

16. December 2023

Praise for Elijah and Elisha

Eccl 48:1-16

Then the prophet Elijah arose like a fire, his word flaring like a torch. It was he who brought famine on them and decimated them in his zeal. By the word of the Lord he shut up the heavens, three times also he brought down fire. How glorious you were in your miracles, Elijah! Has anyone reason to boast as you have? - rousing a corpse from death, from Sheol, by the word of the Most High; dragging kings down to destruction, and high dignitaries from their beds; hearing a rebuke on Sinai and decrees of punishment on Horeb; anointing kings as avengers, and prophets to succeed you; taken up in the whirlwind of fire, in a chariot with fiery horses; designated in the prophecies of doom to allay God's wrath before the fury breaks, to turn the hearts of fathers towards their children, and to restore the tribes of Jacob. Blessed, those who will see you, and those who have fallen asleep in love; for we too shall certainly have life. Such was Elijah, who was enveloped in a whirlwind; and Elisha was filled with his spirit; throughout his life no ruler could shake him, and no one could subdue him. No task was too hard for him, and even in death his body prophesied. In his lifetime he performed wonders, and in death his works were marvellous. Despite all this the people did not repent, nor did they give up their sins, until they were herded out of their country and scattered all over the earth; the people were left very few in number, but with rulers from the house of David. Some of them did what was pleasing to God, but others multiplied sins.

Once again we hear the praise of the two great prophets whom God has given to the people of Israel!

Although the message of the prophets often appears to be a threat to those who walk in other ways, in reality their call to repentance, often accompanied by a warning of the consequences of wrongdoing, is nothing more than an act of kindness on the part of God. What a responsibility it would be to see that a person is bringing misfortune upon himself by his wrong ways and not to warn him!

The two prophets, Elijah and Elisha, fulfilled their mission and proclaimed the truth.

But today's reading laments the fact that the people did not repent, even though they saw their mighty deeds. What a tragedy! Here we see the depths of the human soul. The question arises again and again: Why do some people continue on the wrong path when they have been warned and instructed, not only by the words of the prophets, but also by people close to them or by their own conscience?

Here we encounter an almost inexplicable abyss of narrow-mindedness and hardness in the human heart!

Living in sin robs a person of his freedom and makes him a slave to sin. In this subjugation, the human being submits to the law of sin and thus enters more and more into the domain of the prince of this world. The intellect, already affected by original sin, becomes darker and darker; the will becomes weaker and weaker; the supernatural light of God can no longer penetrate the soul. Various forms of pride spread in it, making it indifferent and resistant to the warning voices of the prophets. A similar thing happens with error, for it also blinds man, even if it does not involve the full weight of guilt.

It is an almost hopeless condition, and this is the reason why people do not give up their wrong ways. Were it not for the patience and mercy of God, who never ceases to fight for confused humankind, it would be in vain, from a human point of view, to continue to preach to those who do not listen.

But when our means are exhausted and we see no way of touching those who are dear to us, we are left with prayer and trust in God, which He uses. Indeed, He knows ways to reach the hearts of people that we do not, and His love will not rest until He has found them and embraced them in His fatherly love.

To this day we continue to hear of impressive conversions. These are people who, by God's grace, see the right way and leave the ways of confusion and sin, even if it is late and sometimes after great hardship. Today's reading also tells us that in Judah there remained a small remnant who did what was pleasing to God. So, thank God, there are examples of conversion, and they are a real miracle. That is why we must never lose heart in our efforts to help others to meet the Lord, even if it all seems to be in vain.

Today, at a time when the antichristian spirit is increasingly manifesting itself in the world and has even penetrated the Church, we Christians need the courage of these two prophets to bear fearless witness to the truth, even when at first we do not see the fruits, and the powers of darkness act as if they have all the power.

The indifference we may encounter must be countered by the perseverance and steadfastness of faith; the temptation to discouragement by the strengthening of the theological virtue of hope; human respects by the spirit of fortitude.

The example of Elijah and Elisha should serve as an encouragement to us, so that, in God's grace, we may fulfil the mission entrusted to us, and remain faithful to Him even in difficult times of persecution.