

Friday 1 May 2020

Num.11, 23: *"Is the LORD'S arm too short?"*

Mt.6, 28-29.31: *"See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?"*

The words Num.11, 23 are spoken to Moses in answer to his doubt that God could not deliver what he said he would. Moses doubts that what God has said will come true: "How can it be when even the potential for it just isn't there?!" Moses' doubt is understandable, even to some extent justified. It is born of faith which, though weak, is not God-denying or contemptuous of him; born of a faith which seeks to comprehend and understand God's ways rather than judge them; born of a faith which admits it can't see rather than a faith that does not want to see. As such it is doubt of the kind God uses to strengthen faith: *"Is the LORD's arm too short? Now you will see whether or not what I say will come true for you."*

The same cannot be said of the doubt arising among the people with regard to the same situation (worry about food!). It is a doubt which does not lead to seeking God but to grumbling against him! It is also born of faith, but of a faith which holds God in contempt and mistrusts his care which it wants to manipulate for its own end.

In the event God helped his people, showing them that his arm is indeed not too short, but not without judgment on the faith that was not faith. (vv. 31-34)

In Mt.6, Jesus teaches his disciples about these matters, and an interesting, if not crucial, parallel with Num.11 appears in what Jesus says in the verse following v.31: *"For the pagans run after all these things"*. That is, it is the way of a *pagan* to worry about food, drink, clothes and the like. As in Num.11 the people's worrying led to their grumbling against God because it was born of a faith which, it turned out, was *not* in God, so Jesus here makes clear also the connection between worrying about such things (leading so easily to grumbling!) and idol-worship, i.e. the misplacing of faith.

It is because of this connection that Jesus says: *"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness"*, that is: Put your faith carefully where it belongs – in the living Lord *"whose arms are not too short"*.