

24. November 2021

Remaining steadfast

Lk 21:12-19

Jesus said to the crowd: 'But before all this happens, you will be seized and persecuted; you will be handed over to the synagogues and to imprisonment, and brought before kings and governors for the sake of my name-and that will be your opportunity to bear witness. Make up your minds not to prepare your defence, because I myself shall give you an eloquence and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relations and friends; and some of you will be put to death. You will be hated universally on account of my name, but not a hair of your head will be lost.'

During the last few days, we heard a series of four meditations on the virtue of fortitude, and today's Gospel is perfectly in line with this theme, presenting us now with the most drastic situations that can befall a Christian: being persecuted, arrested, imprisoned, handed over by one's parents, siblings and other relatives, brutally murdered... It is as if the Lord is telling us very clearly: "You must be courageous and strong! Be ready, for you must stand firm!"

Instead of softening or trivialising these words of Jesus, let us confront them... Whoever does not close his eyes, will be able to see that this is not merely a reality of the past or only experienced today in certain regions; but that a "dark cloud" hangs over many Christians.

The scenarios we see emerging in the current crisis - in which pressure is exerted on people to submit to experimental vaccination, even against their convictions and conscience - already have a certain "smell" of persecution.

Is this exaggerated? No, unfortunately not.

In the meditation of 18 November, I briefly touched on this issue (<http://en.elijamission.net/2021/11/18/>). However, I would like to return to it today, since it is an issue that affects so many people. There are various reasons why people do not want to participate in this experiment. But here I will focus on one reason, which is related to what the Lord describes in today's Gospel.

Among Christians there are some who choose not to be vaccinated for reasons of conscience. For them, it is a directive of the Lord what some prelates expressed in the

manifesto "Veritas liberabit vos": *"For Catholics it is morally unacceptable to develop or use vaccines derived from material from aborted fetuses."* In this case, these faithful do not adhere to certain statements of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which, incidentally, are not binding and in which it is implied that, given certain circumstances, the use of vaccines that have used embryonic cell lines could be justified.

Thus, they are now increasingly confronted with measures, both from state and church, which restrict their freedoms. In addition, they often have to listen to reproaches from their relatives or church representatives, who accuse them of being unfaithful, of not taking responsibility for their environment, of being selfish, of endangering the health of others, and many other serious accusations. Because of their decision, they are increasingly marginalised.

Apart from the fact that these accusations are unfounded, since vaccinated people can also become infected with the virus, infect others and suffer serious adverse effects (which can even lead to death), this is an unlawful interference with people's freedom. It is particularly sad for these faithful that the representatives of the Church - which is their Mother - often speak and act in unison with governments and offer no support to those who in conscience make a different decision. Thus, already now these Christians are being persecuted because of their faith.

If we now observe how in certain countries the measures are being stepped up more and more, we can no longer rule out that in the future even those who refuse to be vaccinated will be imprisoned. In Austria, compulsory vaccination is now being implemented, and perhaps other countries will follow this reprehensible example.

So much for the current situation.

Of course, today's gospel does not only apply to this topic; it always applies when we suffer persecution for the Lord's sake. For such circumstances, Jesus gives us two indications:

1) *"Make up your minds not to prepare your defence."* The Holy Spirit will see to that. Therefore, if we remain in the truth without departing from it, the Spirit of truth will inspire us with the right words.

2) *"By your perseverance you will save your lives."* Here again the virtue of fortitude comes into play: perseverance! Let us remember that this virtue teaches us to endure suffering, not to evade the cross. In situations like the ones the Lord describes today in the gospel, our fortitude will be put to the "fiery test".