

5. February 2021

"Overcoming pride and arrogance"

1 Cor 1:26-31

Reading corresponding to the memorial of St. Agatha

Consider, brothers, how you were called; not many of you are wise by human standards, not many influential, not many from noble families. No, God chose those who by human standards are fools to shame the wise; he chose those who by human standards are weak to shame the strong, those who by human standards are common and contemptible - indeed those who count for nothing - to reduce to nothing all those that do count for something, so that no human being might feel boastful before God. It is by him that you exist in Christ Jesus, who for us was made wisdom from God, and saving justice and holiness and redemption. As scripture says: If anyone wants to boast, let him boast of the Lord.

The criteria according to which God chooses may be very different from what we imagine. We tend to look on the outside of people, and we like to admire extraordinary qualities, but in the Kingdom of God things are different! The Lord sees into the hearts of people, and often manifests his glory in those who are weak in the eyes of the world; in those people who are apparently "nobody" or who are hidden from the world.

If we meditate on today's text, we can realise that God wants to preserve us from pride, which hinders the work of grace, because it is centred only on the self.

In order to follow Christ and to advance spiritually, it is essential that we perceive pride and arrogance within ourselves, even in its most subtle manifestations. Whether we correspond to God's grace will depend to a large extent on this; or whether, on the contrary, we slow it down considerably or even become an obstacle to it. Often we are not aware of our pride because we are not used to looking inside ourselves. Or perhaps we only notice it at the moment when we feel that our heart is already closed, when we become aggressive, when we speak badly about others and belittle them etc.... Hopefully at least at that moment we notice the arrogance, so that we can take the necessary measures!

But we must be aware that pride has very deep roots. It begins to work when we give in to our thoughts of vanity; when we compare ourselves with other people for

our own benefit; when we seek the praise of others and enjoy it when we receive it; when we want to attract attention and be the centre of attention; when we think we are better because of our education, our abilities, our beauty, our family, nationality or profession; because of a spiritual position; because of our religiosity, etc... instead of thanking God and giving Him the glory.

In short: every time we look at ourselves and seek our own honour, pride is already at work. In fact, pride will always find an open door when our eyes are not on the Lord and we do not consciously seek His glory in all that we do, whatever it may be. When this happens, the gaze is on ourselves, and then we get caught up in our own 'self', and gladly accept the attention of other people.

Pride is indeed an evil, and it is so deep-rooted that we often don't even notice it. There is an Arabic saying: "It is easier to spot a black beetle on a black stone in a black night than to recognize pride in one's own heart".

And the problem is that one is too proud to want to discover the pride in one's heart. It is as if we have placed a guard at the entrance, to reject any attempt that could lead us to a knowledge of ourselves.

It is therefore understandable that the spiritual fathers attach such great importance to the subject of pride, insistently inviting us to enter the school of humility.

Today's reading shows us clearly how important it is that man should not boast before God. It is deeply paradoxical that we abuse the marvellous gifts we have received from God, whether natural or supernatural, in order to build up our own honour and image in the eyes of others.

It is our fallen nature that tries to earn its value in the eyes of others and in our own eyes. And unfortunately we often look for that value in the wrong place, for never is man so great as when he worships God; never is he more filled with divine grace than when he strives for a pure heart and tries to overcome his pride; never can he be more precious to others than when he serves them in the Lord, seeking nothing for himself.

In mentioning these three aspects of man's true greatness, we have already hinted at some of the remedies for growing in humility:

- Worshipping God and giving Him glory in all things.
- Purifying the heart and allowing God to purify it.
- Listening to the Holy Spirit.

- Practising works of charity towards one's neighbour.

With this we have addressed a subject to which I will return again and again, because it is dear to the Lord's heart that we also use all the graces He has prepared for us to glorify Him and to achieve our goal.