

5. April 2022

In God there will always be a solution

Num 21:4-9

They left Mount Hor by the road to the Sea of Suph, to skirt round Edom. On the way the people lost patience. They spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why did you bring us out of Egypt to die in the desert? For there is neither food nor water here; we are sick of this meagre diet.' At this, God sent fiery serpents among the people; their bite brought death to many in Israel. The people came and said to Moses, 'We have sinned by speaking against Yahweh and against you. Intercede for us with Yahweh to save us from these serpents.' Moses interceded for the people, and Yahweh replied, 'Make a fiery serpent and raise it as a standard. Anyone who is bitten and looks at it will survive.' Moses then made a serpent out of bronze and raised it as a standard, and anyone who was bitten by a serpent and looked at the bronze serpent survived.

Today we are told of the temptation to discouragement that attacked the people of Israel, with the terrible consequence of rebelling against God.

We need to be aware that discouragement is not simply a relatively harmless state of mind, into which we can sink and hope that it will end at some point. Discouragement can have the consequences that today's biblical account shows us.

Discouragement - and I am not talking about a pathological depression that requires special treatment - darkens our soul and significantly damages our trust in God. It is a feeling that often arises after having experienced any kind of disappointment, and it wants to rob us of our inner strength. We easily fall into a state of discouragement when we want to achieve or change something by our own efforts, but do not succeed; or when we expect something from other people or from God, and our expectation is not fulfilled. Then discouragement closes in on us again and we lose hope.

Unfortunately, at such times we are often unable to recognise that the cause of our discouragement lies neither in the circumstances, nor in God, nor in other people, but in a false attitude on our part.

Let us look at today's biblical example.

God had heard the plea of his people and delivered them with a strong hand from the oppression of Pharaoh. We know that, throughout the wilderness journey, He cared for His people. But, evidently, the people were not satisfied with what God provided for them; and they lacked the food to which they were accustomed. This impression and

the desire for that food became so strong that the extraordinary miracle that God had worked for them was pushed into the background or even forgotten.

Looking at this situation of the people of Israel, we can understand a little of how discouragement arises and spreads. We no longer remember the works of God; instead we are absorbed in the given situation, which somehow threatens us and wants to rob us of our faith and trust.

From these considerations, the way is also open for a "spiritual therapy". We have seen that discouragement is a kind of temptation that wants to confuse our soul. We must also bear in mind that the tempter certainly makes use of this discouragement, intensifies it and, in the worst case, wants to use it to lead us to despair and rebellion against God.

That is why it is necessary that we immediately resist all thoughts and feelings of discouragement and renew our trust in God. This happens through prayer, invocation of the Holy Spirit, conscious reception of the sacraments, meditation on biblical texts that assure us of God's omnipresent love and providence, and other spiritual means. A renunciation of the powers of Evil could also be a great help.

All these spiritual measures must go hand in hand with a firm decision of our will, not to let ourselves be carried away by discouragement and to consider it for what it really is: a lie, which proliferates as soon as we give it credence.

The situation presented to us by discouragement does not correspond to the reality of our faith. As long as our life lasts, there will be no hopeless situation, even if it appears to be so. This is what faith teaches us! And to it we cling, and in the goodness and omnipotence of God we place our hope, even if everything around us seems dark.

After the people repented and prayed to God, He gave them the solution: whoever looked at the bronze serpent would be left alive.

As we know, this serpent raised on a pole foreshadowed our Crucified Lord, who calls all men, no matter how hopeless their situation may seem, into the Kingdom of the Father. He unravels people's lives, until they can live in the light of God and be with Him in eternity.