

27. January 2021

“The grace of forgiveness”

Heb 10:11-20

Every priest stands at his duties every day, offering over and over again the same sacrifices which are quite incapable of taking away sins. He, on the other hand, has offered one single sacrifice for sins, and then taken his seat for ever, at the right hand of God, where he is now waiting till his enemies are made his footstool. By virtue of that one single offering, he has achieved the eternal perfection of all who are sanctified. The Holy Spirit attests this to us, for after saying: No, this is the covenant I will make with them, when those days have come. the Lord says: In their minds I will plant my Laws writing them on their hearts, and I shall never more call their sins to mind, or their offences. When these have been forgiven, there can be no more sin offerings.

Let us now return to the rhythm of the readings after the radio play about St Agnes.

But I would like to take one of the many moving scenes from the radio play into today's reflection. It is the scene in which Claudius, the prefect's son, wants to enter the brothel to ravish Agnes. He is met by an angel of the Lord and kills him. When Claudius' father asked Agnes what had happened, the saint replied: *“Claudius wanted to disgrace me. But the one whose commandments he wanted to transgress showed his power over him and killed him. God wanted to save him from sin and sent his angel to save him.”*

We know how it continued. At the prayer of St Agnes, God restored Claudius to life and he was converted to Christ.

Here the gravity of sin comes face to face with us unvarnished. Indeed: It is better to die than to sin so grievously. Better Claudius be saved from such a crime - even by death - than that he should inflict upon himself the spiritual death of sin.

Only when we grasp to some extent the gravity of sin do we begin to understand how great is the mercy of God. In our radio play, Claudius, awakened from death, turned to the Lord and joined Agnes in confessing to the Lamb of God: *“O Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us.”*

What an infinite gift is the forgiveness of sins!

Unfortunately, many people have not yet discovered this grace and are chained under the burden of their sins. Some do not even seem to notice this burden and thus heap more sins upon themselves. They not infrequently drag other people into sin with them. However, it is better to suffer from sins than to commit them and not even notice. If people suffer under the burden of their sins, they may call for help and seek the Lord. If they do not notice, then they are teetering on the edge of the abyss that is ready to swallow them up at any time.

But it is also deplorable when Christians know about the forgiveness of guilt, but do not seem to be properly redeemed. Perhaps they cannot forgive themselves either. But how wonderful and profound is the word: "*I shall never more call their sins to mind, or their offences.*"! Where sincere repentance has taken place, the Lord wants nothing more to do with past sins. He has put a new law in our hearts and inscribed His law of love in us.

The memory of past sins can indeed serve as a warning to us, but the past and forgiven sins should no longer be an unforgiven burden. For with such the devil works to torment man!

If it should be difficult for us to leave our sins behind and forgive ourselves, then let us just remember that God does it this way! If this is the way of the Lord, why should we not imitate God at this important point, which is what we try to do in everything else?

What applies to ourselves is all the more essential in our dealings with other people. For there is a great danger that if I have not forgiven myself in depth, I will also find it very difficult to truly forgive the other person. The accusation against myself, which I have not really overcome, I then often unwittingly transfer to the other person and thus hold him in his guilt.

But the word of today's text applies: So we have entered the sanctuary through the Lord and our High Priest has cleared the way for us through his atoning sacrifice. We can now always walk on this path and also return to it when we have gone astray. What a dimension of freedom the Lord gives us!