

18. October 2023

Feast of Saint Luke, evangelist

“I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves”

NOTE: As today is the Feast of Saint Luke the Evangelist, we will interrupt our series on the lives of the saints and meditate on the passage foreseen for this occasion, taken from the Gospel of Saint Luke.

Lk 10:1-9

*After this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come. And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and salute no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace shall rest upon him; but if not, it shall return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages; do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you; heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’*

How much we need good labourers for the harvest; labourers who are aware of their dignity and responsibility to serve in the Kingdom of God! They must be aware that they are in the service of God and of people who are waiting for them and who want to receive what the Lord will give them through them. If only each one of us could understand this; not only those who are called to lead the Church, but all those who have had the grace to meet the Lord and to be touched by Him. What each one of us should at least do is to fulfil this desire of the Lord: *"Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest"*.

But even more, we can respond to this desire of the Lord by being true disciples of His, so that in our witness of life the beauty of faith shines forth and opens the way for vocations. The "labourers in the Lord's harvest" are not only priests and religious - although these vocations are certainly of great importance - but every Christian must take his rightful place and bear fruit.

The Lord then goes on to describe the attitude in which the disciples are to carry out their task. His first sentence is striking: *"Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves"*.

This attitude can only be learned from the Lord Himself, who came into the world as the "Lamb of God" (cf. Jn 1:29). The comparison of the sheep in the midst of the wolves applies to Himself, for He shows us that the kingdom of God cannot be established by weapons or violence. In fact, it is a very different way, which is to conquer people in love and truth, rather than to dominate them. If possible, we should even try to reach out to those who have given in to the evil inclinations of their fallen nature and become wolves. But how is this to be done?

Walking the "way of the Lamb" does not mean giving up and being at the mercy of the evil we face, whether it is external or internal. No! On the contrary, we must be fully prepared for battle, equipped with the spiritual armour that the Apostle Paul describes in the sixth chapter of the Letter to the Ephesians (v. 11-18). But these weapons are purely spiritual, and the fight against evil must be waged in the Spirit of Christ. Therefore, we cannot adopt the attitude of the wolf in order to defend ourselves against it, let alone to defeat it. On the contrary, in so far as we would act like the wolf, we would be spiritually joining the wolf pack and fighting on the wrong side.

Instead, the sincerity of the disciples must be demonstrated. To fulfil their mission, they do not need the supposed security offered by material goods: "Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals. Nor should they stop unnecessarily: "salute no one on the road", because they are to concentrate on their mission: *"heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'"*.

In these three sentences from today's Gospel, which I have just quoted, we can see a fundamental training for this "service of the Lamb":

1) *"Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals"*

The disciple's security in fulfilling his mission is to be placed solely in God. This requires a deep union with Him and a process of inner purification, in which one does not want to find security in secondary sources. The latter limit inner purity. We can understand it well in this example: a Church with many goods and attached to them will hardly have the strength to tame, let alone overcome, the wolves, but in certain areas it will end up collaborating with them and adopting their way of being and acting.

2) *"Salute no one on the road"*

Disciples are to concentrate on the essentials. There are many distractions in this world that diminish the strength and concentration of our souls. These are not the sins that rob us of the life of grace, but voluntary distractions that in the long run weaken us and make us more susceptible to temptation. Whoever wants to be part of the "Lamb's following" must remain focused on the essentials in order to fulfil the mission entrusted to him.

3) *"Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'"*

All wickedness distorts the nature of man. That is why the "wolves" need not only to be converted but also to be healed, because they too "have fallen into the hands of robbers" (Lk 10:30), that is, they are under the influence of demons who want to rob man of his life of grace. The proclamation of the Kingdom of God, which came to us in the person of Jesus, is the essence of the mission of the disciples. At all times and in all places, in season and out of season (2 Tim 4:2), the love of God must be proclaimed. Only He can turn wolves into lambs and awaken humanity. The disciples are at the service of God's work! All they have to do is be sent. Everything else will be given to them by God (Mt 6:33).