

“Blessed are those who does not take offense at me” – said Jesus to his disciples a long time ago, and says to us today: “Blessed you are if you do not take offense at me”.

Dear Brothers and sisters in Christ,

What does this expression “taking offence at somebody” mean? What is it like being offended at something or at somebody? I would say in other words: being stopped by reality, and being shocked by it for a short time. I walk along on my way as usual, but suddenly I trip over a stone or a snag. I have to stop to understand what has happened to me, because I have not realised these obstacles before.

I turn around to see and look for the cause of my tripping over. I percept a new segment of my way, and as for the next step I lift my leg and take a bigger and more careful step to go on. In other words I have to change my point of view to step on, and go ahead.

How did Jesus scandalise people around him? Why were they offended at his deeds or behaviour? Actually he confronted them with sudden events, ideas, thoughts, that they had never seen before. He tried to point to the real nature of God, in other words he tried to get his audience to convert to the Lord... If you pass Jesus you cannot go on further without being touched by this new aspect of God’s reality...

John the Baptist, the famous prophet of God was in prison, just because he declared God’s message, he declared the truth. Even John took offence at Jesus. Up to that point he probably had believed that Jesus was to chase out the Romans of Israel. And he was to punish his contemporaries, at least all of the sinners – that was John’s belief about the Messiah. It seemed to be that nothing really had changed although Jesus had begun his mission months before. John was in prison, suffering a lot, Herod was sitting in his palace enjoying his life and goods. Jesus: without any effective action. Is he the real Messiah?

So taking offence at somebody means that I have an idea of somebody or something that is not compatible with God’s reality. When I realise my mistake suddenly, I take offence at reality first. Not at myself. I got astonished and begin to fear of this new reality. It is something unknown. Can I really accept it?

I have several ways in front of me to decide on: or I simply go ahead avoiding the unknown path, relying of my well known image of reality, and denying the new aspects.

But I may choose another point of view, and try to see reality in an other way. We need to change our mind, and start to see thing in a new way. This is what we call in Greek *Metanoia*. *Metanoia* means suddenly seeing behind a curtain, that hides reality from our mind and update our thinking to God's perspective.

In a hard situation – sometimes we also have a certain deep question in a fixed position, a fixed hope for salvation. Sometimes we pray eagerly for good things but nothing changes. We are in a similar situation, like John: thinking where is God? Does he listen to us? Has he enough force to change the world – our world in this situation?

We see wars, violence, cruelty – even though we pray God, and ask Him for peace, it still happens. In the Middle East, in Africa, wherever... in this case when we are so blocked in our way of our thinking we are in a similar situation like John in the deep of the prison.

He sent a message to Jesus – seeing nothing happening around him: are you really our Saviour? Why do you not give us more evidence about these changing once and for all?

Jesus in his answer gives a new perspective of God's reality: look around and think of the prophecies given in the Scriptures: God's promise is being fulfilled, He is faithful to his people, "the wounded are healed, crippled people can walk, the blind can see, dead people are risen" just as the prophets said before. Blessed are those who do not take offence at Him, blessed are those who understand the signs and starts to percept what really is going on. Think of the signs and rely on God's perspective of these events. He heals you too, and lifts you up, if you accept Him. Rely on his mercy, rely on his gentleness. His power becomes visible in these attitudes. Blessed are those who believe in the promises of the Lord: blessed are those poor in spirit, blessed are those who cry, who are chased, if they welcome the Good News. They got comforted and strengthened by Jesus himself. This is the reality of the Gospels: God has come to us but not to destroy our reality, but to offer us a new perspective. This is what we celebrate at Christmas.

Let it be! Amen.

Szeged, 10th of December 2016.

Fr. Attila Thorday
(thorday@gmail.com)