

7. March 2020

“Love to the enemies”

Mt 5,43-48

„You have heard how it was said, You will love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do as much? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Do not even the gentiles do as much? You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.“

The Lord expects nothing less than perfection from his disciples!

What Jesus expects from his disciples is nothing less than perfection!

It is a tremendously high goal, but that is how is our Lord: He wants perfection, but at the same time He has compassion on our weakness and our sin. It is important that we understand these two aspects well.

The Lord always wants us to respond to His love with all that we are and have, for then the plan that He has for us can be carried out. If we are already loving, we can love even more; if we are already living in the truth, we can immerse ourselves more deeply in it; if we are already resembling the Lord, we can do so even more. Of course the Lord does not expect us to achieve all this from the beginning. He wants us to long to get there and to try. Then, He Himself will help and sustain us in all situations, and grant us the gifts of the Spirit to reach that high goal. Moreover, the Lord will comfort us when we are weak and when we feel that we do not correspond to what we desire. He will encourage us to go on! For the way of growth in love will not end while our earthly life lasts...

One of the great challenges in the way of perfection is the love of enemies, of which the Lord speaks to us in today's gospel. This demand becomes concrete at the moment when we really have someone who wants to harm us, or who even does so, perhaps without even noticing it.

The first reaction - which is certainly natural - is to distance ourselves from such a person, and not want to have anything to do with him. This response is already much better than the desire for revenge and hatred!

But now let us imagine what would happen if God had this reaction. What would happen if he were to turn away from us for every sin that we commit, and no longer want to have anything to do with us? For one who lives in a relationship of trust with the Lord, it is impossible to imagine that He would react in this way. Perhaps at times we get the impression that He does, but faith assures us that the door to God's heart is always open to us, even when we reject His offerings. Moreover: God is waiting for us; His angels and saints are interceding for us, and the Lord is seeking the ways to reach our hearts.

And this is the model of perfection set for us! The Father never withdraws his love; he *"makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good"*.

What does this mean for us? The love of enemies we can reach only by God's grace! It is not rooted in our human nature. It is a merely supernatural attitude. Therefore, we must ask God for it, and learn to handle the contrary feelings that are aroused in us. Certainly feelings will not be transformed to the point of emotionally loving the enemy.

It is, rather, a decision of the spirit and of the will, which we can reach through prayer and in the contemplation of Our Lord's behaviour, who from the Cross prayed for his enemies (*cf. Lk 23,34*). We can also keep in mind that the enemy who harms us, could be in danger of condemning himself. By thinking of this, we touch upon precisely one of the reasons why the Lord came to us: He wants sinners to be converted so that they may be saved (*cf. Lk 5,31-32*). The love behind this desire is so great that it takes upon itself all suffering. And, in the fulfillment of this immeasurable mission, Jesus glorifies the Father.

Through the love for our enemies, we can become very much like the Lord. It is the highest level in the school of love; a high scale in the way of perfection. If it happens that a real enemy appears in our life, for whatever reason, let us ask the Father for the grace to act like Him; the Holy Spirit to strengthen us; and the Lord to give us the same attitude that He had in front of His enemies.

We can also turn with confidence to the Virgin Mary, for she is very concerned

about the salvation of men, and sometimes a person's hatred is not even a conscious decision to do evil; but there can be many reasons that only God knows.