

7. January 2020

“Discernment of the spirits”

Part 1

*1 Jn 3,22-4,6*

*Whatever we ask we shall receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what is acceptable to him. His commandment is this, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and that we should love one another as he commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments remains in God, and God in him. And this is the proof that he remains in us: the Spirit that he has given us. My dear friends, not every spirit is to be trusted, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets are at large in the world. This is the proof of the spirit of God: any spirit which acknowledges Jesus Christ, come in human nature, is from God, and no spirit which fails to acknowledge Jesus is from God; it is the spirit of Antichrist, whose coming you have heard of; he is already at large in the world. Children, you are from God and have overcome them, because he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world, and therefore the world inspires what they say, and listens to them. We are from God; whoever recognises God listens to us; anyone who is not from God refuses to listen to us. This is how we can distinguish the spirit of truth from the spirit of falsehood.*

For the meditation of 7 and 8 January 2020, I take the reading of 7 January and divide it up for two days. This version is a revised version of my reflections from the previous year.

Today's reading is about the "discernment of spirits" which precedes a "separation of spirits", to which I will return tomorrow in the second reflection.

In the letters of John, we are in good hands with the theme of the discernment of the spirits, because they do not allow for twilight.

Clarity belongs to the discernment of the spirits, so that the right conclusions can be drawn.

The basic statement at the beginning of the text already points to an unambiguous way, which is or should be self-evident to us Christians: Only those who keep the

commandments of God can assume that the Spirit of God can unfold its effect in him and that God takes up residence in him. As long as man does not keep the commandments of God and does not make every effort to comply with them, he remains in the dark according to a real knowledge of God; the Spirit of the Lord cannot penetrate him. But the work of the Spirit is to lead man to conversion.

Perhaps we easily forget this when we are accustomed to an environment in which the commandments of God have less and less binding force on people! A pure knowledge of what the commandments of God are, or merely a knowledge of biblical content, is not a real recognition. Even the devil knows the commandments of God! True recognition means to love the commandments of God and to want to obey them!

*"He who has my commandments and keeps them is he who loves me" (Jn 14,21)*  
the Lord tells us!

According to the above passage, it is the Spirit that we have to recognize in us, who invites us to follow the commandments of God ever more precisely and to put them into practice ever better. It is not enough for this Spirit if we follow them only unwillingly! He wants to teach us to understand the goodness of the commandments; that we should believe in Jesus and love one another as it is according to His commandment, and that this is the true joy.

But what does the Spirit of God teach us when we know that other people do not obey the commandments of God? Today, even in the Church, there is an attitude that one no longer dares to make such a statement at all, because otherwise one would "condemn" the other person.

The knowledge and determination of an objective violation of the commandments of God is, however, by no means a condemnation, but a necessary realization of reality!

If the Spirit of God in us seeks to make us keep the commandments, he cannot be indifferent to the condition of another person when he fails to keep the commandments of God. If such a spirit would spread in our Church, so that we would no longer dare to call sin a sin, then no longer the Spirit of God would be at work, but another spirit.

This is what the discernment of spirits teaches us and this has consequences.

For if we follow this "other spirit" then not only will we become more and more confused, but we will also no longer take responsibility for people in prayer, urgently ask for their repentance or even make sacrifices for them, because we no longer recognize sin or relativize it in its destructive meaning.

Let us take a concrete example: premarital sexual intercourse has always been considered a sin. Today, in many Catholic circles it is no longer considered a sin, and so the correction that one can receive Holy Communion only if this sin has been forgiven in confession is less and less likely to occur!

What does this mean for the worthy reception of Holy Communion? Each one of us can follow this question for himself and draw the appropriate conclusions!

In these examples we already encounter the spirit of the Antichrist mentioned in the Epistle of John, because he will try to relativize sin, even to justify it, and finally to praise it as a good work. Let us remember, for example, that the killing of a child (abortion) is described as an act of freedom of woman's decision!

Further aspects of the discernment of spirits will be considered in tomorrow's reflection!