

6. October 2020

“Good and blind zeal”

Gal 1:13-24

You have surely heard how I lived in the past, within Judaism, and how there was simply no limit to the way I persecuted the Church of God in my attempts to destroy it; and how, in Judaism, I outstripped most of my Jewish contemporaries in my limitless enthusiasm for the traditions of my ancestors. But when God, who had set me apart from the time when I was in my mother's womb, called me through his grace and chose to reveal his Son in me, so that I should preach him to the gentiles, I was in no hurry to confer with any human being, or to go up to Jerusalem to see those who were already apostles before me. Instead, I went off to Arabia, and later I came back to Damascus. Only after three years did I go up to Jerusalem to meet Cephas. I stayed fifteen days with him but did not set eyes on any of the rest of the apostles, only James, the Lord's brother. I swear before God that what I have written is the truth. After that I went to places in Syria and Cilicia; and was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judaea which are in Christ, they simply kept hearing it said, 'The man once so eager to persecute us is now preaching the faith that he used to try to destroy,' and they gave glory to God for me.

There can be - as we hear in today's text - a false zeal that is blind! St. Paul was a very pious man and - as he himself testified - he surpassed even most of his contemporaries and worked with the greatest zeal for the tradition of the Fathers! But with this zeal he also rejected the emerging Church, which he saw as a danger to his faith, and persecuted it excessively!

We can see, then, that zeal alone is no guarantee that what one does is right and enlightened in the religious sense! It is therefore necessary to examine, in the sense of discernment of spirits, what zeal is determined by; it can, for example, mix with ambition, be determined by looking for our own glory, greed and the desire for power, etc., and therefore have a destructive effect!

Zeal, on the other hand, can be a great driving force for good; such as zeal to help others, to preach the Gospel, to practice the virtues, to fulfil one's duties, to make amends!

There are a few elements that show whether this zeal is good zeal or whether it is too strongly guided by self-interest! It would be best if, with God's help, you can perceive yourself to some extent and thus determine whether the zeal is pure! This is especially true in the religious sphere! However, as we are often not able to assess ourselves so well, here are some hints:

Zeal should not lead to an inner hardening which no longer knows any mobility and therefore becomes rigid! He must not become blind and simply ignore everything that might try to order him and ignore people and their situation!

Conversely, one can formulate that a good and enlightened zeal can also perceive limits, remains flexible, is not judgmental and has something positively inviting, while the dark zeal has a repulsive and often merciless effect!

Another aspect of this text is that St. Paul, after his knowledge of the Son of God, did not consult anyone at first! Only later did he go to Jerusalem to meet the other apostles!

On our path of discipleship, we are always invited to consult with the Lord himself. Without doubt it is wise to have a good spiritual guide or someone to advise us! But there are all too few of them, so that our inner path - always within the framework of the Holy Scriptures and the authentic teaching of the Church as guiding principles that cannot be crossed - asks for a deep relationship with God!

We are not left alone by God, but the Holy Spirit has been sent to us! He is our counsellor when we cultivate an intimate relationship with Him! We just have to learn to ask him concretely and not just leave our thinking to our natural ability! We always need the connection to God, because our mind often does not understand the higher view of God, but remains caught up in its own thoughts!

Familiarity with the Holy Spirit is not only intended for special souls, but would be the norm of inner life! Why should God not tell us his advice when we ask him for it? Why should he leave us in the dark on important issues - and even if he did, he will strengthen us to wait with patience.

Of course, one must be careful not to confuse one's own thoughts and feelings with the Holy Spirit and to maintain a certain self-criticism! But the Holy Spirit himself will teach us what comes from him and what does not!

Let us turn to the Holy Spirit, who is our reliable advisor.