

18. November 2019

“Remain faithful!”

*I Macc 1, 10-15.41-43.54-57.62-63*

*From these there grew a wicked offshoot, Antiochus Epiphanes son of King Antiochus; once a hostage in Rome, he became king in the 107th year of the kingdom of the Greeks. It was then that there emerged from Israel a set of renegades who led many people astray. 'Come,' they said, 'let us ally ourselves with the gentiles surrounding us, for since we separated ourselves from them many misfortunes have overtaken us.' This proposal proved acceptable, and a number of the people eagerly approached the king, who authorised them to practise the gentiles' observances. So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, such as the gentiles have, disguised their circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant, submitting to gentile rule as willing slaves of impiety. The king then issued a proclamation to his whole kingdom that all were to become a single people, each nation renouncing its particular customs. All the gentiles conformed to the king's decree, and many Israelites chose to accept his religion, sacrificing to idols and profaning the Sabbath. On the fifteenth day of Chislew in the year 145 the king built the appalling abomination on top of the altar of burnt offering; and altars were built in the surrounding towns of Judah and incense offered at the doors of houses and in the streets. Any books of the Law that came to light were torn up and burned. Whenever anyone was discovered possessing a copy of the covenant or practising the Law, the king's decree sentenced him to death. Yet there were many in Israel who stood firm and found the courage to refuse unclean food. They chose death rather than contamination by such fare or profanation of the holy covenant, and they were executed.*

The apostasy of the people of Israel from God!

What a tragic story that unfortunately repeats itself. The traitors of the covenant of God wanted to live according to the laws of the foreign peoples, to make a covenant with them, knowing well that this was directed against God. They believed or pretended that they would be worse off if they did not live in greater communion with the other peoples.

What really led them to this point of apostasy from God, that they even reversed the circumcision of sacrificing the Sabbath to foreign gods, that is, to commit abominations?

First of all, it seems that a misjudgment of their life situation is the starting point: false thoughts that separate from God! One may wonder why such thoughts have found room for them in the first place. Have the men gone wrong before and no longer tried to respect God's commandments properly?

In the reflections of the fallen men, the distrust of God can be noticed. What happened then came when one follows false thoughts: the apostasy of God and his covenant and the exercise of that idolatry of the foreign peoples from which God wanted to save his people.

Antiochus the Greek king - in him we can see a type of Antichrist - systematically tried to dissuade the people from worshipping the true God. Under the threat of death, it was demanded to give up one's own way of life. Some followed him and fell away from God.

But there were also many who remained faithful to the Lord and His commandments. They passed the test that had come over them. Obedience to God was more important to them than their own lives.

Sacred Scripture is not simply a record of past events, but is given to us for teaching. That is why it is important to apply the message of this report to the time in which we live.

First of all, our faith is also under threat.

We are surrounded by many people who think differently from us Catholics and are exposed to influences that want to soften our faith. It is not easy to resist them permanently and not to take over the thinking of the world.

It takes a clear path of following Christ, sticking to His commandments and the true doctrine of the Church, so that our thoughts do not go astray. You can quickly get used to the seductions of this world without realizing it if you lose your alertness.

The temptation to adapt to the thinking of the world is constantly present, for it is not easy to stand in contradiction with the general course of the world. Some

people do not stand up to the fact that, as a Catholic, one must defend convictions which are described as unfashionable and from yesterday, and even in extreme cases as hostile and unloving.

This situation even arises more and more in the Church itself, if one sticks to the church's previous doctrine and tradition and does not abandon it to the *Zeitgeist* (spirit of the time), which has also entered the Church. The absurd situation has arisen that those who remain faithful to the Gospel and the doctrine of the Church can suddenly be described as rigorists who oppose the "new spirit".

This must not, however, be surprising or frightening, but all the more it is necessary to imitate those Israelites who have remained faithful to the holy covenant. Obedience to God is higher than anything else, higher than one's own life!