

17. July 2021

“How Do You Deal with Persecution?”

Mt 12:14-21

'At this the Pharisees went out and began to plot against him, discussing how to destroy him. Jesus knew this and withdrew from the district. Many followed him and he cured them all but warned them not to make him known. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: Look! My servant whom I have chosen, my beloved, in whom my soul delights, I will send my Spirit upon him, and he will present judgement to the nations; he will not brawl or cry out, his voice is not heard in the streets, he will not break the crushed reed, or snuff the faltering wick, until he has made judgement victorious; in him the nations will put their hope.'

The Lord finds Himself here in a very concrete situation of persecution. In fact, He was aware that the Pharisees had resolved to kill Him. That is why He left that region, and those whom He had healed were commanded not to speak publicly about Him. His hour had not yet come, so he escapes from those who want to silence him (*cf. Jn 7:30*). Nevertheless, He continues to carry out the mission for which He was sent. People must come to know Him, so that hope may enter in their lives and they may experience God's merciful love.

How to deal with a situation of persecution must be carefully considered. In the Lord's example, we see that He does not throw Himself unprotected into the turmoil of battle, as we know from some heroic figures, real or imagined. When persecution comes for the Lord's sake, it must always be carefully examined what His Will is in the particular situation. One does not belong to oneself, but has a mission to fulfil on God's behalf. The focus is then on how to continue to carry out this mission in such a situation. It is therefore not so much a question of self-protection, although this is legitimate. Nor can fear be the determining factor, but rather attentive listening to God's will: How does He want His plan to be realised in the situation of persecution?

The fact that from then on Jesus' actions were more hidden was due to the persecution. However, the Lord can continue His work. Perhaps some pastors in the Church who are aware of the current crisis also think this way. Perhaps they believe that if they take a public stand, they will be persecuted and will no longer be able to continue their ministry for the good of God's people. From this point of view, their silence could be justified, but not if it is primarily a question of protecting themselves.

In fact, it is not only when one's own life is at risk that we can speak of persecution, but it begins much earlier and manifests itself in various forms. What needs to be carefully examined is whether it is indeed persecution or rejection for the sake of Jesus, or whether it is our own faults and shortcomings that are the reason. If so, we should try all the harder to improve. But if the rejection we suffer is really for Jesus' sake, it will ennoble us in a very subtle way and unite us more deeply to the Lord.

Indeed, persecution is already present when one cannot freely speak the truth without risking ridicule by others; when one's God-given personal freedom is curtailed; when political correctness prescribes in an almost dictatorial way what to think, etc. What was said above applies here: we must find the right way to fulfil the mission God has given us. Especially the spirit of counsel can assist us in this, helping us to make the right decision and guiding us to say the right thing at the right time. The spirit of fortitude also comes into play, helping us to overcome human respects, which often prevent us from giving the right witness.

Let us not forget that the Lord already foretold the persecutions that will befall us, when he spoke to his disciples: *“If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too” (Jn 15:20)*.

Let us take them seriously, but let us remain calm, so that we can discern in God's light what is the right response.