

21. June 2021

“Overcoming the world”

1 Jn 5:1-5

'Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God, and whoever loves the father loves the son. In this way we know that we love God's children, when we love God and keep his commandments. This is what the love of God is: keeping his commandments. Nor are his commandments burdensome, because every child of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. Who can overcome the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?'

Today, on the feast day of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, we meet a man who had already “conquered the world” at a very early age.

Aloysius came from a noble family and at the age of ten promised the Virgin Mary “eternal chastity”. Later, he had to confront his father in order to enter the Jesuit Order. There, Aloysius studied theology and devoted himself intensively to caring for the sick. When a plague epidemic broke out, he cared for the sick without worrying about himself. After three months of suffering, he himself died of the disease.

The saint left as a legacy many letters, which served as an example especially for young people. In these writings, as well as in his deeds of love for his neighbour, the faith that overcomes the world is manifested.

In the following, we will meditate on some sentences of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, which are excellent clues for a serious following of Christ and show us how we too can “overcome the world” in faith.

“It is a very dangerous matter to let oneself be carried away by a special attachment to a creature or created thing.”

Here the saint reminds us that we must learn to remain free before creatures. The danger St. Louis sees in this attachment is that our heart is no longer undividedly united to God. Consequently, our capacity to love diminishes. In the worst case, when creatures take the place of God, they can even become a kind of “idol” for

us. Part of the “victory over the world” is God's free and guided dealings with all creation, with people as well as with things.

“The Christian's strength springs from the holy fear of God, for he who fears God needs fear nothing else.”

This is a very good reference to the gift of the fear of God. Indeed, it moves us not to want to offend God in any way, because we love him and fear him in the sense of holy reverence. St. Aloysius makes it clear that with the gift of fear we can overcome the world, for we no longer fear the world and what is in it. Let us remember what Jesus said, *“In the world you will have hardship, but be courageous: I have conquered the world.”* (Jn 16:33). Then, the more this gift of the Holy Spirit is awakened in us, the more we will be able to overcome in the Lord the various threats and seductions that come from the world.

“All the perfection of the Gospel is attained through the fervent practice of prayer, and he who is not a man of prayer will never be perfect”

Here is essential advice never to neglect prayer. Through authentic prayer, God can increasingly exert his influence on us and dwell more deeply in our hearts. There are vocations that are especially dedicated to prayer; while others have other tasks besides prayer. But for anyone who wants to live the Gospel seriously, it is essential not to neglect prayer. It would be an illusion to believe that, being active, we would not be so much in need of the blessing of prayer, or that this activity could substitute for prayer. St. Aloysius, a man of prayer and of service to the sick, was well aware of this and exhorts us to cultivate prayer fervently.

“He who omits to help the soul of his neighbour does not know how to love God, because he does not seek to increase his glory”.

We are left with this last piece of advice from St. Aloysius, who calls us to care for the soul of our neighbour. There is nothing that is more important to man than to live according to the Will of God.

If we strive to increase the glory of God, we are also indirectly overcoming the world, for the world imprisons and binds the soul of man. Every step we support towards detachment from the world, every true comfort we give, every help we offer for the healing and sanctification of a soul, glorifies God and His love. We know that the conversion of a sinner causes joy in heaven (*cf. Lk 15:7*), and

everyone who takes the way of the Lord or goes deeper into it will increase the glory of God. And we can share the fruit of it!