

10. June 2020

“The decision”

1 Kgs 18,20-39

Ahab called all Israel together and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. Elijah stepped out in front of all the people. 'How long', he said, 'do you mean to hobble first on one leg then on the other? If Yahweh is God, follow him; if Baal, follow him.' But the people had nothing to say. Elijah then said to them, 'I, I alone, am left as a prophet of Yahweh, while the prophets of Baal are four hundred and fifty. Let two bulls be given us; let them choose one for themselves, dismember it but not set fire to it. I in my turn shall prepare the other bull, but not set fire to it. You must call on the name of your god, and I shall call on the name of Yahweh; the god who answers with fire, is God indeed.' The people all answered, 'Agreed!' Elijah then said to the prophets of Baal, 'Choose one bull and begin, for there are more of you. Call on the name of your god but light no fire.' They took the bull and prepared it, and from morning to midday they called on the name of Baal. 'O Baal, answer us!' they cried, but there was no voice, no answer, as they performed their hobbling dance round the altar which they had made. Midday came, and Elijah mocked them. 'Call louder,' he said, 'for he is a god: he is preoccupied or he is busy, or he has gone on a journey; perhaps he is asleep and needs to be woken up!' So they shouted louder and gashed themselves, as their custom was, with swords and spears until the blood flowed down them. Midday passed, and they ranted on until the time when the offering is presented; but there was no voice, no answer, no sign of attention. Then Elijah said to all the people, 'Come over to me,' and all the people came over to him. He repaired Yahweh's altar which had been torn down. Elijah took twelve stones, corresponding to the number of tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of Yahweh had come, 'Israel is to be your name,' and built an altar in the name of Yahweh. Round the altar he dug a trench of a size to hold two measures of seed. He then arranged the wood, dismembered the bull, and laid it on the wood. Then he said, 'Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood.' They did this. He said, 'Do it a second time;' they did it a second time. He said, 'Do it a third time;' they did it a third time. The water flowed round the altar until even the trench itself was full of water. At the time when the offering is presented, Elijah the prophet stepped forward. 'Yahweh, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel,' he said, 'let them know today that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, that I have done all these things at your command. Answer me, Yahweh, answer me, so that this people may know that you, Yahweh,

are God and are winning back their hearts.' Then Yahweh's fire fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this they fell on their faces. 'Yahweh is God,' they cried, 'Yahweh is God!'

A dramatic situation in which the prophet Elijah finds himself! He has the impression that he is the only one who still serves the true God. Although Elijah was not the only one, there were still more who did not bend their knees before Baal. But there were few. Most fell away from faith, compromised or even followed false gods. The Prophets spoke as the kings wished. What chaos! It was what you might call apostasy, apostasy from the true faith.

In this situation, the prophet is sent, who has been faithful to the Lord in all persecutions and he exposes the Baal servants for what they really are: they are false prophets. They do not serve the true God, they do not speak in His name, they are deceived by the demons.

The sign that accompanies this dramatic situation of confrontation with the priests of Baal has a clear objective. The Israelites must see before their eyes that they are following false gods - the Scriptures call these false gods **NOTHING**S. There can be no escape for them. The Lord confronts them with the truth, and now comes the hour of decision. Will they follow the true God or not?

In this case it was so that the people decided for the true God.

"When all the people saw this they fell on their faces. 'Yahweh is God,' they cried, 'Yahweh is God!'"

When we hear this text with this clear intervention of God, then the question can easily arise whether the Lord could not also intervene so clearly today. Do we not need again an Elijah ministry through which God shows men who the true God is and who the idols are?

In the year 2018 I have interpreted this text as well. At that time I wrote at the end:

"If we offer the right sacrifice of discipleship to the Lord, our prayers will be heard and the fire will come down, the Holy Spirit will guide us! But if we compromise with the world, if we let the antichristian spirit into our church and into our hearts, then our prayers will not be answered! It is high time for the Church to carry out

its mission in an uncompromising way, free from confusion! The confused world urgently needs it! Therefore we may pray that God will intervene and - he will do it!"

Today, two years later, I see that the Lord is calling people clearly to conversion by allowing the pandemic, which - despite all the easing of the situation at some regions - is not yet over. It should be proclaimed loudly from all church roofs: "Change your life and turn back to God! God does not want you to be lost. He does not want you to run after false gods. He does not want you to establish a culture of death in disregard of His commandments on life."

Instead, God wants people to recognize, worship and love Him as Father. Only then will true peace come and the heart of man be filled!

But the proclamation has become very weak. A call to repentance can hardly be heard. Even in the crisis of the pandemic, there were so few signs from shepherds. Some hurry to assure that God does not punish, that these pandemics have nothing to do with Him. At the most they say that God is with us in his solidarity!

Surely God does the latter because he is our good Father!

But if God allows such a worldwide epidemic, then he wants to rebuke the world and the Church, regardless of how the pandemic came into being. People must return to his commandments and leave the terrible ways of death. The commandments of God are not offers to be chosen or not to be chosen. They are the choice between a true life in the grace of God or a life of spiritual death.

The Church must urgently recall her mission to proclaim the Gospel with authority. This is the essential thing.

It also includes the discernment of spirits.

This teaches us that there is no place in the Catholic Church for idols and contents alien to the faith. *"They have no knowledge, those who parade their wooden idols and pray to a god that cannot save."* (Isa 45,20) Neither pachama worship nor other deviations from the faith can please God, just as when the unique mission of the Saviour is mentioned in the same breath as other religions. It is still true that only in the objective state of grace is it possible to receive Holy Communion, etc.

Should God overlook, approve and not rebuke all these transgressions? He is a Father and His love therefore consists also in rebukes, especially when one no longer listens properly.

I think the prophet Elijah would clearly say today that the world and the church must repent. The outbreak of the pandemic is a clear message! If the physical life is threatened here, then the apostasy is a deadly virus that threatens the spiritual life. Therefore, the answer can only be to turn to God with the whole heart! Perhaps then he will shorten the time of tribulation!

What will we decide on?