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OCTOBER 1, 2019

Tuesday of the 26th Week of Ordinary Time

*Memorial of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus*

Zec 8:20-23

Ps 87:1b-7

Lk 9:51-56

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The prophecy of Zechariah 8:20-23 nourishes the hope of the people of God, who await its fulfillment in the universal pilgrimage of peoples to Jerusalem at the end of time (see Zec 8:22). The book of Zechariah, located in the penultimate place among the Twelve Prophets, is attributed to one of the last active prophets, alongside Haggai, after the Babylonian exile during the time of the restoration of the religious and civil Jewish community in the “land of the fathers,” as the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem was completed.

The prophetic promise comes in the third part of the book (see Zec 8:12-14), but it is already anticipated in the first part, in Zec 2:10-11. It falls within a prophetic tradition that awaits the peaceful pilgrimage of all nations to Jerusalem, as we see in Is 2:1-4, a text that is almost completely identical to Mi 4:1-4. It is above all the tradition of the Isaian school to develop the theme of this hope, toward which Judaism definitively looks, together with the coming of the Messiah, at the end of time (see Is 49:22-23).

Regarding the final conversion of all the nations to the Lord, the prophetic tradition is unanimous in the conviction that this will not come as a result of missionary activity carried out by Israel. Such conversion will be a response to the action of the Lord himself in the hearts of all peoples at the end of time.

The Gospel reading on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem sheds new light on the prophets' words on the conversion of all peoples to the Lord using the image of the great pilgrimage to Jerusalem at the end of time. Luke's reference to "the days for his being taken up" (Lk 9:51) concerns not only Jesus' ascension into heaven (see Lk 24:50-51; Acts 7:46), but also the mystery of his passion and death in Jerusalem. Jesus had already said this to his disciples, when he explained to Peter the meaning of Peter's own profession of faith in him as Messiah. "The Son of Man," he said, "must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised" (Lk 9:22). He repeated this to the disciples after his transfiguration (see Lk 9:44) and a third time to the Twelve, before his final ascent from Jericho to Jerusalem (see Lk 18:31-33). On each of these occasions, he told the disciples that they could not understand the meaning of his words.

God's plan for universal salvation – for Israel as well as for all the nations – passes through Jerusalem as the place where Jesus was "raised up" (Jn 12:32). It is the profound, irresistible, and divine attraction of the mystery of the cross lived, witnessed to, and transfigured by Jesus to arouse, promote, and accompany the movement of the conversion of the nations to Jerusalem, the place chosen by the Lord for the mystery of salvation. Jesus involved in his mission first the Twelve and then the Church, which he had established by specific call. The disciples cannot but follow Jesus, though they had a hard time understanding, judging by their own words and deeds: it is a journey of conversion, which begins with a call and continues throughout one's life.

Jesus' passage through Samaria during his journey to Jerusalem is an episode that is emblematic of the conversion that the disciples of Jesus must continually undergo if they are to accompany him and support him in his mission of evangelization and salvation. When he sends messengers ahead to prepare for his arrival in a Samaritan village (see Lk 9:52), Jesus is perfectly aware of the hostility that divides Jews and Samaritans (see Jn 4:20), but this does not dissuade him; even the disciples, moreover, must

learn to manage this deep hostility differently. The reaction of James and John – whom Jesus, with a hint of irony, had nicknamed “sons of thunder” (Mk 3:17) – to the negative response of the Samaritans of the village (see Lk 9:53) is angry and violent (see Lk 9:54). The two brothers are motivated by an imprudent conviction of being bearers, in some way, of a superior religious truth. Some early Gospel manuscripts, preserved in Greek, Syriac, and Latin, add a little explanatory note at the end of the question posed by the two disciples: “Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them, as Elijah did?” (see 2 Kgs 1:10-12, Sir 48:3). To Jesus, it was an improper request and an inappropriate appeal to the authoritative-ness of the Holy Scriptures: “Jesus turned and rebuked them” (Lk 9:55). The same ancient variant of this passage that mentions Elijah also deepens Jesus’ reproach, for he tells them, “You do not know of what Spirit you are, for the Son of Man has not come to destroy but to save” (Lk 9:55-56). This Christian catechesis reminds us of the nature of Jesus’ mission, which is not about inflicting divine vengeance; the reference to the Spirit that is moving James and John is significant in the theology of the school of Luke, which includes the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. In the Gospel story, Jesus simply moves on to a different village (see Lk 9:56). It is a pastoral strategy (see Lk 10:10-11) that will also guide Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey to Antioch of Pisidia (see Acts 13:46). Jesus says nothing about the rejection of the Samaritans of that village; rather, one of the first missions of the Church of Jerusalem will be to the Samaritans. The deacon Philip, moved by the Holy Spirit, will begin the work (see Acts 8:5), and Peter and John will complete it (see Acts 8:14-17).

The Church’s mission is to conform itself to the person and the mystery of Christ. It is a conversion that engages one’s whole life, leaving to the Lord the task of opening the doors of mission and moving people’s hearts. The times and ways of the conversion of the nations are the Lord’s work; the task of the Church is to convert itself to the Spirit and to the person of the Lord Jesus.