

5. May 2023

## I am the Way

Jn 14:1-6

*Do not let your hearts be troubled. You trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house there are many places to live in; otherwise I would have told you. I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared you a place, I shall return to take you to myself, so that you may be with me where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going. Thomas said, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' Jesus said: I am the Way; I am Truth and Life. No one can come to the Father except through me.*

These words of the Lord, showing Himself to be the Way, the Truth and the Life, are of insurmountable clarity. They are precisely the last words of today's Gospel, so they are the Lord's instruction to us to counteract that confusion of heart which He mentions at the beginning of the text, "*do not let your hearts be troubled.*"

These affirmations are essential for the preservation of our Christian faith. In the globalised world in which we live, there are more and more contacts with people of other religions, or with people who have no faith at all and are mainly interested in the earthly dimension of human life.

As far as the practice of our Christian faith is concerned, we know that, on the one hand, it is necessary to reject the influences of those alien beliefs and currents of thought; and, on the other hand, we have the Lord's command to carry the message of the gospel to the whole world (Mk 16:15), being "light of the world" (Mt 5:14) and "yeast in the dough" (Mt 13:33).

Especially in recent decades, the Church has given more and more weight to "dialogue", understood as a way of encountering those who do not profess the Christian faith. It is now seen almost as the primary way of engaging in conversation with those who do not share our faith. If "dialogue" is properly understood and practised in this way, it could be called a "missionary dialogue", which becomes a very delicate instrument for evangelising according to the mandate given to us by the Lord.

We can therefore agree with Professor Bürkle, who writes: "The theological study of the phenomena and contents [of other religions] is not an end in itself. The interest that the Christian faith has in the encounter with people of other religions is necessarily linked to the validity of this gospel also for those people".

Now, if this starting point for a truly missionary dialogue is lost or relativised, then interreligious dialogue becomes an instrument of confusion. Not only does it lose its supernatural meaning and thus neglect the Lord's mandate, but it also becomes counterproductive. How easily one runs the risk of cooperating in the promotion of a kind of "universal religion", which claims to embrace and surpass all others. This does not necessarily mean that there has to be a common and visible worship between all religions, but that the worship of each religion is considered on the same level, so that each religion would constitute its own way of salvation.

However, there is nothing that contradicts the Gospel and these clear words of the Lord more. If one, as a Catholic, were to adopt such a view, then the heart would already have fallen into confusion, and the unequivocal words we hear today from the mouth of Jesus would increasingly fade from memory or be completely misrepresented.

With all the good intentions one may have in seeking understanding between nations and brotherhood among all men, if one loses sight of the fact that this can only happen under the one Saviour of mankind, one would end up spiritually blinding oneself. Even unwittingly, one would end up in kinship with those groupings who say: "Catholics, Orthodox, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Freethinkers and Believing Thinkers are for us only first names. Our common surname is Freemasonry". Far be it from us to have such a conception!

The Lord, on the contrary, leaves no room for doubt as to what is the only way for man to reach the Father: it consists in listening to and following Jesus. It is this that takes him out of confusion and offers him the true relationship with God. There are more than enough biblical references to point us to this truth.

The "many dwellings" Jesus speaks of are in the Father's House. Certainly God wants to lead all people to salvation and invites them to His dwelling places. But only those

who accept the Father's invitation can be there. A true brotherhood among all people can only come about when all obey the same Father, and come to Him through Jesus.

In the Gospel of John, when Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, the Lord says to her:

*"Jesus said: Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know; for salvation comes from the Jews. But the hour is coming -- indeed is already here -- when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: that is the kind of worshiper the Father seeks. God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:21-24).*

Two statements from this passage should be kept in mind, which clearly point to the limits of interreligious dialogue. First, that other religions do not worship God "in spirit and in truth". Second, that, in order to do so, they must first know the "salvation that comes from the Jews": the only Saviour, the Redeemer...

The way to the eternal abodes is the Lord Himself, who prepares a place for us.