

30. August 2024

## The folly of the cross

1 Cor 1:17-25

*After all, Christ sent me not to baptise, but to preach the gospel; and not by means of wisdom of language, wise words which would make the cross of Christ pointless. The message of the cross is folly for those who are on the way to ruin, but for those of us who are on the road to salvation it is the power of God. As scripture says: I am going to destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of any who understand. Where are the philosophers? Where are the experts? And where are the debaters of this age? Do you not see how God has shown up human wisdom as folly? Since in the wisdom of God the world was unable to recognise God through wisdom, it was God's own pleasure to save believers through the folly of the gospel. While the Jews demand miracles and the Greeks look for wisdom, we are preaching a crucified Christ: to the Jews an obstacle they cannot get over, to the gentiles foolishness, but to those who have been called, whether they are Jews or Greeks, a Christ who is both the power of God and the wisdom of God. God's folly is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.*

It is God's wisdom that leads Paul to recognise that time and again we must return to the essence of the proclamation: the forgiveness of sins through Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, and the infinite love of God, which shines forth in the event of the Cross. God Himself takes upon Himself man's guilt and thus opens the way to eternal life for him, provided he accepts the gift of faith.

Man's salvation lies in the Cross, and not in the accumulation of knowledge and wisdom of this world. Academic training is of value only to the extent that it is put at the service of God and neighbour. If, on the other hand, man builds upon it his own value or a position of power, then the words of today's text are fulfilled: *"I am going to destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of any who understand"*.

The message of the Cross is so simple and yet so profound! *"For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son"* (Jn 3:16). Now it is up to us to take this message to heart

and to understand its meaning in the depths of our being: God is a loving Father, who wants to lead man back home, despite all his faults and despite having turned away from Him, and offers him a way which He Himself has prepared for us in the Person of His Son, who gave His life to save us.

The wisdom of the world, on the other hand, does not understand this abyss of love, because it is incapable of going beyond the natural dimension of logic, whereas God's love transcends human reason. The wisdom of the world moves in its own categories and remains locked in its own thinking when it tries to judge God's action according to its own criteria.

Therefore, the supernatural light of God is required in order to know God's innermost being, namely His Heart. In this sense, St. Paul writes: "*The natural person has no room for the gifts of God's Spirit; to him they are folly; he cannot recognise them, because their value can be assessed only in the Spirit*" (1 Cor 2:14). To such belong those Greeks mentioned by St. Paul, who did not open their hearts to the message of the Lord.

The Jews, on the other hand, ask for signs. But even if they receive them, they do not understand them correctly or even interpret them in a different sense. In the worst case, they went so far as to say that Jesus worked His signs through the influence of Satan (cf. Lk 11:15). This means that the Jews did not trust in God's self-manifestation; they wanted to set their own conditions for believing, as we see especially at the time of the crucifixion: "*The chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him in the same way, with the words, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the king of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him'*" (Mt 27:41-42).

The message of the Cross is addressed to the heart of man and wants to awaken in him faith, faith in God's love. It is not simply a theoretical knowledge or a proof of God's existence; it is an invitation to enter into a loving relationship with God.

It is not easy for man to understand God's humility and love, because he himself is often far removed from this attitude. This is why the Spirit of God comes to our aid, to reveal to us the mystery of God's greatness: a God who places Himself at the service of man, who does not refuse to become man Himself, taking on the whole human condition, in order to call man to return to Him.

When we accept His invitation, we too become ready to serve unselfishly.

The message of the Cross must not be "diluted" by human wisdom, for in it lies the power of God to touch man, even if the world considers it foolishness. Thus, the message of the Gospel, in its essence, can also be transmitted by very simple people, as were the Lord's disciples themselves. *"Since in the wisdom of God the world was unable to recognise God through wisdom, it was God's own pleasure to save believers through the folly of the gospel".*