

9. December 2023

We need good shepherds and labourers

Mt 9:35-10:1,6-8

“Jesus made a tour through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing all kinds of disease and all kinds of illness. And when he saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers to his harvest.' He summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to drive them out and to cure all kinds of disease and all kinds of illness. Go instead to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those suffering from virulent skin-diseases, drive out devils. You received without charge, give without charge”.

Today's Gospel tells us how our Lord went through the towns and villages proclaiming the Kingdom of God and *"curing all kinds of disease and all kinds of illness"*. These two aspects go hand in hand, because, by embracing the Gospel, we are healed of our spiritual sicknesses, which arise from confusion and darkness. If the true light of the Holy Spirit does not illuminate our understanding, it becomes confused, even worse if it is confused by a false light! It then becomes obscured in its knowledge of God, and - with the passage of time - can even come to a kind of "apostasy of reason". This is why the proclamation of the Gospel must be accompanied by clear and unadulterated doctrine. This is the only way to counteract with truth the confusion that often affects us when we are influenced by the mentality of the world.

Shepherds and labourers are needed in the Lord's vineyard! Jesus Himself is the Shepherd, who lays down His life for the sheep (Jn 10:11). Only under His guidance and with Him as their point of reference can the shepherds in the Church exercise their ministry in an authentic way. The voice of the Shepherd must resound in them, otherwise we cannot follow them. Sacred Scripture warns again and again of false shepherds (Mt 7:15), who pursue their own interests and not the Will of God.

But we must not only ask the "Lord of the harvest" to grant us good shepherds and to bring out of confusion those who have blinded us; we must also pray for good labourers

for the vineyard. They are so few and the harvest is so plentiful! In these words of the Lord, one can feel something of the pain in His Heart: He sees the whole of humanity, and not only the People of Israel. How many people have not yet received the proclamation of the Gospel, or have relegated it to the background, or even forgotten it!

We can correspond to the desire that the Lord explicitly expressed: to ask for authentic missionaries, who proclaim the Gospel with authority and credibility. We need them always, but with particular urgency in these times!

Who else but the Lord can lead people out of the present crisis, which has a global dimension? Right now we need apostles, who proclaim the Gospel and have the courage to really see what is happening, without being intimidated or swept along by the current.

We should also ask for the signs that accompany the proclamation: *"Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those suffering from virulent skin-diseases, drive out devils"*.

This dimension of the Gospel is not only a beneficial work, which makes God's love for people tangible; it is also an eloquent sign, capable of awakening people to faith, showing them clearly the presence of God. Let us not forget that this service is part of the apostles' equipment.

Now, with what attitude should this ministry be carried out? *"You received without charge, give without charge"*.

Everything connected with the gospel requires great purity. This includes no business with religion. The service must remain free from any self-interest. In yesterday's reading, we had heard that St. Paul even renounced the "wages" due to the labourer, so as not to be dependent on anyone (1 Cor 9:18). The proclamation must not be contaminated by a worldly spirit; it must take on the character that we see in a St. Paul or a St. Francis Xavier.

In this Advent, let us render a service to our Lord and to His Church: Let us ask Him insistently to grant us good and faithful shepherds and diligent labourers for His vineyard.