



Balta Lelija

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“Distance from the world”

Lk 10:1-12

Jesus said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and salute no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace shall rest upon him; but if not, it shall return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages; do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you; heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off against you; nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, it shall be more tolerable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few”. How true this word is! There are so many people who have yet to be touched by the Gospel. Although the Good News has been proclaimed in many parts of the world, there are still countless people who do not know it or have hardly heard it. So much remains to be done, and when we look at the number of labourers in the vineyard, we might think that there are not enough of them. Therefore, the Lord counsels us to ask for labourers in God's vineyard; labourers who have been truly touched by the Gospel; labourers who are aware of the importance of all people finding salvation in Christ.

The labourers in God's harvest should take to heart the words the Lord addressed to His disciples when He sent them out into the towns and villages: *“Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves”.*

In fact, these words of the Lord stand in stark contrast to certain tendencies in the Church of our time, which insist on always and everywhere seeing and recognising the

positive in the world, easily losing the necessary critical distance that the Christian must have from it.

The Church is called to be leaven in the world (cf. Lk 13:21), to penetrate it with the Spirit of God and not, on the contrary, to allow herself to be penetrated by the spirit of the world. When the Lord sends us out *"like lambs in the midst of wolves"*, it means that there is a danger of which we must be aware, a danger that lurks and surrounds us. We must become more and more aware of our condition as "lambs" in Christ, so as to be able to distinguish the voice of the Lord from that of the wolves, even if they are disguised as sheep (cf. Jn 10:3-5).

Revelation even describes a beast that resembles a lamb but speaks like a dragon (cf. Rev 13:11), and Scripture explicitly warns us that Satan can appear to us disguised as an angel of light (cf. 2 Cor 11:14).

While it is true that the Church must not turn in upon herself, it is also true that she must remain very vigilant in carrying out the task of evangelisation entrusted to her. The Church cannot allow herself to be led by a kind of human optimism that does not properly assess the dangers of evangelisation and can end up adopting worldly methods.

It is a spiritual challenge to live in the world without being of the world (cf. Jn 17:11, 16). Certainly, the Lord's warning does not mean that we should move in the world as if every person we meet were a wolf ready to devour us, always on the defensive. It requires a subtle spirit of discernment to hear the inner warnings of the Holy Spirit that call us to be vigilant. This state of vigilance will prevent us from dealing with the world naively, with familiarity and trust.

The world is not the place where we can move without reservation and without discerning the spirits. Rather, it is the place where we must prove our faithfulness by seeking to live according to the spirit of the Gospel and to proclaim it in word and in our witness of life. The wolves represent the dangers that surround us: it is the spirit of a world far from God that threatens to infect us; it is the wiles of the devil that try to seduce us; it is our own flesh with its passions that wants to dominate us...

To be vigilant, however, does not mean to be fearful and closed; it means to be realistic and aware of the dangers and to face them in the Spirit of the Lord.