

15. December 2019

“To wait in patience for the Return of the Lord”

Jak 5, 7-10

Now be patient, brothers, until the Lord's coming. Think of a farmer: how patiently he waits for the precious fruit of the ground until it has had the autumn rains and the spring rains! You too must be patient; do not lose heart, because the Lord's coming will be soon. Do not make complaints against one another, brothers, so as not to be brought to judgement yourselves; the Judge is already to be seen waiting at the gates. For your example, brothers, in patiently putting up with persecution, take the prophets who spoke in the Lord's name.

The return of the Lord!

How long has the church been waiting for it, or is she still waiting at all? Is she aware that every day brings us closer to the return of Christ?

Again and again there were movements which considered the coming of the Lord and thus the end of the world to be very close and caused corresponding reactions. However, some of these reactions misled people and left disappointment because the expected coming of the Lord has not happened. As can easily be done, an attempt was made to revise the presumed date of arrival (Adventists). When the appearance of the Lord did not happen again, it could happen that one either renamed a period again or gave up resignedly and completely lost sight of the Lord's return.

Such issues in particular require a peculiar level of sobriety, but this does not mean losing sight of them or not even consciously including them in our reality of faith.

Today the apostle points to patience as a basic attitude on how to wait for the Lord's arrival. Patience is not to be confused with a natural phlegm, which cannot unsettle us. Nor it is simply a stoic equanimity about things and circumstances.

Rather, it is a waiting for the right time, which we cannot determine ourselves, a conscious submission to the Lord's schedule. In today's text, it is compared to the natural ripeness of the harvest, which the farmer can only expect and cannot determine himself. He puts trust in the course of the natural process. We are called

to put trust in the providence of God, who makes everything happen at the time that he carries in his hands.

But that does not preclude an ardent desire that the Lord may come soon, looking for real signs of his coming, the constant striving for him, the eagerness to do everything that is assigned to us. But in all of this we keep surrendering to the Lord and waiting patiently! As paradoxical as it may sound, we can practice holy impatience in a holy patience.

But the text today still gives us clues as to how we should expect the Lord:

“Do not lose heart, because the Lord's coming will be soon.”

Here the virtue of fortitude is meant. We have to enter the kingdom of God through many tribulations and not be discouraged. We have to accept the struggle that has been given to us, to stand up again after defeats, to trust in the goodness of the Lord and to continue. Strengthening the heart means deeply anchoring it in love and truth, making it a protective wall against the darkness, being at home in the heart of Jesus.

“Do not make complaints against one another, brothers, so as not to be brought to judgement yourselves.”

Here the brother's accusation may be meant, the negative talk about each other, which does not want to correct other people's mistakes, but uses them against him. If you become aware of your own mistakes, it will be easier to be more patient with the other brothers' mistakes. So it's about the loveless judging that draws the judgment on itself.

“For your example, brothers, in patiently putting up with persecution, take the prophets who spoke in the Lord's name.”

We first look to the Lord Himself, but then we also see many examples making suffering fruitful. The key is to learn to accept suffering with confidence from the Lord's hand. This is not always easy, because of course one likes to avoid suffering and it is often not understandable why we are overwhelmed by it. But patience is required again. Nothing happens without the will of the Lord, be it his active or passive will. Therefore it is important to look at God and at those who have suffered with patience. We can not only take them as wonderful examples, but also specifically ask for their help and prayers.

One last note about this text: It is striking that the expected arrival of the Lord is mentioned three times. The awareness of the Lord's return, which is to fulfil us, makes it even more urgent to implement the apostle's advice - just as a near death should mobilize everything within us to unite as deeply as possible with the Lord. Since we do not know the day or hour of Christ's return (*cf. Mt 24,36*), just as we do not know the hour of our death, it is important to spend one's life with great spiritual vigilance, which means holy sobriety.