

23. April 2024

No one shall snatch them out of my hand

Jn 10:22-30

It was the feast of the Dedication at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered round him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

Today's Gospel asks the Jews the key question: "Are you the Christ?" But did they really want to hear the answer?

It seems that Jesus sees that their hearts are not open because, as He says, they are not His sheep. They lacked the crucial thing: to listen to His voice. Even if the Lord had openly proclaimed His identity, it would not have changed anything; on the contrary, His words would have been used to accuse Him even more. In fact, He points out that the testimony has already been given, but it has not been accepted. Not even the works of the Father, which Jesus did publicly and which testified to Him, led them to recognise the Lord.

Here we are confronted with the abyss of the human heart... One can close oneself to the truth, one can close oneself to God.

The words of the Lord in today's Gospel give us a tool for discerning spirits. Whoever closes himself to the truth, that is, to the Lord, does not belong to His flock and does not know the voice of his Lord. In this sense, we should be careful not to speak too optimistically about unity and brotherhood among all people. Jesus does not do this! Rather, He clearly distinguishes His sheep from those who are not of the fold.

While it is true that it is God's will that all people find unity in Him and live as His children, this does not mean that His plan is already fully realised. It is only when people come to know and follow the Lord that there can be unity among human beings and that peace which the world cannot give (cf. Jn 14:27). This invitation is addressed to all people, and then, in following Christ, there will be only one shepherd to feed the sheep: God Himself, the Good Shepherd. To these His sheep, Jesus assures eternal life, because they follow Him and He knows them.

The following words of the Lord are fundamental for the "wake of the Lamb" and remain valid forever:

"My sheep... shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one".

These words are a great comfort in all times, but they are particularly relevant in times of persecution. Indeed, the "wake of the Lamb" always suffers persecution, but at certain times it becomes more acute. But whatever happens, if we cling to the Lord as His disciples, no one can separate us from Him: *"Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom 8:38-39).

That is why it is necessary to deepen day by day the relationship of love with the Lord and to follow Him in the certainty that He loves us. All we have to do is listen sincerely to His voice and hold on to His promise! It is not so much our feelings - however religious they may be - that keep us anchored to the Lord; it is His promise that no one can snatch us out of His or the Father's hand. Feelings come and go. If we build our house on them, we will be like a leaf blown by the wind. The word of the Lord, on the other hand, is the rock on which we can build firmly.

Jesus leaves us these words because He wants us to be sure of His love. He knows what awaits His disciples. That is why they must take these words to heart, so that they may be anchored in these promises and receive from them, in all situations, the consolation that only God can give.

The same is true for us, if we consciously follow the Lord and listen to His voice. Tribulations are coming our way, and in an increasingly anti-Christian environment that has infiltrated even the sheepfold, our firm confession of faith in the Lord is needed... Do we stand firm or do we allow ourselves to be softened? Do we make concessions to the world or to the spirit of the world that has infiltrated the Church, or do we stand firm?

The "wake of the Lamb", that is, those who listen to His voice and follow Him wherever He goes (cf. Rev 14:4), will remain under the protection of the Lord, and no one will be able to snatch them out of His hand.