

4. October 2020

“Sweet grapes should grow in the vineyard”

Isa 5:1-7

Let me sing my beloved the song of my friend for his vineyard. My beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it, cleared it of stones, and planted it with red grapes. In the middle he built a tower, he hewed a press there too. He expected it to yield fine grapes: wild grapes were all it yielded. And now, citizens of Jerusalem and people of Judah, I ask you to judge between me and my vineyard. What more could I have done for my vineyard that I have not done? Why, when I expected it to yield fine grapes, has it yielded wild ones? Very well, I shall tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I shall take away its hedge, for it to be grazed on, and knock down its wall, for it to be trampled on. I shall let it go to waste, unpruned, undug, overgrown by brambles and thorn-bushes, and I shall command the clouds to rain no rain on it. Now, the vineyard of Yahweh Sabaoth is the House of Israel, and the people of Judah the plant he cherished. He expected fair judgement, but found injustice, uprightness, but found cries of distress.

What moving words of the Lord! How close he is to his people already in the times of the Old Testament! How much he loved his people and strove for them; how tenderly he surrounded them, always anxious to bear witness to his love! Sweet grapes were to be brought by the vineyard, fruits of love and justice, God's glory was to be reflected in the life of man - but only sour grapes were to be harvested, those that were not ripe and permeated by the sun, which gives them sweetness! So the fruits of the vines he planted for his pleasure were inedible!

Very well we understand that the Lord means his people and he says it! We also hear the consequences! God takes away the protection from his people! Instead of them becoming a flourishing people, glorifying the Lord, they become a wasteland!

How often does this happen to peoples and individuals throughout history? How often have we seen in the Church that there have been times of decline, then again of upturn; a time of conversion, then again the danger of decline, when the grace given by the Lord has not been maintained, when the world has become more and more important for them, when the commandments of God have been neglected!

And how is it today? Do we hold fast to the commandments of God, or have they become indifferent to us in the current of time?

Do they still apply without restriction and require us to obey them, or is the church increasingly permeated by an antichristian spirit that has already found his home in the world! A spirit of relativism, which would then like to present the commandments of God as time-bound directives or ideals, which would have to be corrected by human reality.

Without overlooking the positive signs of conversions and some spiritual awakenings and attempts at renewal, one must ask oneself how God sees his great vineyard, which he has planted in the world through his Church and which is the church. Are there good fruits of faith, hope and love growing? Does the Church continue to strive primarily and with all her strength for her first task, the evangelisation of this world? Or is its focus shifting more to the secular sphere, as the Italian priest Don Nicola Bux criticises:

“According to the recent speech of the President of the Italian Bishops’ Conference, the number of those who reproach the bishops for speaking like politicians and for dealing with questions of the economy, immigration, work, ecology, etc. is increasing. In short, they are concerned with matters that concern politics, although they should be concerned with the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments, because their vocation is to give glory to God and to save people’s souls. The Lord did not solve the problems of poverty, hunger or wars, but preached conversion to God as a condition for being able to solve the other problems as well, though never definitively. Thus he said: “For the poor you have always with you”.

Is there not a danger in today’s church of putting eternal things behind temporal ones, whereby it loses its inner strength, as well as through sins and errors that want to infect and destroy the body of the church?

Let us listen again to Don Nicola Bux:

“It was Cardinal Ratzinger who, in 1985, still lamented as Cardinal: the understanding of the Church herself is in crisis. She is considered to be an organisation which has to deal with the body and not with souls. But Jesus Christ came into the world to save souls from sin and lead them back to God the Father. He did not come to solve the economic and social problems of the Roman occupation in Palestine. In addition, an understanding of the Church has spread

which reaches "from Che Guevara to Mother Teresa", as Jovanotti sings, where everyone, without necessarily converting to Jesus Christ and independent of God's commandments, continues to live as he pleases. All this leads to a blurring of the Catholic identity. This is also because a non-Catholic way of thinking has penetrated the church."

Of course, it is always necessary to turn to the poor in Christian love and also to make a positive contribution to solving the problems in the world. But this is integrated into the main mission of proclaiming the Gospel, and the scales must not shift too much away if the church does not want to lose her spiritual dimension!

I think God wants us to be busy living in his grace and giving witness to the redemption through Christ. The fruits of the Spirit are to grow, and the great gift of belonging to the Catholic Church must be both proclaimed and defended. The Church is renewed by those who, in the Spirit of God, give witness to the world, Is the Lord satisfied with the state of His Church? Are there enough sweet grapes growing, are we a joy to the Lord, or are there too many sour berries?

Only God can answer that. But we can endeavour to bring forth those fruits that are sure to please the Lord: sincere prayer and authentic witness, together with the works of spiritual and bodily mercy!