

8. May 2021

“The True Leader of the Mission”

Acts 16:1-10

From there he went to Derbe, and then on to Lystra, where there was a disciple called Timothy, whose mother was Jewish and had become a believer; but his father was a Greek. The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him, and Paul, who wanted to have him as a travelling companion, had him circumcised. This was on account of the Jews in the locality where everyone knew his father was a Greek. As they visited one town after another, they passed on the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, with instructions to observe them. So the churches grew strong in the faith, as well as growing daily in numbers. They travelled through Phrygia and the Galatian country, because they had been told by the Holy Spirit not to preach the word in Asia. When they reached the frontier of Mysia they tried to go into Bithynia, but as the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them, they went through Mysia and came down to Troas. One night Paul had a vision: a Macedonian appeared and kept urging him in these words, 'Come across to Macedonia and help us.' Once he had seen this vision we lost no time in arranging a passage to Macedonia, convinced that God had called us to bring them the good news.

In today's text, St. Paul was twice prevented from visiting a certain area on his missionary journey, until he understood through a dream that he was called to Macedonia. This invites us to look more deeply at the importance of the Holy Spirit for mission. It was one of my favourite themes in Hagia Zion, Jerusalem, when I spoke to groups of pilgrims we accompanied in the Holy Land in recent years.

We see how the Holy Spirit actively determines the direction of the mission. St. Paul depends on these directives, for it is through Him that he is guided. Otherwise he would act primarily on the basis of his reason. This, however, is not capable of grasping certain larger unknown contexts.

These instructions of the Holy Spirit come in different ways. In the above text it is not described how the Holy Spirit prevented Paul from coming to Asia or Bithynia, whether it was, for example, an external obstacle by which they recognised it or an inner intuition or something else. But the guidance of the Holy Spirit is clearly

spoken of. There is no indication, for example, that unknown forces prevented Paul from achieving his goals.

In Troas, Paul's dream made God's plan clear to him: he was to come to Macedonia. Here, at the latest, the reason why the Spirit led him differently became clear to him.

This text shows very well who the true leader of the mission is. Both the outward ways and the contents of the mission are to be determined by the Holy Spirit, as well as the way of proclaiming and, of course, the touching of the hearts of the hearers is also done by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is therefore not only the supreme guide of our inner life, but the spiritual motor of evangelisation and missionary work. We should be aware of this. As much as it is important to fully use for mission our God-given natural abilities - which do the best service when purified - it is even more important to clearly perceive the guidance of the Holy Spirit and to cooperate with it. This means to really get to know Him as He speaks to us, guides us, strengthens us, points us to the right path, corrects us, etc.

This may not be as familiar to us today as it obviously was to the apostles. But this is because we have probably rather lost the fine sense of His presence and replace it more with our reason. Let us remember: reason is a high gift, but it has a natural character and is thus always subject to imperfection and limited. The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, has divine character, or rather is God Himself. If He is at work in us, then it is always a perfect work on His part. The limitation is only in the extent to which we can perceive His efficacy and cooperate with it.

We are approaching the feast of Pentecost.

This is a good opportunity for those who are entrusted in some way with the transmission of the faith, to become more familiar with the presence of the Holy Spirit, to speak consciously with Him and to ask Him to know Him better, both in terms of His inner and outer guidance. No doubt He will respond as a divine friend. This will inspire all our missionary efforts and also make us grow on the path of holiness. The latter always benefits the mission, because here we are also formed "how we say things"! The more the Holy Spirit works and our human cooperation is in His school, the more we can hope for fruitfulness.