

29. August 2020

“Martyrdom of St. John the Baptist”

Jer 1,17-19

As for you, prepare yourself for action. Stand up and tell them all I command you. Have no fear of them and in their presence I will make you fearless. For look, today I have made you into a fortified city, a pillar of iron, a wall of bronze to stand against the whole country: the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests and the people of the country. They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you, Yahweh declares, to rescue you.'

We all know the courageous testimony of Saint John the Baptist, which he gave before the King to draw his attention to the fact that his association with Herodias was contrary to the will of God! Herod was torn between secret admiration of the prophet and rejection of his message, and under the influence of Herodias, he was then tempted to have the Baptist beheaded! Before that, his senses were confused by the beauty of the daughter of Herodias and he made her that fatal promise to grant her a wish, whatever it might be! We know how it ended and we can read about it in the Gospel of today (*cf. Mark 6,17-29*)! John became a witness to the truth, just as it was with Jeremiah.

Today, the truth is not in high demand in public! Hardly anyone dares to say it clearly! It is more like having an explanation, an excuse, a relativization for everything! The so-called "political correctness" has managed to either silence all more or less unambiguous statements or to label them "extreme"! But since nobody wants to be extreme, one prefers to remain silent! This is an indirect system of exercising power, which becomes more and more effective and even wants to silence the admonishing voice of the church, or it may only resound on those issues which are publicly accepted, i.e. which are "streamlined"!

Let us make it concrete: let us imagine that a high person of the Church goes to a Catholic politician and tells him that he cannot live with a second woman because his first wife, to whom he is validly married, is still alive! He would probably be "executed" in the media! Would he be supported by the Church, perhaps by one or the other bishop? Probably only by very few, if any!

We can also look at this by the example of receiving Holy Communion. In the USA there are courageous bishops who refuse to give Holy Communion to politicians because they publicly support abortion, e.g. Cardinal Burke. But there are now only a few. They are in the succession of the Baptist and a Jeremiah!

This is the situation of the Baptist, in which he gave his life and gave his testimony for the validity of God's commandments! This testimony is still valid today and is an example for us of how to stand up for the truth without fear! Herod, on the other hand, and others who have not remained faithful to God's commandments, serve as a deterrent, so to speak, as to how one should not act.

We may see today's word, which went to the prophet Jeremiah, and rightly found its way into the readings of the day for the martyrdom of John, as an invitation to be witnesses of the truth! After all, it is not our truth that we as Christians represent, but the truth that has been entrusted to us by the One who is the truth Himself (*cf. Jn 14,6*)! To serve it is a sacred duty and the highest honour.

Truth is the "*pillar of iron*" and the, "*wall of bronze*"! Anyone who turns against her will fall in the long run! In the succession of Jeremiah and St. John the Baptist, we too will become an "*wall of bronze*" and an "*pillar of iron*" against the prevailing lies and deception, if we remain firmly anchored in the truth!

Here it is important to heed the Lord's admonition to Jeremiah: "*Have no fear of them*".

This means for us today: do not be frightened by the spirit of the times, nor by the spirit of the times in the Church, which relativizes the truth and no longer wants to hear it properly.

It is a special challenge for our time to remain in the truth and to resist all those siren voices that want to "reconcile" us with the spirit of this world and weaken our Catholic soul! Even if we do not have to wield the truth entrusted to us as a sword with which we may flail wildly according to our own, often still unpurified, temperament, the proclamation of the truth is a mission from which we cannot escape.

The knowledge of the truth brings with it an inner obligation, namely to make it heard, to make room for it and to be consciously at its service! John the Baptist and many other confessors teach us this! The truth is not a private matter, as one priest said in a sermon: "The Church is not a sect that gives private knowledge to people,

it is not an occult institution, it is public! Everyone can and should hear its message!"

So it is also with the truth! It is not private knowledge for a few initiated people! We, who by God's grace were allowed to recognise this truth, are at its service; just like John the Baptist, like Jeremiah and the many witnesses! This also applies to the present situation in the church.

Slowly there is an awakening among the faithful that something is going wrong in our church. This is still connected with the fear of being pushed into the corner by opponents of the Pope or of sinning if they see something different from the church leadership, to which they should be obedient!

Well, love for the Hierarchy does not mean closing one's eyes to error. What kind of love would that be?

I would like to quote at the end a word from a Chinese friend who has become very dear to us:

"There is no need to be afraid before the truth."