

20. March 2021

“A free heart”

*Jn 7:40-53*

*Some of the crowd who had been listening said, 'He is indeed the prophet, 'and some said, 'He is the Christ,' but others said, 'Would the Christ come from Galilee? Does not scripture say that the Christ must be descended from David and come from Bethlehem, the village where David was?' So the people could not agree about him. Some wanted to arrest him, but no one actually laid a hand on him. The guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees who said to them, 'Why haven't you brought him? 'The guards replied, 'No one has ever spoken like this man.' 'So,' the Pharisees answered, 'you, too, have been led astray? Have any of the authorities come to believe in him? Any of the Pharisees? This rabble knows nothing about the Law - they are damned.' One of them, Nicodemus - the same man who had come to Jesus earlier - said to them, 'But surely our Law does not allow us to pass judgement on anyone without first giving him a hearing and discovering what he is doing? 'To this they answered, 'Are you a Galilean too? Go into the matter, and see for yourself: prophets do not arise in Galilee. 'They all went home.*

Who had blinded the Pharisees so much that they were not able to change their negative attitude towards Jesus? Had they not heard positive testimonies about him? First they had heard from the guards of the court that Jesus had spoken like no one had ever spoken before. They were so impressed by his person that they did not dare to arrest him. The guards said to the Pharisees, “*No one has ever spoken like this man.*”

Let's look at the reaction of the Pharisees: They thought Jesus was deceiving the people, and they curse these people. It is this last reaction that reveals that their opposition to Jesus was infected with evil, because to curse is to bring evil down on a person. This is especially true when a whole people is cursed, as happens in today's Gospel. A curse is even more tragic when it is pronounced by a spiritual authority.

Unlike the Pharisees, the guards sense the presence of God in Jesus. They could not explain his wisdom and attraction and were touched in the depth of their being. It happened in a dimension that only God can touch, unless man has voluntarily closed himself to God's activity.

The Pharisees also did not listen to Nicodemus, a man from their midst, who warns them of the wrong they are doing to Jesus.

Where does this closed heart come from?

Jesus gives us the main reason in another passage of the Gospel when he said that the Pharisees in question do not have God as their Father, but the devil (*cf. Jn 8:44*). So their closed-mindedness does not come from ignorance, insecurity and fear, or a justified caution, but it has its origin in malice and enmity towards God.

With the people, on the other hand, we can see a different kind of reaction. They are not sure about Jesus. Some recognise him as the Messiah, others doubt him and refer to passages of Scripture. However, we do not perceive that closed-mindedness that we discover in the Pharisees. The people who were cursed by the Pharisees showed greater openness and sincerity and asked who Jesus really is.

What can we learn from today's Bible passage?

We should think about the way we ask questions: are we asking questions that really get to the bottom of things and intend to find the truth in the answer; or are they questions that only seek to confirm the conclusions we have already drawn?

We must never be afraid of the truth, because it sets us free (*cf. Jn 8:32*)!

For example, if we have doubts about the way of the Church, we can speak this out before God with a free heart.

If we feel limitations in our heart, if we perceive fears or bondage, then it is good to take these before the Lord first, so that we can ask a question in true freedom. God will answer our doubts in a way that only He knows, and He will melt away all the closedness that we still have in our hearts.