

## Super flúmina Babylónis

« The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack.  
In green pastures he makes me lie down; to still waters he leads me.  
[...]  
your rod and your staff comfort me. »

What happened to the rod and the staff of the Good Shepherd, who « *makes us lie down in green pastures; leads us to still waters* » and then « *sets a table before us, in front of our enemies* »? He gives us sheep pasture that is equivalent to « milk », a delicate food for those who don't know Him yet; but then He gives us also « solid food » of the table prepared for those who are adults in Faith (every day we grow more 'adult', of course). Wisdom, too, mixes water to wine in different doses according to the need, increasing the dose of water for *worldly* teaching and that of wine for those who *contemplate His glory*.

The Good Shepherd's peculiar trait in herding is exactly his ability to use

- sometimes the *rod*: straightness, truth, authority, teachings, govern, the instructing words and the reproaching ones;
- sometimes the *staff*, the cane used both to defend himself and the herd from the assaults of bandits and wolves and to hold up on impassable paths the lambs who are not yet steady: the backing and the help in distress, then; the support not to stumble and fall.

(For example, we feel the lack of a firm and clear voice speaking about *gender ideology* and its implications: it's the most serious anthropological wound on the global scene, but the Vicar of Christ never expresses himself about that or about the many errors in the bioethical sphere.)

The relinquishment of govern implies the *breviatio manus Domini* (Is 59:1, « no, the hand of the Lord is not too short to save »), as Romano Amerio reminded. That's what happens when doctrinal errors are not removed, when the erroneous theses are not rejected and proved to be unconvincing.

«... man needs knowledge, he needs truth, because without it he cannot stand, he cannot advance. Faith without truth doesn't save, doesn't straighten our steps. It remains a nice fairy tale, the projection of our desire to be happy, something that satisfies us only insofar as we are willing to deceive ourselves. Or it is reduced to a pleasant feeling that consoles and warms us but is liable to our moodiness, to the change of times and is unable to support a constant walk through the life path. » (*Lumen Fidei*, 24)

Tenderness without justice and firm authority doesn't breed anybody. It is useful at a first moment, when people need to be accepted and taken care of; then, however, it is necessary to educate and to 'appoint', as the Lord did: he summoned and **appointed** Twelve of them (*Mark* 3:13-19), the first ones in His army of priests till the end of times. Firmness, an attribute of those who exert authority, is not authoritarianism: it is authoritativeness. Jesus Christ didn't debate: He taught with authority. Without the *rod* – the authority and strength of Truth which is inseparable from Love –, who is going to defend us from the assaults of falsehood, from the lure of ideologies, from false messianisms? Then we will also need the *staff*, that is, Love which raises us up again every time we fall, experiencing that evil has not the last word: on the contrary, our Lord saves and transforms us.

The Holy Father Benedict XVI said about that:

« Your rod and your staff comfort me: » the shepherd needs the rod as protection against savage beasts ready to pounce on the flock; against robbers looking for prey. Along with the rod there is the staff which gives support and helps to make difficult crossings. Both of these are likewise part of the Church's ministry, of the priest's ministry. The Church too must use the shepherd's rod, the rod with which he protects the faith against those who falsify it, against currents which lead the flock astray. The use of the rod can actually be a service of love. Today we can see that it has nothing to do with love when conduct unworthy of the priestly life is tolerated. Nor does it have to do with love if heresy is allowed to spread and the faith twisted and chipped away, as if it were something that we ourselves had invented. As if it were no longer God's gift, the precious pearl which we cannot let be taken from us. Even so, the rod must always become once again the shepherd's staff – a staff which helps men and women to tread difficult paths and to follow the Lord. » (Benedict XVI, Homily of Conclusion of the Year for Priests).

The Church, that continues through the time and space the work of the Good Shepherd, must herself have the power and the ability to use the rod and the staff. That's exactly why the Pope holds the *ferula pontificalis* instead of the pastoral staff of the bishops: because he's also the *shepherd of shepherds*.

Let's ask the Lord the grace to see how He uses – through the Church and her Supreme Pontiff – the rod and the staff.