

31. May 2024

The sobriety

1 Pet 4:7-13

The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers. Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another. As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

The end of all things is at hand! Although many centuries have passed since St Peter wrote these words, they are still relevant today and are a key affirmation for Christian vigilance. It was and still is a great challenge: to live in the world on the one hand, and on the other to be focused in the depths of our being on a future goal.

When the Apostle exhorts us to keep sane, he is referring to an attitude that comes from this vigilance, knowing that the end of all things is at hand. Everything is to be placed in its proper spiritual order, our attention is to be focused on the essential, and all secondary things are to be given their rightful place in this hierarchy of values. Wisdom does not act spontaneously and emotionally; it weighs, reflects and acts consciously. It is therefore related to sobriety, which St Peter also mentions.

Sobriety does not mean a joyless, static and inflexible life. Rather, it means not allowing ourselves to be 'intoxicated'. And I don't just mean alcohol and drugs; we can also be intoxicated by illusions and unrealistic dreams.

Even in the history of the Church there have been times when excessive and illusory enthusiasm has arisen and suddenly the faithful have been influenced by it. Something similar happened, for example, after the Second Vatican Council. Enthusiasts thought

that the time had come for a drastic change in everything, that the doors had to be opened wide to the world and adapted to it. Thus all sorts of experiments were made with the liturgy; the sacred language of the Church, Latin, was largely discarded; Gregorian chant, the sacred music proper to our Roman Church, disappeared almost completely; the Tridentine Mass, which had been celebrated for so many centuries, was suddenly overshadowed or even viewed with suspicion. All that was modern seemed to have become the future of the Church, while the traditional ways of expressing the Faith were relegated to the past.

After a while it became clear that this enthusiasm had no real basis. The Church fell into a growing crisis, and its power of attraction was weakened.

Pope Benedict XVI tried to counteract this excessive enthusiasm by repeatedly insisting that the Second Vatican Council should be interpreted and implemented in continuity with the previous Councils. In this way the Church has regained a certain healthy sobriety.

As much as we may rejoice in faith and find in it a source of inexhaustible joy, it must always be accompanied by a sobriety that harmonises our interior experience with the Word of God and the authentic teaching of the Church. In this context, formation in the discernment of the spirit is also essential, in order to be able to discern whether something really comes from the Holy Spirit or whether it is the product of excessive enthusiasm.

Today, I believe it is also essential to apply discernment in the Church with regard to the so-called "culture of acceptance". On the pretext of making room for all, certain hierarchs seek to integrate all kinds of groups into the life of the Church. Here, too, sobriety is called for, so as not simply to implement one's own ideas, which could even come from the world of politics, but to put into practice the intentions of the Holy Spirit.

As a third piece of advice, the Apostle Peter urges us to pray. We should never neglect prayer without serious reason. Rather, we should accustom our souls to regular prayer, which will help us to keep rooting ourselves in the Lord.

As practical advice, the Apostle recommends the practical application of brotherly love. “*Love covers a multitude of sins*”, that is, it allows us to make up for what we have failed to do because of our weaknesses or to atone for our sins. This does not mean that we can allow ourselves to indulge in our weaknesses with the intention of making up for them later with acts of charity. That would be a game!

But it is a very valuable hint, because then, when we succumb to certain weaknesses despite our efforts, we will know that we still have another option (besides confession) to counteract our faults. Then we will not be discouraged!