

31. January 2021

“The best disposition”

1 Cor 7:32-35

I should like you to have your minds free from all worry. The unmarried man gives his mind to the Lord's affairs and to how he can please the Lord; but the man who is married gives his mind to the affairs of this world and to how he can please his wife, and he is divided in mind. So, too, the unmarried woman, and the virgin, gives her mind to the Lord's affairs and to being holy in body and spirit; but the married woman gives her mind to the affairs of this world and to how she can please her husband. I am saying this only to help you, not to put a bridle on you, but so that everything is as it should be, and you are able to give your undivided attention to the Lord.

This is a wish of the apostle and not an instruction. However, this wish comes from his deep apostolic heart and is probably also connected to the expectation of the Lord's return.

Paul realises that the unmarried can be freer for the Lord. We know this in the Church in the life of religious orders and in the priesthood.

And so it is.

It is in the nature of such a decision for the Lord, which we see as a vocation, that one does not care about the things of this world in the way that is inevitable in a family life. The uniqueness of the love relationship with Jesus focuses one's attention on undivided service to the Lord. *“The unmarried man gives his mind to the Lord's affairs”*.

However, it should be so. It would be a great contradiction if one were to leave behind marriage and the things of this world for the sake of the Lord, but then unnecessarily attend to all sorts of worldly affairs and in this way lose the meaning and splendour of such a vocation. A worldly-minded religious or priest is even a sore wound.

The apostle wants to encourage people to choose such a path of total dedication to Christ. He does this because he loves the Lord and wants as many as possible to be completely free for him and to burn for the Gospel. He knows that in principle this

is easier to realise in an unmarried way of life. This is not directed against the sanctity of marriage, for we know *wonderful words from him about marriage* (cf. *Eph 5:21-33*). It is a counsel of Christian prudence for those who are not already bound and can grasp it.

Christian prudence would ask what it can do to serve the Lord. The added spirit of piety takes it further and asks how to please the Lord more.

It is a wise advice from the apostle, for a life of following Christ more closely. When lived authentically, is a great gift from God and an example to others. The love to God of St. Agnes, for example, who was willing to witness her devotion to Christ even unto death, can touch us in such a way that the desire is awakened to be able to love the Lord as she did. We should always pursue this desire even if we cannot enter into such a way of life as St. Paul recommends because of our personal life situation. The development of a fervent love of God is not limited to this way of life. But it is the best disposition.

Today we know life situations that have experienced profound disturbances. Let us think, for example, of marriages that have broken down and can no longer be brought together. One suddenly lives alone not of one's own choosing, or there are other circumstances that lead to this. This is tragic and painful.

But here the word of St. Paul can be effective in a changed way. If one is no longer bound to a person whom one wants to please in the way one was before, then one should set out completely towards the Lord. In this way, personal unhappiness could be transformed with the grace of God. The greater closeness of God is then able not only to heal wounds and comfort, but to bring about a new orientation. One is now primarily concerned with the cause of the Lord. In this way, not only does the sorrowful state open up a deeper meaning, but it can become the source of a new joy that the Lord gives in his goodness!