

10. May 2022

Faithfulness to the Lord and His Church

Acts 11:19-26

In those days, those who had scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, but they proclaimed the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, who came from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch where they started preaching also to the Greeks, proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus to them. The Lord helped them, and a great number believed and were converted to the Lord. The news of them came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem and they sent Barnabas out to Antioch. There he was glad to see for himself that God had given grace, and he urged them all to remain faithful to the Lord with heartfelt devotion; for he was a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and with faith. And a large number of people were won over to the Lord. Barnabas then left for Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him he brought him to Antioch. And it happened that they stayed together in that church a whole year, instructing a large number of people. It was at Antioch that the disciples were first called 'Christians'.

We are honoured to bear the name "Christian"; a name that derives directly from the Name and mission of our Redeemer; a name that is to reach the whole world; a name that carries with it the responsibility to proclaim God's great gift to humanity and to witness to it through our lives.

In the times of persecution of the nascent Church, the Gospel was also proclaimed to the Greeks in Antioch, after it had initially only been preached to the Jews. There it was well received and, as the Acts of the Apostles says, "*a great number believed and were converted to the Lord*". When the church in Jerusalem heard of it, they sent Barnabas to Antioch, and he was able to see with his own eyes the work of the Holy Spirit, "*and he urged them all to remain faithful to the Lord with heartfelt devotion*".

This exhortation is a legacy for all of us. It is not only that we should know the Lord, accept His grace and thus receive the fruits of Redemption; we are also called to remain faithful to the Lord, to the faith as handed down to us by Tradition and to the vocation entrusted to us. The best example of faithfulness is to be found in God Himself, for,

come what may, He shows us His love with unwavering fidelity. The whole of the Old Testament speaks to us of this faithfulness of God, which unfortunately often has to be contrasted with the unfaithfulness of man.

In our days, we have to remain faithful especially to the Church. We know that the world is opening itself up to anti-Christian influences, increasingly disregarding God's commandments and sometimes even perverting them into the opposite. But unfortunately we have to note that this anti-Christian spirit is also penetrating more and more into our Church, trying to weaken it from within, to destroy it or even to use it in a very subtle way to build up a man-made religious entity and, consequently, influenced by demonic forces. We could hardly identify our holy Catholic Church in such a construct!

At this stage of the Church's history, fidelity is particularly necessary: fidelity to the Lord, to His Word, to the authentic doctrine and praxis of the Church. Let us seek constant prayer, the deepening of our relationship with our Mother Mary, the path of holiness and all that is part of our Catholic faith.

We are undoubtedly in times of crisis, and it is then that our faith must prove its solidity and demonstrate that it is truly founded on the Lord. Everything may collapse, heaven and earth will pass away, but the Word of the Lord remains forever (Mt 24:35). This is our comfort in the midst of so much confusion!