

15. February 2025

THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN
“The Sanhedrin decides the death of Jesus”

Jn 11:47-57

So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council, and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on thus, every one will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place[d] and our nation.” But one of them, Ca'iaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all; you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish.” He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. So from that day on they took counsel how to put him to death. Jesus therefore no longer went about openly among the Jews, but went from there to the country near the wilderness, to a town called E'phraim; and there he stayed with the disciples. Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves. They were looking for Jesus and saying to one another as they stood in the temple, “What do you think? That he will not come to the feast?” Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if any one knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

The resurrection of Lazarus, an unmistakable sign of Jesus' divine authority, was unbearable for the religious authorities of the time. Unwilling to recognise the signs that Jesus performed as divine confirmation of His mission, they no longer knew what to do. They saw how more and more people believed in Jesus. Since they had no way to refute Him or to accuse Him of any sin - and therefore of transgressing the Law - they decided to kill Him.

Caiaphas, the high priest that year, was at the head of the Sanhedrin. He spoke the prophetic words that it was better that only one should die for the people than that all the people should perish. The evangelist stresses that these words were not spoken by himself, but were a prophetic inspiration by virtue of his ministry as high priest. Thus

he foresaw the higher purpose of Jesus' death, which these same religious authorities would later instigate before the Roman procurator.

What a tragic situation!

God accredits with undeniable signs and miracles His Son, whom He has sent into the world, and those who presided over the people in God's name commit the worst crime one can imagine: They become responsible for the death of Jesus, who came to redeem mankind and lead them back to the house of the Heavenly Father.

As believers, we know that the Son of God willingly undertook this atoning death. Thus, not only the children of Israel would receive salvation, for, as the Gospel says, Jesus was to die 'not only for the nation, but to gather together the children of God who were scattered abroad'.

By the command of the Risen Lord, the Gospel will be carried to the ends of the earth. All peoples and nations are invited to be reconciled to God through the death and resurrection of Christ, and to receive eternal life in Him. God accepted the death of His beloved Son as an atoning sacrifice and grants salvation to all who believe in Him. What grace!

On the other hand, what a tragedy is the treatment of Jesus by the religious authorities in His day! How much blindness and wickedness is evident! The chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where Jesus was, they were to denounce Him so that He could be arrested. The rejection of Jesus had now turned into active persecution. He was directly threatened with death. The obstinacy of the religious leaders could no longer be dispelled. Their blindness towards Jesus grew with every word and deed He did.

This is the consequence of closing oneself to the truth. The blindness can even become a 'willful blindness', which darkens the person more and more to the point that he or she does not even want to know the truth. At this point, the hardening is complete and there is no way out of this state, unless God brings him out through special grace.

Jesus, for His part, withdraws with the disciples to the city of Ephraim, near the desert. After the decision of the Sanhedrin to put Him to death, the Lord no longer appears in public among the Jews until the time comes.

But His hour is very near! The Lord has only a short time left before He drinks the cup to the last drop. Knowing what awaits Him, Jesus will consciously go up to Jerusalem to meet 'His hour': that hour of supreme darkness which God will turn into the brightest light.