

12. April 2021

“To proclaim the Gospel with boldness”

Acts 4:23-31

As soon as they were released they went to the community and told them everything the chief priests and elders had said to them. When they heard it they lifted up their voice to God with one heart. 'Master,' they prayed, 'it is you who made sky and earth and sea, and everything in them; it is you who said through the Holy Spirit and speaking through our ancestor David, your servant: Why this uproar among the nations, this impotent muttering of the peoples? Kings on earth take up position, princes plot together against the Lord and his Anointed. This is what has come true: in this very city Herod and Pontius Pilate plotted together with the gentile nations and the peoples of Israel, against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed, to bring about the very thing that you in your strength and your wisdom had predetermined should happen. And now, Lord, take note of their threats and help your servants to proclaim your message with all fearlessness, by stretching out your hand to heal and to work miracles and marvels through the name of your holy servant Jesus.' As they prayed, the house where they were assembled rocked. From this time they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to proclaim the word of God fearlessly.

Perhaps the text explains to us in an indirect way what is the main deficiency or one of the main obstacles of today's preaching. It might be just the lack of boldness, which is caused by the fear of man. Fear of man is like a chain that wraps itself around a man and inhibits him from doing what the Lord wants him to do. It is clear that this hinders the spreading of the Word of God. And indeed: Unfortunately, we have to observe that even in the church one has less and less courage to call sin “sin”, for example, and thus is in danger of proclaiming the Gospel only in a way that is pleasing to man.

On the other hand, we hear today about the apostles who - strengthened by the Holy Spirit - are ready to share the Gospel, although they know very well that they are in constant danger of death. The threats are made, and it is clear to the apostles that there is a kind of plot between Herod and Pilate, the Gentiles and the tribes of Israel, directed against Jesus. However, God takes this enmity against Jesus into service to have His will of salvation carried out: The Lord's death on the cross becomes the atonement for the sins of mankind and his glorious resurrection the victory over hell and death (*cf. 1 Cor 15:54-57*).

Although the hostile powers are allowed to persecute the apostles, they cannot prevent the proclamation of the Word of God. Everything they do out of enmity, the Lord will insert into His plan of salvation. Persecutions will lead to the word being carried on in other ways and under other circumstances, because the mission of evangelization must be fulfilled. People are to receive news of the Gospel. They should know about the love of our Father, who is looking for them and wants to live in community with them. They should encounter Jesus, who alone is the way to the Father (*cf. Jn 14:6*).

In order to place oneself completely at the service of the Gospel, one must have the courage to overcome the fear of man. The gaze must be directed to God and not first to people.

Evangelization is a mission of the Lord! (*cf. Mt 28:19-20*) Therefore, the will of the one who sent us must always be in view first. Then the next step is to decide in which way I can best fulfill this mission. I should be guided by prudence and the gift of counsel, and not be hindered by the fear of men. It must not happen that one withholds from a person something important for his life only because it can be resented. Also the fear of all kinds of disadvantages, the fear of going against the “political correctness”, the fear of concrete persecutions etc. must not hinder us at all to preach the Gospel.

That is why this prayer of the apostles for boldness is so essential and also a clear instruction for us. May the Lord give us the courage to proclaim the truth, whether welcome or unwelcome. (*cf. 2 Tim 4:2*)

Unfortunately, many shepherds in our church have come to look more to people than to God. They no longer sufficiently confront the world that has turned away from God with the Gospel, but seek ways to somehow harmonize with that world. People often no longer dare to proclaim the radical clarity of the gospel, which makes it clear to us that the kingdom of God is essentially different from many of the goals of this world.

We have to be especially concerned about the salvation of people's souls, which includes the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

It is biblical realism to always reckon with the hostility of this world until the Lord returns at the end of time and completes all things. This is why prayer for boldness

is most important! How would we stand before the Lord if He entrusted His truth to us and we did not proclaim it for fear of man?