

28. March 2022

## Giving the right place to signs and miracles

**Jn 4:43-54**

*When the two days were over Jesus left for Galilee. He himself had declared that a prophet is not honoured in his own home town. On his arrival the Galileans received him well, having seen all that he had done at Jerusalem during the festival which they too had attended. He went again to Cana in Galilee, where he had changed the water into wine. And there was a royal official whose son was ill at Capernaum; hearing that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judaea, he went and asked him to come and cure his son, as he was at the point of death. Jesus said to him, 'Unless you see signs and portents you will not believe!' 'Sir,' answered the official, 'come down before my child dies.' 'Go home,' said Jesus, 'your son will live.' The man believed what Jesus had said and went on his way home; and while he was still on the way his servants met him with the news that his boy was alive. He asked them when the boy had begun to recover. They replied, 'The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour.' The father realised that this was exactly the time when Jesus had said, 'Your son will live'; and he and all his household believed. This new sign, the second, Jesus performed on his return from Judaea to Galilee.*

It remains a tragedy that prophets are not honoured in their own homeland. True prophets are always messengers of God, who proclaim the truth at the Lord's behest. And truth is healing, even if at first we do not like to hear it. The prophet does not speak in his own name; and if he does, he is a false prophet. The true prophet always speaks in God's name, and what he says comes to pass. It may not always happen as expected, for there are mysterious prophetic oracles; but in the light of God it may be recognised, at least after its fulfilment, that it was really an instruction from heaven.

How much the Israelites suffered when they no longer had prophets; but when they had them among them, it was often so difficult for them to listen to their words! The whole Old Testament tells us the drama that God calls, warns and invites through the prophets; but unfortunately He often encounters hardened hearts.

After the coming of Jesus, in whom the Law and the Prophets reached their fullness (Mt 5:17), the people of Israel no longer had prophets as in ancient times. They had to acknowledge Him, Jesus, who is more than a prophet. He was to be acknowledged, and to this day He is still to be acknowledged. Unfortunately many Jews followed false Messiahs, and we must pray intensely that they will be able to

resist the seductions of a coming Antichrist, who will take on messianic traits and thus deceive many.

In the gospel, we are told about a man who, thanks to a miracle he experienced, believed together with his whole family. This is one of the reasons why the Lord works these signs, besides the fact that He wants to heal and thus reveal the love of God, who is attentive to mankind. Signs and miracles are a visible manifestation of God's action and are therefore not to be despised. Unfortunately, under the assertion that "I do not need to see miracles in order to believe", there are those who despise signs. In itself, this statement is correct; but if God works a miracle, we should receive it with gratitude, rather than thinking ourselves superior and despising it. Of course, at the other extreme, neither should we be 'miracle junkies' and spend our lives looking for and visiting every place where extraordinary things have happened.

Surely this is not the point of miracles!

If someone has found faith more deeply because of a miracle, the next step is for them to take the path of faith, just as happened with the royal official in today's gospel.

But we must also carefully discern whether a miracle really comes from the Lord; or whether, on the contrary, it is a 'pseudo-miracle'; an imitation and a deception of the Evil One. Holy Scripture tells us that the Antichrist and his False Prophet will also perform wonders. These words from Revelation, for example, can be applied to the figure of the False Prophet:

*"Then I saw a second beast, emerging from the ground. And it worked great miracles, even to calling down fire from heaven onto the earth while people watched. Through the miracles which it was allowed to do on behalf of the first beast, it was able to lead astray the people of the world" (Rev 13:11a,13-14a).*

Jesus performed signs and miracles, and we should welcome them with gratitude from his hand. But we should not base our faith on them alone, nor should we fall into the attitude of the Jews mentioned by Jesus, who practically demanded that God perform a sign. But we can ask for miracles, as long as they serve the Kingdom of God. And we must always take care that it is God who receives the glory for the signs and miracles, and not the person through whom He performs them.