

7. September 2024

## Do not go beyond what is written

1 Cor 4:6b-15

*Brethren, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. For who sees anything different in you? What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift? Already you are filled! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things. I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*

It is obvious that St Paul finds the conceited and proud most distasteful... And indeed it is so: if anyone glories in his own knowledge or in other temporary things, pretending to build his own worth on them, he builds castles in the air. Then one may say many words that impress others, but their value is limited and they need to be corrected in order to focus on the essential. Yes, the essential is always, as today's reading says, "not to go beyond what is written", that is, to be in harmony with Scripture. There is no wisdom that goes beyond Scripture! It is our guide.

In today's meditation we will be accompanied by some words from the famous book 'The Imitation of Christ' by Thomas à Kempis. It is helpful to internalise these words of warning in order to focus on what is essential. Here is an extract from chapter one (book one):

"Vanity of vanities and all is vanity, except to love God and serve Him alone.

This is the greatest wisdom: “to seek the kingdom of heaven through contempt of the world.” It is vanity, therefore, to seek and trust in riches that perish. It is vanity also to court honor and to be puffed up with pride. It is vanity to follow the lusts of the body and to desire things for which severe punishment later must come. It is vanity to wish for long life and to care little about a well-spent life. It is vanity to be concerned with the present only and not to make provision for things to come. It is vanity to love what passes quickly and not to look ahead where eternal joy abides. Often recall the proverb: “The eye is not satisfied with seeing nor the ear filled with hearing.”<sup>1</sup> Try, moreover, to turn your heart from the love of things visible and bring yourself to things invisible. For they who follow their own evil passions stain their consciences and lose the grace of God.”

If we are to be guided by God's wisdom and not the wisdom of the world, we must put our whole life under God's rule. And how profitable it is to assimilate the words of the Apostle: "What have you that you did not receive?"

This question should put an end to all pride in the knowledge we possess or in other goods that we do not consider as coming directly from the hand of God. If we understood this, we would see ourselves and the other person, without coming to blows, rejoicing in the gifts that God has given them; and we would all praise God together. A piece of heaven on earth!

Let us listen once again to St Thomas of Kempis, who writes in the same chapter:

“There are many things the knowledge of which does little or no good to the soul, and he who concerns himself about other things than those which lead to salvation is very unwise. Many words do not satisfy the soul; but a good life eases the mind and a clean conscience inspires great trust in God. The more you know and the better you understand, the more severely will you be judged, unless your life is also the more holy. Do not be proud, therefore, because of your learning or skill. Rather, fear because of the talent given you. If you think you know many things and understand them well enough, realize at the same time that there is much you do not know.”

Finally, let us look at the Apostles, chosen by God in a special way to proclaim Him and serve people. We are fools because we follow Christ" - says St Paul. The foolishness of the cross is more than all the wisdom of this world (cf. 1 Cor 1:18). Therefore, there

is no reason to be proud of anything: everything comes from the Lord, and to Him be the glory in all things!