

24. March 2021

**“To remain in the word of God”**

*Jn 8:31-42*

*To the Jews who believed in him Jesus said: If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples; you will come to know the truth, and the truth will set you free. They answered, 'We are descended from Abraham and we have never been the slaves of anyone; what do you mean "You will be set free?"' Jesus replied: In all truth I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave. Now a slave has no permanent standing in the household, but a son belongs to it for ever. So if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free. I know that you are descended from Abraham; but you want to kill me because my word finds no place in you. What I speak of is what I have seen at my Father's side, and you too put into action the lessons you have learnt from your father. They repeated, 'Our father is Abraham.' Jesus said to them: If you are Abraham's children, do as Abraham did. As it is, you want to kill me, a man who has told you the truth as I have learnt it from God; that is not what Abraham did. You are doing your father's work. They replied, 'We were not born illegitimate, the only father we have is God.' Jesus answered: If God were your father, you would love me, since I have my origin in God and have come from him; I did not come of my own accord, but he sent me.*

To remain in the word of Jesus is the great task for those who want to follow him, which lasts the whole of life. It is not just a matter of taking in the Word in order to recognise Jesus - which is the first thing - but of abiding in it.

We know from some examples in the New Testament that the Word can very easily be forgotten if we turn too much to the world, if earthly cares and worries occupy us too much, or if the devil succeeds in turning us away from the Word (*cf. Mt 13:19-23*).

To abide in the Word of the Lord means that the Word penetrates to the innermost part of our soul and needs appropriate care there. It consists of hearing and contemplating the Word again and again, repeating it in our hearts, asking the Spirit of God to open it up to us even more deeply, consulting appropriate literature which may help us to understand the Word even better. Just as our bodies need daily care, so does our supernatural life. The daily contemplation of the Word of

God strengthens and enlightens us, and, as Jesus tells us today, it leads us ever deeper into the truth and sets us free.

However, the Word of God does not only want to be contemplated in itself in order to enlighten us, but it also guides us to right action! Only then will abiding in Jesus be realised when we draw the consequence from the Word of the Lord and learn to deal with the respective situations in the light of the internalised Word.

This requires constant remembrance of the Word of the Lord. This is the task of the Holy Spirit, for he reminds us of all that Jesus said and did. (*cf. Jn 14:26*)

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit should be pointed out here: It is the gift of counsel. The Holy Spirit wants to teach us what is the right response to the situation from God's point of view. So if we do not immediately know inwardly how to react to a certain situation, then it is advisable to specifically call upon the Holy Spirit and ask him for help: "Come, Holy Spirit, show me what to do". The Spirit of the Lord will not hesitate to give us a light and encourage us to do what is according to the will of the Lord!

In today's reading, the Lord continues the conversation with the Jews and his words follow a clear logic: "*if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free.*"

Jesus has in mind the most essential freedom of man. This freedom consists in following God's invitation and living in the truth. The opposite is to be a slave to sin. It binds man to evil and makes him a servant of it. So it is the other way round, as many people unfortunately believe today! To do what I want is not freedom, but to do what is right is freedom.

Now no human being can free himself from sin, it is too deep-seated in us and our good will is not enough. That is why God sends us the Saviour of men to forgive us our sins and to give us the strength to fight against them.

This is also true for the Jews gathered around the Lord. They believe they already have freedom because of their history with God, but without understanding the real dimension of freedom that Jesus means.

Jesus tries to open their eyes. One cannot refer to Abraham or to God as one's father if one rejects him! One cannot be a free Israelite if one wants to kill the Son of God sent by the Father! No, one remains a servant of sin and the real father - as Jesus implies - is the devil, the murderer from the beginning (*cf. Jn 8:44*).

As long as we do not turn away from sin, or at least try to do so by all means, we cannot rely on any privileges to justify wrong behaviour. Neither the Jews can refer to their history, nor we Christians to our baptism.

It is only the turning to Jesus and the offer to live in him that allows us to live in the freedom of God's children (*cf. Rom 8:21*).