

6. September 2024

New ways on safe paths

Lk 5:33-39

'They then said to him, 'John's disciples are always fasting and saying prayers, and the disciples of the Pharisees, too, but yours go on eating and drinking. 'Jesus replied, 'Surely you cannot make the bridegroom's attendants fast while the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them; then, in those days, they will fast. 'He also told them a parable, 'No one tears a piece from a new cloak to put it on an old cloak; otherwise, not only will the new one be torn, but the piece taken from the new will not match the old. 'And nobody puts new wine in old wineskins; otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins and run to waste, and the skins will be ruined. No; new wine must be put in fresh skins. And nobody who has been drinking old wine wants new. "The old is good," he says.'

"For through bodily fasting you restrain our faults,
raise up our minds, and bestow both virtue and its rewards,
through Christ our lord" - the Church exclaims in one of the beautiful prefaces of Lent.

Fasting is undoubtedly a very praiseworthy and commendable ascetic practice, which is favourable for the development of the spiritual life. Unfortunately it is falling into oblivion today, as are many other important spiritual practices. Of course, prayer is also of great benefit, and in no way is the Lord questioning these practices.

Jesus only indicates that, with His coming into the world, the fullness of time has come. Fasting is part of our pilgrimage on earth, while we are still on our way to the Kingdom of God. However, while the Lord Himself is in this world and announces the Kingdom of Heaven together with His disciples, it is the Bridegroom Himself who is among men. They do not have to wait any longer! He has come! It is time for the wedding!

But the Bridegroom does not remain forever on earth. He returns to His Father; not to leave us abandoned, but to prepare for us the dwelling places of eternity (cf. Jn 14:2).

The time of consummation and endless joy has not yet come; we are still in the time of suffering and temptation; the time of combat. The Devil is still allowed to afflict men. The Kingdom of God has yet to be realised on earth and we have yet to prove our faithfulness...

That is why we are still in the time of fasting, which reminds us of the Passion of our Lord, strengthens us for spiritual combat, teaches us to restrain our senses and opens our hearts for the poor.

But in Jesus the light of eternity already shines upon us!

The work of redemption requires new ways. The previous ways had served as preparation until the coming of the Messiah. The law was like a teacher until the coming of Christ (cf. Gal 3:24). But now, with the coming of the Messiah and the Redemption that He grants us, the new wine has come, which also requires new wineskins. The Gospel must reach all peoples. The wineskins cannot be too narrow, lest they burst and the wine spoil. On the other hand, neither can they be porous, but they must be stable and durable.

The Church has been entrusted with the great work of the Lord. The faithfulness with which she must guard the treasure she has received goes hand in hand with openness to the new ways of proclaiming the Gospel in this time. However, it is wrong to believe that the gospel must be adapted to the contemporary world and its mentality. It is not the spirit of the world that is to penetrate the Church, for that would poison the wine. Rather, it is the Holy Spirit who must permeate the world. This is the great transformation that must take place if the Kingdom of God is to expand!

If the Church adapts itself to the world, the Kingdom of the fallen world would proliferate in the Church, i.e. those kingdoms that the Devil promised Jesus when he tempted Him in the desert (cf. Mt 4:8-9). And if the spirit of the world were to permeate the thinking of the Church, then the danger would be that reality would no longer be contemplated and discerned in the light of God, but that the starting point would be the world with its criteria. Thus, the confusion would increase more and more. Unfortunately, it has to be noted that the Church sometimes does not sufficiently apply the spirit of discernment to distinguish the light from the darkness.