

29. January 2021

“He certainly will come before too long”

Heb 10:32-39

Remember the great challenge of the sufferings that you had to meet after you received the light, in earlier days; sometimes by being yourselves publicly exposed to humiliations and violence, and sometimes as associates of others who were treated in the same way. For you not only shared in the sufferings of those who were in prison, but you accepted with joy being stripped of your belongings, knowing that you owned something that was better and lasting. Do not lose your fearlessness now, then, since the reward is so great. You will need perseverance if you are to do God's will and gain what he has promised. Only a little while now, a very little while, for come he certainly will before too long. My upright person will live through faith but if he draws back, my soul will take no pleasure in him. We are not the sort of people who draw back, and are lost by it; we are the sort who keep faith until our souls are saved.

Following Christ will not be possible without suffering!

Jesus himself knew suffering and so it will be with his disciples! He did not leave us in ignorance about this and we also know why this is so: *“And the judgement is this: though the light has come into the world people have preferred darkness to the light because their deeds were evil.”* (Jn 3:19)

Unfortunately, the world that has turned away from God often does not welcome the coming of the Messiah. On the one hand, the Messiah reveals God's mercy and offers people forgiveness of sins, but on the other hand, God's authority is unequivocally proclaimed! And the latter is especially what the powers that be in revolt against God do not want. They do not want to be reminded that their present power is only temporary and that all must appear before the judgment of God! Thus, for their part, there is an enmity against God into which people will be drawn if they remain in darkness!

Seen against this background, it is understandable that the brothers spoken of here in the Letter to the Hebrews have endured many a hard struggle of suffering and have been insulted and tormented before the whole world and have also joyfully accepted the robbery of their property!

But how are we to deal with such situations that can come upon us Christians?

This is where the concrete application of faith comes into play: Christians know that all possessions on earth are only temporary, that one cannot hold on to them, that they are merely an illusory security that can disappear any day.

Such a view makes us look to the eternal goods and expect permanence and fulfilment from them alone, for these goods are not of a material kind. This certainly does not mean that one should be careless with earthly things and not use them in service! But it does mean that one should not set one's heart on perishable things. If one loses them, then it is not so difficult to overcome this or even, as the text says, to accept the loss joyfully.

However, this can only happen if one thinks firmly of the eternal things and is able to cope with the robbery of goods from this view.

We get another piece of advice in today's text:

“You will need perseverance if you are to do God's will and gain what he has promised. Only a little while now, a very little while, for come he certainly will before too long.”

Endurance and perseverance on the path of following Christ are significant values. Again, we do not simply draw this attitude from ourselves, but attain it by looking to the one who is to come and will not fail to come. The heart is anchored in the Lord who will come again at the end of time.

No one knows this time except the Father in heaven, but the return of Christ is the great perspective towards which we should live. Already in personal death there will be an encounter with Christ. There, too, we do not know the time, but it comes closer to us every day! In order to be able to face this death with confidence, we need perseverance in the good, holding on to faith.

It is the same with the Second Coming of the Lord for all people: it comes as surely as personal death and mankind should be prepared for it! Just as we usually think little of death, we also think little of the coming of the Lord at the end of time. But it is precisely the view of these two events that can give us the strength to endure!

When we say that the return of the Lord is delayed for so long, we can think of the word that the Lord does not delay his coming, but that he is patient with us and wants everyone to be saved if possible!

“The Lord is not being slow in carrying out his promises, as some people think he is; rather is he being patient with you, wanting nobody to be lost and everybody to be brought to repentance.” (2 Pet 3:9)

And one last thing: *“My upright person will live through faith but if he draws back, my soul will take no pleasure in him. We are not the sort of people who draw back, and are lost by it; we are the sort who keep faith until our souls are saved.”*

We are called to stand firm in this world. We cannot flee from the battle we are called to fight. It will always catch up with us. Even if we do not have to seek the battle and the cross, we should not retreat when it comes to standing firm. In faith we will be able to resist and thus win life.

So the Lord calls our attention to three things today:

- let us not set our hearts on earthly things,
- let us gain perseverance with our eyes on the end,
- let us not avoid the battle that is set before us!

We can overcome all this in faith!