

31. August 2023

The vigilant attitude

Mt 24:42-51

At that time, Jesus said to his disciples: Watch ye therefore, because ye know not what hour your Lord will come. But know this ye, that if the goodman of the house knew at what hour the thief would come, he would certainly watch, and would not suffer his house to be broken open. Wherefore be you also ready, because at what hour you know not the Son of man will come. Who, thinkest thou, is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath appointed over his family, to give them meat in season. Blessed is that servant, whom when his lord shall come he shall find so doing. Amen I say to you, he shall place him over all his goods. But if that evil servant shall say in his heart: My lord is long a coming: And shall begin to strike his fellow servants, and shall eat and drink with drunkards: The lord of that servant shall come in a day that he hopeth not, and at an hour that he knoweth not: And shall separate him, and appoint his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Vigilance is a key concept in the spiritual life of discipleship. It is not confined to certain stages of our life which might be particularly dangerous; it should be the constant attitude which characterises the Christian life. This does not mean that we should live in that tension which is always afraid of doing something wrong and which may end in scruples. Rather, it means that the soul is attentive to the presence of its Lord. Of course, this includes vigilance against the enemy of humanity, who seeks to take advantage of our weaknesses and inclinations.

In today's Gospel, the Lord gives us clear instructions on how to be vigilant: "watch ye". This disposition means being totally focused on God and waiting for the Lord's return. How would we like Him to meet us if He were to return that very day? It is the same attitude that we must have in relation to our death: How would we like to face it? Surely we would all answer that we would want it to meet us in a state of grace! Therefore, vigilance is required in everything we do.

Are we attentive to the Lord's will? Do we try to listen carefully to what He wants in the small, everyday things, and not just in the big picture and on a general level? Are we easily distracted? Do we neglect prayer and conversion? Are we too preoccupied with earthly things? Are we using modern means of communication correctly, or are we being dominated by them? It is always helpful to examine our conscience so that we do not fall asleep spiritually.

We should also carry out our outward activities and duties with our focus on God. He wants us to cooperate in His work of bringing people back to the Father's house. In other words, He wants us to fulfil the mission entrusted to us as Christians and, more specifically, the task entrusted to each of us personally. The Lord wants to see us at work in this mission, and he praises the servant whom He finds doing so on His return.

As far as the interior dimension is concerned, we must watch over our own hearts and thoughts. Prayer, the sacraments and the word of God strengthen the interior life of a person. Asceticism, on the other hand, helps us not to give in too much to our inclinations and to direct our spiritual life.

As far as the external dimension is concerned, i.e. evangelisation and works of charity, vigilance reminds us of our responsibility towards the world and towards humanity. These two dimensions, interior and exterior, are like two streams of love that converge and increase our vigilance, especially when we keep the Lord present in everything we do.

Vigilance thus helps us to avoid two dangers. On the one hand, that prayer and religious practices do not degenerate into a kind of self-realisation, but that they seek the glory of God and are also at the service of evangelisation. On the other hand, that external activities not be separated from the path of holiness, but be sustained by the interior path, so that they may be permeated by the "taste of love".

On the other hand, external activities must be supported by the interior journey, so that they are permeated by the "taste of love".

Let us ask the Lord for vigilance, that loving attention to Him which will free us from laziness and prepare us for the encounter with Him.