

11. July 2024

The rejection of the gospel and its consequences

Mt 10:7-15

At that time Jesus said to his disciples: "Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those suffering from virulent skin-diseases, drive out devils. You received without charge, give without charge. Provide yourselves with no gold or silver, not even with coppers for your purses, with no haversack for the journey or spare tunic or footwear or a staff, for the labourer deserves his keep. 'Whatever town or village you go into, seek out someone worthy and stay with him until you leave. As you enter his house, salute it, and if the house deserves it, may your peace come upon it; if it does not, may your peace come back to you. And if anyone does not welcome you or listen to what you have to say, as you walk out of the house or town shake the dust from your feet. In truth I tell you, on the Day of Judgement it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town'".

In this text, the Lord shows us something essential. Spiritual goods or charismatic gifts cannot become the object of material interests. When this happens, the message of the gratuity with which God blesses us is spoiled and, consequently, His true image is also obscured.

Today's Gospel is a call to live in the true simplicity of Christ's disciples. In all things, they are to put their trust in the One who sends them and be free from worries about their own life's sustenance. In this way, living in undivided union with God, they will have the freedom and availability to respond to the Lord's call and to give the appropriate response to the concrete situation in which they find themselves. If the disciples are well received, the house is honoured, for it is giving glory to God by welcoming those who are sent to it. In this case, the disciples can share with the members of that household all that they have received from the Lord. In particular, they will bring them peace; the peace that only God can give.

If we try to apply this gospel to our times, we will surely notice the radicality it demands. No provisions; no human reward for service, expecting it exclusively from God; shaking the dust off one's feet in case the gospel message is not received in a given city. The allusion to Sodom and Gomorrah, those cities that succumbed because of their sins, is

also strong. When we encounter a biblical text like this, we may easily prefer to soften its strong statements a little or avoid confronting ourselves with its radicality. We may also be tempted to explain such words by placing them in a historical context of the past, thus robbing them of some of their force.

It is certainly right to apply the words to the present situation and to try to make them more comprehensible to the mentality of our time; but we cannot fall into the error of believing that modern man can correct certain words of Scripture.

Even today the Lord's command to His disciples still stands: "*Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those suffering from virulent skin-diseases, drive out devils*". The grace and authority which Christ conferred on His apostles is still present in the disciples of this age, for could God withdraw this mission which He gave to be fulfilled until the end of time?

Rather, we must question whether the present-day disciples have a strong enough faith to abandon themselves totally to their Lord, and whether they understand that excessive preoccupation with temporal securities contradicts the spirit of sending. The act of faith to live by Divine Providence alone is a clear sign of God's presence and a reminder that the disciple is a sent one who does not come in his own name or act on his own authority. In this context, the Lord even speaks of a right that the disciple has: "*The labourer deserves his keep*". Thus, he is assured of all the help he needs for the service he is rendering.

Now, how can we understand those stern statements about shaking off the dust from their feet, and that the judgment for those who reject the disciples' message will be more severe than for Sodom and Gomorrah?

We must understand these words very well. The gospel is an enormous grace that the Lord offers to humanity. Although it is offered to us as a gift, its rejection entails enormous consequences. It is not the same whether one accepts the truth or remains blind. We can see this in the history of the Jewish people. The rejection of the gospel had consequences. Jesus knew this and wept for Jerusalem, because they did not recognise the hour of grace (cf. Lk 19:44). In such a case, one has to face everything that comes our way in life and in history without the help that God had offered us to overcome it.

And what about Sodom and Gomorrah?

Let's look at the example of Europe... How much grace this continent had received for having had the Gospel proclaimed to it and for having welcomed it! But what is happening today, when the gospel is less and less obeyed? Sins have multiplied and poison the nations; particularly lust, which is trivialised and considered as normal behaviour. However, the consequences are catastrophic: abortions, destroyed marriages, homosexuality as an accepted way of life, relationships outside marriage, children without parents, pornography, media campaigns against chastity... a self-destruction of peoples!

Sodom and Gomorrah? Here we can already see self-destruction as a consequence of rejecting the gospel! Only a sincere conversion can change this situation. Therefore, it is necessary to proclaim the gospel with the same zeal and determination that filled the apostles.