

15. March 2021

“A time of rejoicing is coming”

Isa 65:17-21

*For look, I am going to create new heavens and a new earth, and the past will not be remembered and will come no more to mind. Rather be joyful, be glad for ever at what I am creating, for look, I am creating Jerusalem to be 'Joy' and my people to be 'Gladness'. I shall be joyful in Jerusalem and I shall rejoice in my people. No more will the sound of weeping be heard there, nor the sound of a shriek; never again will there be an infant there who lives only a few days, nor an old man who does not run his full course; for the youngest will die at a hundred, and at a hundred the sinner will be accursed. They will build houses and live in them, they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.*

What times is the prophet Isaiah talking about? One would tend to think that this prophecy corresponds more to the paradisiacal state than to an earthly reality. If I look at the present situation in Jerusalem or also in Christendom, I can conclude that the prophet is referring to a time yet to come. Is it a glimpse of a coming period of peace?

It is worth including here a few considerations on prophecy at a general level, which is an essential component of our faith. The Church claims to be grounded in both the apostles and the prophets. In Israel, the prophets had an extremely important position, and the lack of leaders and prophets was considered a great misfortune for the people (*cf. Dan 3:38*).

The prophets and their respective prophecies - provided they are authentic - are a special intervention of God to guide the people, to correct them, to awaken hope in them, to warn them of the consequences of their actions, to enliven their memory, to announce what is to come, to explain events of the past, etc....

The true prophets and their prophecies are enlightened by God, and in this light they proclaim their words. These are not things that they themselves have devised or that they carry in their hearts; they have received them from God through inner allocutions or visions. They are the voice of God to his people!

On many occasions, the prophets had to assume a difficult position, since the prophecies are not always as optimistic and hopeful as the one presented in today's reading.

The prophet speaks using the 'I' of God; he is His voice. But the prophet is by no means a 'medium', as they are known in the esoteric and occult context. He is not, then, a channel whom God uses as a puppet for His purposes; rather he remains fully present with his whole person. That is why he does not need a trance or an ecstasy (although the latter can also occur); he does not have to perform magical dances or incantations; he does not need to take drugs... None of that! The prophet is a messenger of God, who speaks on behalf of God and sometimes also performs symbolic acts in order to give a concrete teaching to the people (*cf. e.g. Jer 18:1-11*).

As a rule, prophecies are also not fulfilled within a fixed time frame. For example, the prophecy about the Second Coming of Christ does not determine the precise time when it will happen. Jesus lists signs and circumstances that can give us a guideline; “*But as for that day and hour, nobody knows it, (...) no one but the Father alone*” (*Mt 24:36*). Not a few have tried to draw conclusions from the prophecies about the time ahead; some have even calculated dates for the Lord's return (as is the case with Adventists); however, they have often been wrong.

Perhaps we can understand this better if we remember the story of Jonah. God had announced through him that the city of Nineveh would be destroyed (*Jon 3,4*). However, the inhabitants did penance, so that God did not carry out the announced punishment (*v. 10*).

Here we see something of the character of the prophecies. Their fulfilment goes hand in hand with the actions of men. God never wants misfortune for man; He does not want to punish. What He wants is that man should walk in His ways. Through the prophets, He shows what happens when man obeys Him; but He also warns of what will happen if he does otherwise. So it depends on man's reaction.

We too can foresee events in this sense. For example, if we see that someone is going astray and does not change, we can foresee what will happen to him, unless he changes his life. We can even say to that person: “If you go on like this, you will end up in a bad way...” What we would basically be trying to say is: “Change your life!”

Let us now turn to the prophecy of today's reading. God announces a wonderful time: a time that all of us would like to live in and that corresponds to the deepest longing of the human heart. This time will certainly come, once men walk in God's way and listen to him! In many prophecies there are promises about these glorious times. However, it is beyond our ability to know when they will come.

We simply cannot know. Perhaps it will only be understood when those times have arrived.

But from this prophecy we can be left with the certainty that God has prepared a great end for man, and that He is doing everything in His power to bring him there. We are left with the hope that men will not be closed to the working of His grace, and that many will awaken from their confusion.