

13. January 2022

Resistance against false doctrines

1 Jn 2:18-25

Reading corresponding to the memorial of Saint Hilary of Poitiers

Children, this is the final hour; you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, and now many Antichrists have already come; from this we know that it is the final hour. They have gone from among us, but they never really belonged to us; if they had belonged to us, they would have stayed with us. But this was to prove that not one of them belonged to us. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and have all received knowledge. I have written to you not because you are ignorant of the truth, but because you are well aware of it, and because no lie can come from the truth. Who is the liar, if not one who claims that Jesus is not the Christ? This is the Antichrist, who denies both the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son cannot have the Father either; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father too. Let what you heard in the beginning remain in you; as long as what you heard in the beginning remains in you, you will remain in the Son and in the Father. And the promise he made you himself is eternal life.

The manifestation of the Antichrist will remain a painful question until such time as the Lord returns in His glory and light and darkness are forever separated.

Also in the present time the spirit of the Antichrist is perceived, even if we cannot yet identify him as a concrete public personage.

The saint whom we commemorate today - St. Hilary of Poitiers (315-367) - became bishop of his city in the year 350. Hilary was one of those who defended the Church against the heresy of Arius. This false doctrine, known as "Arianism", denied the divinity of Christ. For several decades it was a threat to the Church and became prevalent in the Roman Empire. St. Hilary, who, like St. Athanasius, courageously defended right doctrine, regarded Emperor Constantine II as an Antichrist. Indeed, this Emperor was one of the propagators of Arianism. Because of his opposition, Hilary had to spend some time in exile.

Arianism claimed that Jesus is not consubstantial with the Father, and, consequently, that he is not God. It was therefore a devastating heresy, which poisoned almost the entire Church. Very few bishops were willing to publicly oppose this false doctrine. St.

Hilary wrote a treatise on the Holy Trinity to counter these errors. At the time when Arianism dominated, it was often the simple faithful who clung to the right doctrine; while a large part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy adhered to this false doctrine, for various reasons.

Why is right doctrine so important that one must be willing to do anything to defend it? Why can one not deviate from it?

We can understand this well if we look at the serious heresy of Arianism. According to this doctrine, Jesus Christ is not consubstantial with the Father, but is the first and highest of His creatures. Now, if Jesus does not have a divine nature - that is, if He is not God - neither could He have redeemed us. The whole redemptive work of Christ can only be understood insofar as He, being God, took away man's guilt by His voluntary sacrifice.

From the perspective of faith, then, we can easily recognise how destructive such a heresy is. From this background we can also understand why time and again there were great disputes about the true doctrine of the Church.

Right doctrine is like a spiritual work of art, from which nothing can be removed without great damage. It is similar to the Commandments of God, which cannot be changed without serious consequences.

At the end of the so-called "Arian crisis", truth prevailed in the Church. We owe this to men like St. Hilary and St. Athanasius, who preserved the treasure of holy doctrine without allowing it to be adulterated.

Right doctrine is light for the understanding. Heresy, on the other hand, darkens our reason. It stands between the light of God and our understanding, thus diverting our thinking in another direction. The consequences are serious!

So, if we want to protect ourselves from antichristian influences, we must always discern whether the true doctrine of the Church is being proclaimed. If a new antichrist - or even the "last Antichrist" - appears, he would possess certain means of power to spread his dominion, together with the false doctrine.

This is what happened in the case of Emperor Constantine II. In that sense, we can agree with St. Hilary's assessment of the role of this emperor, because, as today's reading tells us, "many antichrists have appeared".

