

26. August 2020

“Hypocrisy”

Mt 23, 27-32

Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs that look handsome on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of corruption. In just the same way, from the outside you look upright, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build the sepulchres of the prophets and decorate the tombs of the upright, saying, "We would never have joined in shedding the blood of the prophets, had we lived in our ancestors' day." So! Your own evidence tells against you! You are the children of those who murdered the prophets! Very well then, finish off the work that your ancestors began.

It can be seen that the Lord has a deep aversion to hypocrisy, because to give an image of oneself that does not correspond to reality and one does not even try to realize it creates an unreal situation. One deceives the other person and deceives oneself.

After a while one finally believes in the false picture in which one lives.

Hypocrisy is particularly absurd when it concerns a religious person or, even worse, a religious authority. In fact, this is the case that Jesus points to in today's Gospel when he speaks strictly to the leaders of the people. The words of the Lord say that these people are in reality spiritually dead, they hide their inner rottenness.

Given the seriousness of their condition, it must be said that the scribes and Pharisees Jesus are speaking from had already inwardly lost the legitimacy to exercise their ministry.

We might wonder how such a state was achieved.

If we go through the history of the Church, we will find that there were times when, for example, parts of the clergy lived a life that did not in the least correspond to the dignity of the vocation. I do not mean that they committed certain moral sins and errors because of their weakness, but rather that they lived in

a permanent state that was contrary to the greatness of the mission God had given them, and they avoided the call for their conversion.

How can such a situation arise? Let us not speak of possibly infiltrated priests who entered the church as wolves in order to destroy her, but of those who responded to a call from God.

Love can grow cold if it is nurtured. The love of God which calls the priest to this special vocation must be deepened day by day in his response, just as it is in a good marital relationship.

On the spiritual path, love is cultivated through prayer, through meditation on the Word of God, through interior conversion with sincere self-knowledge, through appropriate asceticism and the right way of dealing with people and the world. In the vocation of the priests, the dignified administration of the sacraments is added in a special way.

If love is not deepened, then the many temptations that come to a priest can penetrate more easily and darken the inner life.

In countries where the faith is still practised, priests enjoy special recognition among the population, and they are often respected and trusted, similar to the respect which religious authorities in Israel received in Jesus' time.

This special respect which is due to their ministry can - if one is not vigilant - lead to the fact that one connects this respect increasingly with the own person and so the given recognition can become a pitfall.

Let us construct an example for a better understanding.

A young priest takes over a parish that has not had its own pastor for some time. This priest brings the impulse of first love and the smell of something new. He easily wins hearts and everyone around him feels comfortable. So they begin to admire him and he feels strengthened by this admiration.

Unfortunately, however, this young priest is spiritually little formed. Therefore, he does not realize that he lets his vanity nourish more and more. Although at first he had some distance from being praised, he now begins to seek it. Thus the approval of his parishioners becomes the measure of his success, while the proclamation of the Gospel, with all its challenges, fades into the background.

His sermons focus more and more on what he knows people want to hear, and he carefully avoids those elements that could lead to controversy, such as the call to conversion. Since human praise and admiration seem to support his activity, he begins to neglect his prayer life. As he is busy with various tasks, he no longer prays his breviary regularly. So he gets used to the neglect of prayer and finally leaves it almost completely. As a result, he lacks that inner renewal which happens through prayer, apart from the fact that he is obliged to pray the Liturgy of the Hours.

Instead of deepening his relationship with God, he cultivates extensive human relationships. In time, he no longer keeps the necessary distance from women and his heart turns more and more to people. He fails seriously to cultivate the most important love, namely the love relationship with God.

If this process is not stopped, he will increasingly live a kind of double existence and then move in the space of increasing hypocrisy.

What has been said here as an example of a priestly vocation applies in general. We may never neglect the spiritual path.

But let us add - especially for some souls - hypocrisy is not if you feel cold for example in prayer, if you do not yet love as strong as it would be right, if you do not fully realize what you have to do - because of your weaknesses.

One must not allow oneself to feel insecure, because the inner emptiness that we sometimes have to suffer on the way is not an immediate sign of the consequences of hypocrisy. It is also not hypocrisy when we try to be friendly to people, even if they are not pleasant to us and we may feel a bit strange to practice this friendliness.

Hypocrisy is only given when we consciously disguise ourselves and make no effort to reconcile our life with the reality of our calling from God, when we live a double life, when we abuse our position to seek our own advantage but pretend to act in accordance with it, and we deceive people...

May the Lord protect us in our efforts to follow Him, so that we do not fall into self-deception and slide into a life that will end in hypocrisy!