

10. March 2021

“Always witnessing God”

Deut 4:1, 5-9

'And now, Israel, listen to the laws and customs which I am teaching you today, so that, by observing them, you may survive to enter and take possession of the country which Yahweh, God of your ancestors, is giving you. Look: as Yahweh my God commanded me, I have taught you laws and customs, for you to observe in the country of which you are going to take possession. Keep them, put them into practice, and other peoples will admire your wisdom and prudence. Once they know what all these laws are, they will exclaim, "No other people is as wise and prudent as this great nation!" And indeed, what great nation has its gods as near as Yahweh our God is to us whenever we call to him? And what great nation has laws and customs as upright as the entirety of this Law which I am laying down for you today? 'But take care, as you value your lives! Do not forget the things which you yourselves have seen, or let them slip from your heart as long as you live; teach them, rather, to your children and to your children's children.

Even if to the people of the old covenant were not given a specific call for mission, they were still supposed to bear witness to the greatness of God through their existence. This testimony depended on how well they followed the precepts, for only in this way could God's blessing unfold, which then became evident to the other nations, for *"what great nation would have gods as near to it as Yahweh our God is near to us wherever we call upon him? Or what great nation would have laws and regulations as righteous as anything in this instruction I set before you today?"*

So the old covenant people were to be convincing to the other nations through their obedience and commitment to God. These words are followed by the exhortation not to forget what the people have already experienced with God, knowing well how easily the great deeds of God are forgotten.

The last exhortation remains very much in my memory from the time when I prayed in the morning in Jerusalem at the cross on Golgotha. From a certain time, groups of pilgrims would come and celebrate Holy Mass with a particular form. Countless times I heard the psalm reading in different languages. The recurring

verse was: "*Do not forget the works of the Lord*" (Ps 78:7). How important this is for all of us.

In the apostolic exhortation of Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, the Pope speaks of the fact that the Christian should bear witness by his being. This witness can be given by every Christian, even if he is not called to proclaim the Word. One could speak of the "Evangelisation through the being".

What is meant by this?

As God's Spirit unfolds on the path of following Christ, the believer changes. The fruits of the Spirit are to grow: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control (*cf. Gal 5:22-23*).

This expression of a "Christian being" is convincing. Other people will notice when the fruits of the Spirit grow in a person. Let us have a look at one fruit: joy. Here it is not simply a natural joy that is meant, but a spiritual joy. The apostle Paul speaks of joy in the Lord (*cf. Phil 4:4*). As a fruit, it grows out of the encounter and inner unity with God. It then becomes like an almost permanent inner state that is emanated in all encounters with people. People will feel this and like to stay in the presence of such a person and maybe people will ask where the joy comes from and one can then give testimony.

It would be the same with the other gifts of the Spirit. They really make shine the testimony of a Christian life, because they are also the evidence that God's Spirit is at work in the person and that the person gets involved in His transformation!

Here we can now draw the parallel with the text. Even if we cannot give witness to the Gospel directly with words due to certain circumstances, it is given to us to bear witness to God's love through deeds and "being in Christ".

So if the people of Israel bore witness to God through faithfulness to God and his wise commandments, the people of the New Covenant, in the realisation of following Christ, can bear an inviting witness to the presence of God through the unfolding of the gifts of the Spirit.