

25. April 2024

Feast of St. Mark, Evangelist
Preach the gospel to the whole creation

Mk 16:15-20

Jesus said to His disciples, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it.

During the Easter season we hear again and again the missionary mandate given by the Lord to His disciples. So it is today, as we celebrate the feast of St Mark the Evangelist, who, according to tradition, founded and directed the Church of Alexandria, where he ultimately gave his life in martyrdom.

As I have said many times, we must ask ourselves whether the Church today continues to proclaim the Gospel with authority and without reservation, that is, whether it is fulfilling the primary mission entrusted to it by the Lord as it should.

Let us take a concrete example: How is the question of the evangelisation of the Jews, God's "first love", dealt with in the Church today? In fact, Israel is the first addressee of the Gospel message. Not only because the Lord Himself was a Jew "according to the flesh" (cf. Rom 9:5), but also because the Virgin Mary and all the Apostles were Jews. The Apostle Paul was consumed with zeal to bring his brethren to Christ so that they might attain salvation (Rom 9:1-3). Moreover, a promise of great dimensions awaits humanity if the people of Israel turn to their Messiah, as Scripture assures us:

"If their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!"

Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?" (Rom 11:12-15).

We can therefore assume that the conversion of the people of Israel will be accompanied by a special grace that will be important for the Church and, consequently, for the whole world. We know that this great longing of Saint Paul for the conversion of his brethren, who are of his "*kinsmen by race*" (Rom 9:3), has not yet been fully realised, but we continue to hear testimonies of Jews who have met Jesus and finally found in Him the Messiah who had been promised to them.

What then should be our reaction when we consider the promise of the conversion of the Jews and God's love for His firstborn Israel?

It should awaken in us a great zeal to proclaim the Good News to the Jews in an appropriate way and to pray intensely for their enlightenment. We must insistently ask the Holy Spirit to open the door to their hearts, for could there be anything more beautiful for them than the recognition of the Messiah for whom they have been waiting for so long?

The Church has been sent to proclaim salvation in Christ Jesus; all people, without exception, need this proclamation! Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. No one should be deprived of the grace of knowing the Saviour, much less the "first love of God", that is, the people of Israel.

It would be a fatal error if, in interreligious dialogue, we Catholics were no longer to be inflamed by the deep desire that every person should meet Jesus and follow Him. This would be in direct contradiction to the missionary mandate of the Lord. A kind of ideology would be introduced in its place. To hold the view that faith in Christ is not necessary for salvation would be to abandon the mission and, ultimately, to reject the people of Israel, who would be deprived of the grace given to us in Jesus Christ, as the Scriptures clearly state: "*For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*" (Jn 1:17).

Let us conclude this meditation with a quotation from the philosopher Dietrich von Hildebrand, taken from his book “The Devastated Vineyard”:

“The love of God impels the Church, but also every true Christian, to bring each man into the full light of truth, which is the teaching of the holy Church. Every Christian must long for all men to become acquainted with the Revelation of Christ and to respond to it with faith, for every knee to bend to Jesus Christ. And similarly true love of neighbour requires this. How can I love somebody and not ardently desire that he become acquainted with Jesus Christ, the begotten Son and Epiphany of God, that he be drawn into His light, believe in Him and love Him, and know that he is loved by Him? How can I love him without desiring for him even on earth the blissful encounter with Jesus Christ, which is the greatest source of happiness?”ⁱ

ⁱ Dietrich von Hildebrand, „The Devastated Vineyard“, Chapter 11:
“Ecumenitis”