

17. February 2021

Ash Wednesday
"Start of Lent"

2 Cor 5:20-6:2

So we are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were urging you through us, and in the name of Christ we appeal to you to be reconciled to God. For our sake he made the sinless one a victim for sin, so that in him we might become the uprightness of God. As his fellow-workers, we urge you not to let your acceptance of his grace come to nothing. As he said, 'At the time of my favour I have answered you; on the day of salvation I have helped you'; well, now is the real time of favour, now the day of salvation is here.

Lent is a special time of grace in which we can bring our lives more deeply into line with God and recover what we have missed; we prepare for the holy feast of Easter by being able to offer hidden sacrifices to the Lord, as recommended in today's Gospel:

"When you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right is doing; your almsgiving must be secret, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you (...). When you are fasting, do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do: they go about looking unsightly to let people know they are fasting. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you fast, put scent on your head and wash your face, so that no one will know you are fasting except your Father who sees all that is done in secret; and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you." (Mt 6:3-4.16-18)

A time of grace! Is it not always the case?

Since the coming of Jesus there has been that special time - Scripture calls it a year of favour (*cf. Is 61:2; Lk 4:19*) - in which the door to the heart of God is wide open and we can reach Him unhindered through His Son.

And yet, in this fundamental time of grace, there are special periods in which God's turning towards us can be experienced even more clearly!

"Favour" or grace means God's free turning towards us, which we do not obtain through our own efforts, but which is the outflow of His goodness.

God always accompanies us with his grace, and everything we do on his behalf and in his will, he bestows upon us with this special power and light, so that we can correspond to his intentions and fulfil our task.

Perhaps we could compare grace with a sea of love that comes from the heart of God. Through the open heart of Jesus, this sea comes to us, and when we draw from it, this love reaches us and gives us all that God wants to achieve with this gift. If we accept the gift of his grace and cooperate with God's intention, then our heart opens wider and wider and God can let his grace come to us more and more.

However, one can also let a certain grace pass by! Perhaps, for example, it is a time when we would have to make an important decision. But we miss this time, and when we then want to decide later, we lack the inner strength that the Lord had offered us before.

Certainly, the Lord has quietly admonished us inwardly beforehand or addressed us in various ways, but we have not listened properly, hesitated, etc. So it can happen that we may have to wait a long time before such a situation opens up for us again!

St. Paul says to his own: *“As his fellow-workers, we urge you not to let your acceptance of his grace come to nothing.”*

We can approach Lent with this attitude. None of us knows whether it may not be the last one in our lives. A time of deeper conversion, in which God comes to meet us and calls us more intimately to Himself! Let us remember that our Lord spent forty days and nights in the solitude of the desert, rejecting for us the temptations of the devil (*cf. Mt 4:1-11*), and then proclaiming the Gospel and redeeming us. This proclamation was preceded by the silence of the seclusion with the Father!

We are spending this year's Lent in the shadow of the Corona Crisis. It already began last year and the whole year was marked by it. It is high time to reflect and pray about what the Lord wants to say to us in this extraordinary time, which I look at from an apoclayptic perspective.

While the Corona crisis should not dominate our thinking, no one can bypass it. However, it is important to identify the language of the Lord in this crisis and to distinguish it from what people make of it and what the plans of the Evil One are.

Therefore, I will include this theme in the meditations during this Lent and ask for the prayers to the Holy Spirit of all those who listen to me, so that great fruit may grow from it!