

17 June 2020

“Elisha follows Elijah”

2 Kgs 2,1, 6-14

This is what happened when Yahweh took Elijah up to heaven in the whirlwind: Elijah and Elisha set out from Gilgal, Elijah said, 'Elisha, you stay here, Yahweh is only sending me to the Jordan.' But he replied, 'As Yahweh lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you!' And they went on together. Fifty of the brotherhood of prophets followed them, halting some distance away as the two of them stood beside the Jordan. Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water; and the water divided to left and right, and the two of them crossed over dry-shod. When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, 'Make your request. What can I do for you before I am snatched away from you?' Elisha answered, 'Let me inherit a double share of your spirit.' 'Your request is difficult,' Elijah said. 'If you see me while I am being snatched away from you, it will be as you ask; if not, it will not be so.' Now as they walked on, talking as they went, a chariot of fire appeared and horses of fire coming between the two of them; and Elijah went up to heaven in the whirlwind. Elisha saw it, and shouted, 'My father! My father! Chariot of Israel and its chargers!' Then he lost sight of him, and taking hold of his own clothes he tore them in half. He picked up Elijah's cloak which had fallen, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He took Elijah's cloak and struck the water. 'Where is Yahweh, the God of Elijah?' he cried. As he struck the water it divided to right and left, and Elisha crossed over.

The succession of the prophet Elijah is reported to us here, because God did not leave his people without a prophet! Only when the Son of God himself came did the story of the Old Testament prophets end, because it was fulfilled in Jesus! True prophets who bear witness after the coming of the Lord will point to the Messiah in the power of the Holy Spirit and confess that "Jesus came in the flesh"! By this one will recognize their authenticity!

At the time of Elijah one was still in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Elijah knew that his time had come to say farewell and also that Elisha should follow him; God had told him, and he had thrown the cloak over Elisha as a sign of the calling of his successor! We remember that he said to Elisha: *"Have I done anything to you?"* (1 Kings 19,20)

He was still allowed to say goodbye to the family! Now comes the moment when the authority that Elijah received from God passes to his successor and God confirms once again his choice of Elisha!

When we read this passage from the New Testament, we see the great indications that are already given to us about the coming and working of the Messiah! Elisha asks for two parts of the spirit of his teacher! After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the disciples will be endowed with the Holy Spirit, that is, with the Spirit of Jesus: The Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit, and now the apostles are able to carry out their mission in the authority of the Lord!

Elisha becomes a witness of the Ascension of Elijah, how the disciples then become witnesses of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus! Just this very fact of being witnesses of the resurrection becomes a characteristic of the apostles!

Now the authority which Elijah received from God had passed over to Elisha! With the mantle of Elijah he did the same sign that his Master had done before him! Elisha was now no longer a disciple, but had concretely taken up the following of Elijah, just as the disciples in the New Testament became apostles after the descent of the Holy Spirit, who now proclaimed in the name of Jesus and did signs and wonders!

We can see how in the times of the New Testament, what was prepared in the Old Testament takes place in fullness! But this does not only apply to the apostles, but the mantle of Elijah is, so to speak, also thrown on the whole people of God! We have received the Holy Spirit, we are witnesses of the resurrection through faith!

The light that came into this world through the appearance of the Lord is incomparably greater than the light in which Elijah and Elisha lived, let us only think of the Holy Eucharist, an incomparable gift of the Lord!

As the People of God, we are, in our totality, a prophetic sign that testifies to the coming of Jesus into this world and at the same time proclaims the completion at the end of times, when Jesus comes again! Elijah led the Israelites who had lost their way in idolatry back to the right faith (*cf. 1 Kgs 18,20-39*).

Today, many people also get lost and do not really know God! If we would live according to the mission entrusted to us, then people should be able to have an encounter with the living God through our testimony, because His Spirit is poured out in us (*cf. Rom 5,5*)!

In following the Lord, we have received a grace that goes beyond that which the prophets were entrusted by God, what is there to prevent us from grasping Elijah's mantle, striking it on the Jordan and seeing the waters parting? Then we will walk on dry land through the floods of this world, firmly at the hand of God, and do what the Lord wants us to do: to be witnesses of our Father's love and thus help people to find God and thus true life!