

7. November 2022

## Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved

Mk 16:15-20

Gospel for the memorial of St. Willibrordo of Utrecht

*And he said to them, 'Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. These are the signs that will be associated with believers: in my name they will cast out devils; they will have the gift of tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands and be unharmed should they drink deadly poison; they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover.' And so the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven; there at the right hand of God he took his place, while they, going out, preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that accompanied it.*

The Church's most urgent task remains that of proclaiming the Gospel to all peoples, in order to fulfill the mission entrusted to her by the Lord. Indeed, she is committed to this missionary mandate, and if she were to fail to fulfill it, she would lose her identity.

It is true that there are different ways of proclaiming the Gospel, and that certain aspects of the forms and methods of transmitting it can be modified. It is necessary to employ with astuteness and wisdom all the means that modern times offer us to increase the expansion and fruitfulness of this proclamation. But at its core, the assignment is always the same and the message remains valid, even if the appearances or customs of the place where it is announced change. Whether in China or in the most remote islands, whether in Africa or in the most modern cities, this mission is addressed to us everywhere: "*Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time*" (Mt 28:19-20).

St. Paul, the great Apostle to the Gentiles, exclaimed: "*In fact, preaching the gospel gives me nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion and I should be in trouble if I failed to do it*" (1 Cor 9:16).

Why does the Apostle pronounce these words, if the Gospel does not entail any obligation? It is a question here of an "obligation" that springs from love. The Apostle's heart was on fire. Jesus had drawn him deeply to Himself, so that the persecutor became a tireless proclaimer of the Gospel. Yes, Paul had understood who the Son of God is and how great was the grace he had received from Him. The love that met him, that saved him and sent him; this love inflamed his heart. And it was precisely this love that he wanted to proclaim!

Who can escape the obligation that springs from this love? From love's point of view, it is impossible; otherwise one would be betraying love. This, then, is the "obligation" that impels the Apostle. He never betrayed the Lord nor did his love grow cold.

This is also the motivation of all those who have met the Lord. His commission is the most important thing and takes precedence over everything else. God wants His love to reach all peoples and for this purpose He sends His messengers. Blessed are those who have understood this and have placed themselves unreservedly at the service of this mission!

It is essential that the Gospel be proclaimed without ambiguity and without cutting corners. In the Gospel we have heard today, the profound gravity and seriousness of the Lord's message resounds. What is at stake is nothing more and nothing less than the salvation of humanity. Today we must be well aware of this, when there are modernist currents in the Church that want to deceive us, pretending to equate the Christian message with other religions or belief systems. This is not true! Evidently those who propagate such errors have neither known nor understood the Lord well, besides the fact that they have overlooked the message that the Church has announced throughout so many centuries:

Faith was, is and will continue to be necessary for salvation! Jesus himself tells his disciples unequivocally: *"Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned."*

This profound seriousness that the proclamation of the Gospel must have for us becomes a source of authentic motivation. It is love for God that impels us to procure the salvation of souls; as well as love for humankind, called to spend all eternity with

God, the angels and the saints in unspeakable joy. The person performs a great work when, at the Lord's word, he tries to save others from eternal damnation.

If the Church wants the Lord to return and find her a faithful Bride, she must not hesitate to carry out the mission that He has entrusted to her. She must never tire of longing and struggling so that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, humanity may be gathered as "one flock under one shepherd" (Jn 10:16), so that all people may find their way to God and become members of the Church.

Mother Teresa once said to Malcolm Muggeridge, the brilliant and zealous British journalist who had become a Christian but not yet a Catholic, "Malcom, you're a good man. Why don't you go all the way and become a Catholic?" Malcolm replied, "Well, to answer you in your own words, Mother, I guess God sees that I'm a good man and he needs some good men outside his Church as well as inside." And then Mother Teresa uttered three words: "No, he doesn't." And Malcolm writes in his autobiography, "I could not answer that argument, so I became a Catholic".