

15. June 2020

“Overcoming greed”

1. Kgs 21,1-16

This is what happened next: Naboth of Jezreel had a vineyard close by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria, and Ahab said to Naboth, 'Give me your vineyard to be my vegetable garden, since it adjoins my palace; I will give you a better vineyard for it or, if you prefer, I will give you its value in money.' Naboth, however, said to Ahab, 'Yahweh forbid that I should give you my ancestral heritage!' Ahab went home gloomy and out of temper at the words of Naboth of Jezreel, 'I will not give you my heritage from my ancestors.' He lay down on his bed and turned his face away and refused to eat. His wife Jezebel came to him. 'Why are you so dispirited,' she said, 'that you refuse to eat?' He said, 'I have been talking to Naboth of Jezreel. I said, "Give me your vineyard either for money or, if you prefer, for another vineyard in exchange." But he said, "I will not give you my vineyard." ' Then his wife Jezebel said, 'Some king of Israel you make! Get up, eat and take heart; I myself shall get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.' So she wrote a letter in Ahab's name and sealed it with his seal, sending the letter to the elders and notables of the city where Naboth lived. In the letter, she wrote, 'Proclaim a fast, and put Naboth in a prominent place among the people. There confront him with a couple of scoundrels who will accuse him as follows, "You have cursed God and the king." Then take him outside and stone him to death.' The men of Naboth's city, the elders and notables living in his city, did what Jezebel ordered, as was written in the letter which she had sent him. They proclaimed a fast and put Naboth in a prominent place among the people. The two scoundrels then came and confronted him, and the scoundrels then publicly accused Naboth as follows, 'Naboth has cursed God and the king.' He was then taken outside the city and stoned to death. They then sent word to Jezebel, 'Naboth has been stoned to death.' When Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death, she said to Ahab, 'Get up! Take possession of the vineyard which Naboth of Jezreel refused to sell you, for Naboth is no longer alive, he is dead.' When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he got up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth of Jezreel and take possession of it.

What wickedness comes from greed and abuse of power! In the text today, these two become a deadly mixture, which does not even shrink from murdering an innocent person!

Sacred Scripture, in its great realism, does not hide from us the abysses of the human heart, and we are always called to draw our lessons from it, because *“The heart is more devious than any other thing, and is depraved”* (Jer 17,9)! Jesus reminds us that evil comes from the human heart (cf. Mk 7,21-22)!

So what about greed?

In today's text, Ahab was not willing to accept the reasons why Nabot did not want to sell his vineyard! But these reasons were honourable, for he wanted to honour the heritage of his fathers! This met with the king's "wanting to have" and thus with his personal interest. When the king's wish was not granted, an offended reaction came! This means that Ahab did not curb and overcome his greed, but let it result in an accusation against the person who stood in the way of his will!

How can we deal with greedy tendencies within us?

First of all, it is important to perceive them in us at all!

After all, they do not only refer to material goods, but can also extend to spiritual goods! The "wanting to have", which in its extreme form can become greed, is accompanied by the fact that one takes one's own person and his demands on life too seriously! Through the Apostle Paul, we receive good advice from the Holy Scriptures as to how we can counteract this:

“Religion, of course, does bring large profits, but only to those who are content with what they have. We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it; but as long as we have food and clothing, we shall be content with that. People who long to be rich are a prey to trial; they get trapped into all sorts of foolish and harmful ambitions which plunge people into ruin and destruction. 'The love of money is the root of all evils' and there are some who, pursuing it, have wandered away from the faith and so given their souls any number of fatal wounds.” (1 Tim 6,6-10).

The awareness that our time here on earth is short and that we cannot take anything with us into eternity can help us to have distance to the value of earthly goods! All disorderly hangings on these goods already harm us, because they rob us of our freedom. It is all the more damaging when we become greedy and seek our security and a certain happiness in it, which is a bitter illusion!

The following advice of the apostle also serves to curb our greed:

"As long as we have food and clothing, we shall be content with that."

However, we should always bear this in mind when we feel the urge to "want to have"! The same applies to spiritual goods!

As good and important as they are for us, they must not be tainted by an inner greed and may not come first in our lives! This would be quite tragic in religious orders or even in the formation of priests, if the focus were not on the spiritual formation of the person, but rather on the knowledge of what would lead to the reduction of the transcendent dimension of vocation!

One of the spiritual-psychological problems with greed is probably an inner emptiness, linked to a lack of inner awareness of self-worth! The abundance of goods and the desire for them seems to bridge this inner emptiness and give a value that is recognised in the world, which is also true for the (avaricious) acquisition of spiritual goods!

If we go to the cause of all evil (for the root of all evil is greed, see above), then we must also overcome our inclinations, if they aim in this direction.

We cannot fill our inner emptiness with natural or spiritual goods! The depth of our soul remains unsaturated and empty! Only through prayer and the inner connection with God and through all the help He gives us, for example in the sacraments, can these depths be filled with His presence, and the painful emptiness can be overcome! God lets us experience this emptiness, if we do not constantly pass over it, so that we can find the right answer in our relationship with Him!

Nor do we draw the inner value of our person from the acquisition of material and spiritual goods! Our deepest value is that we are created in the image of God and are loved by Him! This alone provides us with the true security of life and gives us the freedom to use the things of this world in such a way that their acquisition does not harm us. We can use them but not look to find any value or security in it.

For this reason we are called to let this truth penetrate ever more deeply within us, so that we may be able to live our lives in peace.