



17. March 2024

LENTEN ITINERARY

Day 33: "Ecclesia in deserto"

We have already travelled a long way on our Lenten itinerary and now we are almost at the gates of Holy Week.

During the last five days we have been dealing with the serious subject of the Antichrist, who is to come at the End of Time, but whose spirit is already manifesting itself beforehand in various guises. Here we are confronted with the abyss of iniquity, a dark personification of the alienation from the living God. But in the end, as St. John's Revelation describes, the Beast (often interpreted as an image of the Antichrist) and the False Prophet will be cast into the lake of fire (cf. Rev 20:9-10).

This subject should not frighten us; it should keep us awake. We cannot overlook the reality of evil in this world; and, on the other hand, we must not make too much of it. Our gaze must always be focused on the Lord. Let us remember how Jesus concludes in Luke's Gospel His discourse on the End Times... After having spoken about the tribulations that will befall mankind at the End Times, He alludes to His glorious Return: *"And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand"* (Lk 21:27-28).

This is the great eschatological perspective: the Lord will return and we must prepare ourselves to receive Him. He Himself gives us clear instructions: *"Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened by debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life. Stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen, and to hold your ground before the Son of man"* (Lk 21:34a,36).

Thus, day by day we draw nearer to the Lord's return; or rather, His return draws nearer and nearer. No one but the Father in heaven knows the day or the hour (Mt 24,36); however, Jesus gives us clues so that we can identify when the time is near (Lk 21,31).

The dark and perverse dominion of the Antichrist will be annihilated by the Lord *"with the breath of his mouth"* and destroyed *"by his glorious appearance at his coming"* (2 Thess

2:8). Therefore, we must await the Parousia of our Lord and endure the tribulation of the antichristian dominion, offering resistance to it with the appropriate weapons in the army of the Lamb.

It is a time of great trial! The Church, persecuted from within and from without by the Dragon, will have to go for a time into the desert, as the Apocalypse says: "*The woman was given a pair of the great eagle's wings to fly away from the serpent into the desert, to the place where she was to be looked after for a time, two times and half a time*" (Rev 12:14). The wilderness is not to be understood as a physical place - although it cannot be ruled out either - but rather as a spiritual reality.

If the great apostasy of which St. Paul speaks (2 Thess 2:3) comes, and even a large part of the church hierarchy is involved in it, then the faithful are left destitute on the external level. The wonderful temples and churches could then fall into the hands of that church which has turned away from the Lord, as we are currently experiencing in Germany. Then the faithful will have to find places where they can live their faith to the full. Those who cling to the traditional faith without making concessions to the spirit of the world are already being marginalised. They will have to turn to the "ecclesia in deserto" (Church in the desert) to find there the nourishment that strengthens their souls: the holy Word of God, preserved without adulteration, and the holy sacraments worthily celebrated. As far as Holy Communion is concerned, it cannot be administered to all, irrespective of their faith and state of grace.

Such times, though we need not necessarily long for them, are a special challenge to our journey of following Christ. They are propitious times to consolidate our faith and to profess it. Times of persecution are often times when the gospel spreads. They are times when the Lord uses them to make us shed our lukewarmness and become true witnesses of His return.

Thus, these times, with their external and internal tribulations, help us to move forward on our spiritual journey. When suddenly all our securities begin to waver, when we can no longer rely on what has always been our support, then the Lord leads us to make Him alone our refuge and safe harbour. Here the processes of purification of which we have spoken in our Lenten journey, whether at the level of the senses or of the spirit, whether active or passive, are dynamised and intensified. Our prayer becomes simpler,

we invoke the Name of the Lord and cling to Him when everything around us seems to be faltering. Thus, the process of inner transformation moves forward...

The Church in the desert, though materially poor, will be rich, for she will be the custodian of the treasures of the Church. The words of the Lord to the angel of the church of Smyrna can be applied to her: *"I know your hardships and your poverty, and though you are rich - the slander of the people who falsely claim to be Jews but are really members of the synagogue of Satan"* (Rev 2:9).

Meditation on the reading of the day: <http://en.elijamission.net/2019/01/21/>

Meditation on the Gospel of the day: <http://en.elijamission.net/2021/03/21/>