

28. September 2023

God always first

Hag 1:1-8

*'In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of Yahweh was addressed through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel governor of Judah and to Joshua son of Jehozadak the high priest as follows, 'Yahweh Sabaoth says this, "This people says: The time has not yet come to rebuild the Temple of Yahweh." '(And the word of Yahweh was addressed through the prophet Haggai, as follows,) 'Is this a time for you to live in your panelled houses, when this House lies in ruins? So now, Yahweh Sabaoth says this, "Think carefully about your behaviour. You have sown much and harvested little; you eat but never have enough, drink but never have your fill, put on clothes but feel no warmth. The wage-earner gets his wages only to put them in a bag with a hole in it." Yahweh Sabaoth says this, "Think carefully about your behaviour. Go up into the hills, fetch timber and rebuild the House; and I shall take pleasure in it and manifest my glory there- Yahweh says.'"*

The lesson the Lord communicates to His people through the prophet Haggai is a simple one; it is the same lesson that runs through the whole of Holy Scripture, from the Old to the New Testament. Jesus formulates it very clearly: *"Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on God's saving justice, and all these other things will be given you as well"* (Mt 6:33).

It is always time to give God first place in everything! The people of Israel are wrong to delay the building of the House of the Lord. Therefore, He makes them see the inadequacy of their life by not giving God the first place.

God explains it to them as He would explain it to a child. Sometimes people need direct experience in order to understand. There is a good German saying: "Those who don't listen must feel", meaning that he will have to experience "in the flesh" the consequences of his actions. Unfortunately, it must be added that this form of education through experience does not always result in understanding.

We Christians must internalise it deeply: Above all, it is about God! Giving Him the glory, seeking Him in prayer and doing His Will is first and foremost.

If we notice confusion and disorientation in our Church today, it is certainly a consequence of God no longer being given first place. It easily happens that secondary or tertiary things are put in the foreground; that human things are put before spiritual things; human ideas before the guidance of the Holy Spirit; personal interests before the fulfilment of God's Will. In this way, a great spiritual disorder is generated, both in personal life and at the level of the Church and above all in politics, which in many countries has embarked on a course that leads to the abyss.

If we identify the deepest roots of the confusion, whether at the personal, church or political level, and if we interpret events correctly in the light of God, then this will also show us how to re-establish the lost spiritual order. God must once again take first place in people's lives! The first focus must not be on the human being himself, but on God and His infinite love for us. If we know Him more deeply and live out of His love, we will be able to meet our neighbour with a love that goes beyond that which is merely human.

On a personal level, this means living a true conversion to God and advancing on the path of sanctification. Jesus made His disciples the light of the world and the salt of the earth (cf. Mt 5:13-16). How can our light - and therefore the light of God - shine if it is obscured by self-interest or vanity, if we do not take care to have enough oil for the lamps, like the wise virgins (cf. Mt 25:1-13)? How can we be salt of the earth if we do not remain faithful to the truth of the Gospel and proclaim it, even if the whole world rejects it? Is this not how salt becomes bland and spiritual food becomes tasteless?

At the level of the Church, giving God first place means fulfilling Jesus' missionary mandate to go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to all nations (cf. Mt 28:19), wisely and fearlessly, and not to settle in this world as if we were part of it. In no other name is there salvation; only in Jesus is redemption (cf. Acts 4:12). If the Church cooperates with worldly and political institutions to create a better world, but renounces her claim to truth in order to do so, this goal can never be achieved. The proclamation of the truth in Christ is by no means a possession of ours to dispose of; it is a sacred mission. For this reason it cannot be relegated, because the Church is at the service of the truth that has been entrusted to her.

The political sphere also lives by values that have been predetermined by God, and not by values that have to be created anew. Politics without God is doomed to failure,

because there is no dimension of human life that can do without God. Therefore, Catholics who are active in politics are called to act according to the guidelines of the faith and its value system, so that politics comes into contact with the truth of the Gospel.

So let us not delay the proclamation and witness of God; let us not postpone the building of the House of the Lord, as if all human requirements and needs had to be fulfilled first, and then turn to God. No! Let us turn to Him completely, and then the Spirit of God will order everything and everything will take its rightful place! God always comes first!