

10. March 2025

## THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

“The right attitude towards religious authorities”

Jn 18:12-24

*So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews seized Jesus and bound him. First they led him to Annas; for he was the father-in-law of Ca'iaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Ca'iaphas who had given counsel to the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. As this disciple was known to the high priest, he entered the court of the high priest along with Jesus, while Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept the door, and brought Peter in. The maid who kept the door said to Peter, “Are not you also one of this man’s disciples?” He said, “I am not.” Now the servants[a] and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves; Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself. The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him, “I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together; I have said nothing secretly. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me, what I said to them; they know what I said.” When he had said this, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, “Is that how you answer the high priest?” Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?” Annas then sent him bound to Ca'iaphas the high priest.*

As the Lord had foretold, in the hour of danger Peter was not able to hold on to his testimony for Jesus. Even earlier, in the Garden of Gethsemane, when his Lord asked him to accompany Him in His suffering and to watch with Him, the disciple was not strong enough and fell asleep (Mt 26:36-46). Now, in danger of being imprisoned himself, Peter denies that he belongs to Jesus. The Lord had predicted that he would deny Him three times. In today's passage, he does so for the first time. Evidently, Peter does not realise that Jesus' word is already beginning to be fulfilled.

In the meantime, Jesus was brought before the high priest Annas, who questioned Him about His doctrine. But the Lord gave him no answer, claiming that He had spoken openly for all to hear His teaching. Besides, Annas was not really interested in His teaching. Jesus knew too well the traps set for Him by the stubborn religious authorities, so there was no point in answering them. Therefore He told the high priest to ask the people who had heard Him.

We see that Jesus did not show any kind of servility towards the religious authorities of His time, who thought they had the right to judge Him. On the contrary, He had even rebuked them on several occasions. While it is true that the Lord sometimes avoided unnecessary confrontations - also in order to carry out His mission - He never concealed the truth out of human respect.

Later, after the Resurrection and the descent of the Holy Spirit, the disciples - and in particular Peter, who denied the Lord - will become faithful witnesses, ready to give their lives for Jesus' sake. They will not be intimidated even by the hostile Jewish authorities, who will seek to forbid them to proclaim the Lord's message to men.

In today's passage, when he is questioned by the high priest, Jesus' attitude is even clearer. One of the servants slapped Him after He answered Annas. Perhaps he considered it an offence to the High Priest. But the Lord, without quarrelling or fighting, sets the record straight: *"If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?"*

The attitude we see in the Lord and, subsequently, in His disciples invites us to examine our fundamental attitude towards religious authorities. It is certainly right to show them respect and obedience. However, respect and obedience must not be distorted by fear and servility. Otherwise, these virtues will be perverted and lose their beauty and freedom.

Religious obedience is not 'independent', but ultimately linked to God. Religious authorities can only legitimately demand obedience when they themselves obey God. We see this in the Pharisees and scribes, as well as in the high priests of that time. They acted as adversaries of God, inspired by the 'father of lies' and the 'murderer from the beginning', as Jesus made clear. By obeying them, they would be violating the truth.

Today, too, we must again and again discern what corresponds to the truth of our faith and what does not. If the Church authorities demand from us something that is not in line with the authentic doctrine and morals of the Church, something contrary to the Gospel, we should not lose respect for them, but neither should we obey them. The truth does not tolerate false obedience!

Annas sends Jesus bound to the high priest Caiaphas. The Lord permits this, not out of servility, but to consummate His mission to redeem mankind.