

27. March 2021

**“To use the freedom in the right way”**

*Jn 11:45-57*

*Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees to tell them what Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and Pharisees called a meeting. 'Here is this man working all these signs,' they said, 'and what action are we taking? If we let him go on in this way everybody will believe in him, and the Romans will come and suppress the Holy Place and our nation.' One of them, Caiaphas, the high priest that year, said, 'You do not seem to have grasped the situation at all; you fail to see that it is to your advantage that one man should die for the people, rather than that the whole nation should perish.' He did not speak in his own person, but as high priest of that year he was prophesying that Jesus was to die for the nation- and not for the nation only, but also to gather together into one the scattered children of God. From that day onwards they were determined to kill him. So Jesus no longer went about openly among the Jews, but left the district for a town called Ephraim, in the country bordering on the desert, and stayed there with his disciples. The Jewish Passover was drawing near, and many of the country people who had gone up to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves were looking out for Jesus, saying to one another as they stood about in the Temple, 'What do you think? Will he come to the festival or not?' The chief priests and Pharisees had by now given their orders: anyone who knew where he was must inform them so that they could arrest him.*

After the raising of Lazarus, the enemies of Jesus made the final decision to kill him. It was too obvious that great powers were at work in Jesus and that more and more people believed in him. The High Council found a pretextual justification for their intention to eliminate Jesus. Caiaphas - the high priest of that year - however, spoke out the deeper reason for Jesus' atoning death: “*You do not seem to have grasped the situation at all; you fail to see that it is to your advantage that one man should die for the people, rather than that the whole nation should perish.*” He did not speak in his own person, but as high priest of that year he was prophesying that Jesus was to die for the nation.”

A prophetic inspiration means that the whole situation is seen from God's point of view. Not those reasons given by the high council are the decisive ones from God's point of view, but what the death of the Lord means in God's plan of salvation. The

inspiration of the high priest did not come from his personal piety and closeness to God, but was a grace bestowed upon him by his office.

We also know this grace from the ministry of the priests of the Catholic Church. For example, they are given the grace of being able to administer the sacraments. When the priest celebrates Holy Mass according to the rules of the Church, the great miracle of the transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ takes place. This happens even if the priest's personal life does not match the height of his vocation, even if he lives in sin. So God can also work through ministers when they fall short personally, as was the case with Caiaphas, the high priest, who became the leader of those responsible for Jesus' death.

Jesus was thus to die for the people and for the scattered children of Israel. This circumstance touches on a point that always raises serious questions for some people: Why does God allow suffering? And even more concretely: Why does God allow the suffering of his own Son? Some may still wonder whether the High Council and the Pharisees are to blame for Jesus' death at all, if it was intended by God.

To get closer to some aspects of this question, it is essential to distinguish between God's active will and his permissions. The active will of God, one could also say: the actual will of God is always directed towards the good. God cannot will anything else out of himself but the good, because he is "the good" himself (*cf. Mk 10:18*). He is light and in him dwells no darkness.

However, God deals with the sin of angels and human beings who commit it in abuse of their freedom and thus work against the active will of God. This abuse can happen because He has endowed rational beings with freedom of will and because a true love relationship between God and His children needs freedom as its foundation. This is easily understood on the human level. Genuine love between two people can only happen in freedom and cannot be forced.

So God allows man to a certain extent to realise his will, even if it is against God's original intentions. This is called God's permission. However, since God has not given omnipotence to man or to the angels, the possibility of an abuse of freedom remains limited in time and in effect. In addition, God sticks to his plan of salvation for human beings in spite of the resistance. He integrates the resistance into his plan of salvation. We could say, humanly speaking, that the oppositions become often painful detours along which God nevertheless achieves his goal.

Suffering and its consequences originally arose from the turning away from God. We see as a consequence of the paradisiacal fall into sin that man must die (*cf. Rom 5:12*). In this respect, illnesses and physical suffering are the consequences of the state of separation from God.

Now the redemption of man does not happen by simply taking away the suffering, but that it is brought to redemption in its entirety. The connection with God is restored, sin is forgiven and the spiritual effects of sin are healed. Even physical suffering undergoes a change when it is snatched away from senselessness.

God also takes suffering, like all the bumps in our lives, into service. It can serve to purify man if he consciously tries to bear it and connects it with the suffering of Christ. Christ accepted suffering out of love for God and man and redeemed man through his voluntary suffering and death.

Even if God glorifies this way of His Son and offers the world redemption in Him, His death remains the responsibility of those who bear the guilt for it. No one is forced to do evil so that good may come of it, and the killing of an innocent human being, and in this case of the Son of God, is an evil act, out of which, however, God in his omnipotence has made a redemptive act!

Let us use the freedom we have received from God as human beings to seek His will and to do it!