



18 March 2021 Faith and love”

Jn 5:31-47

Were I to testify on my own behalf, my testimony would not be true; but there is another witness who speaks on my behalf, and I know that his testimony is true. You sent messengers to John, and he gave his testimony to the truth-not that I depend on human testimony; no, it is for your salvation that I mention it. John was a lamp lit and shining and for a time you were content to enjoy the light that he gave. But my testimony is greater than John's: the deeds my Father has given me to perform, these same deeds of mine testify that the Father has sent me. Besides, the Father who sent me bears witness to me himself. You have never heard his voice, you have never seen his shape, and his word finds no home in you because you do not believe in the one whom he has sent. You pore over the scriptures, believing that in them you can find eternal life; it is these scriptures that testify to me, and yet you refuse to come to me to receive life! Human glory means nothing to me. Besides, I know you too well: you have no love of God in you. I have come in the name of my Father and you refuse to accept me; if someone else should come in his own name you would accept him. How can you believe, since you look to each other for glory and are not concerned with the glory that comes from the one God? Do not imagine that I am going to accuse you before the Father: you have placed your hopes on Moses, and Moses will be the one who accuses you. If you really believed him you would believe me too, since it was about me that he was writing; but if you will not believe what he wrote, how can you believe what I say?

The logic of our Lord is clear. He who does not believe Moses will also disbelieve him. We also hear this in the story of the rich man who refused Lazarus any kind of food and then asked Abraham to send Lazarus, who had died, to his brothers so that they would believe (*cf. Lk 16:19-31*). Again, the answer is unmistakable: “*If they will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead.*” (v. 31) And indeed: it is hard to grasp but even the most obvious miracles cannot bring about a change of thinking. We have heard it, for example, in the story of St Agnes, St Agatha.

Recently I received a kind letter from China. The writer complained why people did not believe, since God had testified in so many ways.

The answer is not easy. We must seek it from the Lord.

There are two passages in today's text that give us a clue as to why this is so.

"I have come to know that you do not have the love of God within you."

The gift of faith and its acceptance must have something to do with love. This sounds surprising at first, because we do not want to draw the reverse conclusion that all those who do not believe do not have love and that the capacity to love is limited only to those who believe.

But let us look more closely!

Accepting a gift means having an open heart. Do we not sometimes experience that people are not very grateful and can hardly accept gifts or even take them for granted? Were the Jews addressed perhaps not grateful for the gift of being the chosen people, of having had a leader like Moses and the prophets? Was there not already a rebellion against God's leadership in the desert at the time of the exodus from Egypt (*cf. Num 14:2-4*)? Didn't Miriam and Aaron question Moses' special position (*cf. Num 12*)?

Gratitude is a key to whether a heart opens to love or remains closed - especially towards God, but also towards people. If a heart is open, then the gift of faith can easily sink in and find more and more space.

So if the Jews addressed by the Lord did not have love for God - combined with gratitude - in them, then their hearts were closed and they could not and would not accept faith in Jesus. We know how this closedness increased. Even miracles and raising the dead were not enough to lead them to faith (*cf. Jn 11:45-54*).

In the Apocalypse we read that the hearts of the people became more and more closed to the Lord and they even cursed him (*cf. Rev 16:21*). Not only miracles and healings were rejected. Even stern admonitions of God, so to speak the last warning of the Lord, are not heard by a closed heart! In this context, we can critically ask whether the current Corona crisis, which is evident almost worldwide and entails considerable restrictions on civil and church life, is being understood as a call from God to repentance. Probably not!

Another reason is given here by the Lord:

"How can you come to faith if you receive your glory from one another, but do not seek the glory that comes from the one God?"

People have a tendency to reward themselves. Any honour sought for oneself and not from God is vanity. Vanity means that the capacity to love is directed towards one's own person, which can degenerate into self-centredness. But if the capacity to love is directed towards one's own person, one can no longer truly receive, for everything serves the greater glory of one's own person.

Here, too, the heart closes itself.

In extreme cases, for the vain person, God even enters into a kind of competitive relationship. He does not owe his good or even supposed good to God at all, but to his own greatness, which other people are supposed to recognise. In the extreme case, this is pronounced in Lucifer, who even wants to be worshipped (*cf. Mt 4:9*). What a pleasant difference when we hear the word of the Virgin Mary: „*You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.*” (*Lk 1:38*)... “*For the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name.*” (v. 49)

The vain one, on the other hand, who seeks honour from men, is easily offended, quickly feels his dignity violated and does not even notice that he makes himself dependent on the praise and recognition of men. God is more and more out of sight. The praise and honour of people is enough for him. He lives in a self-made and unreal world and through the increasing self-boundedness he becomes more and more difficult to receive the gift of faith. He has already received his “gift” through the honour of others. Faith, on the other hand, leads away from the self and towards God. It seeks God's glory!