

13. September 2021

“The faith of the centurion”

Lk 6:43-49

*'When he had come to the end of all he wanted the people to hear, he went into Capernaum. A centurion there had a servant, a favourite of his, who was sick and near death. Having heard about Jesus he sent some Jewish elders to him to ask him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus they pleaded earnestly with him saying, 'He deserves this of you, because he is well disposed towards our people; he built us our synagogue himself.' So Jesus went with them, and was not very far from the house when the centurion sent word to him by some friends to say to him, 'Sir, do not put yourself to any trouble because I am not worthy to have you under my roof; and that is why I did not presume to come to you myself; let my boy be cured by your giving the word. For I am under authority myself, and have soldiers under me; and I say to one man, "Go," and he goes; to another, "Come here," and he comes; to my servant, "Do this," and he does it. 'When Jesus heard these words he was astonished at him and, turning round, said to the crowd following him, 'I tell you, not even in Israel have I found faith as great as this. 'And when the messengers got back to the house they found the servant in perfect health!'*

Today's Gospel is about faith: *'I tell you, not even in Israel have I found faith as great as this'*.

The Lord did not want to leave this faith unanswered, even though the centurion did not belong to the people of Israel, and Jesus knew that he had been sent first of all to the lost sheep of Israel (cf. Mt 15:24). This centurion, on the contrary, was part of the Roman occupation, which was viewed with hostility by the people of Israel. But Jesus noticed the heart and the extraordinary faith of this man. The Roman Catholic Church has taken up the centurion's wonderful statement in its holy liturgy, modifying it only slightly, and in the traditional rite it is even repeated three times: *"Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed"*.

What makes the centurion's faith so exemplary, for Jesus to commend it in front of the crowd?

First of all, one can perceive an attitude of humility in the centurion's words. He is aware that there is an abysmal difference between him and Jesus. He does not stand proudly as a Roman, demanding healing from the Lord as if it were his right. Rather, he intercedes for someone else: his sick servant. This shows us that he really cared for him. Certainly in many Roman households the situation was different. Slaves were a possession that was simply replaced once they could no longer fulfil their function. The fact that this centurion set out to seek help, seeing the suffering of his servant, shows us that his attitude towards his subordinates is different.

Based on his own experience as a leader, who gave orders to be carried out, the centurion can easily understand the authority and power of Jesus. Thus, he knew that whatever Jesus said would be done. It was not even necessary for the Lord to come to his house... a single word would suffice!

And, indeed, his request was heard...

This is truly an exemplary attitude of faith: on the foundation of humility, there is loving concern for the other person and the firm conviction that the Lord can heal. Looking at the faith of the Roman centurion, we can question whether we ourselves possess such faith. Yes, faith is an essential aspect of waiting for the Lord's return. He himself asks this question: *"When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth? (Lk 8:8)"*

If we look soberly, we will see that in many countries there is only little true faith; and in many others that had already received the proclamation of the gospel, we clearly see a great apostasy.

What, then, can we answer the Lord?

In fact, we can only ask Him to look at the faith of His Church, and, in saying this, we have to note that even in Her there is a growing apostasy, confusion and worldliness, and that the number of the faithful who are striving to live the faith in all its implications is sadly diminishing.

But it is no use simply lamenting! On the contrary, it is up to us to deepen our faith and to ask the Lord to strengthen it, precisely in such difficult times, which some consider to be the times in which the Church is living her "Passion". Thus, these times of progressive decline can become a challenge to root ourselves all the more deeply in the Lord, so that we can also offer others support and guidance.

The times of apostasy in which we find ourselves may signal the approaching Return of the Lord, and call us to a total surrender to God's service, leaving behind all lukewarmness.

No one knows the day or the hour of Christ's Second Coming, only the Father in Heaven (Mt 24:36). But we are called to live as if he were returning today, in order to be prepared.