

13. March 2021

**“Faithful love is what pleases me, not sacrifice”**

*Hos 6:1-6*

*Come, let us return to Yahweh. He has rent us and he will heal us; he has struck us and he will bind up our wounds; after two days he will revive us, on the third day he will raise us up and we shall live in his presence. Let us know, let us strive to know Yahweh; that he will come is as certain as the dawn. He will come to us like a shower, like the rain of springtime to the earth. What am I to do with you, Ephraim? What am I to do with you, Judah? For your love is like morning mist, like the dew that quickly disappears. This is why I have hacked them to pieces by means of the prophets, why I have killed them with words from my mouth, why my sentence will blaze forth like the dawn-for faithful love is what pleases me, not sacrifice; knowledge of God, not burnt offerings.*

Here in this moving text from Hosea we encounter the core of all true knowledge of God and the right response of man.

Love moves God to create man, to redeem him and to perfect him. There is no other motivation. It is the most beautiful and profound imaginable and it is true! Just as true is the right answer: our love for God.

It is so true that St. Augustine, struck by the love of God, wrote:

*"Late have I loved Thee, O Beauty so ancient and so new; late have I loved Thee! For behold Thou were within me, and I outside; and I sought Thee outside and in my unloveliness fell upon those lovely things that Thou hast made. Thou were with me and I was not with Thee. I was kept from Thee by those things, yet had they not been in Thee, they would not have been at all. Thou didst call and cry to my and break open my deafness: and Thou didst send forth Thy beams and shine upon me and chase away my blindness: Thou didst breathe fragrance upon me, and I drew in my breath and now I pant for Thee: I tasted Thee, and now hunger and thirst for Thee: Thou didst touch me, and I have burned for Thy peace."*

And the same saint, wounded by love, wrote the unforgettable sentence:

*"Love, and do what thou wilt."*

When we truly love, our will is guided by that love - moved by the Holy Spirit. It is not an arbitrary doing of whatever one pleases, but the most intimate union with

the Holy Spirit makes us perceive more and more what the will of the Lord is and makes the joy grow in us to comply with that will.

Let us imagine eternity. The life of the angels and saints is in complete contemplation and unity of will with God. There is no more wavering, but they stand forever firm and secure in the decision they have made for the Lord. It is their bliss, a state we can only guess at. Perhaps we sometimes feel something of it, but it is not yet permanent and can still be disputed.

Augustine's sentence, however, already goes in that direction. The deepening of our love for God and thus also the increasing receptivity to his love fortifies us more and more. A certainty given by the Lord will grow ever stronger, as we also heard in the Father's Message of 7 March. There is no doubt that we have not yet reached complete security in this life, and we know the sentence of the Apostol of the Gentiles: *"Everyone, no matter how firmly he thinks he is standing, must be careful he does not fall."* (1 Cor 10:12), which admonishes us to be vigilant. But an inner strength wrought by the Holy Spirit is a characteristic of a growing firmness in God.

*"Love I want, not sacrifice, knowledge of God instead of burnt offerings."*

Let us look back at the text of the reading: It is not that God rejected in themselves slaughter and burnt offerings at that time, he had ordered them himself. The frequent criticism of the prophets referred to the fact that in spite of the sacrifices made to God, the heart was closed and injustices continued to be committed. In this way, however, the sacrifice was devalued, i.e. one continued on the wrong path and so the sacrifice became a devalued act. This was very displeasing to God. Sacrifices that we bring to God on the path of discipleship, e.g. for the conversion of people, are of course very welcome. After all, they are made out of love for God and people.

*"Love I want, not sacrifice, knowledge of God instead of burnt offerings."*

The crucial question for us is when the Lord makes us understand that he wants love:

How can we grow in love?

The answer is as simple as the word of St. Augustine mentioned above *"Love, and do what thou wilt."*

It is: follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Let us sum it up: When we follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit, love grows in us in the unfolding of a fruitful spiritual path that enables us to love and to do everything according to the will of the Lord.