

20. March 2022

The need for conversion

Lk 13:1-9

It was just about this time that some people arrived and told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices. At this he said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than any others, that this should have happened to them? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen on whom the tower at Siloam fell, killing them all? Do you suppose that they were more guilty than all the other people living in Jerusalem? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did.' He told this parable, 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it but found none. He said to his vinedresser, "For three years now I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and finding none. Cut it down: why should it be taking up the ground?" "Sir," the man replied, "leave it one more year and give me time to dig round it and manure it: it may bear fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down."'

Holy Scripture never tires of exhorting us to conversion, nor does it hide from us the consequences of consciously closing oneself to this call of God. Today, a trend is spreading which overlooks the consequences or minimises them to such an extent that the call to conversion hardly has the effect of shaking people....

It is true that the manner of proclaiming the gospel must not be such that men turn to God solely out of fear of the consequences of sin. Rather, man's response must be a loving response to God's love. Here the emphasis must be! But not warning people about the consequences of not listening to God would not correspond either to the message of the Old Testament or to the words of the Lord in the New Testament. God makes this clear to us! Therefore, the truth about the terrible and destructive consequences of sin is also part of the proclamation. It is precisely when we become aware of this dimension that God's saving work and the love of the Lamb of God, who takes upon himself the sin of the world and redeems us, shine even more brightly.

The Lord wants to harvest fruit in our lives; fruit for the Kingdom of God. Every prayer, every good deed, every self-denial for God's sake, every suffering endured

in the Lord; all the fruits of the Spirit in our life increase love and make that light shine to which Jesus refers when he tells us: "*You are the light of the world*" (Mt 5:14). What an opportunity is offered to us to live a life full of meaning, helping other people also to be torn out of the meaninglessness of their existence...!

We cannot allow ourselves to be deceived! There will always be an emptiness in those who do not truly know God, even if they themselves do not perceive it. In a sinful life a destructive force is at work. Whoever loves God and his neighbour will suffer under the fact that there are still so many people who do not know the Lord; and, even more for those who have already had a true encounter with God, but have turned away from Him again.

In such cases, what the Lord gives us to understand in this parable is a consolation ... We know that God is patient with us, that He offers people the possibility of conversion again and again. If this were not the case, the world would have already succumbed and sin - like an unstoppable cancerous tumour - would have destroyed everything. We must always keep this patience of God in mind, both in our own efforts to convert and in the proclamation. Unnecessary severity is thus moderated.

The exhortation to conversion must be immersed in God's light, without in the least weakening it. The clear warning that Jesus pronounces in today's Gospel is not simply a threat, to frighten and instil fear in people. Rather, it is a warning not to close oneself to the truth, thus putting one's own life at risk. It is God's concern for man, who does not measure the consequences of his actions and is in danger of rushing blindly into misfortune, accumulating guilt on his conscience. That is why the Lord uses clear language, just as He sometimes has to do with a stubborn child when danger threatens him.

This message, which to our ears may sound like a drastic warning from God, springs from the same love with which He tenderly surrounds us at all times.

If we are called to point out to others the way to conversion, it may be necessary to include these clear warnings. But they must always be moved by the same love with which God seeks us and wants to preserve us from disgrace.