

12. August 2021
“God goes ahead!”

Jos 3:7-10a.11.13-17

Yahweh said to Joshua, “This very day, I shall begin to make you great in the eyes of all Israel so that they will know that, as I was with Moses, so I shall be with you. Now, give this order to the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant, when you have reached the brink of the waters of the Jordan, you must halt in the Jordan itself.” To the Israelites, Joshua then said, “Come closer and hear the words of Yahweh your God.” Joshua said, “By this, you are to know that the living God is with you and without a doubt will expel the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites before you. Look, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of the whole earth is about to move into the Jordan at your head. As soon as the priests carrying the ark of Yahweh, Lord of the whole earth, have set the soles of their feet in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan will be cut off; the upper waters flowing down will stop as a single mass.” Accordingly, when the people left their tents to cross the Jordan, the priests carried the Ark of the Covenant ahead of the people. As soon as the bearers of the ark reached the Jordan and the feet of the priests carrying the ark touched the waters -- the Jordan is in spate throughout the harvest season- the upper waters stood still and formed a single mass over a great distance, at Adam, the town near Zarethan, while those flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely separated. The people crossed opposite Jericho. The priests carrying the ark of the covenant of Yahweh stood firm on dry ground in mid-Jordan, while all Israel crossed on dry ground, until the whole nation had completed its crossing of the Jordan.

Yesterday we considered the special nature of the calling of Moses and emphasized that no one can presume to claim for himself a special grace that God gives for a mission he has given, or even to take the place of the called one. Miriam and Aaron had to learn this (cf. Num 12).

It was different with Joshua. *“Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him, and him the Israelites obeyed, carrying out the order which Yahweh had given to Moses.”* (Deut 34:9) So it said in yesterday's reading. This recalls another passage of Scripture when Elisha succeeded Elijah and performed great signs (cf. 2 Kgs 2 to 13).

Joshua, confirmed and appointed by God, legitimately succeeds Moses, and the Lord promises him that he will be with him as with Moses. The decisive phrase for the miracle of the expulsion of the Canaanites and the crossing of the Jordan dry-footed is pronounced by Joshua before the Israelites: *"Look, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of the whole earth is about to move into the Jordan at your head."*

It is the Lord himself who clears the way for his people, just as only true authority comes from him, which he bestows as he wishes. We then see through the crossing of the Jordan how God works a miracle similar to that of the exodus from Egypt.

This event establishes the closeness to Moses and should also be a sign for the often vacillating people that after the death of the incomparable Moses: *"Since then, there has never been such a prophet in Israel as Moses"* (Deut 34:10).

God does not abandon the people, but continues to lead them. An important lesson for us! God leads His own through history and we can be grateful when people fully or largely comply with their mission and God thus glorifies Himself in them. The presence of God can be perceived more strongly in the fruitfulness that then often occurs (cf. Mt 7:20), and this is a great help to the knowledge of God. However, one must not stop at the human person, however holy and radiant it may be. The whole reality shines only when it transcends to God. It is always God who leads, it is never man who performs God's acts of his own accord!

The "incomparable Mother of God Mary", rightly beatified by all peoples, makes us understand: *"For the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name"*. (Lk 1:49) Let us listen to her carefully!

The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord precedes the people and it is God who performs the miracles. This is a comfort to believers in these difficult times.

Even if the shepherds called and appointed by God do not fulfill their mission or even become apostate, the Lord will not abandon His own. He will teach the faithful in such times especially to seek His immediate nearness and to perceive it even more clearly. In spite of all human weakness and reprehensibility of evil, God will guide the destiny. Nevertheless, it should be our constant prayer and hope that he will also raise us human shepherds who will listen to him undividedly and not rely on this world and the God who rules in it.