

27. August 2021

“Called to Holiness”

1 Tes 4:1-8

'Finally, brothers, we urge you and appeal to you in the Lord Jesus; we instructed you how to live in the way that pleases God, and you are so living; but make more progress still. You are well aware of the instructions we gave you on the authority of the Lord Jesus. God wills you all to be holy. He wants you to keep away from sexual immorality, and each one of you to know how to control his body in a way that is holy and honourable, not giving way to selfish lust like the nations who do not acknowledge God. He wants nobody at all ever to sin by taking advantage of a brother in these matters; the Lord always pays back sins of that sort, as we told you before emphatically. God called us to be holy, not to be immoral; in other words, anyone who rejects this is rejecting not human authority, but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.'

We are called to holiness, and indeed, this is the most important task to undertake once we have lived a true conversion. The path of sanctification means beginning to listen to the Holy Spirit, who becomes the guide of our spiritual life.

To please God, we leave behind the old selfishness; that attitude in which we tend to revolve around our own self. Instead, the decisive question appears, “Lord, what is pleasing to You?” If we ask it sincerely, we will come to understand better and better the answer God gives us, for He loves this question, which glorifies Him.

On the human level, we know how beautiful it is to meet someone who sincerely asks us, “What can I do for you?” This person will quickly win our affection! Now, this happens even more so if we address this questioning to God, whose generosity is insurmountable. Indeed, the question “How can I please you?” is already the effect of the gift of piety, which is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit that serve to transform us entirely according to God's will. If this question becomes the lighthouse of our life, it will give us direction and we will begin to detach from ourselves in order to focus more and more on God.

Today's reading shows us that the Thessalonians had already embarked on the path of sanctification, and St. Paul invites them to make progress on it. This tells us something very important: it is possible to improve on the path of following Christ. In other words, it is possible to grow in love.

This is precisely what the path of sanctification is all about, for God has poured the Holy Spirit into our hearts (cf. Rom 5:5). And since the Holy Spirit is a divine person, it is God's own love that is now at work within us. This love is perfect, and it invites us to overcome our imperfections, to avoid sin and to perceive the influence of the Holy Spirit in us and upon us.

This path is not as difficult as it might seem at first, nor is it unattainable. Let us keep in mind that it is the Holy Spirit who reminds us of all that Jesus said and did (cf. Jn 14:26), and also gives us the strength to put it into practice.

Let us imagine a good teacher who instructs us in our work. He will tell us how we should do things; he will give us advice; he will encourage us when we are about to give up; he will correct us when we are wrong; he will insist that we listen to his instructions and be attentive when he speaks to us... If we value our teacher at work and trust him, it will be all the easier for us to accept his teachings, and to fulfill the tasks entrusted to us.

From this perspective, it will not be difficult for us to understand how the Holy Spirit works, for He is the true Master of the inner life. Moreover, He provides us with the strength to unfold the supernatural life in us, strengthening our will and enlightening our understanding. In this way, we can grow day by day in love.

In today's text, the Apostle to the Gentiles exhorts us to make proper use of the gift of sexuality. Apparently in the Thessalonian community there were still difficulties in restraining the sexual instinct through love. On the one hand, Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to abandon fornication, for sexual contact outside of marriage does not correspond to the Lord's Will. But neither should sexual life within marriage be dominated by lust. This means that pleasure, which is a gift for the conjugal union, must not become an end in itself, falling into unworthy and immoral practices.

In our time, it remains a great challenge to live conjugal sexuality with dignity and in a holy way, knowing how to properly integrate sexual pleasure into the love of the spouses. This challenge is probably addressed in a special way to the male, who is usually weaker in the field of lust.

Sanctification embraces the whole person, who is called to be configured according to the image of God, so that all that God has given him may develop and shine forth in him for His greater glory.

NOTE: Although in this meditation we have not addressed the saint whom we commemorate today, St. Monica, the mother of St. Augustine, we invite you to read the reflection we dedicated to her last year:

<http://en.elijamission.net/the-struggle-for-conversion/>