

10. September 2024

The saints will judge the world

1 Cor 6:1-11

Is one of you with a complaint against another so brazen as to seek judgement from sinners and not from God's holy people? Do you not realise that the holy people of God are to be the judges of the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you not competent for petty cases? Do you not realise that we shall be the judges of angels? - then quite certainly over matters of this life. But when you have matters of this life to be judged, you bring them before those who are of no account in the Church! I say this to make you ashamed of yourselves. Can it really be that it is impossible to find in the community one sensible person capable of deciding questions between brothers, and that this is why brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? No; it is a fault in you, by itself, that one of you should go to law against another at all: why do you not prefer to suffer injustice, why not prefer to be defrauded? And here you are, doing the injustice and the defrauding, and to your own brothers. Do you not realise that people who do evil will never inherit the kingdom of God? Make no mistake -- the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, the self-indulgent, sodomites, thieves, misers, drunkards, slanderers and swindlers, none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. Some of you used to be of that kind: but you have been washed clean, you have been sanctified, and you have been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and through the Spirit of our God.

The Apostle Paul sees the inability of the Corinthian congregation to resolve conflicts internally, and laments that instead they take the dispute to courts where the judges are unbelievers or unjust. This behaviour is incomprehensible to the Apostle, and he deplores the fact that there is not a single wise man in the congregation who can mediate as a judge between the brethren and, moreover, that the Christians in Corinth would not prefer to endure injustice rather than resort to this worldly form of litigation.

The Apostle makes a clear distinction between those he calls "saints" and the "unrighteous" or "unbelievers". He wants the difficulties that arise between brethren to be resolved, but unfortunately there seems to be no one who can act as a peacemaker, making real the beatitudes that Jesus pronounced in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt

5:9). This is unfortunate, because those who are involved in disputes - which, moreover, revolve around trifles - often lose sight of the bigger picture and forget the Gospel criteria for judgement. Both sides insist on their right, and this unspiritual attitude ends up leading them to turn to worldly judges. The Apostle's warning is clear: *"it is a fault in you, by itself, that one of you should go to law against another at all: why do you not prefer to suffer injustice, why not prefer to be defrauded?"*

In this context, St. Paul lets us know that "the holy people of God are to be the judges of the world". How can we imagine this to be?

Judgement before God is about giving an account of how the grace He has entrusted to us for our life has been handled. *"When someone is given a great deal, a great deal will be demanded of that person; when someone is entrusted with a great deal, of that person even more will be expected"* - the Lord tells us (Lk 12:48). Since God is holy and righteous to the full, He can never make a mistake in judging a person's life.

All those who have responded to God's call by His grace - and such we may call "saints", to use St. Paul's terminology - are a living example of the great fruit that can come forth when one sincerely follows the Lord. In these people there shines a bright light and they are like stars in the heavenly Jerusalem (cf. Dan 12:3). You can see how much good they have done for the Kingdom of God with their lives.

We know that in the history of our holy Church there have been many exemplary people, who shine like stars. One of them was St. Paul, whose wisdom we can draw on to this day in his letters, and through whose indefatigable mission the faith spread to so many corners of the world by the grace of God.

But the light emanating from the "saints" also shows who did not cooperate with the grace the Lord had given them. The final judgement is certainly God's alone, because He knows the circumstances in depth and the intentions of the hearts are laid bare before Him. But the "saints" become the yardstick by which the life of the "unrighteous", as St. Paul calls them, will also be measured.

This counts even for the angels: *"Do you not realise that we shall be the judges of angels"*, says the Apostle. He is referring here to the fallen angels, who lost the place of honour

that God had originally intended for them. In the light of the saints - who by nature are inferior to them, but have surpassed them in love - they will receive God's judgement.

May God grant us to fulfil our vocation and long for eternity, like a St. Paul!