

2. January 2023

## The discernment of spirits

1 Jn 2:22-28

*Who is the liar, if not one who claims that Jesus is not the Christ? This is the Antichrist, who denies both the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son cannot have the Father either; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father too. Let what you heard in the beginning remain in you; as long as what you heard in the beginning remains in you, you will remain in the Son and in the Father. And the promise he made you himself is eternal life. So much have I written to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. But as for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you; since the anointing he gave you teaches you everything, and since it is true, not false, remain in him just as he has taught you. Therefore remain in him now, children, so that when he appears we may be fearless, and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.*

In this reading at the beginning of the new year, St John calls us to discern the spirits, and warns us about the concrete dangers that threaten our faith.

The Apostle mentions the Antichrist... This word often lends itself to esoteric speculation or is simply strange or unfamiliar to us. However, the figure of the Antichrist - or antichrists - is an important element in Sacred Scripture and there are also many serious literary sources that have dealt with this subject.

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the worst "religious imposture" of the Antichrist is spoken of:

*"The supreme religious deception is that of the Anti-Christ, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of His Messiah come in the flesh." (CCC N° 675).*

This means that man puts himself in the place of God and, in a certain sense, worships himself.

To get to that point, there must be a background, namely errors in doctrine and in the praxis of the faith. Indeed, it is right doctrine that leads to right practice. Therefore, if anything is changed in doctrine, the consequences will be devastating.

From the outset, St. John wanted to prevent the access of errors in the faith by giving us this clear indication: the Antichrist is the liar, the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ. That is why the Antichrist must be resisted, whether he presents himself as a concrete person in the public sphere, or whether he manifests himself in a lying spirit that obscures divine truths.

Christians are to stand on what they have heard from the beginning. The Holy Spirit, with his anointing, testifies within us the truth of right doctrine. Thus we abide in the Father and in the Son.

This means that, by abiding in the true doctrine of the Church, we also abide in God and do not depart from Him. This doctrine is sure, and we do not need anyone to pass on to us teachings that lead us in other ways.

These warnings of St. John, with which he sought to protect Christians from the dangers of his time, are perfectly applicable to our time as well. Unfortunately, there are theologians and even priests who no longer teach the bodily Resurrection of Christ, who deny the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and who call into question other dogmas of faith as well. Together with St. John, we must warn the faithful, saying to them, "Do not believe them!" We must know that in all these confusions the spirit of the Antichrist manifests itself, and we are called to remain in what faith taught us from the beginning.

Cardinal Brandmüller made this important statement: "In the present situation, our orientation must be the Tradition of the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit and embodied in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Whatever contradicts the Catechism, no matter from whom it comes, is not Catholic truth. Whoever professes the faith of the Catechism and lives according to it, is on the right path."

These are important words for current and future controversies about the doctrine and praxis of the faith. If we remain steadfast in the Tradition of the Church and in the practice that derives from right doctrine, we will not fall into the deceptions of the anti-Christian

spirit. Thus, we remain in the Father and in the Son, and the Holy Spirit, with his anointing, will remain in us.

To begin this year, St. John gives us a simple and clear advice for the discernment of spirits. If we apply it, we remain in the true faith. But let us not forget to pray for those who err in the faith, who are uncertain or have been deceived.