

5. April 2024

## The missionary mandate

We will listen to the gospel corresponding to this day according to the traditional calendar:

Mt 28:16-20

*Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."*

This is the Lord's command which remains valid until the end of time, for all power in heaven and on earth has been given to the Lord. The disciples, and thus the Church herself, fulfil this command of the Lord down through the centuries, for all men must submit to God's loving dominion in order to attain salvation. These words of the Risen Lord are so clear, and have always been observed by the Church, that it would be astonishing and even absurd if there were suddenly room for other conceptions which no longer regard the Lord's missionary mandate as binding, or even relativise it. If this were to happen, a grave error would obviously have been introduced into the Church, and the absolute importance of the Lord's Word for time and eternity would no longer be understood, and with it He Himself.

Holy Baptism and instruction in the faith for all people is the will of God. The ministry of the Lord's first apostles and so many missionaries who followed their example point the way.

We must convince people of the truth of the Gospel by proclaiming the Word of the Lord with authenticity, by administering the sacraments with dignity and by bearing witness with our own lives. In his "Apology to the Gentiles", Tertullian puts these words into the mouths of the pagans, referring to the first Christians: "See how they love one

another". It is hard to resist such a testimony, because when the love of God enters the hearts of Christians, they proclaim the Lord in everything they do, moved by this love.

In connection with the command to proclaim the Gospel, the Risen Lord also leaves us this promise: *"I am with you always, to the close of the age"*.

Although we can always count on the presence of the Lord, who never abandons us in His love, this phrase can refer especially to Jesus' earlier statements. This promise of His becomes a reality when we fulfil His mission. If the Church were to neglect this mission and no longer fulfil it as God intended, or even falsify it, then the special care of Jesus, the very grace associated with the proclamation of the Gospel, would also be lost.

On the basis of these considerations, it is legitimate to ask whether the present state of weakness in the Church, and its consequences, could be linked in particular to the fact that the Lord's missionary mandate is no longer being properly fulfilled, and thus a certain fullness of grace has been lost or significantly diminished. Indeed, the neglect of the power of preaching and teaching the people is a sign of a lack of conviction about the uniqueness of the Christian faith and the necessity of the Holy Catholic Church for salvation. This conviction is then replaced by ideologies, personal ideas and deceptions of all kinds.

It is all the more important, therefore, to focus our attention on the Lord's missionary mandate and to try to fulfil it, even if this is contrary to the spirit of the times or to certain theological trends and currents in the Church's present leadership.

The Lord's commission is still valid and will remain so forever. It can certainly be adapted to the circumstances of the times, for example by using modern means of communication for evangelisation, but it can never change in its essence. The Lord is and will remain the *"Alpha and the Omega"* (Rev 22:13). His word, and therefore His mission, will never pass away (cf. Mt 24:35). We are in danger of deviating from it and withdrawing from His presence if we do not keep His words as He wills.

When this happens, we can only regain access to the stream of grace that the Lord offers us for the mission entrusted to us by sincerely converting to Him, turning away from all false doctrine and anchoring ourselves in His Word and in authentic doctrine.

But if we allow ourselves to be moved by these words, and if each one of us tries to fulfil the mission of the Risen One in the place where He has placed him, not only will the light spread in this world, but the words of Jesus will be fulfilled: "*For to him who has will more be given*" (Mt 13:12).