

5. November 2023

Abiding in God's blessing

Mal 1:14b.2:1-2b.8-10

I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and my name is feared among the nations. And now, O priests, this command is for you. If you will not listen, if you will not lay it to heart to give glory to my name, says the Lord of hosts, then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings. But you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by your instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts, and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you have not kept my ways but have shown partiality in your instruction." Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?

The Old Testament readings show us the drama of the history of the People of Israel and of all humanity. In reality, history repeats itself: it is always God's faithfulness in the face of man's unfaithfulness. The Lord's blessing on His people can turn into a curse; that which in God's grace was wonderful and simple can turn out to be a hard fate when grace is lost.

In a way, it could be said that, for those who had tasted of the Lord's goodness, but then forsook His ways, life is even harder than if they had never known Him. Of course this does not mean that we should not evangelise, to spare people the burden of the Lord's yoke. How wrong this conclusion would be! To know the Lord is to live, forgiveness of sins is His great gift and life in His presence is the passage from death to true life. But life in God demands vigilance, lest we falter in our efforts to serve Him sincerely.

What are the reasons why the prophet speaks so harshly in this text?

Firstly, the reading speaks of the fact that the name of the Lord was not glorified, certainly because the man's heart was not focused on God. Other things would have taken first place, and the remembrance of God would have faded more and more. The heart turned away from Him!

This passage is also a wake-up call for all of us who want to serve the Lord

In fact, He asks us to love Him with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our strength. This is the only valid response we owe to God's love. We must examine ourselves carefully, for we can never feel safe, as if we are exempt from stumbling or becoming attached to things or creatures. The great temptation of active people is to neglect prayer for the sake of other things that are apparently more important. Over time, we can become accustomed to the absence of prayer, getting the false idea that we can replace it with our work, while the dialogue with God as such becomes less important. But this is a deception, for the soul needs prayer to immerse itself more deeply in God! If we neglect it, our soul will easily be carried away by everything we do and think, and will not give first place to God.

On the other hand, if we always try to pause, questioning whether what we are doing is for the glorification of God, it may be easier for our heart to remain centred on Him.

Another aspect that might explain why the prophet uses such harsh language is the fact that the priests he is addressing had strayed from God's way, causing many others to fall into the same error. And this is a great responsibility!

Unfortunately this is the way it is: when one person takes a wrong turn, he will also drag others down the same path. That is why it is so important that we, as Catholics, follow the path that has been laid out for us. The Church gives us an authentic doctrine, inspired by the Holy Spirit, of which we can be sure. It is worth stressing that this doctrine must also be observed by those who have been appointed as pastors in the Church. But if they falter - which unfortunately can happen - then we must hold fast to the Church and its Tradition, resisting in times of crisis with confidence in God. Something similar can be said of the spiritual path of following Christ. Here too we Catholics have a rich tradition to draw on, which will keep us from embarking on rough roads.

A final reason given in the reading for using those strong words is the fact that the priests were a respecter of persons in the Law. To be a "respecter of persons" means that one does not focus on the truth as such in order to proclaim it, but differentiates between people. In this way, one becomes partial and promotes injustice. This attitude can also be called "human respects", when we are afraid, for example, to speak the truth, for fear of repercussions or because we have a preference for someone.

Let us focus on the Lord, so that His blessing, which accompanies us, may increase more and more. And if we have grown weak, let us immediately return to His arms, so that our heart may never depart from Him.