

29. April 2020

“All will serve the kingdom of God”

Acts 8,1-8

Saul approved of the killing. That day a bitter persecution started against the church in Jerusalem, and everyone except the apostles scattered to the country districts of Judaea and Samaria. There were some devout people, however, who buried Stephen and made great mourning for him. Saul then began doing great harm to the church; he went from house to house arresting both men and women and sending them to prison. Once they had scattered, they went from place to place preaching the good news. And Philip went to a Samaritan town and proclaimed the Christ to them. The people unanimously welcomed the message Philip preached, because they had heard of the miracles he worked and because they saw them for themselves. For unclean spirits came shrieking out of many who were possessed, and several paralytics and cripples were cured. As a result there was great rejoicing in that town.

Persecutions have been, are and always will be!

Unfortunately, we must always reckon with them, even if there may be a period of calm. Whether it be internal or external struggles: The light came into darkness and darkness did not seize it (*cf. Jn 1,5*). As long as the Lord has not yet returned at the end of times, as long as the struggle will last, as long as Christians will have to reckon with the fact that not only will they have to resist temptations from the devil, their own greed and the temptations of the world within, but that there may also be threats from without: against life, against honor and much more!

This fact can help us to deepen our faith more and more and to make us aware that we can never live in a comfortable security in this world!

In today's text we hear of a serious persecution of the Church in Jerusalem, of the raging of Saul of Tarsus, the later Apostle Paul, after the stoning of Stephen. The Christians were scattered.

But we can record two important moments, what happened in this persecution and how God includes it in his plans of salvation!

The scattered proclaimed the Gospel, and so it came to Samaria and Judea. God pursues his goal so that people will receive news of his love in Jesus Christ and knows how to include everything in his plans with wise foresight. Whatever the devil and the men instigated by him will try, it will not succeed in the last consequence, even if this also means suffering for the believers.

This is an important lesson for us, so that we do not allow ourselves to be clouded by an apparent omnipotence of evil and by any hopelessness that might enter our souls because of hard times. Rather, we can take a step forward in faith and say: When such struggles and persecutions come - painful as they are - the Lord will do great things!

This step is important and corresponds to our reality of faith and removes the powers of darkness from the concrete influence on our soul. Let us therefore not only look at difficult situations from the point of view of disaster, without trivializing them, but let us place our trust in God, who is the Lord of the situation, however hopeless it may seem!

The second moment is when we see that Philip, endowed with special authority, wins people for Christ and demons must go away. Healings happen and there is great joy in the capital of Samaria.

We remember when Jesus was in Samaria during his lifetime and cast out many demons from the possessed, whom he then allowed to throw themselves into the sea with the pigs. The Samaritans were full of fear and asked him to go (*cf. Mk 5,1-20*). Now they received the Lord in his apostle and unanimously heeded Philip's words.

Where there is much darkness, God also sends great light, and we can already look forward to the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, which will take place soon. The persecutor becomes the proclaimer, the persecution must serve the proclamation, the plans of the evil one are integrated into the wise action of God!

Let us also take these words with us into our present time. The friendship and all too close cooperation with the spirit of this world, which we can see in church circles, cannot hide the fact that the signs of persecution of Christians are increasing.

The so-called "lockdown" in the Corona pandemic has shown us how quickly public life can be paralysed and the churches closed. We must remain vigilant that

this strong dominance of politics over the life of its citizens and the Church does not mutate into a kind of world dictatorship in the face of catastrophes and global environmental concerns.

But even if that should happen, the Lord will always show us his ways and the Gospel will still find to come to the people!