

12th Sunday of Ordinary Time A/2008

An old Latin proverb says, "The first to tell the truth must be crucified". What this proverb would like to say is that most of the time people do not like the truth, especially when it hurts. They prefer to live their life in the way they think is suitable to them without being contradicted or criticized. If it happens that someone pushes them around, they become mad and aggressive. That is what happened to the prophets, as we heard in the first reading with Jeremiah.

In fact, Jeremiah had denounced the sin of Israel and their abandonment of the ways of God. As a result, he was under attack from everywhere; many wanted him to disappear and to leave them in peace. What hurts the prophet most is that even his best friends are among his persecutors who want to harm him.

However, in spite of the persecution and hardships, Jeremiah does not give up. He keeps telling the truth and fulfilling his mission. He knows that God is with him; he will not abandon him. Whatever might happen to him, God will rescue him. For that, the last word will never belong to his detractors and wicked ones, but to God who will let his cause triumph.

Jeremiah's message has a parallel in today's Gospel. Jesus tells us not to withdraw from the truth and to speak with boldness the message we have received. Everything of what we have heard from him should be proclaimed publicly. What Jesus wants is that those who evangelize might talk about him in time and out of time, even when they meet hatred and rejection.

In other words, although the mission is difficult; the disciple has not to be afraid. It is true that human beings can kill the physical body; but God can condemn a person to the death of the soul. In that sense, eternal death is worse than physical death. That is why it is better not to be afraid about our persecutors.

Moreover, the disciple is protected by the Lord who takes care of him. If God cares for the sparrows, surely he cares for his beloved ones. Jesus teaches us here a complete trust in his Father. There is nothing, even the worst case, that can happen to us without God's knowledge. In all that happens to us, God is with us, surrounding us with his love and mercy. Our life is in his hands.

It does not mean that our enemies cannot harm us. It means only that even in such a situation, we are not forgotten. That is why, in persecution, we need courage, perseverance and fidelity. It is only by doing so that Jesus can recognize us before his heavenly Father and reward us.

At the listening of the message of Jesus and what happened to Jeremiah, the question we can ask is this: Why are people so reluctant to the truth? Why do they refuse to abandon their wrong doings and convert? Why are they inclined to harm those who tell them the truth?

St Paul answers that it is because of sin. For St Paul, indeed, the sin of the world is a fact. All of mankind is born into this sinful situation, and death is a direct consequence of sin. Sin takes its origin in the disobedience of the first man, Adam, from God and affects the whole humanity.

The argument St Paul develops is based on what we can call the solidarity of the human race. Humanity is a whole; it is made up of one web. Adam was not an individual, *per se*; he was a prototype of humanity. He was one of mankind, and because of that, his sin was the sin of the whole of humanity.

Where does St Paul draw such an idea from? The idea of the solidarity of the human race is typically Jewish. A Jew never thought of himself as an individual, but always as part of a grand ensemble, which is a clan, a family or a nation apart from which he had no real existence. Nowadays, we see such a vision of the world prominent in the Arab world, in some tribes in Africa, and Aborigines in Australia. If you ask an Aborigine his name, he will easily give the name of his clan or tribe, and not his own personal name.

Such a concept raises certainly the question of personal responsibility, if we have to be accountable or not for our wrong doings and deeds, or if we have to hide ourselves behind the clan and the tribe. In truth, the solidarity of the human race does not diminish personal responsibility; we are accountable for the things we do or not do. We cannot be held accountable for the mistakes or faults of others.

However, there is a reality we cannot deny, namely the fact that in each one of us, including children, there is an innate inclination to evil, a natural tendency to do wrong things instead of the good. Without education and discipline, we cannot get rid of it. It is exactly this point which is the concern of St Paul. In other words, with the principle of the solidarity of the human race, St Paul tries to explain our common origin with regard to sin, and the existence of death in the world as its consequence. It was a Jewish belief that, if Adam had not sinned, man would have been immortal (Sirach 2, 3).

Another thing to say is that this very same concept of solidarity, which can be used to produce so desperate view of the human situation, can be used in a reversal way to fill it with a blaze of glory. Into this situation comes Jesus.

Here the argument of St Paul becomes brilliant. As mankind was solid with Adam and was therefore condemned to death, so mankind is solid with Christ and is therefore acquitted to life. The point of St Paul is to say that humanity was brought in a desperate situation because of Adam's sin; thanks to Jesus we have found our escape and salvation. Jesus has defeated sin and death by his own death on the cross. Moreover, even though the law has come and made sin much more terrible, the grace of Christ overcomes the condemnation which the law must bring.

The consequence is: we have to thank God for sending Jesus in the world as our savior. We have to trust him and follow him. May he help us to do so as we come together to worship his Father. God bless you all!

Jeremiah 20, 10-13; Romans 5, 12-15; Matthew 10, 26-33



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