



9. October 2021

**In everything we prove ourselves authentic servants of God**

**2 Kor 6:4-10**

***Reading of the feast day of St. Dionysis and his companions***

***In everything we prove ourselves authentic servants of God; by resolute perseverance in times of hardships, difficulties and distress; when we are flogged or sent to prison or mobbed; labouring, sleepless, starving; in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness; in the Holy Spirit, in a love free of affectation; in the word of truth and in the power of God; by using the weapons of uprightness for attack and for defence: in times of honour or disgrace, blame or praise; taken for impostors and yet we are genuine; unknown and yet we are acknowledged; dying, and yet here we are, alive; scourged but not executed; in pain yet always full of joy; poor and yet making many people rich; having nothing, and yet owning everything.***

It is the gifts of the Holy Spirit that enable the servants of God to endure all these sufferings and afflictions. They do not collapse under the burden of their ministry and remain on the ground, but the Spirit of the Lord raises them up again and again. In consciously accepting the cross of the mission entrusted to them, they grow inwardly and become more and more like their Lord. This is the great mystery of the servants of God: we are "*dying, and yet here we are, alive*"

When we read such texts or hear about the lives of the saints with their sufferings, such as St. Dionysis and his companions, different feelings can arise. On the one hand, we may admire such people, praise their courage in suffering and see them as great models; on the other hand, we may also be frightened by such words. If we relate them to our own lives and imagine that we would have to suffer similar things, then it is understandable that we can also be afraid of such a life. It can then easily happen that we even let ourselves be discouraged because we see ourselves incapable of performing such deeds.

It is all the more important to understand that holy people are well aware of whom they owe their ability to perform works that go far beyond their human limitations. Who can be joyful at any time when suffering is happening to him?

There must be neither a romanticising nor a mystifying view of suffering. If we look at our Lord, we see in Gethsemane that he accepted suffering from the Father's hand and asked three times if the cup of suffering could pass Him by (Mt 26:39-44). This shows that He also passed through the night of suffering, as does everyone who has to bear affliction.

But - and this is the decisive point: The acceptance of a suffering as a cross (cf. Mt 16:24) happens with God's grace, and it is this special grace of God that subsequently raises up the inner life of the sufferer. When he unites it with the Lord, he not only remains focused on Him in his heart, but God Himself unites with him in this suffering. On this path a deep spiritual joy can awaken for the Lord to be so near. Suffering in all its heaviness and intolerability does not penetrate the soul, but the soul remains in God through grace. In this way it becomes able to integrate suffering into life in such a way that it cannot exercise a spiritual dominion over it and take possession of all the soul's powers. So it

becomes understandable when the Apostle to the Nations tells us, we are *"in pain yet always full of joy"*.

It is profoundly true what the apostle tells us: such a life at the service of the Lord, as he describes it, is very different from what we know otherwise. The key to this lies in the first words: *"in everything we prove ourselves authentic servants of God"*. The apostles face everything that comes their way as servants of God. This bond with God and acting on His behalf shapes their whole life. They cannot simply be driven by the inclinations of their nature, the Spirit of God would deny them this. They cannot flee to avoid their task, they cannot give up in distress and need, and abandon themselves to the dynamics of fear. The Spirit of the Lord always raises them up, strengthens their will and kindles in them the fire of love. With every effort on their part and the willingness to get up again after a "defeat", the grace of God multiplies, purifies, enlightens and unites them to His will.

The message for us:

In the place where God has called us, the circumstances of life in which He has placed us, the crosses we have to bear: in all of this we are called to bear it as God's servants. It is not our human nature that is capable of doing this, but only the grace of God and our cooperation. This is what we are called to understand. The more we understand this and learn to hold on to God even in the most difficult inner and outer circumstances, the more that attitude will be able to grow in us which the apostle sets before us: *"In everything we prove ourselves authentic servants of God"*.