

29. November 2023

Numbered, weighed, divided

Dan 5:1-6,13-14,16-17,23-28

„King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his lords, with whom he drank. Under the influence of the wine, he ordered the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar, his father, had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, to be brought in so that the king, his lords, his wives and his entertainers might drink from them. When the gold and silver vessels taken from the house of God in Jerusalem had been brought in, and while the king, his lords, his wives and his entertainers were drinking wine from them, they praised their gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone. Suddenly, opposite the lampstand, the fingers of a human hand appeared, writing on the plaster of the wall in the king's palace. When the king saw the wrist and hand that wrote, his face blanched; his thoughts terrified him, his hip joints shook, and his knees knocked. Then Daniel was brought into the presence of the king. The king asked him, "Are you the Daniel, the Jewish exile, whom my father, the king, brought from Judah? I have heard that the Spirit of God is in you, that you possess brilliant knowledge and extraordinary wisdom. I have heard that you can interpret dreams and solve difficulties; if you are able to read the writing and tell me what it means, you shall be clothed in purple, wear a gold collar about your neck, and be third in the government of the kingdom." Daniel answered the king: "You may keep your gifts, or give your presents to someone else; but the writing I will read for you, O king, and tell you what it means. You have rebelled against the Lord of heaven. You had the vessels of his temple brought before you, so that you and your nobles, your wives and your entertainers, might drink wine from them; and you praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, that neither see nor hear nor have intelligence. But the God in whose hand is your life breath and the whole course of your life, you did not glorify. By him were the wrist and hand sent, and the writing set down. "This is the writing that was inscribed: MENE, TEKEL, and PERES. These words mean: MENE, God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it; TEKEL, you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting; PERES, your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

"God is not to be fooled" (Gal 6:7). King Balthasar had to learn this lesson, as well as all those who, through imprudence, lightness or pride, transgress God's commandments. In the case of King Balthasar, all these elements probably came together. The wine made up the rest, so that the king overlooked any warning signs he might have received.

But what he could not overlook was the hand that made it clear to him that God was

intervening. Daniel revealed to him the meaning of the words that finger had written on the palace wall, made him see his iniquity and announced the consequences of his actions. In German the term "menetekel" has even been introduced into the language, which indicates something like an "evil omen".

How many times will this scripture appear (counted, weighed, divided) - even if not visibly - to warn the powerful of this world, when they do not care for God's commandments and even induce other people to do evil? What will be the words that threaten those who pass laws that endanger the lives of unborn children; or, worse, those who do business or experiment with aborted babies? What will be the sentence that hangs over presidents who promote abortion with all the means at their disposal? What words are written over pastors who no longer protect the flock and who betray their calling?

"God is not to be fooled!" (Gal 6:7)

Faith cannot be understood if we omit the dimension of judgement. Mercy would become a concept without content; truth would degenerate into a merely philosophical construct.

It is good that in these days before Advent, the biblical readings remind us of the so-called "last things". Why does Holy Scripture speak to us of catastrophes, of the Last Judgement, of the punishment of the wicked and the reward of the good? Why does the Word of God not hesitate to show us the consequences of wrongdoing? Is it simply to threaten us or even for revenge?

No! This is not God's intention! He always and everywhere calls men to conversion. Here is the key concept... Why is what happened back then with King Balthasar being passed on to us so many centuries later? Because it is not only a story that concerns the Jewish people, but the Word of God has been given to us as a teaching for all times!

The story of this king should give us a healthy fright, by showing us what pride and recklessness lead to, by showing us what it means to violate God's commandments, and by warning us that no earthly power can think it can mock God. Rulers cannot do so in the public sphere, nor can we in our private sphere.

Judgement is coming, and with it justice.

But the message of comfort is that first comes the Redeemer, the Saviour of the nations... The more we understand that the nations have brought upon themselves a sentence of judgement, the more we can understand the brightness of God's mercy.

He is coming who has paid the debt of mankind (Col 2:14); He is coming who can erase that sentence of judgement and whose hand He wants to inscribe on our hearts: "You

are mine, no one can snatch you away from my love (cf. Jn 10:28)".

He comes who calls us to conversion, who can heal and free our lives, who makes all things new.

He comes in supplication before our hearts and asks us to let Him in. With Him comes blessing and true peace: peace with God, peace with our neighbour, peace with ourselves.

If we let Him in, He will forgive our guilt, however great it may be. Even a King Balthasar could be saved; the heralds of the culture of death could become witnesses of life; the impure could become chaste; the proud could become humble; the stingy could become generous; the persecutors could become heralds of the Kingdom of God...

All this can be done by the One for whose coming we shall prepare ourselves in the coming weeks and whose glorious return we eagerly await. In Him shines the mercy and love of God for mankind. In Him shines the light from on high; He wants to save all men! God has everything ready for this banquet of reconciliation, if only we accept His invitation.

Everything is possible when we turn to God, because He loves us, but the condition is that we convert! We had better do it today, because tomorrow it could be too late!