

10. October 2020

“The law kept us under guard”

Gal 3:21-29

As it is, scripture makes no exception when it says that sin is master everywhere; so the promise can be given only by faith in Jesus Christ to those who have this faith. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the Law, locked up to wait for the faith which would eventually be revealed to us. So the Law was serving as a slave to look after us, to lead us to Christ, so that we could be justified by faith. But now that faith has come we are no longer under a slave looking after us; for all of you are the children of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus, since every one of you that has been baptised has been clothed in Christ. There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither slave nor freeman, there can be neither male nor female - for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And simply by being Christ's, you are that progeny of Abraham, the heirs named in the promise.

It took no small amount of persuasion on the part of the apostle Paul to enforce the novelty of the gospel message, especially among those who were instructed in the Jewish faith! On the one hand, the apostle emphasises that the message of the Gospel is in accordance with the previous tradition, that the coming of the Lord was proclaimed by the prophets and was formed in their person, and on the other hand he also emphasises the freedom that came to people through faith in Christ.

In today's text, Paul presents the law to us as the disciplinarian, yes, he even speaks of the "prison of the law"! To understand this better, we must bear in mind the weakness of man, who is always in danger of succumbing to his bad inclinations and falling into sin! How often do we encounter this circumstance in the Holy Scriptures! It is a fatal misjudgement to assume that man, if left to himself and his nature, simply does good! No one knows this better than our heavenly Father! That is why He gives the law to the people of Israel before the coming of His Son! It shows what sin is and also lets the Israelites feel the consequences if they violate the law!

God sets up this law like a watchman, so that man remains in the protection of the law and is not at the mercy of his inclinations! Man should keep himself and walk in the ways of the Lord, so that he does not violate the great good of life and the image of God! Therefore such a law regulates many things for man, which is in a

way a prison, as Paul expresses it! This "disciplinarian" has to fulfil his task until the grace that is effective in us through the coming of the Lord no longer needs this disciplinarian, he would even become an obstacle to us living in the freedom that the Lord brings us!

There are some important elements to be discerned for our path of following Christ:

We could say that, for our inner, spiritual journey, asceticism and discipline are a kind of "inner disciplinarian", so that we do not abandon ourselves to tendencies that reduce the fruitfulness of our journey! Asceticism - that is, struggle - curbs our tendency to abandon ourselves to the sensual and spiritual pleasures of life! The stronger we are bound up in them, the more necessary asceticism becomes!

Let us take two simple examples: excessive eating as sensual derailment and excessive talking as mental disorder! Both are harmful to our spiritual life! While excessive eating makes us slightly lethargic and also endangers our health, excessive talking damages the ability to listen, to focus on God and also harms our fellow human beings! Both are forms of "letting oneself go".

The "inner disciplinarian" now lays down rules for us! For example, he prescribes to work on a too strong desire to eat! Depending on how strongly we are inhibited by this, more rules are needed to ensure that we do not give in to our weakness!

It is similar with the disorderly urge to speak! If we do not rein it in through efforts and restrictions, we will not succeed in arranging it in such a way that it no longer does any harm!

So we see that certain measures of restriction should help us not to derail! However, they are not the aim and they do not have the power to make us holy! They tie us up until the grace of the Lord becomes so effective in our spiritual life that we no longer need the strict manner of restraint and have found the right measure in the two examples given of orderly eating and orderly speaking!

These examples could now be extended to other areas! Perhaps this will make us a little clearer about what the Holy Apostle wants to communicate to the Galatian community! The disciplinarian of the Old Covenant has done his service until the coming of the Lord! Now it is time to live in the freedom of the grace that Jesus Christ has brought us! Through faith we are sons of God in Jesus Christ!