

17. July 2024

Everything is inserted in God's plan

Isa 10:5-7,13-16

Thus says the Lord: Woe to Assyria, rod of my anger, the club in their hands is my fury! I was sending him against a godless nation, commissioning him against the people who enraged me, to pillage and plunder at will and trample on them like the mud in the streets. But this was not his intention nor did his heart plan it so, for he dreamed of putting an end to them, of liquidating nations without number! For he thinks: 'By the strength of my own arm I have done this and by my own wisdom: how intelligent I have been! I have abolished the frontiers between peoples, I have plundered their treasures, like a hero, I have subjugated their inhabitants. My hand has found, as though a bird's nest, the riches of the peoples. Like someone collecting deserted eggs, I have collected the whole world while no one has fluttered a wing or opened a beak to squawk.' Does the axe claim more credit than the man who wields it, or the saw more strength than the man who handles it? As though a staff controlled those who raise it, or the club could raise what is not made of wood! That is why Yahweh Sabaoth is going to inflict leanness on his stout men, and beneath his glory kindle a fever burning like a fire.

Today's reading gives us an insight into God's ways with His people and with their adversaries.

To understand this passage correctly, it is necessary to realise that God is always concerned about His people, and constantly tries to lead them on the right path. However, as many passages of Holy Scripture show us, this was and remains a difficult undertaking. The people easily deviated from the precepts of the Lord and took a wrong course. And when the people do not obey God's precepts, they fall under the influence of enemy powers, be they spiritual or tangible enemies, such as in today's reading the foreign kings who attack Israel. Now it is not that God is impotent and at the mercy of the enemy powers; but He knows how to include them in His plans.

Thus, the king of Assyria becomes the rod to correct Israel; the rod that, by God's permission, falls on the people because of their transgressions.

And what does he do? He steals like a thief and tramples the people underfoot like the mud of the streets, says the text of Isaiah. What does the Lord want to show by this? It turns out that Israel itself is committing theft against God, for how else can it be defined if one is entrusted with a good and then takes it for oneself? Let us recall Jesus' parable about the owner of the vineyard from whom the vinedressers steal what is rightfully his (cf. Mt 21:33-44). In this case, Jesus even predicts that these murderous vinedressers will kill the heir, referring to His own death.

In the destruction that the king of Assyria brings upon Israel, God makes His people see what they themselves are doing to Him, which is robbing God and trampling the covenant underfoot like the mud of the streets.

If we do not listen to God's instructions, we will have to learn by experience. But unfortunately even then there is often still a need for a "prophet", who explains things and helps to interpret the circumstances from God's perspective.

All this does not mean that the king of Assyria, acting as the "rod of God", is justified and blameless. He too is robbing God, in that he attributes to himself the great power that the Lord has allowed him to attain, and thus exalts himself.

All arrogance results in humiliation, as the Holy Scripture tells us: *"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall"* (Prov16:18). So the one whom God uses as a "rod of rebuke" will also be held accountable for his actions.

This message is important for us in many ways.

First of all, we must realise that God integrates all events and circumstances into His plans as we follow Christ. This also applies to the manifestations of the Evil and all his machinations, both inside and outside of man. The plans of darkness - although often those who carry them out are not aware of it - are not autonomous. So it is not that they are "on an equal footing" with God's plans, nor is it that the outcome is yet to be defined. That is why, when speaking of the battle between the children of light and the children of darkness, it must always be made clear that the powers of darkness have already been defeated by the Lord on the Cross. Now, this victory of the Lamb is to be fully realised and actualised on earth.

Another message of today's reading is the comfort of knowing that God will call to account those who, in one way or another, exercise authority. Even if they exercise it in God's Name and at God's behest, they are still subject to God's judgement as to how they exercise this authority.

Finally, as far as our own lives are concerned, it is essential that we handle as faithful stewards those gifts that God entrusts to us and all the good that He gives us. We must not abuse anything for our own interests, and the more responsibility we are entrusted with towards God and people, the more carefully we must see to it that our lives and all the good we receive serve the glory of God. If possible, we should not do this out of fear of the consequences, but simply out of love for the One from whom all good comes.