

25. August 2021

“The testimony of life reinforces the announcement”

1 Tes 2:9-13

'You remember, brothers, with what unsparing energy we used to work, slaving night and day so as not to be a burden on any one of you while we were proclaiming the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, that our treatment of you, since you believed, has been impeccably fair and upright. As you know, we treated every one of you as a father treats his children, urging you, encouraging you and appealing to you to live a life worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and his glory. Another reason why we continually thank God for you is that as soon as you heard the word that we brought you as God's message, you welcomed it for what it really is, not the word of any human being, but God's word, a power that is working among you believers.'

Yesterday, when we looked at Nathanael, of whom the Lord said that he was a “true Israelite” (Jn. 1:47), we reflected on the characteristics of a true Christian and how we could recognize him.

In today's reading, St. Paul speaks without hesitation about how he and his collaborators had given a good witness for the Christian community, and now he appeals to this witness.

Perhaps it might seem a bit strange that the Apostle seems to be praising himself in this way. In the spiritual formation we receive from the Lord, as well as from the teachers of the spiritual life throughout the history of the Church, we are exhorted rather to hide our good works and to attribute everything to the Lord.

In principle, this is the right thing to do, for we are always in danger of placing ourselves in the foreground and seeking the praise of others.

If now the Apostle to the Gentiles praises himself, contrary to such recommendations, the motive must be different. In fact, we also know that other passage in the Second Letter to the Corinthians, in which St. Paul describes his special sufferings and graces as an Apostle of Christ (2 Cor 11:18,21-30). The reason why he expounded it was because there were people who had infiltrated the community and spoke of their special gifts in order to impress the faithful. And, indeed, they had succeeded. This was what St. Paul wanted to correct, so that they would not be

deceived and would remain on the way he had taught them. That was why he also mentioned the special gifts that God had given him.

In today's reading, in speaking of the witness that he and his collaborators gave, St. Paul wants to underline the fact that it was through him that the truth had been announced to the community, and that this announcement had been confirmed by their testimony.

We all know how difficult it is to have credibility when the word that is proclaimed and the personal testimony are far from each other. When this is the case, it is much more difficult for people to be open to the truth of what is being proclaimed than when they see coherence between the life that is lived and the word that is proclaimed. The testimony of life has its own capacity for conviction, and we are called to strive for such coherence.

However, it would also be a mistaken point of view to believe that we could evangelize exclusively through the witness of life, leaving aside all proclamation. In this way, we would be depriving people of the nourishment they so desperately need. On the other hand, it would also be unrealistic to believe that only after having reached a high degree of holiness could we go out to proclaim. In such a case, the word would soon die out, since we would probably not find many people who have attained the holiness of a St. Paul.

The Apostle to the Gentiles underlines once again how important it is to welcome the Word of God, which is essentially different from human words, since it has the power to enlighten, correct and transform us. In this way, it becomes effective in us.

We should never neglect to read the Word of God, but, if possible, we should take the time to do so every day. If we feed our body day after day, how much more necessary it is to nourish our soul and our spirit with the Word of God! In chapter 10 of the Book of Revelation (8-11), St. John is urged to devour a book. The desert fathers speak of “ruminating” the Word. This refers to interiorizing it, so that it can dwell in us and bear fruit.

In today's confusing times, it becomes even more important to collect within ourselves a “treasure” of biblical words, to which we can turn at any time and place. In times of great tribulation, when even access to the Holy Mass is blocked (as, in fact, has already happened), we can always have recourse to this treasure and feed ourselves from the “table of the Word”.

If we collect many words of Sacred Scripture in our hearts, they will be a powerful weapon against that spirit that wants to confuse people.

Therefore, also in view of the spiritual combat, it is important to be very familiar with the Word of God and to know by heart one or another passage.