

11. September 2024

## Time is short

1 Cor 7:25-31

*About people remaining virgin, I have no directions from the Lord, but I give my own opinion as a person who has been granted the Lord's mercy to be faithful. Well then, because of the stress which is weighing upon us, the right thing seems to be this: it is good for people to stay as they are. If you are joined to a wife, do not seek to be released; if you are freed of a wife, do not look for a wife. However, if you do get married, that is not a sin, and it is not sinful for a virgin to enter upon marriage. But such people will have the hardships consequent on human nature, and I would like you to be without that. What I mean, brothers, is that the time has become limited, and from now on, those who have spouses should live as though they had none; and those who mourn as though they were not mourning; those who enjoy life as though they did not enjoy it; those who have been buying property as though they had no possessions; and those who are involved with the world as though they were people not engrossed in it. Because this world as we know it is passing away.*

Today St. Paul shakes us with his exhortation, warning us about the end times. Time is running out, and we Christians must make the most of what time we have left, because the Lord will return soon. This is the essence of today's reading, and it is from this perspective that we can understand the indications that St Paul gives below.

His words should in no way be understood as a rejection of marriage, which in another context Paul describes in wonderful terms (Eph 5:21-32). Neither could this text be used as an excuse to neglect the obligations within marriage. What he wants to tell us is something else!

If our spiritual eyes are fixed on the Second Coming of Christ, we will be more aware of the urgency of the work in the Kingdom of God. It is not only about our personal sanctification; it is about the proclamation of the gospel. In the light of what is to come, all other things take second place, and receive their value and importance from the One who comes at the end of time to judge the living and the dead.

This also concerns marriage, which is not to be the primary issue; it is to be integrated into the urgent call to evangelisation. Elsewhere, St. Paul recommends to those who are not married to remain so, as long as they are able to live in continence (1 Cor 7:8-9). The background is the same: the appearance of this world is passing away; the time is drawing near.

Therefore, we should not lose ourselves in the things of this world, but focus inwardly on the Return of the Lord and all that is related to this event.

Some might object that St. Paul wrote all this in view of his expectation of the imminent Advent of Christ, which in the end did not take place according to his expectations.

It is possible that the Apostle to the Gentiles, who after his conversion put his whole life at the service of the Lord, counted on His imminent Return. But, be that as it may, this does not detract from the force of the statements we have heard. Another passage of Scripture makes it clear that the Lord does not delay, but is patient until all are converted (cf. 2 Pet 3:9).

So it is precisely from this point that the urgency derives: even if the Lord is patient and waits, He will return soon. Now is the time of grace; now the year of grace which was inaugurated with the coming of Christ into the world is still in vigor. Therefore, there is no time to lose!

How can we understand this urgent appeal today?

Regardless of the exact time of Christ's Second Coming, which only the Father knows (Mt 24:36), we can be sure that the time is nearer today than in the Apostle's time. Therefore, his call has not lost its urgency; rather, as time goes by, it becomes more and more urgent. The danger is that we fall into a spiritual lethargy, telling ourselves that it will be a long time before the Lord comes, or not even thinking of the end. If we are drowsy, we lose precisely that watchfulness and concentration which so urged St. Paul to preach the gospel and which made him such a fruitful co-worker of the Holy Spirit.

In addition to working on our own sanctification, which is indispensable for real and persevering service in the Kingdom of God, we should also participate in the apostolic zeal of St. Paul. Let us not give the things of this world first place; but let us give them

their due rank, so that the fire of following and serving the Lord does not become a tiny flame.

By thinking of those souls who have not yet received the Gospel or who have yet to go deeper into it; by taking part in the longing of our Heavenly Father, who wants to draw His own to Himself; by fixing our eyes on the soon Advent of the Lord, we can better understand St. Paul's words and focus totally on God.