

28. June 2020

**"The self-deception"
Part 2**

As of yesterday, we are reflecting on an important spiritual theme, which should help us to wake up entirely to the truth, so that our following of Christ may be free of illusions and our witness may thus be more effective in the world. It is about "self-deception"...

In one of the psalms we can read the following words: *"But who can detect his own failings? Wash away my hidden faults."* (Ps 19,12). In several passages of the New Testament, Jesus points out the blindness of the Pharisees and the scribes. God knows the heart of man and nothing is hidden from him.

For the following of Christ, the disposition to know oneself in the light of God is of utmost importance, thus entering into a more realistic and sincere relationship with Him. Certainly we tend to avoid confrontation with our reality, and we can even be afraid of it, fearing to lose our good image and to be put to shame. But these fears must be overcome, for the One before whom we stand is a loving Father, who does not despise us for our errors and sins, but wants to raise us up, inviting us to abandon ourselves completely in his mercy.

We must not, therefore, be afraid to recognize ourselves as we are. On the contrary! What should concern us is, that we may still live in some form of blindness and self-deception, and that we may not be willing to put aside the illusions we have created about ourselves.

Sladek's text, alternated with some personal comments of mine:

"He who lives in self-deception not only has a mistaken image of himself; but in the unconscious depths of his soul he rebels against God's judgment. Therefore, he fights not only against the truth, but also against God, and thus closes himself to the grace of divine mercy that is constantly offered to him. If, on the other hand, man is sincere with himself and recognizes before God that he is not yet ready to abandon the complacency of his own self or to recognize Him as the Lord of his life, then he is taking on an attitude that will allow him to advance on his path towards God. The grace of God can work with its healing power only if the heart opens up before Him with sincerity and trust, confessing to Him the truth of its own

sinfulness. Therefore, God's forgiveness cannot work as long as man minimizes or justifies his guilt and sinfulness, even if he does so unconsciously."

The latter is also fundamental for spiritual accompaniment. Although we must be sensitive to the person who requires our help, we can never leave him or her in the illusions that he or she has created about himself or herself. It is necessary for the person to come to recognize their situation before God as it is, knowing that they have a loving Father who seeks to attract them to Himself with His love. On the contrary, the minimization of guilt and responsibility leads to a dead end and keeps man captive in his blindness.

"True conversion to God does not happen until man gives his heart to Him with all his longings and desires, and even to the unconscious depths of his soul. And here is the beginning of sanctification. The person who is aware that he still seeks first of all the satisfaction of his own ego and is therefore still far from perfect love for God, will no longer rely on his own religious and moral efforts or defend his good will at all costs; he will maintain the humble attitude of one who recognizes his sinfulness. Taking the words of the prodigal son, we could say that this person knows that he does not deserve God's love (cf. Lk 15,21); but at the same time he is aware that he can live in trust in God's infinite mercy.

Moved by this conviction, and not self-justified by his own merits or presumptuous confidence in the perfection of his life, the consecrated person (applies to all Christians) will be able to proclaim and witness the Good News in the Church and in the world. In word and deed, he will bear witness that the firm decision to follow Christ means, first of all, to demolish his hidden self-justification, in order to live more and more in the certainty of one's own sinfulness and in the confidence in divine mercy which overcomes every sin. The denial of oneself, to which Christ exhorts those who wish to follow him (cf. Mt 16,24), will consist first of all in overcoming the often unconscious search for prestige and power, rather than in renouncing the legitimate pleasures and joys given by God. In this way, in a growing inner authenticity and an attitude of true humility, we prepare our hearts for conversion".

The practice of the advice given by Fr. Sladek in search of inner sincerity and the demolition of self-justification, must be accompanied by wise asceticism and the limitation of natural pleasures, which will strengthen the soul.

But it must be borne in mind that the latter should not be aspired to as a first goal, nor should they lead to a hidden pride based on one's own merits.

“The saints, who have brought conversion to the depths of their soul and are well aware of it, in everything give glory to God, for they know that whatever is good in them is a gift of divine goodness; while the weaknesses and sins of their life, whether great or small, indicate the only thing they are and have of themselves. This is how a Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque was able to recognize: “From my evil I fear everything; but from your Love I expect everything“. In the light of these truths, we see that overcoming self-deception, which in turn is the foundation of self-justification, will be the prerequisite for a fruitful life of priests and religious in the Church and in the world.”

Logically these words count for all those who want to follow Christ. The experience of being loved by God should encourage us to overcome any form of self-deception, for the result will be that we will be able to serve the Lord with greater freedom and less tension. If we do not repress our faults or despair over them, but place ourselves with them before God, and try to overcome them with his strength, then joy will grow in us, and we will become more capable of serving others.