant, "Do this," and he does it.' When Jesus heard this he was astonished and said to those following him, 'In truth I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found faith as great as this. And I tell you that many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of Heaven.

Especially in the reflections during Advent, we will keep an eye on the second coming of Christ. The whole salvation story is approaching to this event and we Christians are well advised to consciously include this dimension in our lives. No one knows time and hour but God Himself. But will the Lord find His bride awake and faithful when He comes at the end of time? Today the gospel addresses to the faith.

"I have never found such a faith in anyone in Israel!" The Lord did not want to escape this belief of the centurion, even though he did not belong to the people of Israel and Jesus was sent to the lost sheep of Israel (*cf. Mt 15,24*). On the contrary, the centurion belonged to the Roman occupying power and this was for the people in Israel hostile. But Jesus looked at the heart of this man and at his amazing faith.

In the sacred liturgy of the Roman church, a sentence of this centurion, slightly modified, was added and repeated three times in the old Roman rite: *"Lord, I am not worthy that you enter under my roof, but only say a word and my soul shall be healed."*

What makes the faith of the centurion so exemplary that Jesus puts it before everyone's eyes?

At first humility is recognizable. He is aware that there is a big difference between him and Jesus. In no way does he appear as the proud Roman and seek a healing from Jesus. No, he comes and asks for another man, for his sick servant. Assuming that he did not do this out of selfishness, we see that he had a heart for his servant. This was certainly different than many other Romans, where the servants were certainly simply replaced when they could no longer fulfil their ministry! But the fact that the centurion opened himself for the sake of his servant because he suffered great pain points to another attitude of this man towards his subordinates.

Of his own example, as a centurion giving commands that were obeyed, he easily concluded the authority of the Lord, and it was clear to him that what the Lord said would happen. One word from Jesus was enough; he did not need to come himself! And Jesus granted him the hearing of his petition: *“Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would.” And his servant was healed at that moment. (Mt 8,13)*

Here we truly find an exemplary attitude of faith: on the foundation of humility lives the loving concern for another and the firm conviction that the Lord can heal. But this example is also important for another reason! Jesus makes a statement about the future in the context of this event: *I say to you: many will come from the East and the West to sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; but those for whom the kingdom was destined are thrown out into the uttermost darkness; there they will howl and gnash their teeth.*

This applies to the coming of the peoples, for whom the pagan centurion is a sign. And indeed, through the path of faith in the Son of God, God gives people direct access to him. The message of the Lord does not remain with the lost sheep of Israel, it opens to all mankind invited to enter the house of the Heavenly Father!

When we look at the centurion's belief, do we ask ourselves if we have such faith?

Faith is an essential element in waiting for the return of the Lord. The Lord asks the question: *„Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Lk 18,8)*

We have to realize that in many countries there is very little true faith, and in those countries where the gospel is proclaimed, a great apostasy is often obvious.

So what could we answer to the Lord?

In fact, we can only ask him to look at the faith of his church, and when we say that we must see that there is also an increasing apostasy, confusion, and secularization in it, and the number of believers who try to live faithfully, unfortunately are small.

But here we ourselves are asked to deepen our faith and to ask the Lord for the strengthening of our faith, especially in such difficult times, when some see our Church in the Passion. Thus, such times of increasing apostasy can become a challenge, to bind oneself more deeply to the Lord and to give a hold and an orientation for other people. Times of apostasy can call us to go completely to the service of God and leave all lukewarmness behind. The apostle Paul has probably already waited in his time that the Lord will come soon. How much nearer his coming may be now!