

2. May 2020

“It is the spirit that gives life”

Jn 6,60-69

After hearing it, many of his followers said, 'This is intolerable language. How could anyone accept it?' Jesus was aware that his followers were complaining about it and said, 'Does this disturb you? What if you should see the Son of man ascend to where he was before? 'It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh has nothing to offer. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. 'But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the outset who did not believe and who was to betray him. He went on, 'This is why I told you that no one could come to me except by the gift of the Father.' After this, many of his disciples went away and accompanied him no more. Then Jesus said to the Twelve, 'What about you, do you want to go away too?' Simon Peter answered, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.'

“It is the spirit that gives life”. This was obviously incomprehensible to some disciples, and they grumbled against the words of the Lord. Murmuring is a state of mind that denotes an inner rebellion, a rejection that has been going on for some time - more in secret - and that can become stronger with every new word of the Lord.

The consequence was that many disciples who did not belong to the Twelve no longer followed the Lord. The mention of Judas in this connection may indicate that he too belonged to those who murmured against the words of the Lord in secret! The spiritual background of this murmuring was, according to the words of the Lord, that they did not believe and therefore their hearts were not really opened to the words of the Lord!

In order to understand the words and deeds of the Lord in the Spirit, one must first be led, even enlightened, by this Spirit. Otherwise there is always the danger of interpreting the words of the Lord in the earthly sense, and with that comes the difficulties. Then the mind tries to explain things only in the way it knows. Let us think of that teacher of Israel, Nicodemus, who wanted to understand the words of the Lord that one must be born anew to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, as if one had to return to the womb (*cf. Jn 3,4*).

The words of the Lord are spirit and life and therefore must be understood in spirit. The Holy Spirit helps us to do this by opening up the meaning of the words of

Jesus. So if we do not immediately understand one of the words of Jesus and are not able to explain it with our intellect either, then we should ask for the Spirit of the Lord, so that he gives us a light and we then learn to understand in this light. Besides, we always have the possibility to look in our own church tradition to see if there is an authentic explanation for this passage!

After this murmuring against him, the Lord then turns to his twelve to hear how they think, and he receives Peter's glorious answer: *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.”*

This is now the answer of a disciple enlightened by the Spirit of the Lord, and it is valid for all times, for this is the confession which all disciples of the Lord can repeat - even in our own time!

Where shall we go? This simple question shows that Peter has reached the goal. Where else is he going to look, if he has already found the Messiah, the Son of God? the Son of God? In Jesus lie all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge! (*cf. Col 2,3*) This is also true for us today! The world may change, the conditions of life too, but the truth does not change. It is the rock on which life stands, it is unchangeable, but we can recognize it even more deeply!

Peter did not gain this knowledge out from himself, it was given to him by the Father, as Jesus testified (*cf. Mt 16,17*). This shows that we cannot recognize Jesus in a natural way, who he really is and what all this means! Here the word applies: *“the flesh has nothing to offer”*. What this means in this context is: human cognitive faculty is not sufficient for this supernatural process!

Whoever has the grace to be able to repeat the word of Peter with all his heart, may he always remain conscious of this gift and deal with it with the utmost attention.

Let us be careful that faith and the exercise of faith do not become a kind of routine, and let us always seek anew the source from which the water of life flows. May the Lord open the ways of faith to men, so that they may make this confession of Peter's with us!