

12. March 2021

“God wants to heal infidelity”

Hos 14:1-10

Israel, come back to Yahweh your God your guilt was the cause of your downfall. Provide yourself with words and come back to Yahweh. Say to him, 'Take all guilt away and give us what is good, instead of bulls we will dedicate to you our lips. Assyria cannot save us, we will not ride horses any more, or say, "Our God!" to our own handiwork, for you are the one in whom orphans find compassion.' I shall cure them of their disloyalty, I shall love them with all my heart, for my anger has turned away from them. I shall fall like dew on Israel, he will bloom like the lily and thrust out roots like the cedar of Lebanon; he will put out new shoots, he will have the beauty of the olive tree and the fragrance of Lebanon. They will come back to live in my shade; they will grow wheat again, they will make the vine flourish, their wine will be as famous as Lebanon's. What has Ephraim to do with idols any more when I hear him and watch over him? I am like an evergreen cypress, you owe your fruitfulness to me. Let the wise understand these words, let the intelligent grasp their meaning, for Yahweh's ways are straight and the upright will walk in them, but sinners will stumble.

“I shall cure them of their disloyalty, I shall love them with all my heart”. What a beautiful expression, in which God's Being is made better known to us! If we look at human relationships, we realise how difficult it would be to pronounce such a sentence. Think, for example, of adultery: how much it hurts the relationship and the person betrayed, how deep is the pain and how humiliated one feels!

We cannot think that our sin and unfaithfulness do not hurt God. As we contemplate the Passion of Jesus, we see how much God can suffer. He knows our human suffering in all its dimensions.

Because of his love for us, God is vulnerable. It hurts him immensely when we take the wrong path. If we, who are created in His image, have a sensitive heart, capable of loving deeply and therefore also of suffering greatly, can God, who gave us the heart, remain indifferent to us?

God wants to heal unfaithfulness. But what are the consequences of unfaithfulness? If we look at the opposite value, faithfulness, we will notice that

the one who practises it keeps his promise, stands firm in the decision of his will and in the conviction that he has formed in himself, remains with the person he has chosen... Although in human relationships it can sometimes be justified to distance oneself from a person, when he has, for example, taken a turn and started to support things with which one cannot agree, or has acquired bad habits; this will never be the case with God. He cannot change; but all that He says and does proceeds from the truth and love which are the essence of His Being!

Let us now look at Israel, for this word of the Lord is addressed, in the first instance, to this people... We see that Israel broke their word before God, turned their heart away from Him, forgot what He had done for them, sought other gods to worship them... Whereas faithfulness would have anchored their heart more in God, increasing love and trust; unfaithfulness causes the opposite. The heart becomes changeable; it loses its inner strength, so that it becomes weak in the face of all kinds of temptations; it becomes more and more difficult to decide and to commit oneself. Even if one acknowledges with repentance that one has turned away from God and the right path, the heart remains in a state that requires healing. The heart has become sick because of unfaithfulness.

But God wants to heal it, and the heart needs healing, so that it can regain its direction and get back on the right path.

God shows that his love has not turned away from unfaithful Israel. In beautiful words he describes what he has in wait for them, once they return and turn away from idols. What God says in this biblical text is reminiscent of the feast that the father of the prodigal son prepared for him after his return (*cf. Lk 15:22-24*). The unfaithful heart can thus experience God's compassionate love, and repentance can become even deeper, as it recognises what it has abandoned, how much it has been scattered and to what extent it has wounded love.

If repentance before a loving Father is deep, then the heart is strengthened, for pride and indifference, which precede turning away, melt away; and in their place come love of God and gratitude for His salvation. A new path now begins, and the soul that has been found again must be most vigilant, ever calling upon God's help, lest it turn away from Him again. Perhaps in this situation fervour will also grow, so as to take up the path again with greater strength and to want to make up for what has been lost. In this way, the Lord will heal the heart, which had become disoriented and confused in its wanderings on the wrong path.

One last aspect should be mentioned. If Israel - and I mean also every soul that has strayed from the path - questions the reason for so much goodness from God, the answer is this: *“I shall cure them of their disloyalty, I shall love them with all my heart”*. His love is out of pure generosity! This answer can touch the heart even more deeply. God does not make calculations for us; He does not need us for Himself; there is not the slightest interest on His part; He simply wants to love, because He Himself is love (*cf. 1 Jn 4:8*)!

This truth can deeply touch our hearts, so that we too, renewed, may undertake a kind of “love” that is not only for ourselves, but also for others.