

18. November 2020

“Holy reverence”

*Rev 4:1-11*

*Then, in my vision, I saw a door open in heaven and heard the same voice speaking to me, the voice like a trumpet, saying, 'Come up here: I will show you what is to take place in the future.' With that, I fell into ecstasy and I saw a throne standing in heaven, and the One who was sitting on the throne, and the One sitting there looked like a diamond and a ruby. There was a rainbow encircling the throne, and this looked like an emerald. Round the throne in a circle were twenty-four thrones, and on them twenty-four elders sitting, dressed in white robes with golden crowns on their heads. Flashes of lightning were coming from the throne, and the sound of peals of thunder, and in front of the throne there were seven flaming lamps burning, the seven Spirits of God. In front of the throne was a sea as transparent as crystal. In the middle of the throne and around it, were four living creatures all studded with eyes, in front and behind. The first living creature was like a lion, the second like a bull, the third living creature had a human face, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was studded with eyes all the way round as well as inside; and day and night they never stopped singing: Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God, the Almighty; who was, and is and is to come.' Every time the living creatures glorified and honoured and gave thanks to the One sitting on the throne, who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders prostrated themselves before him to worship the One who lives for ever and ever, and threw down their crowns in front of the throne, saying: You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you made the whole universe; by your will, when it did not exist, it was created.*

The worship of God by the holy angels and the elders who worship the majesty of God! How important it is that we do not lose this dimension! Especially when we are children of God and are called into the most intimate relationship with God, our Father, reverent love with all the appropriate gestures must not be neglected. It is not as if God needed these gestures. They are gestures that are in accordance with the truth, that lead God's creatures into the right attitude towards Him, so that all His creatures may give Him glory and be seized by His glory. It is man who needs these gestures of worship! If he loses them, he deprives himself of that beauty

which lies in the act of worship, that beauty which we see in today's text in the adoration of the angels and elders.

When I was able to be in Jerusalem more often in recent years, I had the grace to pray every day before the cross, in that place where the exalted King gave his life for us human beings to fulfil the will of the Father. Many people came daily, and you could see the different attitudes. Some people are hardly aware of the importance of this place, but then one sees gestures of the greatest emotion and reverence! Among Orthodox Christians, it is customary to throw oneself on the ground before God and show deep reverence! They are not in the least disturbed by the presence of other people, which is particularly noticeable among Ethiopians! Other believers kneel gripped before the cross and remain long before the Lord! Even if they do not see the throne of God, with the angels and elders, they express all their reverence for God in faith! What dignity emanates from such believers, how inviting are these gestures to give glory to God, each in his own way!

Even silence before the Lord belongs to the dimension of worship of God. One gives God the space to fill the place with his wonderful presence! How inspiring is a liturgy celebrated with dignity, how banal it appears when its holy splendour is not properly received through restlessness and chatter, when the reverence and holy silence in the liturgy are lost, or when the expression of reverence is impaired by banal worldly acts.

Right reverence, which has nothing to do with fear, false respect or servile submission, shapes man not only in relation to God, but also in relation to other people and to the whole of creation. It has a fundamental timidity in words and gestures to slide into triviality. It teaches people to see in "conspectu Dei" and takes care not to devalue them. There is a growing awareness that every human being was created in the image of God (*cf. Gen 1:27*) and is called to bear witness to the love of the Father in this world as a child of God. Even if a person misses his goal in life and suffers a disfigurement of his nature through sin, he is still called by God to live in the dignity that the heavenly Father has given him. The path of conversion is open and so the lost man can return and find his God-given dignity.

How far we are often from this attitude and we must learn it from the Lord. It is hard to bear that often a justified criticism is interspersed with hurtful remarks which do not respect the dignity of the other person. Even in a justified anger one must learn to contain oneself and to distinguish between the matter and the person.

In all the aftermath of the American election campaign, for example, and after the election on 3 November, one's own standpoints are often laced with such hurtful remarks that objectivity often fades into the background. One may justify this with the freedom of speech and set against oppressive systems of freedom of expression. Certainly, man should be free to express his views freely, both in society and in the Church. This is a high good which must not be compromised and which serves the truth. But does this also mean being able to insult and hurt other people, to insult them publicly, etc. Is this not an abuse of freedom of speech and a lasting violation of the dignity of human coexistence?

The right reverence for God will help us to ensure that such an attitude of reverence also grows in our relationship with people. We must watch over our hearts and rule our tongues. From Mary, the Mother of God, we can learn the right love and reverence for God and man. Our divine friend, the Holy Spirit, is certainly ready to take us to his school to grow in the holy reverence that ennoble life.