

18. June 2020

“Song of praise for the two prophets”

Sir 48,1-14

Then the prophet Elijah arose like a fire, his word flaring like a torch. It was he who brought famine on them and decimated them in his zeal. By the word of the Lord he shut up the heavens, three times also he brought down fire. How glorious you were in your miracles, Elijah! Has anyone reason to boast as you have? -rousing a corpse from death, from Sheol, by the word of the Most High; dragging kings down to destruction, and high dignitaries from their beds; hearing a rebuke on Sinai and decrees of punishment on Horeb; anointing kings as avengers, and prophets to succeed you; taken up in the whirlwind of fire, in a chariot with fiery horses; designated in the prophecies of doom to allay God's wrath before the fury breaks, to turn the hearts of fathers towards their children, and to restore the tribes of Jacob. Blessed, those who will see you, and those who have fallen asleep in love; for we too shall certainly have life. Such was Elijah, who was enveloped in a whirlwind; and Elisha was filled with his spirit; throughout his life no ruler could shake him, and no one could subdue him. No task was too hard for him, and even in death his body prophesied. In his lifetime he performed wonders, and in death his works were marvellous.

Once again the song of praise of the two great prophets sounds out, whom God has given to the people of Israel!

Even if the message of the prophets often seems like a threat to those who hear it, who take other paths, their call to repentance, with the frequent threat of the consequences of evil actions, is in reality an act of God's goodness! What a responsibility it is when we see that a person attracts misfortune through wrong ways and we do not warn him!

The two prophets Elijah and Elisha have fulfilled their mission and proclaimed the truth! But today's text laments that despite the powerful action of the two prophets the people did not convert! What tragedy and what a deep look into the abyss of the human soul!

Again and again the question arises: Why do people continue on a wrong path, although they receive warnings and are not only instructed by the words of the

prophets, but certainly also receive corresponding indications in their personal surroundings or even in the deep layers of their soul?

Here we come up against an almost inexplicable abyss of human closedness.

The life in sin robs a person of his freedom and makes him a slave to sin! In this subjugation he follows the laws of sin and thereby gets deeper and deeper into the sphere of power of the "prince of this world"! The mind, which is already affected by original sin, is further darkened, the will is weakened even more, the supernatural light of God no longer penetrates the soul! Various forms of pride run through the soul and make it dull and resistant to the warning voices of the prophets! The same, even if not burdened with the full weight of guilt, applies to the error that makes spiritually blind!

It is virtually a hopeless condition that explains why man does not leave his wrong ways! Were it not for the patience and mercy of God, which never ceases to call the confused man, then, from our human perspective, the further proclamation to those who do not listen would be hopeless!

But when our possibilities are exhausted and we see no way to reach those people we are worried about, then prayer and trust in God is still a key that God can use! He still knows ways to reach the hearts of people we do not know, and it is His love, which does not rest, to find people and to embrace them in His fatherly love!

We have heard in the last days that even the apostate king Ahab committed acts of penance; we know from the biblical accounts the conversion of the city of Nineveh (*cf. Jon 3,4-10*) and we hear again and again in our days about amazing conversions! People recognize - perhaps late and sometimes even through great hardship - in the grace of God the right way and leave their confused and sinful ways! Even of Judah, so the reading says, a small remnant remained, and some did what is right! So there are - thank God - examples of conversion after all, and they are a real miracle! That is why we must never cease our efforts to participate in the conversion of other people, even if it seems hopeless!

Today, at a time when the antichristian spirit is manifesting itself more and more conspicuously in the world and has also penetrated the Church, we Christians need the courage of the two prophets in order to bear witness to the truth without fear, even if at first we cannot see any fruits and the power of darkness acts as if it can dominate everything!

The indifference that we may encounter must be met with perseverance and firmness of faith; the challenge of discouragement with the divine virtue of hope; enmity with supernatural love; fear of man with the spirit of strength!

Elijah and Elisha are given to us as encouragement to fulfil the mission entrusted to us in the grace of God and to remain faithful to God even in difficult times of persecution!