

4. October 2024

Proclaiming the gospel without compromises

Lc 10:13-16

At that time, Jesus said: "Woe to you, Chora'zin! woe to you, Beth-sa'ida! for if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Caper'na-um, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades. "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

We must face the message of the Gospel, even if its words seem harsh to us at first. It is important to counteract the tendency, unfortunately widespread today, to relativise the strong passages of the Gospel, to soften and adapt them to the mentality and tastes of the times. In this context, there is a danger of misapplying the concept of mercy and thus developing a false pastoral vision.

While it is true that God's mercy saves the world, it would be wrong to neglect His justice.

Today's passage clearly reminds us of the responsibility to which acceptance of the Gospel calls us. The cities visited by the Lord are not the same after His coming. They have a different level of responsibility because the Gospel has been proclaimed to them and they have seen with their own eyes the signs and wonders that testify to it.

Of course, the Christian faith must not be imposed by physical or psychological force! But it is necessary to present the message of the Gospel with all its consequences.

It is right to place the saving message of mercy at the centre of the proclamation and to make people aware of God's fatherly love revealed to us in His Son. But we cannot ignore the consequences of not accepting the Gospel, nor the consequences of remaining in a state of sin, both in time and in eternity.

St Francis of Assisi, whose memory we celebrate today, was aware of this reality.

In his famous Canticle of the Creatures, the words ring out: "Praise be to you, my Lord, for our sister, bodily death, from which no living person can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin! Blessed are those whom you find in your most holy will, for the second death will not harm them".

To this day, the radical character of St Francis and his following of the Crucified One continue to have an impact on the Church and the world.

Unfortunately, his person and his spirituality are often misunderstood, and he is also shrouded in a false romanticism. His Canticle of the Creatures, for example, is an expression of his deep love for God, which extends to the whole of creation; it is in no way an echo of a pantheistic mentality.

St Francis was a man marked by the Lord, which was also visibly manifested in the stigmata he received. Francis was overwhelmed by the love of Christ and gave an extraordinarily radical response. He no longer wanted anything for himself; he wanted to give everything to Christ, living in extreme poverty. This poverty means wanting to depend totally on the Lord, to receive everything from His hands, no longer living by one's own strength and plans. In the spirit of poverty, Francis turned to the poor, in whom he wanted to serve Christ Himself.

We cannot understand St Francis without considering his immense love for God. It burned in him so intensely that everything he gave to God seemed small to him. All his spoils were to serve to make the presence and goodness of God all the more manifest in his life, so that the Lord would get all the glory and he himself would shrink back.

It is precisely the followers of St Francis who, for many centuries, have proclaimed the Gospel with conviction in order to lead people to salvation in Christ. May they never falter in this mission, may they never relativise it, may they never fall into the dangers of a dialogue which no longer aims to lead people to the true faith! May they never cease to show people the justice of God, without which mercy loses its meaning! May they also never fall into the danger of focusing on ecological and political issues, nor of supporting romantic and neo-pagan ideas, which are also being forged in the Church itself! St Francis of Assisi was on fire for God and the Gospel. May his disciples, with God's grace, continue this legacy!