

22. November 2024

A predication can be bitter

Rev 10:8-11

Then I heard the voice I had heard from heaven speaking to me again. 'Go', it said, 'and take that open scroll from the hand of the angel standing on sea and land.' I went to the angel and asked him to give me the small scroll, and he said, 'Take it and eat it; it will turn your stomach sour, but it will taste as sweet as honey.' So I took it out of the angel's hand, and I ate it and it tasted sweet as honey, but when I had eaten it my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, 'You are to prophesy again, this time against many different nations and countries and languages and kings.'

The Word of God can be sweet as honey in the mouth because it is the truth. And yet this very truth can be bitter for those who proclaim the word.

In today's text in Revelation it says at the end of the verses that John must prophesy once more over many peoples and nations and that among other things the seven plagues were to be announced.

As difficult as it may be to proclaim such things to men, those who are called to proclaim must not shy from doing so. Revelation does not spare us, but speaks with clear words - as does the Lord Himself - about the consequences of a life turned away from God. But because it is the truth, it will become sweet for those who are listening.

All the plagues of the Apocalypse are not simply inevitable natural sequences, but are also serve the purpose of purifying humanity. If you like, you can say that they are a kind of last attempt to bring people to change their lives.

“Whoever does not want to listen, must feel!” says a German proverb, expressing that he who does not listen to the truth must learn it through experience. But let it be added: Even the experience is not certain, for the Apocalypse describes to us situations in which people, even after experiencing the greatest plagues, did not convert, but even hardened their hearts (cf. Rev 16:9).

Here we can take a look at the gospel of today (Lk 19:45-48). It is certainly bitter for the Lord to have to drive the traders out of the temple. How much he would have loved - and of course still does today - if the temples were holy places of worship, if people, despite all their weaknesses, sincerely sought holiness, if they themselves became the temple of God (cf. 1 Cor 3:16)!

But the reality described is different: the temple is alienated, the temple of the body is polluted by sin, people bring judgment upon themselves! And if God then lets the judgment happen, they are in danger of not finding the right conclusions of a true conversion.

Nevertheless the temple must be cleansed. Since God offers every person the possibility of repentance and forgives the sins, there can always be a new beginning, and this offer of grace must always be present at the proclamation, so that people do not lose all courage or even fall into despair! But this includes making it clear to people what can happen if conversion does not take place. We would bring guilt on ourselves if we did not disclose this.

True love therefore also means accepting the bitterness of a proclamation that does not please men or even causes rejection. If it were not so, there would be no Apocalypse, no Old Testament, no corresponding words of Jesus! In short: it would no longer be the Catholic faith, but another faith that only proclaims what pleases people.

We have already been told in the Holy Scriptures that teachers will come who do just that and thus falsify the Word of God (cf. 2 Tim 4:3)! Also in our times such teachings are on their way in the Church, and they seem to be becoming more prominent. This is a very bad thing, and even worse is that many shepherds are silent, allowing or even supporting such teachings!

Dietrich von Hildebrand lamented in his book “Der verwüstete Weinberg” (The Devastated Vineyard) in 1973 that the legitimit authority in the church is not really attentive to this sad development to false teachings¹.

In the first chapter of the first book he writes:

¹ Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Devastated Vineyard* (New York: Roman Catholic Books, 1985), 6.

“This failure of the bishops to make use of their God-given authority is perhaps, in practical consequences, the worst confusion in the Church today. For this failure not only does not arrest spiritual diseases, heresies, and the blatant as well as the insidious (and this is much worse) devastation of the vineyard of the Lord; it even gives free rein to these evils. The failure to use holy authority to protect the holy Faith leads necessarily to the disintegration of the Church.”

A deplorable state of affairs! In addition those who defend the traditional faith are more likely to be corrected and disciplined. Even if perhaps sometimes harsh tones are struck by the defenders of the faith, it is they who oppose the increasing desolation of the vineyard. May the Lord intervene and order everything according to His will!