

19. February 2020

“Spiritual advices”

Jas 1, 19-27

Remember this, my dear brothers: everyone should be quick to listen but slow to speak and slow to human anger; God's saving justice is never served by human anger; so do away with all impurities and remnants of evil. Humbly welcome the Word which has been planted in you and can save your souls. But you must do what the Word tells you and not just listen to it and deceive yourselves. Anyone who listens to the Word and takes no action is like someone who looks at his own features in a mirror and, once he has seen what he looks like, goes off and immediately forgets it. But anyone who looks steadily at the perfect law of freedom and keeps to it - not listening and forgetting, but putting it into practice - will be blessed in every undertaking. Nobody who fails to keep a tight rein on the tongue can claim to be religious; this is mere self-deception; that person's religion is worthless. Pure, unspoilt religion, in the eyes of God our Father, is this: coming to the help of orphans and widows in their hardships, and keeping oneself uncontaminated by the world.

We cannot thank the apostle enough for his advice, which shows us the realization of a truly spiritual life. It is immensely important to follow such advices, for how are we to grow spiritually if we do not put into practice what we are advised to do?

What concerns us today about the state of the Church is not the lack of intellectual ability, but the lack of deep spiritual life, which weakens us in the face of the temptations of the world, the flesh and the Devil.

If we listen carefully to the words of this reading, we will find several clear instructions to boost our spiritual life. Let us meditate on one of them today:

"Remember this, my dear brothers: everyone should be quick to listen but slow to speak."

Of course, this means that we should only open our ears quickly to the valuable contents and that a responsible pre-selection should already be made. Closing one's ears to the chatter of the world, be it inside or outside, is part of the fundamental discipline of an authentic spiritual path.

Listening - or rather, attentive listening - has to be directed to the voice of the Lord, as he communicates himself to us directly or indirectly. Here we have the wonderful German word: "Lauschen", that means a strong inner attention to everything that comes from God, to all what is helpful to us on the way with Him.

While listening requires a vigilant attention, our words, on the other hand, should not simply gush out of us, but should be well reflected and filled with the Holy Spirit. The words we will speak to other people are in need to be examined before: are they objective, free of resentment, anger and vengeance? Are they uplifting or hurtful, clarifying or confusing?

We can notice that our words are often not filled with love. The Holy Spirit must transform us inwardly, so that from a purified heart good words may come. Some spontaneous and quick remarks reveal to us that our heart is still unreflected and not purified. Therefore, before we pass these comments on to the outside world, to other persons, we should examine them in ourselves and try to overcome all bad tendencies. That is why a restraint in speaking is called for, so that the words are reflected enough and are first purified in "love and truth".

There is still an aspect to be added. If we are too quick in speaking without having listened enough, then we will hardly be able to lead the conversation objectively. There is the danger that we become negatively dominant, directing the conversation to our own person without having a clear thread in it.

Listening attentively and being slow in speaking affects our whole person, because such spiritual exercises teach us to restrain ourselves. In fact, immediately after this advice, the Apostle exhorts us to be slow to anger as well. But how easily our tongue is inflamed and words slip out of our mouth that should not have been said!

The purpose of controlling our words and anger is not to suppress them, as if anger and unthoughtful or even unkind words did not exist in us. It is rather to overcome them! We must realistically become aware of the negative emotions; but once they are detected, we must rein them in through inner prayer and overcome them with the invocation of the Holy Spirit. In any case, we cannot simply abandon ourselves to the impulses without putting them in order, because they would then dominate us and possibly also other people.

The other advice given by the Apostle James in this passage we will deal with on a later occasion...