

12. January 2024

God alone is our King

1 Sam 8:4-7,10-22a (Reading from the Novus Ordo)

The elders of Israel all assembled, went back to Samuel at Ramah, and said, 'Look, you are old, and your sons are not following your example. So give us a king to judge us, like the other nations.' Samuel thought that it was wrong of them to say, 'Let us have a king to judge us,' so he prayed to Yahweh. But Yahweh said to Samuel, 'Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you: it is not you they have rejected but me, not wishing me to reign over them anymore. Everything that Yahweh had said, Samuel then repeated to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, 'This is what the king who is to reign over you will do. He will take your sons and direct them to his chariotry and cavalry, and they will run in front of his chariot. He will use them as leaders of a thousand and leaders of fifty; he will make them plough his fields and gather in his harvest and make his weapons of war and the gear for his chariots. He will take your daughters as perfumers, cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields, your vineyards and your olive groves and give them to his officials. He will tithe your crops and vineyards to provide for his courtiers and his officials. He will take the best of your servants, men and women, of your oxen and your donkeys, and make them work for him. He will tithe your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry aloud because of the king you have chosen for yourselves, but on that day Yahweh will not hear you.' The people, however, refused to listen to Samuel. They said, 'No! We are determined to have a king, so that we can be like the other nations, with our own king to rule us and lead us and fight our battles.' Samuel listened to all that the people had to say and repeated it in Yahweh's ear. Yahweh then said to Samuel, 'Do as they ask and give them a king.' Samuel then said to the Israelites, 'Go home, each of you, to his own town.'

This biblical passage allows us to see how God deals with those who, instead of being guided by Him, prefer to fulfil their own desires. As this text makes clear to us, God allows it and even corresponds to the people's desire. He does not violently impose His right to rule on the people. But through the prophet Samuel, He shows them very clearly the consequences of their actions. In spite of everything, the people of Israel did not want to change their minds, but wanted to be like the other nations and not to

distinguish themselves from them. This problem of wanting to be like the other nations can be found again and again in the history of Israel. It was difficult for them to accept that they were different because of the special vocation that God had given them. Thus, without fully understanding the consequences, they preferred to place themselves in the hands of a king chosen by them and to assume the high price they would have to pay for it, according to what the Lord had shown them.

What about God?

"It is not you they have rejected but me, not wishing me to reign over them anymore." With these words, the Lord gives Samuel to understand that, in deciding on a king, it is Him whom the people are rejecting.

Thus, what God had planned for His people could not be fully realised. The people did not understand, and to this day many people do not understand... Obedience to God is a loving obedience; a response to His love. When God's Will is rejected in order to impose one's own will, His plan cannot unfold as He had originally intended. Instead, man, with all his imperfections, takes over the guidance and easily falls into the traps of Evil.

God, in His love, accompanies man on this path. However, He warns the people of Israel through Samuel that He will be silent when they mourn under the rule of a human king.

Why in such circumstances will God not respond? Perhaps it is because they do not yet truly recognise their mistake of having rejected God's love and opted for their own ideas. Perhaps they only call on the Lord because they feel the crushing yoke of the king, but they will probably continue on their way as soon as another comes along who rules them with less tyranny.

We can learn from the history of the children of Israel, even from their mistakes. If we men submit ourselves to the gracious rule of Jesus, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light (Mt 11:30), then we will not have to bear the yoke of the "kings of this world". Even if they were to oppress us, our hearts would still be free and we would only bow down to the One to whom *"All authority in heaven and on earth"* (Mt 28:18) has been given.

In today's reading, we hear God accede to the will of the people and command Samuel to give them a king. However, we know how many kings in Israel's history did what displeased the Lord (cf. e.g. 2 Ch 22:3-4), and all the suffering that resulted. Then, when their true King - the Messiah - came, they failed to recognise Him (Acts 13:27).

We can never be thankful enough for the immense love and patience that the Lord has for us men, to the point that He even accompanies us on the paths we choose, always with the aim of bringing us back to Him.

But what would have happened to Israel if they had not asked for a king like the other nations? How would their history have continued? What would the life of the nations be like if they recognised, honoured and loved God as their Father, and embarked on His ways?

One has only to listen to the glorious promises the Lord has made to us to imagine what life on earth would be like, if only....