

9. July 2024

Labourers for the harvest

Mt 9:32-38

They had only just left when suddenly a man was brought to him, a dumb demoniac. And when the devil was driven out, the dumb man spoke and the people were amazed and said, 'Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.' But the Pharisees said, 'It is through the prince of devils that he drives out devils. 'Jesus made a tour through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing all kinds of disease and all kinds of illness. And when he saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers to his harvest.'

In today's Gospel, the Pharisees make a serious and absurd accusation to the Lord: "It is through the prince of devils that he drives out devils". Here we are faced with the great danger of committing the sin against the Holy Spirit.

The sin against the Holy Spirit consists in acting with full consciousness against that which is recognised as revealed by God, and, consequently, deliberately shutting oneself off from the truth. In the case of the Devil, we can rightly assume that this abyss of malice dwells in him; whereas in the case of individuals we cannot say with certainty, since we are incapable of knowing the depths of their soul and spirit. Only God knows it!

However, the Pharisees' accusations of Jesus are extremely dangerous, because the words they have heard from His mouth and the deeds they have seen Him do should be enough for them to believe. That is why Jesus laments the stubbornness of their hearts (cf. Mk 3:5). Stubbornness is a form of closedness of heart and will. To see the hand of the Devil in the deliverance of a possessed person is a sign of a high degree of blindness, which goes hand in hand with perversity of heart. In this unhealthy combination, even sin against the Holy Spirit can arise.

Jesus sees so many people who are like sheep without a shepherd, and it would seem that His gaze falls on our times as well. We are badly lacking in shepherds, who proclaim the faith with courage and wisdom to those who do not yet believe, and lead those who already believe to safe and fruitful pastures. Instead, we are sadly faced with much confusion, and the question of why the Church no longer speaks with the same clarity and forcefulness that used to characterise her is becoming ever more urgent.

That is why today more than ever we must follow Jesus' advice and ask for labourers for the harvest. We urgently need them: courageous bishops, priests faithful to doctrine, dedicated religious, especially those who support in contemplation those who actively work in the vineyard... We also need lay faithful who, living in the world, allow themselves to be shown by the Holy Spirit the ways to reach out to so many people. In this service of evangelisation we are never alone; it is the Holy Spirit who pushes us. That is why we also ask the Spirit of God to strengthen those who are already working in the harvest, so that they do not grow weary and their strength is always renewed to fulfil their mission: to teach, to proclaim, to heal sicknesses and diseases.

At this point, it is important to respect the hierarchy of values. First comes the salvation of the soul, and then comes the health of the body. This is why it is essential that we live our spiritual life as authentically as possible, because how can we proclaim the Lord if we are not filled with Him? How can our life itself become a silent proclamation, if we are far from fulfilling what faith teaches us and entrusts to us?

We cannot emphasise this enough: Let us take even more responsibility for our discipleship of the Lord, so that our plea for labourers for the harvest will be even more effective and God will hear it! Dear Lord, grant labourers to your Church!