

14. June 2022

The 'Ahabs' of this world have to convert

1 Kgs 21:17-29

Then the word of Yahweh came to Elijah the Tishbite, 'Up! Go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, in Samaria. You will find him in Naboth's vineyard; he has gone down to take possession of it. You are to say this to him, "Yahweh says this: You have committed murder and now you usurp as well. For this -- and Yahweh says this -- in the place where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth, the dogs will lick your blood too." 'Ahab said to Elijah, 'So you have caught me, O my enemy!' Elijah answered, 'I have caught you! For your double dealing, and since you have done what is displeasing to Yahweh, I shall now bring disaster down on you; I shall sweep away your descendants and wipe out every manjack of the House of Ahab, fettered or free in Israel. I shall treat your House as I treated the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat and of Baasha son of Ahijah, for provoking my anger and leading Israel into sin. (Against Jezebel too Yahweh spoke these words, "The dogs will eat Jezebel in the Field of Jezreel.") Those of Ahab's family who die in the city, the dogs will eat; and those who die in the open country, the birds of the air will eat.' And indeed there never was anyone like Ahab for double dealing and for doing what is displeasing to Yahweh, urged on by Jezebel his wife. He behaved in the most abominable way, adhering to idols, just as the Amorites had, whom Yahweh had dispossessed for the Israelites. When Ahab heard these words, he tore his garments and put sackcloth next to his skin and fasted; he slept in the sackcloth; he walked with slow steps. Then the word of Yahweh came to Elijah the Tishbite, 'Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Since he has humbled himself before me, I shall not bring the disaster in his days; I shall bring the disaster down on his House in his son's days.'

Guilt, penitence and mercy from God... These are the essential themes in today's reading.

Sadly, Ahab was one of those kings of Israel of whom Scripture says that "they did what was displeasing to the Lord".

We have already spoken about the great responsibility that came with the office of being king of Israel, and we have seen how disastrous the consequences were when, also because of the bad example of their king, the people were seduced into idolatry. What a responsibility!

But who will dare to tell the king that he is sinning against God? It is the prophet of the Lord who must fearlessly proclaim the truth! The true prophet must be committed only to the task he has been given, and cannot keep silent out of human respect or false consideration for people. Then, of course, what also happened to the prophet Elijah in today's reading can happen to him. "*So you have caught me, O my enemy!*" King Ahab said to Elijah, when he came to fetch him on God's orders. The king presents the situation completely reversed!

Indeed, this is often the case: When people live in lies and injustice, they often consider the one who speaks the truth as their enemy. But in reality it is they themselves who have become enemies of God.

In this context, the question arises again and again: Who corrects politicians today, for example, when they legalise abortion? Where are the "Elijahs" of our time? On a general level, the prophetic voice of the Church seems weak and muffled... What a tragedy!

In the example of today's text, we see what can happen when the prophet speaks the truth and points out to the king the consequences of his actions. At least Ahab is frightened and begins to do penance. It is better to do penance out of fear of God, than to give no sign of change or to take the prophet's words seriously, out of self-glory and self-indulgence in one's own greatness.

Although King Ahab's penitence is imperfect and he is certainly not yet fully aware of all that he had done to God and to the people, the Lord looks at those first steps and exempts him from all the consequences that He Himself had announced would befall him.

Now, in the time after the coming of Jesus, God offers us the way of conversion in the Person of his Son. The "Ahab kings" of this world can come to the Cross and receive God's forgiveness, if only they take it seriously. They do not necessarily have to do the same Old Testament practices of penance that King Ahab did, but they do have to be

sincerely converted, turn from their evil ways and their blindness, and ask God for forgiveness. Will they? Who will dare to tell them? Who is not afraid of them?

We can at least pray for them, keeping in mind especially those who, in their confusion and blindness, are carrying great guilt on their backs. How can they one day find themselves in front of those whom they have harmed so much?

There are too many "Ahab kings" who continue in their blindness and continue to rule the world, heedless of God's commandments. And there are too few "Ahab kings" who, after the words of the prophet, at least begin to do penance. But what the "Ahab kings" could perhaps hold against us is that there are also very few who have the courage to tell them the truth. The pastors of the Church too often remain silent, so that those "Ahabites" can continue in their evil ways without being corrected. Of course God will also have other ways to intervene, and in this we can put our hope; but this does not exempt us from assuming more clearly the prophetic task of the Church. Our Catholic Church must not become a "clappers' club"; it must be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (cf. Mt 5:13-14)!