

27. November 2021

God alone is the true hope

Lk 21:34-36

"Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened by debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life, and that day will come upon you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come down on all those living on the face of the earth. Stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen, and to hold your ground before the Son of man."

Before reflecting on this Gospel, let us take a look at today's reading from the book of Daniel (7:15-27). We will listen to part of it:

"This is what he said: "The fourth beast is to be a fourth kingdom on earth, different from all other kingdoms. It will devour the whole world, trample it underfoot and crush it. As for the ten horns: from this kingdom will rise ten kings, and another after them; this one will be different from the previous ones and will bring down three kings; he will insult the Most High, and torment the holy ones of the Most High. He will plan to alter the seasons and the Law, and the Saints will be handed over to him for a time, two times, and half a time. But the court will sit, and he will be stripped of his royal authority which will be finally destroyed and reduced to nothing. And kingship and rule and the splendours of all the kingdoms under heaven will be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High, whose royal power is an eternal power, whom every empire will serve and obey."

Events are predicted here that are not easy to interpret. Some things we will understand only when they have come to pass and circumstances allow us to recognise that the prophecies are coming true in a concrete way. There may be people who have received a special light from the Lord to understand this symbolic language and to interpret the signs.

Probably the unanimous interpretation of these symbols seen by Daniel is that they represent empires of this world. Before the Last Judgement described here, a "king" hostile to God will be installed, who will especially persecute the "saints". There are those who believe that certain elements of these prophecies are already being fulfilled in current events. Indeed, there seems to be an allusion here to an anti-Christian dominion, which is now increasingly manifesting itself. We must therefore watch carefully the events that are taking place and prepare ourselves for persecution. It is clear that, in the context of the coronavirus crisis, measures are being taken in certain countries that could easily lead to dictatorial regimes. In fact, there are governments that are already taking on the trappings of dictatorship.

In today's Gospel, Jesus gives us the crucial guideline to be prepared, both for the Last Judgement and for the "birth pains" that precede it. Jesus addresses these words to his disciples, that is, to those who have already decided to follow him. Thus, he also speaks

directly to us, and it is up to us to pass on to others the essence of Jesus' warnings.

The Lord mentions vice, drunkenness and the worries of life as elements that limit our vigilance. He is certainly not referring only to excesses in alcohol; but to a whole way of life that lacks sobriety, that feeds on false expectations and desires, so that it is not able to correctly interpret the signs of the times. Ideologies can also "intoxicate" us, when, instead of putting our trust in God, we put it in people who are not without error. One also lacks sobriety when one allows oneself to be carried away by the currents of the times and by what is politically correct. It can go so far that one becomes infected by the general blindness that one no longer sees things from God's perspective, but even interprets them wrongly.

But we also neglect our vigilance when we become entangled in the concerns of everyday life, when earthly realities absorb our thoughts and actions to such an extent that we are no longer able to read the signs of the times. In this context, the Lord even draws the comparison of a snare that will fall on the inhabitants of the earth: *"Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened by debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life, and that day will come upon you unexpectedly, like a trap."*

These are very clear words! We must understand that a snare may be laid for us, a trap, so that - if possible - we will no longer be able to get out of it and we will be caught in that blindness which does not allow us to be on the watch for the Day of the Lord. It is not easy to counteract this blindness and to unmask the traps into which many people have already fallen, and unfortunately even some of the faithful. The remedy to get rid of the blindness and escape the traps is vigilance and prayer. Nowhere, except in the Lord Himself, can we find true security. Everything can be shaken, and that is why the Lord insists that it is necessary to be ever watchful. This is far more important than any purely intellectual speculation or reflection. We must simply be aware that salvation is in the Lord alone. This is also what happens on the way of purification, in which we are deprived of all our securities, until our soul is entirely anchored in God and united with Him.

We are now on the threshold of the Advent Season and the new liturgical year. We must not allow the difficult situation of the world to deprive us of joy and tenderness before the coming of Jesus. No! The Good News announced by the angels to the shepherds remains ever valid (cf. Lk 2:10-14)! This message of salvation must be brought to mankind: in His Son, the Heavenly Father has opened wide the doors of His Heart to us, so that through Jesus we may come to Him and remain with Him forever.

Let us combine this joy with watchfulness for the Second Coming of Jesus at the End Times. The Day of the Lord is at hand, and we must soberly note *that "the light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it" (Jn 1:5); the Son of Man "came to his own and his own people did not accept him." (Jn 1:11).*

A tender and loving relationship with the Child in the manger does not contradict the

vigilance of a "warrior of the light", who seeks to escape the snares of darkness, just as the Lord did in the time of His earthly life (cf. e.g. Mt 21:23-27). Let us joyfully assimilate this exclamation of the prophet Isaiah:

"Look! though night still covers the earth and darkness the peoples, on you Yahweh is rising and over you his glory can be seen." (Isa 60:2)

May God grant that men may recognise this light! He is the only true hope!