

14. April 2021

## “Overcoming jealousy”

*Acts 5:17-26*

*Then the high priest intervened with all his supporters from the party of the Sadducees. Filled with jealousy, they arrested the apostles and had them put in the public gaol. But at night the angel of the Lord opened the prison gates and said as he led them out, 'Go and take up position in the Temple, and tell the people all about this new Life.' They did as they were told; they went into the Temple at dawn and began to preach. When the high priest arrived, he and his supporters convened the Sanhedrin - this was the full Senate of Israel - and sent to the gaol for them to be brought. But when the officials arrived at the prison they found they were not inside, so they went back and reported, 'We found the gaol securely locked and the warders on duty at the gates, but when we unlocked the door we found no one inside.' When the captain of the Temple and the chief priests heard this news they wondered what could be happening. Then a man arrived with fresh news. 'Look!' he said, 'the men you imprisoned are in the Temple. They are standing there preaching to the people.' The captain went with his men and fetched them - though not by force, for they were afraid that the people might stone them.*

So it was jealousy that moved the High Priest and his people to try to silence the apostles.

Jealousy can become a tremendous plague. In the account we have heard, this jealousy is particularly abominable, because the apostles are truly in the service of God's work. The High Priest and those on his side are jealous of the great results achieved by the apostles in their own eyes. We see that it is not so much the concern that the people might fall into error in listening to the preaching of the apostles. If that were so, their behaviour would be understandable, up to a point... But no; their reaction comes from a stubborn heart. Even Pilate had noticed that one of the reasons why Jesus had been handed over was jealousy (*cf. Mt 27:18*).

There are different forms of jealousy. Not all its manifestations are bad; there are some that have their justification. Let us think, for example, of the jealousy felt by spouses when there really is a just reason, because it turns out that the love due to the spouse is not received by him (or her), but by someone else. Or let us remember how St. Paul writes to the Corinthians that he is jealous for them with

God's own jealousy (*cf. 2 Cor 11:2*). Or we have also heard that God himself is a "jealous God" (*cf. Ex 20:5*). By this 'jealousy', he means idolatry, when man puts other things of little value before God, who, being our Creator and Redeemer, has the right to be loved by us. Although God does not need our love for Himself; He claims and asks for it, so that His creatures, His children, may receive what He has prepared for them.

But in the context of today's reading, we encounter a very different kind of jealousy: it is that destructive force of which the Proverbs say: "*Cruel is wrath, overwhelming is anger; but jealousy, who can withstand that?*" (*Prov 27:4*). Also the apostle James warns that "*wherever there are jealousy and ambition, there are also disharmony and wickedness of every kind*" (*Jas 3:16*).

This destructive jealousy darkens man, seems to devour him and burns like a flaming fire. One can no longer see any good in the other person, at least not in those aspects on which envy focuses.

Today's story shows us that jealousy drove the High Priest to the point of putting the apostles in prison. But God wants them to continue the proclamation of the Gospel, so he releases them from prison and sends them out to continue in their service. This is the time of the apostles, and no civil authority or deformed religious authority can stop them!

Let us cleanse our hearts of all jealousy, so that our actions may be free. Let us not look with envy upon the gifts of others; neither upon their intellectual gifts, much less upon those gifts which are directly in the service of God. If such feelings arise in our hearts, let us quickly bring them before the Lord, and not allow them to gain ground in us. If we inwardly oppose such emotions, and reject them, God will see our intention. We can turn to Him and say, "Lord, I am sorry if I have these kinds of feelings within me - please help me to overcome them!"

It will also help us if we pray for the person for whom we feel jealous or envious, and give thanks for the gift God has given him or her. This may be contrary to our feelings, but it is an act we do with our spirit and will. If we make a sincere effort, with God's help the poisonous thorn of jealousy will gradually disappear from our hearts, and we will be able to meet freely the person whose gifts we are jealous of. These victories are very important on our path, and it is in this way that the heart is purified.