

18. February 2021

“True life”

*Lk 9:22-25*

*He said, 'The Son of man is destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and to be put to death, and to be raised up on the third day.' Then, speaking to all, he said, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me. Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, will save it. What benefit is it to anyone to win the whole world and forfeit or lose his very self?*

At the beginning of Lent, Scripture presents us with the Lord's way through suffering and death to resurrection.

We want to consciously follow this path as followers of the Lord, because it is deeply anchored in our lives. Despite all the beauty that life can bring, no one can avoid suffering, whether it is one's own or that of other people. Life in itself has a dimension of suffering, since we are born separated from God and are deprived of the sight of God. Much hardship and difficulty lie on the way (*cf. Gen 3:16-19*): children are born in pain, life is threatened by death, old age takes its toll!

But how do we deal with it? Is it a life that simply flows by and takes us along, and that we carry out more or less passively?

Jesus invites us to a different understanding and thus also to a different path! He calls us into his discipleship! We are to follow his life and not simply live the life that is offered to us by the world.

The Lord enters our life and makes it his! In faith we accept this and in Holy Baptism this is accomplished sacramentally. Our lives are now to be fully in the life of God and unfold into the life of the Lord.

The Apostle Paul expresses this mystery again and again in his letters:

*“I have been crucified with Christ and yet I am alive; yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me.” (Gal 2:19-20) Or: “By our baptism into his death we were*

*buried with him, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power, we too should begin living a new life” (Rom 6:4).*

Jesus draws our attention to the conditions for his life to unfold in us. It states:

*“If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me.”*

The one condition is self-denial.

It is precisely the insight not to live a life according to our fallen human nature with its desires. It is not a matter of living "our life" by enjoying this world, conforming to its attractions and seductions and following its promises of happiness, but of living the life of the Lord in us, which then becomes our true life.

This is not to say that asceticism may be hostile to life, but it is the clear insight that all the earthly pleasures and desires can very easily turn into plagues if they take up too much space in our lives! Let us take, for example, the enjoyment of wine. In the right measure it cheers people's hearts (*cf. Ps 104:15; Sir 31:27-28*), drunk in excess, it unfolds a destructive effect (*cf. Sir 31:29-30*).

If we take the path of self-denial and bow to the gentle yoke of Jesus, we will receive true freedom and true joy.

In following the Lord this means: I seek to do everything for the glory of the Lord, just as Jesus glorified the Father by word and deed. Accordingly, I do not seek to realise my own interests, but like the Lord, the glory of God and that which serves the neighbour. That would be a true change of paradigm of a previously natural-minded person.

The other condition that the Lord mentions here is the conscious acceptance of the cross.

On the one hand, this is the acceptance of the - we could say – “natural crosses”, which have to do with our imperfect existence on earth, just as the Lord also took upon himself the human condition (*cf. Phil 2:6-8*).

But then they are also crosses that we have to bear because of our being Christians, when we testify to the truth and have to experience how it is rejected. But these are

precisely the crosses of the Lord, who came as the light of the world into darkness and was not received by His own (*Jn 1:9-11*).

Self-denial and acceptance of the cross in following the Lord are requested by Him.

These are words that might frighten one at first. But if we understand them more precisely, they will be opened up to us in their depth and will bring inner peace and allow us to grow in love on the path of following the Lord!