

15. November 2021

Keeping fidelity

1 Macc 1:10-15, 41-43, 54-57, 62-64

'From these there grew a wicked offshoot, Antiochus Epiphanes son of King Antiochus; once a hostage in Rome, he became king in the 107th year of the kingdom of the Greeks. It was then that there emerged from Israel a set of renegades who led many people astray. 'Come,' they said, 'let us ally ourselves with the gentiles surrounding us, for since we separated ourselves from them many misfortunes have overtaken us.' This proposal proved acceptable, and a number of the people eagerly approached the king, who authorised them to practise the gentiles' observances. So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, such as the gentiles have, disguised their circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant, submitting to gentile rule as willing slaves of impiety. The king then issued a proclamation to his whole kingdom that all were to become a single people, each nation renouncing its particular customs. All the gentiles conformed to the king's decree, and many Israelites chose to accept his religion, sacrificing to idols and profaning the Sabbath. On the fifteenth day of Chislew in the year 145 the king built the appalling abomination on top of the altar of burnt offering; and altars were built in the surrounding towns of Judah and incense offered at the doors of houses and in the streets. Any books of the Law that came to light were torn up and burned. Whenever anyone was discovered possessing a copy of the covenant or practising the Law, the king's decree sentenced him to death. Yet there were many in Israel who stood firm and found the courage to refuse unclean food. They chose death rather than contamination by such fare or profanation of the holy covenant, and they were executed?'

The people of Israel once again turn away from God... What a tragic story, which unfortunately repeats itself over and over again! The betrayers of God's covenant wanted to live according to the customs of the pagans and make a covenant with them, certainly knowing that this was against God. They believed that it would be worse for them if they did not live in greater communion with the other peoples, or at least that is what they put forward as a pretext.

But what was it that really led them to apostatise from God, to the point of revoking circumcision, sacrificing to idols and profaning the Sabbath, thus committing abominations?

Evidently, the starting point was an erroneous assessment of their life situation: these are the false thoughts, which separate them from God. One may wonder how such thoughts found a place in their lives, because they had already set out on the wrong course and were no longer really striving to keep God's commandments?

In the reasoning of these apostate men is reflected the distrust of God. And then happened what happens when one follows the thread of evil thoughts: the turning away from God and His covenant, and the practice of that idolatry of the foreign peoples, from which the Lord had wanted to preserve His people.

Antiochus, the Greek king, in whom we can see a prototype of the Antichrist, tried to systematically turn the people away from the worship of the true God. Under threat of death, he demanded that they renounce their own customs. Some followed him, and turned away from God.

But there were also many who remained faithful to the Lord and His commandments. They overcame the test that came upon them! Obedience to God was more important to them than their own lives!

Holy Scripture is not simply an account of past events; it is given to us as a teaching. That is why it is important that we also apply the message of this text to the time in which we live.

First of all: our faith is also under threat. We are surrounded by many people who think differently from us Catholics, and we are exposed to influences that want to soften our faith. It is not easy to resist them in the long run, without adopting the mentality of the world.

It takes a clear following of Christ, clinging to his commandments and to the authentic doctrine of the Church, so that our thoughts do not fall into error. If vigilance is lost, one can quickly become accustomed to the seductions of this world, without perceiving them clearly.

The temptation to adapt oneself to the mentality of the world is always present, because it is not easy to oppose the current of the world. Some people cannot stand the fact that, as a Catholic, they have to defend certain convictions that are considered old-fashioned and backward, and in the extreme case are condemned as inhuman and unloving, before a majority.

Lately, this situation has arisen even in the Church itself, when one clings to the previous doctrine and Tradition, without sacrificing it for the sake of the "spirit of the times", which has also infiltrated the Church. It has come to the contradictory situation that suddenly those who remain faithful to the Gospel and the doctrine of the Church and oppose the "new spirit" are labelled as "rigorists".

However, this should neither surprise nor frighten us. Rather, it becomes all the more important that we now imitate those Israelites who remained faithful to the Holy Covenant. Obedience to God is more important than anything else; it is even above one's own life.