

30. November 2023

Feast of St Andrew the Apostle
How can they believe in Him if they have never heard of Him?

Rom 10:9-18

“If you declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and if you believe with your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved. It is by believing with the heart that you are justified, and by making the declaration with your lips that you are saved. When scripture says: No one who relies on this will be brought to disgrace, it makes no distinction between Jew and Greek: the same Lord is the Lord of all, and his generosity is offered to all who appeal to him, for all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then are they to call on him if they have not come to believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard of him? And how will they hear of him unless there is a preacher for them? And how will there be preachers if they are not sent? As scripture says: How beautiful are the feet of the messenger of good news. But in fact they have not all responded to the good news. As Isaiah says: Lord, who has given credence to what they have heard from us? But it is in that way faith comes, from hearing, and that means hearing the word of Christ. Well then, I say, is it possible that they have not heard? Indeed they have: in the entire earth their voice stands out, their message reaches the whole world”.

Today, on the feast of St. Andrew the Apostle, the Church once again makes us realise how important the proclamation of the Gospel is. Contrary to what certain modernist tendencies suggest, the words of St. Paul make it clear to us that faith is necessary for salvation. Confessing the Lord and calling on His name is indispensable, because the Kingdom of God is not only destined for the private sphere of the individual; His lordship is universal, and the faithful must make it known everywhere! Precisely the fact that our faith is to be "proclaimed from the housetops" and is intended for the public sphere distinguishes it from any other secret society (Mt 10:27).

Confessing Jesus always has a witnessing character and expresses one's belonging to God. To deny the Lord and to persist in doing so, on the other hand, deforms one's whole life and entails the risk that the Lord will then also not declare Himself in one's favour (cf. Mt 10:33). Of course, this does not mean that we should feel pressured to profess our faith publicly in every situation. But we should ask the Lord to grant us the courage of confessors, so that we stand up for our faith and do not deny it in front of men. This also

means declaring ourselves in favour of the Church!

St. Paul shows us the logic of why the proclamation of faith is necessary: *"All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then are they to call on him if they have not come to believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard of him? And how will they hear of him unless there is a preacher for them?"*

In this context, it is important that we have a good understanding of inter-religious or ecumenical dialogue, which we hear so much about today. This dialogue will be valuable to the extent that it constitutes a means of evangelisation and does not weaken the profession of faith. Let us take dialogue with other religions as an example. We can only carry this out in accordance with the missionary mandate if we are convinced that every person must know our Lord Jesus Christ. In us there must be a deep desire that also those who lead a pious life and possess certain seeds of the Word of God in their respective religion come to the fullness of the knowledge of Christ. Otherwise, we would be depriving people of the most important thing, and this would be an offence to love. In reality, this can only happen when one's own heart is no longer well lit in faith, and when the conviction has weakened that for salvation it is necessary to call on the name of the Lord.

How much more important it will then be to bear witness to the Lord for those who are far from the faith! The plea: "Lord, send out labourers into your harvest" (cf. Mt 9:38) must become a constant and urgent plea to God. The missionary mandate is most important, and each one is called to serve in evangelisation according to the proper way the Lord has entrusted to him.

St. Paul was on fire in the Holy Spirit to carry the message of the Lord everywhere and to see to it that the faith proclaimed is also kept alive.

Let us remember that in the readings of the previous days we were exhorted to grow in love and inner peace, which becomes the foundation for peace on the outer level. Today, as we celebrate St. Andrew the Apostle, we hear that faith and the profession of faith are part of the mission entrusted to us, for *"How can they believe in him if they have never heard of him?"*

If we want love and peace to spread in the world, we must proclaim the Gospel.

May St. Andrew intercede for us that we may be on fire with the Spirit! And we ourselves must see to it that this fire is not extinguished. For who will proclaim the truth to men if Christians, who have known it, do not do so?