

16. August 2020

“God’s first love”

Rom 11,13-15,29-32

Let me say then to you gentiles that, as far as I am an apostle to the gentiles, I take pride in this work of service; and I want it to be the means of rousing to envy the people who are my own blood-relations and so of saving some of them. Since their rejection meant the reconciliation of the world, do you know what their re-acceptance will mean? Nothing less than life from the dead! There is no change of mind on God's part about the gifts he has made or of his choice. Just as you were in the past disobedient to God but now you have been shown mercy, through their disobedience; so in the same way they are disobedient now, so that through the mercy shown to you they too will receive mercy. God has imprisoned all human beings in their own disobedience only to show mercy to them all.

Again we encounter the apostle's concern for his people and his hope that Israel will find faith.

He wants to make his people jealous so that they realize that God has turned his love towards the Gentiles and to save at least some of them.

Certainly God has not forsaken his people, but the people have not received the graces (the hour of grace) that were prepared for them with the coming of Jesus (*cf. Lk 19,44*). Paul knows this very well, because the grace of Jesus struck him and from then on he burned for him.

What can Paul do for his people?

We heard a few days ago that he himself wanted to be separated from Christ in order to win them for him (*cf. Rom 9,3*). Paul is deeply imbued with the value of the vocation that went out to the people of the Jews, because “*there is no change of mind on God's part about the gifts he has made or of his choice*” because God's gifts of grace and vocation are irrevocable.

Israel always carries this choice of God with it, just as, for example, a priest has an indelible mark, even if he is not faithful to his vocation.

So what about the Jews, the first called? Which path will God continue to take them? Can we still expect a great wave of conversion? Will they still recognize him whom they have pierced (*cf. Zech 12,10*), and what will this mean for the Church and for humanity?

We know some ways from Jews to Jesus through their own testimony. Our friend Roy Schoeman has collected in one book sixteen testimonies of Jews who found the way to the Lord and to the Church. Often these ways are very unusual and touching. Again and again we hear from them that they come home when they find the Lord and the way to the Church and realize that their previous faith and the encounter with Jesus belong together.

Rabbi Israel Zolli, for example, a well-known rabbi who found his way into the church, was asked why he had given up the synagogue for the church:

"But I have not given it up. Christianity is the integration, the completion or crown of the synagogue. For the synagogue was a promise and Christianity is the fulfilment of that promise. The synagogue pointed to Christianity, Christianity presupposes the synagogue. So you can see, one cannot exist without the other. What I converted to was to living Christianity."

Testimonies such as these show us the inner coherence of the way that God and his people Israel will follow until the coming of the Messiah, and how this people will remain bound to God's promise, for it was to them that Jesus and the apostles first turned before turning to the Gentiles (*cf. Mt 15,24*). Also the refusal of the great part of the Jews to accept Jesus as their Messiah until today has integrated God into his plan of salvation and now first calls all peoples to faith.

Will this make the people of the Jews jealous? Sometimes I have thought about this when I was in Israel. What do the Jews think when they see so many people from all nations coming to worship the one who was rejected by them? They even protect the holy places of Christianity in some places! What hidden plan of God is there to be perceived?

God - so the apostle tells us - wants to have mercy on all. And with the revival of Israel a grace is still waiting for us, when God could embrace his firstborn completely in his arms.

Finally, let's listen to an excerpt from a homecoming Jew named Charlie Rich: He was sitting in an empty church and said to himself:

"If only I could believe with the same assurance as those who come to worship here believe. If only I could believe that the words in the gospels are really true, that Christ really existed, and that these words are exactly those that came from his own mouth were uttered from his own human lips and that they were literally true. Oh, if this only were a fact, if only I could believe that this were a fact, how glorious and wonderful that would be, how consoled happy and comforted I would be, to know that Christ was truly divine, that he was God's own Son who come down from another world to this earth to save us all. Could it be possible - I felt - that that which see me too wonderful to be true, actually was true, that it was not a deception, no fraud, no lie. Suddenly something flashed through my mind and I heard these words spoken in it. Of course it is true, Christ is God, is God come down to make Himself visible in the flesh. The words in the gospel are true, literally true!"

That was the grace for Charlie Rich that changed his life...

May many more follow!