

10. February 2020

## "The primacy of contemplation"

*Lk 10,38-42 (Reading from the memory of St. Scholastica)*

*In the course of their journey Jesus came to a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. She had a sister called Mary, who sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to him speaking. Now Martha, who was distracted with all the serving, came to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Please tell her to help me.' But the Lord answered, 'Martha, Martha,' he said, 'you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part, and it is not to be taken from her.'*

This well-known passage of the New Testament is often chosen to commemorate a contemplative religious sister, as is the case with the saint we celebrate today: St. Scholastica, the twin sister of St. Benedict, who is patron of Europe and founder of the Order of the Benedictines.

The general - and certainly correct - interpretation of this text is that the contemplative dimension must have the first place in our life, even above the active one. This is why contemplative communities - those who are totally dedicated to prayer and to the path of interior transformation - have a special place in the Church.

In the turmoil of the French Revolution, contemplative orders were no longer tolerated and, in ignorance of the dimension of interior life, they were required to convert their monasteries into active communities, which provide educational services, nursing, etc.

The turning away from God, or the path towards such a turning away, will always be directed first against contemplation, because the fruits of such a way can only be seen with the eyes of faith. Contemplation, as it were, first of all escapes the logic of natural life. And since "*the natural person has no room for the gifts of God's Spirit*", as St. Paul so rightly said (*1 Cor 2,14*), he will first attack what glorifies God most, that is, a way of life which is totally oriented towards God, and which reflects in a special way the intimacy of the loving relationship between God and man!

Saint Martha also had to be corrected by the Lord, in order to understand better. Certainly she thought that Jesus would support her in her desire to receive help from her sister, but the Lord broadened her perspective and, as so often, gave an unexpected answer.

Mary, on the other hand, understood better the situation of Jesus' presence. When the Lord is there, the first thing to do is to listen to him and interiorize his words!

The contemplative life rests in the heart of the Father, and tries to live in that love and cultivate it. This happens especially in prayer. God Himself wants His resting place in our hearts, and for Jesus it was easier to communicate to Mary, who was listening and sitting at His feet, than to Martha, who was so busy with her chores.

The receptive attitude also corresponds to the life of grace, because grace always precedes us and offers itself to us. God is therefore the one who acts out of love, the one who gives Himself to us, but He needs our response and receptivity. And from the interiorization of God's Will comes then the right action.

Thus we are called to be, first of all, receptive and listening, so that, knowing God more deeply, we may become the servants and friends of His Spirit!

We never lose time if we spend it in the right way with God!

The teachers of spiritual life rightly draw our attention to the fact that every work done in accordance with God's will and in purity of heart, has a supernatural character and therefore surpasses the works of our natural good will.

With regard to St. Scholastica, we know that she lived as a religious sister, according to her own brother's rule. This whole rule is based on the principle "ora et labora"; that is, "pray and work". And, at the same time, it insists that "nothing should be preferred to prayer."

This is the order and the right balance: First prayer, then deeds! If we apply this word wisely in the place where God has put us, it will bear great fruit and make our lives richer!