

1. May 2021

“Abide in joy”

*Acts 13:44-52*

*The next Sabbath almost the whole town assembled to hear the word of God. When they saw the crowds, the Jews, filled with jealousy, used blasphemies to contradict everything Paul said. Then Paul and Barnabas spoke out fearlessly. 'We had to proclaim the word of God to you first, but since you have rejected it, since you do not think yourselves worthy of eternal life, here and now we turn to the gentiles. For this is what the Lord commanded us to do when he said: I have made you a light to the nations, so that my salvation may reach the remotest parts of the earth.' It made the gentiles very happy to hear this and they gave thanks to the Lord for his message; all who were destined for eternal life became believers. Thus the word of the Lord spread through the whole countryside. But the Jews worked on some of the devout women of the upper classes and the leading men of the city; they stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from their territory. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went off to Iconium; but the converts were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.*

This is the order of salvation that God had foreseen. First the Jews, whom the Lord had long prepared, were to accept the message of salvation. Let us imagine what would have happened if not only the “holy remnant” had accepted the Gospel, but a large part of the people together with the religious hierarchy. What a dynamic could have been expected if the Holy Spirit had been able to move many Jews with the zeal of St. Paul and Barnabas to become witnesses of the Risen Lord!

It turned out differently as we hear and know. The apostles who proclaimed the message of the Lord were not only contradicted, but they became victims of blasphemy.

Blasphemies are a kind of preliminary step to cursing. They want to rob the other person of his dignity and draw him into a dark corner, make him suspect in front of other people. One no longer deals objectively with the content and possibly not even with the person himself, but has already spoken his negative judgement about him and solidifies it through any kind of blasphemy.

The apostles, however, are not intimidated by this and give the right answer. The right answer is the fearless proclamation of the truth. Even though the Jews were the first and foremost address of the Lord's proclamation and, according to the words of Paul and Barnabas, they unfortunately proved unworthy, yet the Lord does not therefore abandon His plan of salvation for all nations: *"I have made you a light to the nations, so that my salvation may reach the remotest parts of the earth."* Now the Gospel comes to the Gentiles and is received with joy by those who have believed. It is the joy of the converts who find salvation!

Even today we can experience this when a person is freed from the chains of sin, how grateful he is! Or also when the light of faith falls on those who have fallen into error in their search for God. But it also applies to those who knew the right faith, but it never really came to life. Or those who grew up in another religion and then meet the Lord and experience with joy that it is He whom they have always sought! How great is the joy for a Jew today when he realises that Jesus is the promised Messiah!

This quality of joy filled the Gentiles and the word of the Lord was carried on. This is how it should be: Whoever has found the spring from which the water of life flows must not fail to show it to others.

But the apostles had to experience that it did not remain only with contradiction and blasphemy. Those who are caught up in blasphemies are also easily willing to incite and instigate persecutions. Jealousy and perhaps consequently contempt and hatred have taken hold of them and now dominate their behaviour.

Yet the disciples remained in the joy of the Lord even in the face of hostility. The Holy Spirit strengthened them!

An important lesson for all who remain faithful to our holy faith and perhaps suffer disadvantages, mockery and even persecution for this reason. Let us look to the apostles and above all to the Lord himself. It is necessary to remain faithful to Him and to keep away from modernistic deformations of the faith, not to pay any attention to them.

Today, on the day when the Church also remembers St. Joseph, we can not only commend to him the natural dimension of work, but also the great work of proclaiming the Gospel.