

17. October 2024

Models in faith

Phil 3:17–4:1

Brothers, be united in imitating me. Keep your eyes fixed on those who act according to the example you have from me. For there are so many people of whom I have often warned you, and now I warn you again with tears in my eyes, who behave like the enemies of Christ's cross. They are destined to be lost; their god is the stomach; they glory in what they should think shameful, since their minds are set on earthly things. But our homeland is in heaven and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transfigure the wretched body of ours into the mould of his glorious body, through the working of the power which he has, even to bring all things under his mastery. So then, my brothers and dear friends whom I miss so much, my joy and my crown, hold firm in the Lord, dear friends.

How important is the example of life in order to visualise what the Gospel means in practice! How necessary is this witness so that people can glimpse the beauty and splendour of following Christ! This carries with it a great responsibility, not only before God, but also before people....

So how do we live, how consistent is our life with what we proclaim in word? The call to be an example to others can become a great motivation, to always take those steps that allow the testimony of the Gospel to be even more radiant. This involves not only outward works, but also the display of virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which adorn and embellish us inwardly, and give us the strength to fulfil all the tasks entrusted to us.

In today's reading, St. Paul shares with us the sorrow he feels for those who have abandoned their way. They have embarked on a course that leads to perdition. Their fall is all the more painful because they, who are now "enemies of the cross", had known the message of the Gospel and, as can be deduced from the Apostle's words, had also accepted it.

There are two aspects to consider here, which can become very important for us....

On the one hand, it is the sharing of the sorrow that Our Lord feels for these souls; a sorrow that should lead us to pray for them... We cannot allow ourselves to be too much

discouraged by the ugliness of the life of an "enemy of the cross"; but we have to fight all the more for them through prayer. Indeed, we can imagine the state of a soul in which the grace of the Lord can no longer display its light and radiance. What emptiness, what meaninglessness, what a contradiction!

On the other hand, these negative examples should serve as a warning to us, so that we should never be negligent. While we can be sure of God's love and firmly believe that our mutual love and trust in Him heals and strengthens our heart, we must always be vigilant, to remain steadfast on our path and move forward accordingly. While we must cultivate absolute trust in God, we must at the same time be vigilant with regard to ourselves. Certainly these "enemies of the cross of Christ" may have started well, but, at a certain point, they abandoned the way. Perhaps they fell into errors, made false concessions, neglected prayer, gave in to the seduction of sin, did not keep the necessary distance from the world and adopted its mentality....

The Apostle Paul gives us two pieces of advice:

- 1) We should take as our example and imitate the true models, who are those who authentically live their faith. If we do not know such models personally, we can find them in many saints. They are not only examples to follow; they are also friends, who are eager to help us in our efforts.
- 2) The second and even more important piece of advice is to cultivate and deepen communion with the Lord. In the long run, only this will be able to protect us. Therefore, we must be concerned in the first instance with cultivating our relationship with Him.

And let us not forget to ask for the intercession of the saints, such as St Ignatius of Antioch, whose feast we celebrate today. He burned for the Lord and fearlessly faced martyrdom, which he even longed to suffer for the sake of Jesus. We can therefore ask his intercession for the spirit of fortitude so that we may go our way with determination in the pursuit of Christ, not allowing difficulties and struggles to prevent us from living and even dying for the Lord.