

10. December 2024

Advent in apocalyptic times
Part III: Vigilance

As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man. Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left. Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Mt 24:37-44)

If I could choose one word that should be part of the dominant concepts in the season of Advent and in relation to the return of Christ to which history is moving, it would be the word "vigilance". Vigilance is overcoming the habit and lethargy that so easily envelops us human beings. Vigilance means that the soul is focused on the essential, that it lives in what is called 'kairos'.

Indeed, the very fact that our earthly life is limited by death should teach us the importance of vigilance. If, thanks to faith, we have understood that this life is less than the blink of an eye compared to eternity; and that in eternity our closeness to God will depend on the extent to which we have corresponded to His love in this world, then we will live in fruitful vigilance. Now is the time to act! Now is the time to "lay up treasures in heaven" (cf. Mt 6:20)! Now is the time to show our love for God day by day! We have only this life entrusted to us by the Lord, and in Him this time belongs to us!

The Gospel text we heard at the beginning, describes how a person clings to natural life. This attachment is so strong that nothing can really awaken them to read the signs of the times. Nothing can move them to perceive the true situation of their life and to respond appropriately. Therefore they will not recognise the coming of the Son of Man by the signs that precede it. So the human being is totally unprepared.

There is a vigilance that makes people aware of the dangers that threaten them and makes them take the right attitude towards them: *“If the master of the house knew at what hour of the night the thief would come, he would be on his guard and would not allow a hole to be made in his house”*.

And there is also a vigilance of love: it is that of those souls who await the Lord's return and work with fervour in His vineyard. In such souls the love of Christ has already been awakened, and they can even hasten His coming, as the Apostle Peter says:

"Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God" (2 Pet 3:11-12).

As far as the spiritual life is concerned, which is given additional dynamism by the conscious expectation of the Lord's return, both watchfulness and vigilance are important and complementary.

The vigilance of love, which means that the presence of the Holy Spirit is growing in us, makes us very attentive to even the smallest of the Lord's wishes, and also leads us to strive diligently to fulfil in a spirit of piety the tasks that the Lord has set for us in our lives (the duties of state).

At the same time, a vigilance inspired by the Spirit of God is also aware of the dangers that surround man. The great trust in God that comes from love does not make us blind. It does not lead us to an attitude of trusting naivety that does not know how to evaluate situations, but it makes us see things from God's perspective. Vigilance, then, is not an anxious tension or an overestimation of evil; nor is it a mere optimism that "all will be well".

As for the return of the Lord - which, as we have heard, we can even anticipate through love - we know the signs that will precede it. They have been sufficiently described to us. The Lord even points them out to us specifically so that we know that His coming is near.

The Lord is near, and in increasingly apocalyptic times, special vigilance is required on our part.