

30. August 2021

“The coming of the Lord”

1 Thess 4:13-17

We want you to be quite certain, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, to make sure that you do not grieve for them, as others do who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and that in the same way God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. We can tell you this from the Lord's own teaching, that we who are still alive for the Lord's coming will not have any advantage over those who have fallen asleep. At the signal given by the voice of the Archangel and the trumpet of God, the Lord himself will come down from heaven; those who have died in Christ will be the first to rise and only after that shall we who remain alive be taken up in the clouds, together with them, to meet the Lord in the air. This is the way we shall be with the Lord for ever. With such thoughts as these, then, you should encourage one another.

In the early Christianity, there was evidently the expectation that the Lord would return soon for the Final Judgment. Thus, all of life had to be oriented towards that goal, because the certainty of the Lord's Return confers vigilance and attention to our whole existence.

It is something similar to what happens when we live aware of the death that awaits us; when we "integrate" death into our life, since for us Christians it means the definitive encounter with the Lord. Such an attitude will make us prudent, so that we take advantage of the time we have been given to serve the Kingdom of God, and are thus prepared for our encounter with the Lord at the hour of our death.

As St. Paul tells us in this text, we are not in ignorance concerning death, as are those who have no hope. By such he means those who do not believe, for whom death remains something incomprehensible, which with its violence and fright unexpectedly snatches life from you, leaving others bewildered, as happens especially when someone near and dear to you dies.

For non-believers, the afterlife has no answer. Thus, this question is obscure to them and cannot give them comfort. This shows us how important it is to proclaim to people also the so-called "afterlife", that is, the ultimate realities of man, so that they may have hope and learn to understand life and death from the perspective of faith.

Even in these times there are many non-believers, and not a few of them have erroneous ideas about death and the afterlife, so that they cannot have true hope.

Today's text speaks to us of the "rapture" of the faithful who are still in this world when the Lord returns. The Apostle's words seem to indicate that he himself thought he would witness the Return of Jesus: *"we who are still alive for the Lord's coming will not have any advantage over those who have fallen asleep"*

But, although at certain times the faithful believed that his Return was imminent and millenarian movements arose, the truth is that this time has not yet come. However, this should not confuse us at all, for the Lord expressly told us: *"But as for that day and hour, nobody knows it, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, no one but the Father alone."* (Mt 24:36). What we have to do is to interpret the signs of the times, the signs that precede his Second Coming.

And if the Lord has not yet returned, it is not a delay, as St. Peter says in his letter: *"The Lord is not being slow in carrying out his promises, as some people think he is; rather is he being patient with you, wanting nobody to be lost and everybody to be brought to repentance."* (2 Pet 3:9)

The Lord's intention, then, is to save mankind and to offer to all generations to come the possibility of this salvation. People must listen to the proclamation of the glory of eternal life, where an endless joy awaits us, united to God and His own. But, at the same time, it is important that they also know that there is an eternity separated from God, which represents torments for the person.

Thanks to faith in Christ, the great questions about life and death have obtained an authentic answer. Just as the Lord died and rose again, so it will be with us. We do not know whether or not we will be among those who will still be in this world when the Lord returns in his glory, but that is not the decisive thing!

What is important is that we abide by the following words of the Apostle Paul to Titus, and that the Lord finds us ready: *"You see, God's grace has been revealed to save the whole human race; it has taught us that we should give up everything contrary to true religion and all our worldly passions; we must be self-restrained and live upright and religious lives in this present world, waiting in hope for the blessing which will come with the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Christ Jesus. He offered himself for us in order to ransom us from all our faults and to purify a people to be his very own and eager to do good."* (Tit 2:11-14)