

OCTOBER 23, 2019 Wednesday of the 29th Week of Ordinary Time

Optional Memorial of St. John of Capistrano

Rom 6:12-18

Ps 124:1b-8

Lk 12:39-48

Throughout his Letter to the Romans, Paul maintains that it is useless to rely on the Law of Moses, since it does not free humanity, but rather enslaves and condemns humanity. In fact, before the coming of the Law of Moses, sin and death were already in the world, because of Adam. But since the Law had not yet been revealed and there were still no precepts, it was not possible to impute to sinners their failings, in their formal aspect of transgressions, nor could the sanctions provided for by the Law be applied to them. However, according to the natural law written on the hearts of all, personal responsibility for sin remained the same for everyone. Therefore, after receiving the Law, the Jews only saw their responsibility increase and, with it, their faults.

The Jewish expectation was that in the last days, when the Messiah arrived, he would bring a new law or a reinterpretation of the Law. This third period, which Paul calls “the fullness of time,” was inaugurated by the birth and the Paschal Mystery of Christ, the Anointed One of God. Paul teaches that with his coming, then, we were freed from the Law, because the grace of the Lord Jesus began to reign.

Paul leaves aside the account of Noah and what it could mean with regard to the covenant, sin, and the law, and he passes directly from Adam to Moses. He intends to face the problem exclusively in terms of the Mosaic Law, because it was with this argument that some of the Jews, or Jewish-Christians, the false brothers, were disturbing the Christian communities he had founded, trying to impose circumcision as something necessary for one to be redeemed and saved by God.

Now, when Paul states that the Law was involuntarily the cause of the proliferation of sin and that, even if indirectly, this caused the overflow of God’s grace overpowered by sinful humanity, he opens himself to many questions and criticisms. Anticipating the objections that he would have received, Paul affirms that the Christian, once joined to the Paschal Mystery of Christ, who died and rose again, wants nothing more to do with sin and its terrible consequences. The

fact that the justification of Christ brings redemption, life, and freedom to all does not mean that the sinner can continue to sin in the same way as before or even more, abusing his freedom in Christ or provoking God to manifest even more his grace. The authentic Christian considers himself dead to sin and lives exclusively for God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, being no longer subject to the Law, but under the protection of grace, the Christian is exhorted to offer his body and all his being to practice only good, mutual love, and justice; he is called to consecrate himself entirely to the service of God for the benefit of others. This is the great evangelizing mission of the Church. Indeed, redemption makes us born again through a bond of filial adoption and implies the beginning of a new life in the light of the Holy Spirit.

This teaching of Paul in relation to the Law is perfectly in tune with that of Jesus. The administrator who has made a mistake, disobeying an explicit order of his master, will be punished more severely than the servant who committed the same mistake, but without being aware of the law in force. This is very simply the teaching that the Apostle explains in his letter. The Law has increased the responsibility and, therefore, the guilt for the transgression. All those who have received authority and means of a religious, social, political, economic, juridical, or military nature will receive a serious punishment if they use their power to abuse, exploit, or oppress the people of God or destroy their home, God's creation.

Peter's question, "Lord, is this parable meant for us or for everyone?" (Lk 12:41), opens the horizon to the community dimension of vigilance. The parable of Jesus is addressed to all the members of the ecclesial community, each of whom is invited to carry out her task with fidelity, daily, without postponing anything until tomorrow. Those who are called to watch, the holders of leadership roles within the community, have a greater responsibility. The great challenge of serving Jesus Christ and his Gospel, rather than using it, concerns primarily the leaders of communities. Those sitting at the head of the table must make sure that others have had their share before serving themselves. Jesus praises the honest and wise administrator, the one who is not ensnared by the fascination of power and who manages resources with proper detachment. "Blessed is that servant whom his master on arrival finds doing so. Truly, I say to you, he will put him in charge of all his property" (Lk 12:43-44). The management of the earth's goods in fairness, justice, and transparency are issues of great relevance in the

contemporary world, a world scourged by predatory greed on a global scale and in which human beings are often worth less than products and things. “But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, to eat and drink and get drunk, then that servant’s master will come on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour and will punish him severely and assign him a place with the unfaithful” (Lk 12:45-46).

It is important to pay attention in these words to the attitude of the unfaithful servant, who in his heart is convinced that the Lord’s arrival is far away, and to the final reference to “the unfaithful.” In the Psalms, foolishness and atheism appear as a pair: “The fool says in his heart, / ‘There is no God’” (Ps 14:1; see also Ps 53:2). Those who decide to exclude God from their hearts will not find it easy to welcome their neighbours and to recognize the divine plan for them. The Gospel declares that the Lord will come again as a judge and all people will have to account for their own lives. It is not a threat. It is not part of God’s pedagogy to force himself on us with the spectre of punishment. The Christian community is the home of the Father where life and love are celebrated. It is the choices of each us of that will result in reward or exclusion.

In the vision of St. Paul and of the Gospel, the seriously considered evil, in the light of the certainty of Christ’s victory over death, represents a serious provocation for the Christian mission. The struggle begun by Christ in the heart of the missionary disciple, thanks to the action of the Spirit in baptism, represents a central dimension of Christian proclamation and witness. The mission of the Church, precisely because it is moved by the certainty of victory and merciful love, does not fear the struggle against evil in all its forms. To believers, to whom much has been given, much is required – offering, proclaiming, and sharing thanks to the explicit and confident announcement that salvation from evil and death comes only from Jesus Christ.