

6. October 2023

I throw myself into what lies ahead

Phil 3:8-14

Reading for the commemoration of Saint Bruno

Bretheren, indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Although they are not very frequent, God continues to raise vocations that withdraw completely from the world to live with Him in solitude, renouncing everything "to win Christ". Today we commemorate Saint Bruno who, in 1084, withdrew with six companions to lead an austere religious life. This was to become the Carthusian Order. In a letter to a provost, a friend of his, St Bruno writes

"Prudence knows what Wisdom herself says: '*whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple*' (Lk 14:33). Who does not see how beautiful, useful and pleasant it is to remain in her school, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to learn the divine philosophy which alone gives true happiness"?

St Paul is aware of this because the knowledge of Christ, his Lord, surpasses everything, to the point that the Apostle calls all things "refuse" in order to make clear the abysmal difference between a life with Christ and a life without Him.

While the vocation of a Saint Paul, a Saint Bruno or a Carmelite is one of the most brilliant jewels in the treasury of the Church, every Christian who wants to follow the Lord is called to *"press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"*.

Although we may be more involved in earthly realities because of family life and work in the world, these words do not cease to apply to the situation in which we find ourselves. Nothing should come before Christ; we are to seek Him always and everywhere, striving to do His will! This is what makes our life heavenly from now on. The more the Lord takes shape in us, the more we will be marked by His life.

Paul makes it clear that he himself is not yet perfect, and in this context he gives us an important guideline for following the Lord in ardent love:

The apostle longs for this life in Christ with all his might and subordinates everything else to this goal. Nothing can compete with this special love for Christ - nothing and no one! Everything else, whatever it may be, must be subordinated to the Lord.

And St. Paul mentions another fundamental point: *"forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus..."*

His gaze is fixed on the goal: to be with the Lord in eternity and, until then, to fulfil the mission that God has entrusted to him in this world. He does not look back, that is, he is not constantly preoccupied with earthly realities, but is fixed on the "now" with the prospect of what is to come.

Here is important advice for all of us on how to live fruitfully and wisely! This applies both to a Carthusian or Carmelite nun, whose life is particularly focused on eternity, and to all Christians, most of whom live in other circumstances.

Day by day we draw nearer to eternity, day by day we draw nearer to the day of Christ's return. This focus gives our soul that concentration and strength which we see in the

Apostle to the Gentiles. It teaches us to look at things from the perspective of eternity and to rank them according to their importance. We will voluntarily set aside unimportant things; we will avoid useless or even harmful pleasures; and we will use the time we have been given *"toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"*.

The words of the Apostle and the example of St Bruno invite us all to focus more and more on God, without allowing ourselves to be so absorbed by earthly realities that we lose sight of Him.