

3. February 2021

“Acceptance of corrections”

Heb 12:4-7.11-15

In the fight against sin, you have not yet had to keep fighting to the point of bloodshed. Have you forgotten that encouraging text in which you are addressed as sons? My son, do not scorn correction from the Lord, do not resent his training, for the Lord trains those he loves, and chastises every son he accepts. Perseverance is part of your training; God is treating you as his sons. Has there ever been any son whose father did not train him? Of course, any discipline is at the time a matter for grief, not joy; but later, in those who have undergone it, it bears fruit in peace and uprightness. So steady all weary hands and trembling knees and make your crooked paths straight; then the injured limb will not be maimed, it will get better instead. Seek peace with all people, and the holiness without which no one can ever see the Lord. Be careful that no one is deprived of the grace of God and that no root of bitterness should begin to grow and make trouble; this can poison a large number.

We find it very difficult to accept corrections or discipline, as the text calls it. Our mind can perhaps understand how necessary and good they are, considering that no one is perfect. But our emotions easily rebel and we feel hurt or unjustly treated. There are cultures in which it is almost impossible to correct, because people immediately feel that their honour is being taken away.

However, when God corrects us, it is usually through people or circumstances. That is why a supernatural perspective is needed, since the mediation of people is usually imperfect, precisely because they are human persons.

Today's reading expands on this supernatural gaze. According to the text, corrections are signs of God's love, showing us that he cares for us and that he wants us to progress on the path of perfection. Corrections are a sign of his fatherly goodness! The more we understand this and learn to overcome our sensitivity to reproofs, the more we will allow ourselves to be guided by God.

But how can we learn to overcome our sensitivity in order to better understand and endure corrections? The text shows us the way:

First of all, we have to accept in faith that corrections are signs of God's love, even if emotionally we do not feel this way.

Then we can learn from past experience (surely we have all been corrected!) that when we have accepted a correction and overcome our resistance and dislike of it, *“it bears fruit in peace and uprightness.”*

Both of these elements we can keep in mind when we receive a correction. It will also help us greatly if we immediately begin to pray inwardly, calling upon the Holy Spirit to appease the rebelliousness within us. It is very important that the rebelliousness does not manifest itself outwardly by contradicting the one who corrects us, blaming others, becoming aggressive, and so on.

But in order to maintain a healthy attitude in our following of Christ, we must also not fall into a negative servile attitude, which makes us appear oppressed. This attitude can appear when we do not accept corrections inwardly and do not draw fruit from them, but take them as a violation and feel oppressed under a dictatorial power or betrayed by the one who corrects. That is why it is necessary for us to go through the inner processes to truly accept correction.

Now, it can easily happen to us that the corrections we receive are coarse, exaggerated and without full knowledge of the situation. When this happens, we need to practice Christian prudence by discerning: does my resistance to correction come from my pride, which usually appears in the face of all correction, or are there really objective reasons that make it necessary to clarify the situation? In any case, we should not miss the fruit that correction can bring even if it is not perfectly done.

We cannot expect that everyone who has the authority to correct us will do so perfectly. That is why it would be wrong if the imperfect way of correction of the other person shocks us so much that we do not accept the rebuke or that we take the attitude of counter-attack. If we take this attitude, we close ourselves off from the possibility of discerning the content of the correction and of benefiting from it. And if indeed in the correction there were false estimations or injustices, then we should first calm our upset feelings in prayer before seeking clarification of things.

Otherwise, today's reading recommends us to focus our concentration on the way of sanctification and to seek to be at peace with everyone. In our reality this certainly means that we should keep our heart free in relation to all people, and never allow a bitter root to grow within us, which destroys everything.

How important is this indication: that we must not allow the resentments that are harboured within us to come out again and again in the form of accusations against others. God, who always forgives us, wants us to live in this attitude.

That is why it is necessary to know one's own heart. People who are easily embittered probably still have in their hearts things to forgive and from this can arise an attitude of constant accusation towards certain people and, in more serious cases, this accusation extends to all people and circumstances, even to the point of blaming God Himself. This bitterness spreads and hurts others as well and becomes a source of injustice.

Finally, a last admonition from today's text: let us not spoil God's grace. Let us treat with great care the grace entrusted to us and cultivate it in prayer, in the reading of the Holy Scriptures, in the sacraments, in inner work and in works of mercy.