

6. February 2022

Faithfulness to Tradition

1 Cor 15:1-11

I want to make quite clear to you, brothers, what the message of the gospel that I preached to you is; you accepted it and took your stand on it, and you are saved by it, if you keep to the message I preached to you; otherwise your coming to believe was in vain. The tradition I handed on to you in the first place, a tradition which I had myself received, was that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried; and that on the third day, he was raised to life, in accordance with the scriptures; and that he appeared to Cephas; and later to the Twelve; and next he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still with us, though some have fallen asleep; then he appeared to James, and then to all the apostles. Last of all he appeared to me too, as though I was a child born abnormally. For I am the least of the apostles and am not really fit to be called an apostle, because I had been persecuting the Church of God; but what I am now, I am through the grace of God, and the grace which was given to me has not been wasted. Indeed, I have worked harder than all the others -- not I, but the grace of God which is with me. Anyway, whether it was they or I, this is what we preach and what you believed.

What are the ways through which we have received the gospel and found faith?

Many were probably brought up in the faith from childhood, and will have received the Gospel with a certain naturalness. If a true life of faith develops from there, then this faith will grow and mature with the help of the sacraments and by putting it into practice every day and taking steps towards deeper and deeper conversion. It should be made clear that this only happens when faith is at the forefront of a person's life, and if all other aspects of his or her life are shaped by it.

Perhaps there are other people who, being impressed by other offers, abandoned or stopped cultivating the path of faith in which they had been educated. Thus, other things came to the fore, or sin prevented the life of grace from unfolding in them... However, at a given moment, by the grace of God, they experience an awakening of faith, they are converted, the identity and love they had lost re-emerges in them... It is a return home, to all that had once been so familiar to them, but which is now new to them again.

Others grow up without faith, and at a certain moment they find it and experience the grace of a first conversion, so that they overflow with gratitude.

So what happens to all those who believe and what does St. Paul mean when he warns that it is possible to "believe in vain"?

In the Gospel, the Lord tells us that no one can come to him unless he is drawn by the Father (Jn 6:44). This grace is at work in our spirit; it is a light of knowledge, which is not acquired through the efforts of reason, but is transmitted to us freely. This experience can also involve the feelings, so that a conversion can bring with it a great emotional upheaval, with strong feelings.

The readiness to receive this light varies, and often we cannot understand at all why one person experiences a conversion and another does not. God's ways are mysterious to human understanding! So there is little point in trying to understand them... But we must pray for the conversion of men and women, and deepen our own conversion.

We can retain three points from today's reading:

Firstly, the text exhorts us to be faithful to the Tradition of faith. The words of the Gospel do not change! We can certainly go deeper into the truths of the faith, but it is one faith, the same faith that was handed down to us by Tradition. St. Paul speaks of keeping the Gospel as he preached it.

A second aspect of the reading is that we assent with our understanding and with our reason to that faith which is given to us as a gift of the Holy Spirit. Faith is a supernatural light, and therefore surpasses reason; but it is not irrational but coherent. That is why we can embrace faith with our natural capacities.

Finally, the third point is that we should always keep in mind the central contents of our faith, especially in evangelisation: *"that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried; and that on the third day, he was raised to life, in accordance with the scriptures; and that he appeared to Cephas; and later to the Twelve; and next he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time..."*.

In summary, let us keep the following from today's reading: we, who by God's grace can live in the faith we have received in various ways, are to hold fast to this

faith that has been handed down to us. We must assent with the faculties of our understanding and internalise the central truths of the faith, as well as communicate them to others. If we do so, our life will bear fruit.