

11. December 2022

Waiting with Patience for the Coming of the Lord

NOTE: We will pause today in the "Advent in Apocalyptic Times" series because, since it is Sunday, we want to meditate on the biblical texts for this day.

James 5:7-10

Now be patient, brothers, until the Lord's coming. Think of a farmer: how patiently he waits for the precious fruit of the ground until it has had the autumn rains and the spring rains! You too must be patient; do not lose heart, because the Lord's coming will be soon. Do not make complaints against one another, brothers, so as not to be brought to judgement yourselves; the Judge is already to be seen waiting at the gates. For your example, brothers, in patiently putting up with persecution, take the prophets who spoke in the Lord's name.

The Second Coming of the Lord... How long the Church has been awaiting it! Is she aware that each day that passes brings us closer to the Return of Christ?

Throughout the history of the Church, there were movements here and there that saw the end of the world as imminent, thus arousing the corresponding reactions. However, some of these currents misled people and left them disappointed, since the Lord did not return as expected. Consequently, attempts were made to relocate the supposed date of His Advent. And when again it was not fulfilled, it could happen that, either another time would be pointed out again, or people would fall into resignation and totally lose sight of the Lord's Return.

It is precisely topics like this that require a special sobriety, which in no way means that we lose sight of them or do not consciously include them in our reality of faith.

In today's reading, the Apostle James indicates patience as a basic attitude for awaiting the Advent of the Lord. Now, patience cannot be confused with a lethargic attitude,

with a phlegmatic temperament, which nothing and no one can shake from its stillness. Nor is it a stoic indifference in the face of things and circumstances.

Rather, patience is knowing how to wait for the right moment, which we cannot determine on our own. It is a matter, then, of consciously submitting to the Lord's timing. In today's text, it is compared to the natural ripening of the harvest, which the farmer can only wait for, but not determine on his own. He places his trust in the natural process... We, on the other hand, are called to place our trust in the Providence of God, who makes everything happen at the right time and has everything in His hands.

This patient attitude in no way excludes the ardent longing for the Lord to come soon, nor being attentive to the real signs of His Return, nor constantly invoking His Advent, nor the fervor to do our best in all that has been entrusted to us... In all this, we abandon ourselves again and again to the Lord and wait patiently. Paradoxical as it may sound, we can practice holy patience with a holy impatience.

But today's reading also gives us other indications as to how we are to wait for Christ:

"Do not lose heart, because the Lord's coming will be soon."

Here the Apostle could be referring to the virtue of fortitude. We are to enter the Kingdom of God through many tribulations, without letting ourselves be discouraged. We are to take up the fight that has been entrusted to us, get up after defeats, trust in the goodness of the Lord and continue. To strengthen the heart means to root it in love and truth, to make it a bulwark against darkness, to shelter it in the Heart of Jesus...

"Do not make complaints against one another, brothers, so as not to be brought to judgement yourselves."

Here it could refer to accusing one's brother, to speaking ill of one another, to not seeing his faults in order to help him overcome them; but to use them against him. When one becomes aware of one's own faults and weaknesses, it may become easier to deal patiently with the faults of one's neighbor. The Apostle refers here, then, to a judgment lacking in love, which in turn attracts the Judgment of God.

"For your example, brothers, in patiently putting up with persecution, take the prophets who spoke in the Lord's name."

First of all, we have the Lord himself as our model, but also many others who point out to us how to endure sufferings and make them fruitful. The key to this consists in accepting suffering from the hand of God, with an attitude of trust. This is not always easy, because, naturally, we prefer to avoid suffering and often do not understand why it comes upon us. But here again, patience comes into play: nothing happens without the Lord's Will, whether active or permissive! Therefore, we must look to God and to those who have endured suffering with patience. Not only can we take them as our models, but we can also look to them for intercession.

Finally, one last aspect of today's biblical text: we are struck by the fact that it mentions three times the coming of the Lord that we are awaiting. This awareness, which should fill us, will urge us even more to put into practice the advice of the Apostle James. Just as we would summon everything in us to unite ourselves to the Lord if we knew that our death was imminent, so too we must lead our whole life with great vigilance and holy sobriety, since we know neither the day nor the hour of Christ's return (cf. Mt 24:36).