

1. June 2021

“Prudent dealings with the people of impure intention”

Mk 12:13-17

Next they sent to him some Pharisees and some Herodians to catch him out in what he said. These came and said to him, 'Master, we know that you are an honest man, that you are not afraid of anyone, because human rank means nothing to you, and that you teach the way of God in all honesty. Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay or not?' Recognising their hypocrisy he said to them, 'Why are you putting me to the test? Hand me a denarius and let me see it.' They handed him one and he said to them, 'Whose portrait is this? Whose title?' They said to him, 'Caesar's.' Jesus said to them, 'Pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar - and God what belongs to God.' And they were amazed at him.

When one has closed one's heart against someone, then it is very difficult to overcome prejudices. Instead, everything the other person does or says seems to confirm the suspicions. Since so much evil can come out of a man's heart (*cf. Mk 7:21-23*), the purification of that heart is a most important task. Unfortunately, however, the evil in the heart is often covered by pride, which makes it very difficult to bring about a change of heart. So even if the accusations against the other person are proven to be untrue, the evidence does not seem to be enough to be fair to the other person, and even less so to begin to see him or her with love.

This was the hardening of heart of those who, on the one hand, wanted to stop Jesus, but, on the other hand, were afraid of the people (*cf. Mk 11:18*). If only they had taken seriously the words with which they themselves addressed Jesus: “*Master, we know that you are an honest man, that you are not afraid of anyone, because human rank means nothing to you, and that you teach the way of God in all honesty.*”

These words would have been an invitation to examine themselves in the light of that statement. But the fact that they said one thing and pretended otherwise indicates that they had a corrupt heart, and that malice and falsehood had already become a habit.

Jesus, who knows the hearts of men, realised their hypocrisy and their intent. Knowing that the question came from a disloyal heart, He was not obliged to

answer them. However, Jesus gave them an answer that to this day resolves a difficult question: What does a believer owe to the state and what does he owe to God?

While we owe God everything, we owe “Caesar” only what he can justly demand of us. In this case it is taxes, for the children of God are also citizens of an earthly kingdom, whose rules they must abide by, as long as they do not demand things that go against God's laws. So we see that Jesus did not fall into the trap that was set for Him, showing Himself to be either an enemy of Caesar or an enemy of God.

But Jesus' reaction gives us a further lesson, which is to know how to cunningly evade such traps, so that in the end those who set them are unmasked. Although in this situation they are not likely to be converted, those observing the scene are instructed. By invoking the Holy Spirit, we too can be given light and the right answer if we find ourselves in such a situation.

But we can also benefit our spiritual life by looking at hypocrisy as an evil fruit of the heart. This reflection reminds us of the need to examine our motivations. Indeed, we should not be people with “two hearts”, so to speak, but with one sincere heart. That is why it is good to evaluate whether there are 'coexistences' in ourselves or in our intentions. By this term, we mean the fact that, with the good intention we show outwardly, perhaps a second intention is connected, oriented rather to the satisfaction of our own interests. If we do not become aware of these “coexistences” and do not fight against them, then our way of being can be overshadowed by something that is foreign to us.

For the purification of the heart it is important to know oneself, and to fight against even the subtlest inclinations that do not correspond to the light of the Gospel. The more vigilant we are in this, the easier it will be for the Holy Spirit to purify our heart, so that evil inclinations can no longer develop freely, poisoning ourselves and other people.

On the subject of self-knowledge, a talk can be seen on my YouTube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYGsM602NXA>