

24. July 2022

A warning for all times

Gen 18:20-32

In these days Yahweh said, 'The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin is so grave, that I shall go down and see whether or not their actions are at all as the outcry reaching me would suggest. Then I shall know.' While the men left there and went to Sodom, Yahweh remained in Abraham's presence. Abraham stepped forward and said, 'Will you really destroy the upright with the guilty? Suppose there are fifty upright people in the city. Will you really destroy it? Will you not spare the place for the sake of the fifty upright in it? Do not think of doing such a thing: to put the upright to death with the guilty, so that upright and guilty fare alike! Is the judge of the whole world not to act justly?' Yahweh replied, 'If I find fifty upright people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place because of them. 'Abraham spoke up and said, 'It is presumptuous of me to speak to the Lord, I who am dust and ashes: Suppose the fifty upright were five short? Would you destroy the whole city because of five?' 'No,' he replied, 'I shall not destroy it if I find forty-five there.' Abraham persisted and said, 'Suppose there are forty to be found there?' 'I shall not do it,' he replied, 'for the sake of the forty.' Abraham said, 'I hope the Lord will not be angry if I go on: Suppose there are only thirty to be found there?' 'I shall not do it,' he replied, 'if I find thirty there.' He said, 'It is presumptuous of me to speak to the Lord: Suppose there are only twenty there?' 'I shall not destroy it,' he replied, 'for the sake of the twenty. 'He said, 'I trust my Lord will not be angry if I speak once more: perhaps there will only be ten.' 'I shall not destroy it,' he replied, 'for the sake of the ten.'

This Old Testament passage gives us hope. It describes, on the one hand, the situation of repeated guilt in which man finds himself, which in itself demands punishment. On the other hand, it shows us God's way of acting, which is both just and merciful.

In today's reading, the Lord not only accepts the bargain that Abraham proposes to him, but it fully corresponds to His plans that the "father of faith" should intercede for the people and ask to be forgiven.

We, as Christians, know well that later it will be Christ Himself, the Redeemer, who will intercede for mankind and pay its immeasurable debt with His own blood on the

Cross. And it was none other but the Father Himself who sent His Son to accomplish this work of His love.

Yet despite all Abraham's efforts, Sodom and Gomorrah had to be destroyed (cf. Gen 19:24), because their inhabitants were completely corrupt.

God cannot simply overlook the grave sins of humanity. To believe that, in the end, all men will be saved is a false doctrine and therefore a delusion. There are even those who have come to believe that demons will be converted and saved. However, there will be no "universal reconciliation", nor will there be a continuous reincarnation, in which man could pay for the faults of his former life.

To resist the Judgment of God, it is necessary a sincere repentance of sins, to receive the forgiveness of the Lord and to go towards a serious conversion. God does not make it difficult for us to obtain His forgiveness. In fact, Sacred Scripture tells us: *"All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved"* (Rom 10:13). It certainly refers to a sincere invocation, with the desire to receive forgiveness and be saved.

It could almost be said that, in view of the fact that God is infinitely good and always ready to forgive, it takes a very hardened and stubborn heart to close itself to the ever-present offer of His love.

But unfortunately this can happen, as the Book of Revelation testifies again and again. Even when God allows plagues as a last resort, men's hearts remain stubborn and do not convert (cf. e.g. Rev 16:9).

Is the situation better today than in the times of Sodom and Gomorrah? Realistically, it is not. It would even seem that in our times the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah (e.g. homosexual acts) are becoming socially acceptable, even in those circles of our Church that adapt to the ungodly spirit of the world instead of following the Holy Spirit.

Will the sins of mankind bring consequences? No doubt!

But it is also up to us, as it was to Abraham, to intercede for sinful humanity before the Throne of the Lamb. Many do not even know what they are doing. Like Abraham, we can beseech the Lord to forgive this world in view of the righteous, and to have mercy on the merits of the Passion and Death of his Son. In union with our Redeemer, we can

atone for even the most abominable sins and pray for the conversion of men. All this must go hand in hand with our own path of conversion, which must be deepened more and more.

However, it will certainly not be possible for us to stop everything that God's justice demands. But perhaps we can help to mitigate what is to be expected to befall mankind as a result of so much evil and injustice.

This would be a great service on our part, very pleasing in the eyes of God, because He says *"I do not take pleasure in the death of the wicked but in the conversion of the wicked who changes his ways and saves his life"* (Ez 33:11).