

28. September 2020

“Tests of faith”

*Job 1:6-22*

*One day when the sons of God came to attend on Yahweh, among them came Satan. So Yahweh said to Satan, 'Where have you been?' 'Prowling about on earth,' he answered, 'roaming around there.' So Yahweh asked him, 'Did you pay any attention to my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth: a sound and honest man who fears God and shuns evil.' 'Yes,' Satan said, 'but Job is not God-fearing for nothing, is he? Have you not put a wall round him and his house and all his domain? You have blessed all he undertakes, and his flocks throng the countryside. But stretch out your hand and lay a finger on his possessions: then, I warrant you, he will curse you to your face.' 'Very well,' Yahweh said to Satan, 'all he has is in your power. But keep your hands off his person.' So Satan left the presence of Yahweh.*

*On the day when Job's sons and daughters were eating and drinking in their eldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job. 'Your oxen', he said, 'were at the plough, with the donkeys grazing at their side, when the Sabaeans swept down on them and carried them off, and put the servants to the sword: I alone have escaped to tell you.' He had not finished speaking when another messenger arrived. 'The fire of God', he said, 'has fallen from heaven and burnt the sheep and shepherds to ashes: I alone have escaped to tell you.' He had not finished speaking when another messenger arrived. 'The Chaldaeans,' he said, 'three bands of them, have raided the camels and made off with them, and put the servants to the sword: I alone have escaped to tell you.' He had not finished speaking when another messenger arrived. 'Your sons and daughters', he said, 'were eating and drinking at their eldest brother's house, when suddenly from the desert a gale sprang up, and it battered all four corners of the house which fell in on the young people. They are dead: I alone have escaped to tell you.' Then Job stood up, tore his robe and shaved his head. Then, falling to the ground, he prostrated himself and said: Naked I came from my mother's womb, naked I shall return again. Yahweh gave, Yahweh has taken back. Blessed be the name of Yahweh! In all this misfortune Job committed no sin, and he did not reproach God.*

There are some passages in the Holy Scriptures that describe an encounter of fallen angels with God! In the New Testament the events described are usually short! Satan is rejected by the Lord in the desert (*cf. Mt 4:3-11*); the demons have to go,

in one case they ask for permission to go into the pigs, which then descend into the slope (*cf. Mk 5:12-13*)!

We sometimes hear from exorcists that there are conversations with the demons who speak out!

All in all, however, this area touching the “*deep secrets of Satan*” (*cf. Rev 2:24*) is a subject that should only be dealt with in the necessary objectivity and must be free from any "fascination of evil" so that darkness cannot exert its influence in any way!

Today's text is certainly not so easy to understand, for the fact that God gives Satan permission to test Job is at first sight a mystery! But we must remember that even in paradise, when men were still in a state of innocence, the fallen angel was allowed to tempt us (*cf. Gen 3:1-6*)! Since nothing happens without God and everything is woven into God's plan of salvation, even such difficult circumstances must have their deep meaning!

At first it sounds as if God has to prove to Satan that Job is faithful to him! But this would be a wrong assumption, because God's judgement on man is valid independently of the creatures' point of view and even more so from the point of view of the tempter!

But God integrates the power of evil into his plan of salvation, which is a special aspect of his omnipotence! The devil was - like everything God created - good! So he was not created evil or even arose out of himself as a kind of "destructive anti-power", as some people want to convey false teachings.

As a reasonable creature, God has given freedom as a gift to the angel, so that he can respond to his love, to serve him and, like all creatures, to share in the glory of God, because true love needs freedom as a basis! But this freedom was abused by him and other angels. Thus the angel became Satan, that is, the adversary!

To put it differently: Satan tries to use his gifts against God's plans by abusing freedom! But since Satan has not yet been thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone forever, where the beast and the lying prophet are also and will be tormented day and night for all eternity (*cf. Rev 20:10*), he can tempt people with God's permission!

It is important to emphasise God's permission, because even in the sorrowful trials, which are temptations of all kinds, God has a different intention than Satan wants.

In today's text the intentions are clear: Satan - "the accuser of our brothers" (*cf. Rev 12:10*) - wants to prove that Job honours God only for his own sake! God on the other hand gives Job the opportunity to prove his love for him! In today's text we encounter the tested Job, how he wonderfully expresses his devotion to God in the wake of severe trials!

This is the pattern that underlies temptations; the Lord, through his wisdom, transforms Satan's unholy intentions into plans of salvation!

Starting from this knowledge that temptations are basically meant to strengthen us, the letter of James lets us know:

*“My brothers, consider it a great joy when trials of many kinds come upon you, for you well know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance, and perseverance must complete its work so that you will become fully developed, complete, not deficient in any way.” (Jas 1:2-4).*

God therefore takes the rebellion of Satan into his service as long as he has provided for it in his plan of salvation! Therefore, we must never despair when personal trials come or when we see how the Church is being purified in a special way! The devil tries to discourage us so that we give up, withdraw completely and no longer proclaim the Gospel!

God, on the other hand, wants to strengthen us so that we can connect with him even more deeply, believe even more, remain faithful to the Church and learn how to defend ourselves against Satan!

In all trials, it is important to always keep in touch with the Lord and to understand that He always stays with us, whether we feel this or not, and never to lose faith! In this way we are strengthened and some things can fall away from us that are not part of the essence of our faith journey!