

20. May 2020

**“The Lord of the World”
A short book review**

Before we come close to Pentecost and after the Ascension of the Lord, with prepare ourselves in a novena for the most holy feast of Pentecost, I would like to present a book shortly after our broadcasts on St. Joan of Arc. It was written by Robert Hugh Benson, an English Catholic priest in 1907, with the title "Lord of the World".

It is a kind of futuristic novel with an apocalyptic dimension. It is interesting for us believers because it depicts the conflict between a world apostasy and the Church. He also sketches a picture of what the figure of a future Antichrist might look like.

In the novel we encounter an influential couple, Oliver and Marbel Brand, who are representatives of a new spiritual progressive direction, which, relying entirely on reason and modernity, considers religious beliefs to be outdated, especially Catholicism. Oliver Brand is active in politics and possesses a convincing gift of oratory, which he uses for the goals of the government and in his speeches he denounces especially the backwardness of the Catholic religion.

The Catholic Church still exists. But it has a hard time keeping its members in faith. Many fall away - also priests - and turn to the new spiritual current. Father Percy, one of the central figures of this book is a zealous priest who is very concerned about the salvation of the faithful, but who sees himself increasingly powerless in the face of developments.

In this novel it is the case that the modern world has become so unbearable for many of the faithful that they withdraw to Rome where, under the Pope's guidance, they can still live their faith unhindered.

At the beginning Benson describes the great danger of a war between Europe and the East of the world and this catastrophe seems to be inevitable. Then unexpectedly an American, he is called Julian Felsenburgh, steps into the light of the public.

He is endowed with both: an amazing gift for oratory and a strong charisma, and exerts a great fascination on people. He succeeds in averting the threat of war and

instead brings about peace. The people are happy and grateful for this and, including the governments, are getting more and more under the influence of this personality. For the people, Felsenburgh takes more and more messianic traits and all governments in Europe want to win him as president for their country. But he waits until he is offered to be the president of all Europe. He accepts this offer and becomes the unrestricted sovereign of Europe.

Oliver and Marbel Brandt - like most people - come under the influence of Felsenburgh. He is to them in modern times what Jesus Christ was to the people in former times. But while Jesus, as Oliver Brand emphasized, brought the sword, through Julian Felsenburgh came peace for the whole world. Also the other states fell for Felsenburgh's personality and came under his dominance.

The church recognizes in its faithfulness the deadly danger which emanates from this "new Messiah", who exerts an almost magical power on the people. She is already marginalized in this progressive society and only leads a barely tolerated existence.

Her situation worsens when a new law is introduced. With the help and inspiration of apostate priests, a separate cult for all people has been developed, to which all citizens should be obliged. This is unacceptable to the Catholic faithful and an already painful martyrdom becomes even stronger as the mood against the Catholics becomes more and more hostile. When it becomes known that extremist Catholics are planning an attack on the new public cult, this becomes a pretext for bombing and destroying the headquarters of the Catholic Church in Rome. This plan is approved by all the governments of the world, of which Felsenburgh is the head.

By striking at Rome, they now thought they had destroyed the last enemy against true peace. But the laws became even stricter and finally it was planned to find out by questioning whether the people believed in God, which meant their death sentence.

Not all the prelates were killed in the bombing of Rome. They fled to the Holy Land and Father Percy was elected Pope and took the name Silvester. In secret, he rebuilt the hierarchy of the Church. When he heard of the forthcoming interrogation he wanted to gather his own to prepare them for martyrdom.

Through betrayal Felsenburgh learned that there was still a pope and an intact hierarchy. This prompted him to attack the seat of the Pope in an action with

representatives of all countries, in order to finally destroy the Catholic Church. Everything was ready for the attack on Nazareth, where Pope Silvester had taken up residence. But before this last final blow could be dealt, God intervened!

It is important to me to make those elements from this novel transparent for us, which might be also valid for the present time and should lead us to great vigilance!

a) The modern, liberal age easily can lead to a dictatorship of relativism.

b) If man's inner longing for God is not properly answered, this can easily lead to a neo-pagan pantheistic religiosity.

c) Catholicism remains the first enemy of all antichristian spirits.

But if the church weakens herself from within and loses its identity and mission, ideological cooperation with forces that actually persecute the church can even occur.

d) Even democratic states can, in certain circumstances, come under the influence of a charismatic personality and subordinate themselves to such a personality.

e) To present the figure of the Antichrist as a bringer of peace, gifted with an extraordinary charism, is a possibly quite accurate view. He would hardly win hearts if he were to appear as a strict dictator, like the antichristian figures in the past. It must occur as more subtle deceptions to win people.

f) The faithful church must expect persecutions that can increase in violence. By this I do not mean those Christians who are already persecuted. In a world dominated by the Antichrist, the persecution will be global.

g) As in the novel, there must be resistance on the part of Christians today against the modern trends in which the spirit of Antichrist is already at work! In addition, the readiness for the truth of faith to suffer martyrdom!

h) When all seems to be lost. God will intervene!