

5. September 2020

“Nothing beyond what is written”

1 Cor 4,6b-15

I have applied all this to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that you can learn how the saying, 'Nothing beyond what is written' is true of us: no individual among you must become filled with his own importance and make comparisons, to another's detriment. Who made you so important? What have you got that was not given to you? And if it was given to you, why are you boasting as though it were your own? You already have everything -- you are rich already -- you have come into your kingdom, without any help from us! Well, I wish you were kings and we could be kings with you! For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on show right at the end, like men condemned to death: we have been exhibited as a spectacle to the whole universe, both angelic and human. Here we are, fools for Christ's sake, while you are the clever ones in Christ; we are weak, while you are strong; you are honoured, while we are disgraced. To this day, we go short of food and drink and clothes, we are beaten up and we have no homes; we earn our living by labouring with our own hands; when we are cursed, we answer with a blessing; when we are hounded, we endure it passively; when we are insulted, we give a courteous answer. We are treated even now as the dregs of the world, the very lowest scum. I am writing all this not to make you ashamed but simply to remind you, as my dear children; for even though you might have ten thousand slaves to look after you in Christ, you still have no more than one father, and it was I who fathered you in Christ Jesus, by the gospel.

Pompous people are obviously very unpleasant for the apostle. And indeed it is so! If you boast about knowledge or other transitory things and want to determine your self-worth, you build castles in the air. There are then many words that are spoken and they may be impressive, but in themselves their value is limited and they need correction to the essential. The essential is always the agreement with the Scriptures and not beyond them. There is no wisdom that is above the Holy Scriptures. It is our orientation.

It is helpful to take to heart such admonishing words as those of Thomas a Kempis - who accompanies us in today's contemplation - from the very well-known booklet "The Imitation of Christ", in order to direct our attention again and again to the essential! Here is a passage from the first book in the first chapter:

It is vanity then to seek after, and to trust in, the riches that shall perish. It is vanity, too, to covet honours, and to lift up ourselves on high. It is vanity to follow the desires of the flesh and be led by them, for this shall bring misery at the last. It is vanity to desire a long life, and to have little care for a good life. It is vanity to take thought only for the life which now is, and not to look forward to the things which shall be hereafter. It is vanity to love that which quickly passeth away, and not to hasten where eternal joy abideth. Be oftentimes mindful of the saying, The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing. Strive, therefore, to turn away thy heart from the love of the things that are seen, and to set it upon the things that are not seen. For they who follow after their own fleshly lusts, defile the conscience, and destroy the grace of God.

The whole of life must be placed under the rule of God if true wisdom from God and not the wisdom of the world is to guide us. And how pleasant it is to receive the words of the apostle: “*What have you got that was not given to you?*” Under these words, in fact, any pomposity could stop with knowledge or with other goods that are not received directly from God with thanksgiving. If this were the case, we would look to each other, rejoice in the good of others and know that God communicates Himself with the gifts - and everyone would praise God. A piece of heaven on earth!

Let us listen once again to Thomas a Kempis in the second chapter:

Rest from inordinate desire of knowledge, for therein is found much distraction and deceit. Those who have knowledge desire to appear learned, and to be called wise. Many things there are to know which profiteth little or nothing to the soul. And foolish out of measure is he who attendeth upon other things rather than those which serve to his soul's health. Many words satisfy not the soul, but a good life refresheth the mind, and a pure conscience giveth great confidence towards God. The greater and more complete thy knowledge, the more severely shalt thou be judged, unless thou hast lived holily. Therefore be not lifted up by any skill or knowledge that thou hast; but rather fear concerning the knowledge which is given to thee. If it seemeth to thee that thou knowest many things, and understandest them well, know also that there are many more things which thou knowest not. Be not high-minded, but rather confess thine ignorance.

Finally, let us look at the apostles, those who were chosen by God in a special way to proclaim Him and thus serve mankind. “*Here we are, fools for Christ's sake*” writes the apostle. The folly of the cross is more than all the wisdom of this world

(cf. 1 Cor 1,18). So there is no reason to get proud about anything as if it comes from us. All things come from the Lord and to Him be glory in all things.