

7. May 2020

## “The worth of the Holy Tradition”

*Acts 13,13-25*

*Paul and his companions went by sea from Paphos to Perga in Pamphylia where John left them to go back to Jerusalem. The others carried on from Perga till they reached Antioch in Pisidia. Here they went to synagogue on the Sabbath and took their seats. After the passages from the Law and the Prophets had been read, the presidents of the synagogue sent them a message, 'Brothers, if you would like to address some words of encouragement to the congregation, please do so.' Paul stood up, raised his hand for silence and began to speak: 'Men of Israel, and fearers of God, listen! The God of our nation Israel chose our ancestors and made our people great when they were living in Egypt, a land not their own; then by divine power he led them out and for about forty years took care of them in the desert. When he had destroyed seven nations in Canaan, he put them in possession of their land for about four hundred and fifty years. After this he gave them judges, down to the prophet Samuel. Then they demanded a king, and God gave them Saul son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin. After forty years, he deposed him and raised up David to be king, whom he attested in these words, "I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, who will perform my entire will." To keep his promise, God has raised up for Israel one of David's descendants, Jesus, as Saviour, whose coming was heralded by John when he proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the whole people of Israel. Before John ended his course he said, "I am not the one you imagine me to be; there is someone coming after me whose sandal I am not fit to undo."*

Until St. Paul comes to the passage in his preaching that speaks of Jesus as the Savior, he wanders with his words through the salvific history of God with his people Israel. We could also say that Paul is keen to remain in the line of tradition, in order to make his listeners understand the coming of the Messiah.

This is not simply an evangelistic method of the apostle to the nations, but a logical consequence in the proclamation of the gospel to the people of the Old Covenant. God had long prepared his people for the coming of the Messiah and had already written a long history with them. Every Jew knew it, for it belongs to his identity. To hear this story again and again was comfort and certainty for the believing Jews. The Jew did not see himself as a human being in a quasi ahistorical space,

but God worked the "new" that appeared with the coming of the Messiah in the continuity of the history before. Thus it is said that from the lineage of David *"To keep his promise, God has raised up for Israel one of David's descendants, Jesus, as Saviour"*.

Now we have also a history of God with his Church, the people of the New Covenant. The same applies here: the recurring reassurance that the Lord leads His Church through the centuries and that it has not perished despite all the serious turbulence gives us the security of His presence. The Lord fulfils his promises. It is also important for us to be constantly reminded of God's gracious action and to be at home in our tradition.

Today one is easily inclined to think that some traditional things of faith are no longer so important. An unhealthy euphoria even thinks that only after the Second Vatican Council, and especially in this pontificate, the Church would take its proper shape. This becomes especially painful when a "newness" wants to express itself in the liturgy and takes possession of it. It can so far come that it is even deformed into a field of experimentation with all kinds of ideas, and under the idea of inculturation, for example, it threatens to lose its deeper identity. One will then hardly be able to recall that there is a venerable liturgy handed down over the centuries which has been celebrated by many saints and faithful and which has shaped it. The human soul, however, suffers - perhaps unnoticed - a loss of identity, and in its deepest layers it becomes as if homeless.

Paul does well to proclaim the coming of the Lord in the continuity of God's action, just as it is important for us to remember the sacred heritage. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we must also carefully discover the new things that He brings about! But this cannot happen in a contradictory way. What was once true in the past is still true today! This is also true if the world thinks differently. The church does not have to open itself to such "another spirit", but to resist it and to overcome this spirit in God.

That is why it is important for us Catholics to be anchored both in the sacred tradition of the Church and in Sacred Scripture. The Protestants left the tradition largely behind and wanted to rely only on the Holy Scriptures. They believed that they could authentically interpret it only with the help of the Holy Spirit. Today we know of countless groups in the Protestant field which are in some ways almost without history - if they do not connect with the tradition of the Church. They therefore have no or very little tradition. Accordingly, this dimension of a deeper

spiritual home is missing, and this makes it all the more easy to be receptive to the spirit of this world!

What Catholics should internalize is that the history of our Church arose from the vocation of the people of Israel. In this way we know that we are involved with great care and love in God's longtime plan of salvation, and the words of St. Paul then speak not only to the listeners of that time, but also to us who follow the one Lord he proclaimed!