

10. September 2021

## The Blasphemer becomes believer

*1 Tim 1:1-2, 12-14*

***Paul, apostle of Christ Jesus appointed by the command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope, to Timothy, true child of mine in the faith. Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength. By calling me into his service he has judged me trustworthy, even though I used to be a blasphemer and a persecutor and contemptuous. Mercy, however, was shown me, because while I lacked faith I acted in ignorance; but the grace of our Lord filled me with faith and with the love that is in Christ Jesus.***

The grace of God, which called the Apostle Paul to follow the Lord, is a great comfort. According to the words of the Apostle himself, he had been “*a blasphemer and a persecutor and contemptuous*”, until the grace of God found him, and he, for his part, offered no resistance to God's call.

How many people today live without faith, or do not understand it, or are indifferent or even hostile to it! Perhaps among them there are also blasphemers. These blasphemers blaspheme because they do not understand....

Undoubtedly blasphemy is a very serious act. One has practically only the option of turning away from such people, because often, even without knowing it, they offend the Lord and everything connected with Him. And this is unbearable! However, the testimony of the Apostle to the Gentiles gives us hope... Perhaps not all blasphemers are decidedly evil, but they do not know what they are doing!

That is why it is all the more important to proclaim the faith, and to pray and sacrifice for the spread of the gospel. For how will people know the deep sources of salvation, if the proclamation has not even reached their ears; if the conviction of the faith fades and, consequently, there are less and less authentic preachers and missionaries to testify to the beauty of the faith (cf. Rom 10:14)?

Perhaps we, the faithful, need much perseverance and patience, just as the Lord Himself has. Then we will be able to see in the blasphemer - even if he objectively offends the Lord - also one who does not know what he is doing; someone who perhaps, deep down, is even seeking God... Then we will not be too frightened! In any case, Paul was not rejected by the Lord, but rather enlightened. The Lord counted

him faithful and granted him mercy. Paul, for his part, responded with all his love and put his whole life at the service of God. He tirelessly proclaimed the Lord and sealed his life with martyrdom.

Let us take this text as an invitation to pray particularly for those who behave as enemies of God and the Church. St. Paul is not the only case of conversion that we know of! There are many testimonies of people who were touched by God's grace and left their crooked ways behind them. The encounter with the immense love of the Lord reached their hearts!

It often happens that people have a wrong image of God, and perhaps their aggression is directed against this false image, and not against what God really is. If they would come to know Him as He really is, perhaps their hearts would be opened and everything they had built up as an attack on this false image of God would crumble.

So what is it that we can do to bring people to know Christ? Besides our prayer, sacrifice and authentic proclamation, what is convincing is above all the authentic witness of a redeemed life; a life deeply permeated by God's love and reflecting His true image. This, in turn, will be the fruit of a life in the Spirit of God, allowing Him to transform us interiorly. Perhaps it is precisely this hope of being able to reach out to people who are living a meaningless life that will motivate us to allow ourselves to be purified by God. Perhaps it will also help us to keep in mind certain people who are influential in the public sphere and do a lot of harm.

God gave us so much through St. Paul! His conversion, to which the Church has even dedicated a liturgical feast of its own, is still active today. His Spirit-filled letters became part of Sacred Scripture and remain valid guidelines to this day. His zeal and fervour invite us to imitate him. The Lord did great things in this Apostle, and today He wants to continue to work such miracles! Some time ago, a Mexican woman, in her concern for her country and for the Church, said to me: "Someone like the Apostle Paul should come!"

Let us ask the Lord to grant us ardent people like St. Paul, and let us, for our part, try to fulfil our mission in the light of God!