

OCTOBER 4, 2019 Friday of the 26th Week of Ordinary Time

Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi

Bar 1:15-22

Ps 79:1-5,8,9

Lk 10:13-16

For a deeper understanding of the mission to which all Christians are called, it is useful to start from the words of Jesus in Lk 10:13-16, and then turn to the prayer of Bar 1:15-22, thus shedding light on the history of Israel of God, which is made up of those who belong to historical Israel and also those who join the Israel of God through faith in Christ and baptism.

The discourse with which Jesus sends off his disciples on mission is followed by a stern warning to the villages of Chorazin and Capernaum in Galilee (see Lk 10:13-15). These Palestinian villages had seen the miracles with which Jesus had accompanied his proclamation of the kingdom of God (see Mt 11:21). In Capernaum Jesus had taken the first steps in announcing his message (see Lk 4:23) and shown the power of the kingdom of God (see Lk 4:31-41), and it was there that he received the faith of the centurion of the Roman army (see Lk 7:1-10). From Bethsaida came Philip, one of the Twelve (see Jn 1:44, 12:21). The severe warning of Jesus to the Palestinian villages where he had worked miracles and where he had been met in response with a surprising lack of faith, was not a definitive, irreversible condemnation. At the end of his discourse to the disciples sent on mission, Jesus reaffirms the importance of the mission of evangelization: to evangelize and to be evangelized involves responsibilities that are inescapable before divine judgment, which is not anticipated in a precipitous condemnation without appeals, but points to the ultimate reference point at the end of time (see Lk 10:14-15). Until then, the door to repentance and conversion is always open, through the mysterious paths of divine providence and mercy. Jesus identifies himself with those whom he sends and warns that rejecting them means rejecting God himself, whatever the reason or religious faith that may lead to it (see Lk 10:16).

The trauma of biblical Israel following the Babylonian exile is the context for understanding the long prayer attributed to Baruch (see Bar 1:15, 3:8) in the

book bearing his name. Baruch's prayer starts from the observation that everything the prophet Jeremiah had announced to the exiles of the first Babylonian exile (see Jer 29:4-23) had been realized, and that this was the time to pray that the Babylonian rulers would live long lives, so that the Israelites might not to be subjected to further severe retaliation (see Bar 1:11-12), as Jeremiah himself had recommended at the time (see Jer 29:5-7). Fundamental here is to be aware of the history of sin that involved all generations of biblical Israel, since its liberation from Egypt (see Bar 1:15-22). Its obstinance in not wanting to listen to the voice of the Lord led to the disaster of Israel's exile and to God's silence, or its inability to hear God's voice. At the heart of the reconsideration are not the history and the condition of Israel, but the Lord. And this is true repentance, the true journey of conversion.

What happened in history should not be seen as the result of the Lord's absence; though it may also be due to the arrogance, cruelty, and ruthlessness of international politics, it must be understood fundamentally as an expression of his "justice" (Bar 1:15) and his desire to call Israel back to the centre of its vocation. The discovery of this righteousness of God is a gift of the Lord himself, because it cannot be confused with the sense of guilt or with the resignation to which one abandons oneself in order to come to terms with life; it is also the opposite of rebellion and of definitive desertion of the Lord. The prayer starts from the present and reaches to the origins of biblical Israel (see Bar 1:15-16); the catastrophe and the trauma of exile involve its entire history, explained above all in the light of sin against the Lord and against his word (see Bar 1: 17-18). To "sin in the Lord's sight" is to fail in one's relationship with him. It is a structural tragedy, which happens concretely, consciously, but also carelessly, in "disobeying" the Lord daily, in "not heeding his voice," which is heard also in his "precepts." Biblical Israel cannot invent for itself a way by which to pretend to have a relationship with God. The words of Baruch suggest that the disaster experienced in the history of sin and exile has compromised, in the eyes of the pagans, even the credibility of the kings, rulers, and prophets of the Israelites (see Bar 1:16). This history of sin and punishment is not the last word; the teaching of Moses had foreseen that, by welcoming the call to conversion, biblical Israel would be gathered by the Lord (see Dt 30:1-4).

The story of biblical Israel becoming again the Israel of God is also the story of the Church that, through faith in Christ, becomes part of the Israel of God. Just as the harsh admonition of Jesus to the Galilean cities is not a definitive sentence of abandonment, so also the exile of biblical Israel does not mark the conclusion of the story. The journey of conversion, which should be characterized by the recognition of personal and structural sin, is certainly always a gift from the Lord, but risks being dissipated in a hasty self-assertion, or in a merely formal and fundamentalist recovery of gestures, rites, formulas, and phrases that will never have the strength of an evangelizing mission.