

1. March 2023

LENTEN ITINERARY

Day 8: "The Conversion of Nineveh"

Following the lectionary of the Novus Ordo, today's reading tells us the story of Jonah and the city of Nineveh (Jn 3:1-10). Its inhabitants were converted and consequently exempted from the punishment that would have befallen them.

Let us take this passage of Holy Scripture to heart during our Lenten journey and try to bring it up to date.

What was the reason why Nineveh was to be punished? In the first chapter of the Book of Jonah, the Lord speaks to him in these terms: *"Go to Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim to them that their wickedness has forced itself upon me"* (Jn 1:2).

This wickedness means that grave sins had been committed, which, on the basis of righteousness, bring with them the respective consequences. The prophet threatened the city of Nineveh that these consequences would befall it, but thanks to the conversion of its inhabitants, God spared it from destruction.

Again and again this theme is repeated in Holy Scripture: the consequences of idolatry and grave sins are in themselves unavoidable from the point of view of justice. Only conversion and penance can mitigate or, at best, even avoid them.

But what is the situation in the world today?

It is not difficult to see that we are certainly no better off than Nineveh in its time. There is so much injustice and various forms of idolatry worldwide that destruction is looming over the world today as well.

Let us remember how the measures of the last few years disrupted the normal life of the people, to the extent that even the doors of the churches were closed and public worship ceased for a time. Why did this happen? It was and still is a plague with many consequences, the extent of which we cannot yet foresee.

The terrible war situation in Ukraine holds the danger of an expansion to the point of a nuclear threat. We could list many other events that make us realise that we are living in a kind of apocalyptic scenario.

Have people understood that the coronavirus plague and the measures taken in its wake were a warning? Have they understood that the threatening war in Ukraine is a warning? Have they understood that God allows it because sin is rampant and He is urgently calling them to conversion?

Who will announce this to humanity? With few exceptions, even within the Church there is silence on this subject. Perhaps nowadays one does not even dare to establish such relationships or believes that one can no longer say things like that, lest one cause a scandal.

The story of Nineveh shows us how to deal with such threats. People must be converted and turn from their evil ways, only then can they be saved and exempted from the misfortune that threatens to befall them. There is no alternative way! The inhabitants of the great city understood this, starting with the king.

But what is happening today, and do people still understand it?

And why is this theme important in our journey towards Easter? It is important for us to deepen our own conversion day by day. It is important to understand that we can offer our own conversion to the Lord so that He will forgive humanity. It is important that we know how to read the signs when God is calling for conversion through events and draw the right conclusions. We must not blindly and ignorantly overlook the ark that the Lord is building for the salvation of mankind.

We are connected with the whole of humanity. If we notice that our world and its inhabitants are in danger, if we interpret the signs correctly, then we have to take responsibility. This is to act like the citizens of Nineveh.

We can transport the desperate situation in which Nineveh found itself before its conversion to the condition in which the whole world finds itself today. Its wickedness is on the increase, and so it is time to do everything in our power to turn to God and plead for His mercy on this world that has turned away from Him.

This is a service of love and a kind of "prophetic responsibility". It is not enough to bemoan the state of the world, but we must do our part to turn away by our conversion and penance from the misfortune that hangs over it.