

21. May 2022

“If the world hates you...”

Jn 15:18-21

*At that time, Jesus said to his disciples: “If the world hates you, you must realise that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you do not belong to the world, because my choice of you has drawn you out of the world, that is why the world hates you. Remember the words I said to you: A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too; if they kept my word, they will keep yours as well. But it will be on my account that they will do all this to you, because they do not know the one who sent me.*

When we listen to the witness of Holy Scripture, we may notice that certain concepts we are given to understand in the Church today do not correspond to reality. For example, the idea that our Christian faith would have to adapt to the world, or that people would find it easier to come to the Church and to God if those biblical passages that present the Christian in opposition to the world were ignored or relativised.

Yet in today's Gospel the Lord even speaks to us of the hatred that the world can have for the Christians, and of the persecutions that the disciples will have to suffer because of them.

Where does this hatred come from? One might think that it would be enough for the world to react with indifference to the Christian message, not wanting to have anything to do with it or simply ignoring it.

But, in the long run, this is not the case. The very existence of a professing Christian seems to be something of a threat to the world. From the Gospels, we know that the hatred of the Pharisees and scribes for Jesus grew more and more, until it was fully unleashed at the moment of their loud demands for His crucifixion (cf. Jn 19:15).

The answer to the question posed above (where does this hatred come from?), we can find in the prologue of St. John's Gospel:

*“Light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it. (...)The Word was the real light that gives light to everyone; he was coming into the world. He was in the world that had*

*come into being through him, and the world did not recognise him. He came to his own and his own people did not accept him.” (Jn 1:5.9-11)*

Every true disciple of the Lord has been chosen by Him (cf. Jn 15:16). Jesus has taken him out of the world, with his way of thinking and acting; He has taken him out of the world, which did not recognise the light that came to it. In following Christ, the disciple bears witness to the presence of the Lord, by accepting His teaching and imitating His way of being and acting. Thus, the disciple's very existence reminds the world that it does not exist of itself, but that it owes its existence to another.

Since, by turning away from God, the world came under the dominion of the "prince of this world", the latter acts in and through it and persecutes the "children of light". He certainly finds it unbearable to be reminded by Christians that he himself is a creature and not God; that he is not the origin and cause of all things, nor the goal of Creation.

The passage of Jesus' temptations in the wilderness shows us that the Adversary seeks worship for himself (cf. Mt 4:9). However, this is denied to him by Christ's disciples, while the children of this world often do not even perceive his deceptions and do not even recognise his disguises. Since people often regard the things of this world as the important and definitive things in life, they unwittingly fall into a kind of idolatry. Behind it lie the intentions of the powers hostile to God, who want to turn people away from God and offer them substitutes.

The refusal of the disciples to accept such offers arouses the hatred of the devil, who is confronted with the Lord Himself through His disciple.

Jesus points out another reason why people may persecute Christians: they do not know the One who sent Jesus. They do not know the Father, they do not know His goodness and wisdom. They often have wrong images of God, or they live in ignorance, or they have turned their backs on the Lord.

The Bible's realistic view of the world helps us to understand things in their essence and to adopt the right attitude. The disciple should be characterised neither by a false openness towards the world, nor by a fearful narrowness and closed-mindedness. On the one hand, Jesus knew exactly what is in the heart of man (cf. Jn 2:24-25) and sometimes He hid or eluded their clutches (cf. Jn 10:39). Nevertheless, He carried out His mission in the world to the end and proclaimed the Kingdom of God, which had become present in Him.

We who follow Christ are called to do the same: to proclaim the Kingdom of God with courage, but knowing what the world to which we bring this message is like. We must expect that there will be resistance and even persecution, and we cannot go out to meet the world with a false openness and naivety. But the opposition that awaits us must not cause us to lose heart, for the Lord, who has called His own out of the world, will never abandon them.