

12. February 2020

“The pure heart”

*Mk 7,14-23*

*In that time, Jesus called the people to him again and said, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean; it is the things that come out of someone that make that person unclean. Anyone who has ears for listening should listen!' When he had gone into the house, away from the crowd, his disciples questioned him about the parable. He said to them, 'Even you -- don't you understand? Can't you see that nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean, because it goes not into the heart but into the stomach and passes into the sewer? And he went on, 'It is what comes out of someone that makes that person unclean. For it is from within, from the heart, that evil intentions emerge: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within and make a person unclean.'*

*"Listen to me, all of you, and understand!"* the Lord calls out to those who listen to Him, and that includes us. However, the basis for this is that we really want to listen to Him and not just to hear. Jesus does not speak of the situation of a particular heart; He speaks of the human heart in general.

Therefore we should understand that we are meant personally and that this word has consequences for our way with God!

What are those consequences?

First of all, there is that statement that the Lord makes unmistakably clear to us: It is not what comes from outside that makes us unclean; it is what comes out of the heart. As a consequence, we must stop blaming circumstances for what happens inside us. It is not the external circumstances - however difficult they may be - that spoil us, but only what lives in our heart and comes from it that defiles us!

Therefore, as a second consequence, it is necessary to direct our attention to the purification of our own heart. This is a long and not easy task, because our heart is unfathomable, who can see through it? The Scriptures point this out to us in the following terms.

*“The heart is more devious than any other thing, and is depraved; who can pierce its secrets? I, Yahweh, search the heart, test the motives, to give each person what his conduct and his actions deserve.” (Jer 17,9-10).*

So, if the Lord can explore the heart, then it must be possible for us to perceive in Him and with His help our own heart with its abysses. But the condition for this is that we really want to purify ourselves, and that we recognize that we are in need of purification. Even if we are initially afraid of the idea, it would not be the right attitude not to even try it, for fear of what we might discover in our interior. Then we will not be able to bear fruit on the path with God! On the contrary, if we perceive our faults in the light of the Lord, then we can consciously carry them to God and open them to the Holy Spirit! Thus, we will no longer live in an illusion about ourselves, and self-knowledge will help us grow in humility and be more lenient with other people's faults.

The exploration of the heart is a spiritual process to achieve greater purity of heart. Father Lallemand S.I., a spiritual master who lived between the 16th and 17th century, gives us some valuable considerations on the subject. He tells us:

*"Purity of heart consists in not tolerating anything in our hearts that is contrary to God and the action of grace! ... The devil does not like it if we turn our gaze to our heart, explore its uncleanness and try to make it better. Our heart also does not like to examine itself. Our soul forces are not seldom in a disorder, and we do not like becoming aware of the lack of discipline, for this knowledge would humiliate us."*

So what is to be done?

In order not to lose courage or fall into fruitless introspection, it is necessary in such a process to become more aware of the love of God in our hearts. God does not love us because we are free of faults or only loves us under the condition of being perfect. No, he simply loves us, and through this love that he pours into our heart, he wants to purify us, so that we are ever more capable of responding to his love. The inner purification process is therefore to be understood as a process of God's love and not as a punishment or chastisement.

When we have children, we will gently or even vigorously draw their attention to things that can stand in their way and harm them, and show them other things that will help them to mature on the path of their life.

It is the same on the spiritual path: God invites us to perceive our obstacles in His Spirit and to work on them! Therefore, we should not be afraid when we discover in our heart those inclinations that Jesus describes in today's Gospel. Rather, let us ask the Lord to cleanse our hearts and pay attention to where we have to work!

Let us listen again to Fr. Lallemand, who gives us concrete points on how we can make progress in the purification of the heart:

- 1. Pay attention to venial sins and overcome them.*
- 2. Observe carefully the untidy emotions of the heart and remedy them!*
- 3. Watch over the thoughts and rein them in.*
- 4. Seek to recognize God's inspirations, His plans and dispositions, and encourage yourself to put them into practice!*

The deplorable state of our heart, which Jesus so clearly describes, does not have to remain so. Rather, we are invited to participate in the transformation of our hearts with the help of God.

Let us remember the wonderful Word of the Lord:

*"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Mt 5,6).*

Could there be a more beautiful invitation?