

20. April 2024

## It is the spirit that gives life

Jn 6:60-69

*At that time, many of the disciples of Jesus, when they heard it, said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at it, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you that do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who those were that did not believe, and who it was that would betray him. And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him. Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."*

"It is the Spirit that gives life," says the Lord. We see that many of the disciples could not understand this and murmured against the words of Jesus. The attitude of murmuring reflects an inner rebellion; a rejection that is already forged in the depths of the heart and that can intensify with each new word spoken by the Lord.

As a result of this attitude, many of the disciples who were not part of the group of the Twelve turned away from Jesus. The fact that Jesus indirectly mentions Judas in this context seems to indicate that he too was murmuring inwardly against His words. The cause of this murmuring - according to what the Lord says - was that they did not believe and therefore did not really open their hearts to His words.

In order to understand the words and deeds of the Lord in the Spirit, one must allow oneself to be guided and enlightened by that Spirit. Otherwise, there is always the danger of interpreting them in an earthly and human sense, and therefore the difficulty of accepting them. This is where the mind comes in, trying to explain things in terms of the mechanisms it is familiar with. Let us think, for example, of Nicodemus, who

interpreted literally the Lord's words that one must be born again to enter the kingdom of heaven, as if one had to enter one's mother's womb again (cf. Jn 3:4).

The words of the Lord are spirit and life; therefore they must be understood in the spirit. This is how the Holy Spirit helps us to understand the meaning of these words. Therefore, if at first we do not understand a word of Jesus and cannot find an explanation with our understanding, we must ask the Spirit of God to give us the necessary light to understand it. Moreover, we always have access to the tradition of our Church to find an authentic interpretation of the passage in question.

After the murmuring of many of the disciples, the Lord turns to the Twelve to hear what they think. He then receives this magnificent reply from Peter: *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God"*.

This is the answer of a disciple of Jesus enlightened by the Holy Spirit! This response is valid for all times, because it is a profession of faith that every disciple can repeat, even today.

To whom shall we go?? This simple answer shows that Peter has grasped the reality: where else should he look when he has already found the Messiah, the Son of God? In Jesus are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (cf. Col 2:3). This certainty also applies to our times! The world may change, the conditions of life may be different, but the truth does not change. It is the rock on which life is built, it is unchanging; we can only understand it with increasing depth.

Peter did not acquire this knowledge on his own; it was given to him by the Father (cf. Mt 16:17). This indicates that Jesus cannot be known by mere understanding. Here the word applies: *"the flesh is of no avail"*. In this context it means that human reason is by no means sufficient for supernatural understanding.

*"No one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father"*. Some may interpret these words in a fatalistic tone, as if it were granted to some to believe and not to others. But that is not their meaning. God wants us to know Him and He always offers us faith. But only He knows who accepts it and who rejects it.

Whoever has the grace to repeat wholeheartedly the words of Peter in today's Gospel should always know that this is a great gift and treat it with great care. We must not allow faith and the practice of faith to become routine. Let us seek again and again that spring from which the water of life flows.

May the Lord open people's access to faith, so that together with St. Peter we can make this profession of faith!