

1. March 2021

“A proper confession”

Dan 9:4-10

I pleaded with Yahweh my God and made this confession: 'O my Lord, God great and to be feared, you keep the covenant and show faithful love towards those who love you and who observe your commandments: we have sinned, we have done wrong, we have acted wickedly, we have betrayed your commandments and rulings and turned away from them. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our chief men, our ancestors and all people of the country. Saving justice, Lord, is yours; we have only the look of shame we wear today, we, the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the whole of Israel, near and far away, in every country to which you have dispersed us because of the treachery we have committed against you. To us, our kings, our chief men and our ancestors, belongs the look of shame, O Yahweh, since we have sinned against you. And it is for the Lord our God to have mercy and to pardon, since we have betrayed him, and have not listened to the voice of Yahweh our God nor followed the laws he has given us through his servants the prophets.

Today's reading presents us with one of the great prayers of Holy Scripture. Daniel had searched the Scriptures to find out how long the ruin of Jerusalem would last, according to what the Lord had said through the prophet Jeremiah: seventy years (*Dan 9:2*). Therefore he prayed for his people and uttered this confession which we have read today.

This prayer teaches us the right attitude with which we should approach God. Daniel does not conceal; rather, he clearly pronounces the guilt that Israel laid upon himself. Before this, he had fasted, dressed himself in sackcloth and put on ashes, thus humbling himself before the Lord (*Dan 9:3*).

In a true and humble confession we do not justify or defend our guilt. Today it is very common to justify ourselves by listing the reasons that led us to commit something. More and more the awareness of having sinned disappears, and in its place appear explanations that would diminish, or even eliminate our guilt altogether. Unfortunately, an essential aspect of true confession is thus lost, which is repentance.

It is repentance that melts us inwardly, that overcomes pride. Pride is involved in every sin, to a lesser or greater degree, for the transgression of divine laws is always a form of 'self-empowerment'. We decide for ourselves what we think is right for us in disregard of divine rules.

The prayer presented to us in today's reading is a total stripping away of this position of pride. It contrasts God's greatness and faithfulness with Israel's sinful behaviour: "*O my Lord, God great and to be feared, you keep the covenant and show faithful love towards those who love you and who observe your commandments*". It is precisely by emphasising the righteousness of God's actions that one's own unfaithfulness is revealed.

We can also apply this if we want to make a good confession with true repentance. It is not just a matter of seeing our sins, but of putting them in relation to the immense love the Lord has for us.

A story of St. Teresa of Avila tells us that while she was in the monastery, she still retained some worldly behaviour, unsuitable for the spiritual life. One day, while contemplating the cross of Christ, she heard His voice saying to her: "See what I have done for you. And what will you do for me?" From that moment on, she abandoned her still worldly ways of behaving and took on the following of Christ with all seriousness.

The recognition of our guilt helps us in two dimensions. On the one hand, we can be touched more deeply by God's love so that we can repent more easily. On the other hand, our examination of conscience will be made before the God of love, so that guilt does not crush us. Then we will be able to say with Daniel: "*it is for the Lord our God to have mercy and to pardon*".

Daniel prays for his people and includes himself in the guilt of his people, for he speaks using the "we". Can we too do this, even if we are not the prophet Daniel?

First of all, we must become aware that, through baptism, we have been made sharers in the mission of Christ, who came to pay for the sin of the world by his Passion and his Cross (*cf. Col 2:14*). Whenever the priest offers Christ's sacrifice in the Eucharistic celebration, we can join in this offering.

In addition, we can also ask God to forgive the guilt of the people, for the dimension of making reparation and doing penance on behalf of others is still present in our Church.

Daniel's prayer invites us to honestly acknowledge our sins before a God full of goodness. Furthermore, it makes us aware of all the sins that are happening around us, which are a great burden for a whole people, for they hinder the free action of God's grace and the people bear the consequences of their alienation from God.

The conversion of a person is not only important for that person, but also for the Church and for the whole of humanity. If he becomes a light, then he will also help those others “*who live in darkness and the shadow dark as death*” (Lk 1:79).

Sincere confession before God together with the awareness of a spiritual responsibility for all people becomes an important task, because it helps us, on the one hand, to lead our own life in the truth of God and, on the other hand, to help others to enter into this salvific law.