

12. July 2021

“Darkness and its Influence on Men”

Ex 1:8-14:22

'Then there came to power in Egypt a new king who had never heard of Joseph. 'Look,' he said to his people, 'the Israelites are now more numerous and stronger than we are. We must take precautions to stop them from increasing any further, or if war should break out, they might join the ranks of our enemies. They might take arms against us and then escape from the country.' Accordingly they put taskmasters over the Israelites to wear them down by forced labour. In this way they built the store-cities of Pithom and Rameses for Pharaoh. But the harder their lives were made, the more they increased and spread, until people came to fear the Israelites. So the Egyptians gave them no mercy in the demands they made, making their lives miserable with hard labour: with digging clay, making bricks, doing various kinds of field - work - all sorts of labour that they imposed on them without mercy. Pharaoh then gave all his people this command: 'Throw every new-born boy into the river, but let all the girls live.'

Those times when the Israelites were welcome in Egypt were over. In due course, Joseph had won the favour of Pharaoh, and Pharaoh had invested him with a high office. In the meantime, Joseph and his contemporaries had died, and another Pharaoh reigned in Egypt. Then the benevolent attitude of the Egyptians towards the children of Israel changed and they began to fear the expansion of this foreign people.

In this context, something happened that we have to observe again and again throughout human history. Fear influences action. Thus, the children of Israel were first subjected to hard labour, then enslaved and finally even their male offspring were put to death.

What was the justification? It was feared that the Israelites might ally themselves with an enemy people and fight against Egypt. This same justification is also found repeatedly in history. During World War I, for example, the Young Turk government suspected the Armenians of cooperating with the enemy. A genocide was then carried out that cost the lives of approximately 1.5 million Armenians. We could name other examples where similar things happened.

It is the “murderer from the start” (*cf. Jn 8:44*) who carries out his work of destruction with and against man. Suddenly, the neighbours with whom one lived

peacefully together become enemies, to be watched out for and to fight against. The devil takes advantage of people's weaknesses and evil inclinations and increases them even more, in order to make people accomplices in his dark plans. We can see this clearly in today's text... However, it is an immense comfort to know that God, in His infinite wisdom, knows, on the one hand, the intentions of the devil and, on the other hand, is able to make use of them for His plan of salvation.

If it is clear to us that the powers of darkness want to abuse our evil inclinations for their plans, it will be all the more important that we work on our weaknesses and on our own hearts. If we allow our hearts to be purified by God and practise the virtues, we take away from the powers of darkness a "hidden field of operation" in which their influence can easily pass unnoticed. This principle applies to all situations in our human life, even if we do not occupy positions of power like the Egyptian Pharaoh.

Let us look once more at the biblical example presented to us in today's reading. If we follow the account in the Book of Exodus, we will see that the aforementioned fear of the growing number of Israelites was not the only reason for not letting the people go when Moses later asked them to do so. The oppression of the children of Israel brought much profit to Pharaoh, so that greed and other motives are also apparent. The same was true of the terrible deportation of the Armenians.

People will only be able to live in true peace when they keep God's commandments and accept the love and forgiveness He offers us in His Son Jesus. Only when the Holy Spirit can penetrate deeply into a person, will he or she become capable of overcoming that which hinders the peace of Christ.

It is a tremendous illusion to believe that we can build a peaceful world on the basis of our goodwill alone. To free ourselves from such an illusion, we can take a look at Holy Scripture, at the history of mankind and also at the present time, when we believe that we live in a civilised world.

But if we look closely, we will see that this is by no means the case. The same forces are still at work, causing destruction, discord and many other terrible things. The time has not yet come when the devil will disappear once and for all from human life; it is still our daily struggle to resist evil and to do good. The Evil One is still seeking and finding the pharaohs of this world, to realise his claims. Deception is still at work, to the point where men confuse good with evil. But though darkness is so present, it will not triumph; but at the End Times God will

deliver us from it. Until then, we live in times of trial and God uses the darkness to make His light shine all the brighter.