

5. September 2023

Sobriety and vigilance

1 Thess 5:1-6,9-11

Bretheren, as to the times and the seasons, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When people say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape. But you are not in darkness, brethren, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all sons of light and sons of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

The subject of Christ's return and our readiness to meet Him must be with us throughout our lives. It would be very profitable to have a sound doctrine of the Lord's return; a doctrine that, on the one hand, maintains and encourages our vigilance and, on the other hand, does not lead us into useless speculation, which unfortunately often arises around this subject.

The Lord exhorts His own to live in sobriety and vigilance, so that they will be ready when His great day comes (cf. Lk 12:35). Otherwise, if they fall asleep like everyone else, He will come upon them suddenly and unexpectedly, like a thief in the night.

The slumber alluded to here means not recognising the signs of the times. You think you are living in peace and security, but you are not aware of what is really happening. One is unable to distinguish the apparent and false peace that the world gives from the true peace that only God can give. As an example, I would like to mention a situation that has been disturbing me for many years: Can there be true peace in the world as long as the right to life of unborn children is not guaranteed? Can there be peace when they are being killed by the millions? Anyone who seriously considers these questions will come to the conclusion that, under these conditions, it is impossible to speak of

true peace, because it cannot apply only to those who already see the light of the world, but must be for everyone.

If we think about the time of the Antichrist, which, as predicted in the Scriptures, will precede the Second Coming of Christ, we can imagine that it will be a time in which many of humanity's problems will seem to have been solved. But in reality, the Antichrist will establish a political and spiritual dictatorship over humanity, and will seek to turn people away from God, and therefore from their eternal destiny.

A person in a 'state of vigilance', on the other hand, knows how to discern the spirits, what comes from God and what comes from other powers. Of course, the first and indispensable condition for this is not to live in the darkness of sin and confusion, but to focus on God day by day and to live in deep friendship with Him. Since there is a battle going on for our soul and darkness wants to take it over, this constant vigilance is necessary.

It is easy to neglect our spiritual life, to get caught up in too many activities and to forget our inner renewal.

We must not be deceived! Our human inclinations naturally tend towards the superficial and, because of original sin, we are inclined to evil, as the Church teaches us. Moreover, "*Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour*" (1 Pt 5:8).

The spiritual life requires both external discipline and internal vigilance over our thoughts, words, feelings, etc. We cannot rely on our human nature! On the contrary, we must obey the Spirit of God and allow ourselves to be moulded by Him.

When we have this sobriety, we will be armed and able to put all our hope in the Lord. Whatever comes will not surprise us, because constant watchfulness in the Lord will prepare us for everything, including the hour of our death.

With this assurance we can also comfort and warn others. It is important to be aware that we are "our brother's keeper" (cf. Gn 4:9), and thus to support one another in the way of the Lord. If we notice that one of our brothers is not living soberly and watchfully, let us ask the Lord to show us the right way to admonish him. If someone

falls into doubt, let us strengthen him in the faith. Then, in spite of the dangers around us, we can walk safely in the ways of the Lord, knowing that He is watching over our lives.