

13. April 2023

A time of comfort

Acts 3:11-26

Everyone came running towards them in great excitement, to the Portico of Solomon, as it is called, where the man was still clinging to Peter and John. When Peter saw the people he addressed them, 'Men of Israel, why are you so surprised at this? Why are you staring at us as though we had made this man walk by our own power or holiness? It is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, who has glorified his servant Jesus whom you handed over and then disowned in the presence of Pilate after he had given his verdict to release him. It was you who accused the Holy and Upright One, you who demanded that a murderer should be released to you while you killed the prince of life. God, however, raised him from the dead, and to that fact we are witnesses; and it is the name of Jesus which, through faith in him, has brought back the strength of this man whom you see here and who is well known to you. It is faith in him that has restored this man to health, as you can all see. 'Now I know, brothers, that neither you nor your leaders had any idea what you were really doing; but this was the way God carried out what he had foretold, when he said through all his prophets that his Christ would suffer. Now you must repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, and so that the Lord may send the time of comfort. Then he will send you the Christ he has predestined, that is Jesus, whom heaven must keep till the universal restoration comes which God proclaimed, speaking through his holy prophets. Moses, for example, said, "From among your brothers the Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me; you will listen to whatever he tells you. Anyone who refuses to listen to that prophet shall be cut off from the people." In fact, all the prophets that have ever spoken, from Samuel onwards, have predicted these days. 'You are the heirs of the prophets, the heirs of the covenant God made with your ancestors when he told Abraham, "All the nations of the earth will be blessed in your descendants". It was for you in the first place that God raised up his servant and sent him to bless you as every one of you turns from his wicked ways.'

It is faith that liberates God's action! We hear it again and again, and today it is Peter who reminds us again, when he makes clear to those present the reason why the crippled man was healed: "*It is the name of Jesus which through faith in Jesus, has brought back the*

strength of this man whom you see here", he tells them. Peter also makes it clear to them how unjust their behaviour was towards Jesus, who is the Author of life.

But we see that Peter does not dwell too long on describing the situation; he calls for conversion, and even states that the Jews acted out of ignorance.

Here is an important lesson for us, which teaches us how to deal with sin, both our own and that of others. On the one hand, it is necessary to recognise clearly what was wrong, to point out the sin and not to evade it. But then we must turn to God's mercy and change course, that is to say, convert.

What counts for oneself applies even more to our attitude towards other people. We can objectively see evil and injustice, but we cannot measure the degree of guilt. Perhaps the other person acted out of ignorance, or felt compelled by circumstances to do this or that. Maybe he wanted to do something good but it turned out to be the opposite... Therefore, we should not immediately assume that the person acted out of pure evil. Unfortunately there may also be cases where this was indeed the case, but by no means can it be generalised. He whose motivation is always abysmally evil is the Devil!

We must therefore beware of falling into two errors:

- a) Assuming in principle that those who act wrongly at the objective level have an evil intention. We must examine the situation more closely and try to understand what the motivation might have been, just as Peter did in the passage we have heard today. And in case we cannot discover the motivation, we simply leave it in God's hands.
- b) To close one's eyes to the objective evil that was committed, to overlook it or to relativise it, out of pure understanding and empathy for the person involved and his or her motivations. In this case, one would be lowering the standards of what is objectively good.

The Apostle's vigorous proclamation invites those present, after having repented and converted, to welcome the time of consolation that God will grant them.

What a wonderful concept: the 'time of consolation'! How much guilt weighs on a person or even on whole peoples! Under the weight of guilt, one can hardly breathe,

one cannot walk freely and lives burdened. Perhaps one does not even notice it, because one is used to living under such a burden. But when the Lord frees us from it, then comes the time of consolation. One has the impression that it is only then that one really begins to live, and from then on one can get going.

In this context, I am thinking, for example, of the burden of abortion, which now weighs on so many nations; a yoke that they put on themselves; a yoke that is not that of the Lord. Most people who abort their children will not really know what they are doing. But the objective burden is there, weighing heavily, so that those nations which legalise abortion, and thus also promote it, live under a shadow even without realising it.

What consolation and relief would come once the scales have fallen from the eyes, once the guilt and the aberrations committed have been acknowledged, once the tide is turned and God's infinite mercy can free man from his chains!

The gospel must be proclaimed, so that people can recognise in the light of God how ready He is to forgive; they only have to lift their eyes and gaze upon the face of the Crucified and Risen One! Then the veil will fall from their eyes (cf. Is 25:7) and the ice that has covered their hearts will melt; the Lord will remove the burden and the 'time of consolation' will have come.