

23. March 2021

“Faith in Christ”

Jn 8:21-30

Again he said to them: I am going away; you will look for me and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come. So the Jews said to one another, 'Is he going to kill himself, that he says, "Where I am going, you cannot come?"' 'Jesus went on: You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I have told you already: You will die in your sins. Yes, if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins. So they said to him, 'Who are you?' Jesus answered: What I have told you from the outset. About you I have much to say and much to judge; but the one who sent me is true, and what I declare to the world I have learnt from him. They did not recognise that he was talking to them about the Father. So Jesus said: When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am He and that I do nothing of my own accord. What I say is what the Father has taught me; he who sent me is with me, and has not left me to myself, for I always do what pleases him. As he was saying this, many came to believe in him.

Where Jesus goes, those who die in their sins cannot come. This is indeed how it is, for to enter the Father's kingdom forever requires the forgiveness of sins. This is offered to us by the Son of Man, and when we repent of our sins and turn back, God's forgiveness becomes effective in our lives. However, the condition for this is that we believe in Jesus.

This is the key point of today's text. Through the words of Jesus many came to believe in him, unfortunately we do not hear this from the Pharisees. The Gospel tell us how many of them became more and more hardened and longed for the death of Christ (*cf. Jn 11:53*).

What is the mystery of faith? Why do some believe the message and others do not? Some can give their lives for faith, others are indifferent to it or fight it!

First of all: We cannot answer the question comprehensively, because these things are often hidden and only God knows the circumstances exactly. What is clear, however, is that God wants all people to find faith in His Son in order to be saved (*cf. 1 Tim 2:4*).

It is true that we Catholics believe that if someone has not found faith through no fault of their own, God knows other ways to lead them home to Himself. But this must not slacken our zeal to bear witness to God's love in this world and to introduce people to the way of salvation.

Faith is a supernatural virtue that God gives us, and this faith gives us a share in his life. Faith enables us to know God as he knows himself, though not exhaustively. But we are actually already beginning to recognise God as we will one day recognise him in heaven. There we will see God unveiled, on earth only veiled, by means of the truth that faith presents to us (*cf. 1 Cor 13:12*).

Faith is still an initial knowledge, it is still imperfect, as St. Paul says (*cf. 1 Cor 13:9*), still a half-light compared to the eternal vision of God in heaven. However, in relation to unbelief, it is a bright light, because unbelief is darkness.

As for faith in Jesus, it is primarily a personal faith. The Jews were invited to recognise him as the promised Messiah. They were to perceive that in Jesus the Father came to them, the same God who brought them out of Egypt and led them through the desert, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The deeper knowing happens on a journey of faith and our spirit gladly accepts the truths of faith and is convinced of their truth through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus says in today's text: *“if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”* This phrase is meant to remind the Pharisees of the one who said: *“I am he who is” (Ex 3:14)*

We humans agree to the offer of faith with our hearts, minds and wills and so faith begins to lead our lives. We now see life in a supernatural light - that is, from God and towards God!

This offer to recognise Jesus in his time on earth was a great offer of grace to the Jews. The very fact that Jesus spoke of God as His Father and pointed to Him again and again, emphasising that He does nothing without the Father's will, should not have become an offence to them, but an invitation to understand Jesus' innermost intentions, namely to do God's will and to glorify Him!

However, the light of faith can also be rejected and not penetrate into the soul of man! It can encounter an obdurate heart, a sluggish heart, an uninterested heart: many obstacles. Therefore, the transmission of faith, to which all Christians are

called in a way that is appropriate to them, must also be accompanied by prayer, so that as far as possible all obstacles that stand in the way of the Holy Spirit can be overcome.

A sentence of Jesus from today's Gospel invites us to further reflection: *“When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am He and that I do nothing of my own accord. What I say is what the Father has taught me.”*

If Jesus only spoke this word to the Pharisees and Jews present, then it must be a word that points to the future. Will the Jews as a people still recognise the Lord after many centuries?

If he had humanity as a whole in mind, then this word has already been fulfilled among many peoples.

But there is still much work to be done so that all people will know of the coming of the Son of God!