

29. August 2021

“Listening and acting”

Jas 1:17-18.21b-22:27

*'All that is good, all that is perfect, is given us from above; it comes down from the Father of all light; with him there is no such thing as alteration, no shadow caused by change. By his own choice he gave birth to us by the message of the truth so that we should be a sort of first-fruits of all his creation. So do away with all impurities and remnants of evil. Humbly welcome the Word which has been planted in you and can save your souls. But you must do what the Word tells you and not just listen to it and deceive yourselves. Pure, unspoilt religion, in the eyes of God our Father, is this: coming to the help of orphans and widows in their hardships, and keeping oneself uncontaminated by the world.'*

The Apostle James clearly reminds us that our faith must lead us to the corresponding works; otherwise, it risks remaining a dead faith (cf. Jas 2:17), and can even become for us a cause for condemnation. Faith teaches us how we should live, and the Holy Spirit who dwells in us urges us to concretize it in works. If we do not follow his indications, the impulse may be there, but it is not "made flesh"; that is, it does not become a palpable reality.

So, for us who want to follow the Lord, the question is: How can we better understand the motions of the Spirit and put them into practice?

The reading gives us a clear indication: *"Do away with all impurities and remnants of evil. Humbly welcome the Word which has been planted in you and can save your souls."*

Here we are told about the purification of our heart, the restraint of our passions, to aspire to meekness and to interiorize the Word of God. These are good predispositions to know how to better perceive the voice of the Holy Spirit and to put into action what He wants from us.

The uncleanness and evil in us - whatever it is - makes us insensitive to the delicate presence of the Holy Spirit, and is an impediment for Him to act in us. Our inner freedom is blocked and influenced by the dark side! For example, when we give in to anger or other strong negative feelings, they dominate us. But it is not the way of the Holy Spirit to raise His voice so loudly that we "drown out" these negative feelings. On the contrary, He will teach us to restrain them, so that we become receptive again. At this point, it is fundamental to mention meekness, which appears in today's text and which we should all aspire to.

Meekness, in contrast to unbridled anger, is a very spiritual attitude. It is by no means a matter of apathy or indifference proper to our natural temperament, which is not exalted by anything and shows no interest in anything.

We must exercise ourselves in meekness, learning also to perceive what are the causes of our anger, because certainly it is not always a "holy anger" that invades us. Many times it is rather impatience, because things do not happen as we expected or as we would like them to be, etc. If these are the causes of our anger, it means that we are "bound " to ourselves, especially if the anger and displeasure remain for a long time.

Meekness, on the other hand, renounces this kind of "self-affirmation" and seeks the truth of the objective situation, that is, it does not remain with what our feelings transmit to us, but with reality as it is. Thus, gentleness restrains us, orders our overflowing feelings and seeks what is convenient for true peace. It is important to clarify that it is necessary to have previously made a spiritual decision, because anger always justifies itself and believes it has reasonable motives, since it is carried away by feelings. Therefore, it is necessary to decide not to give it reins and not to justify it.

But how can anger be corrected in time, and not wait until the ardor and exaltation it produces has faded?

At this point, the Apostle's advice comes into play: *"Welcome the Word which has been planted in you."* If we apply it concretely to the case of unbridled anger, it would be important to internalize, for example, that word of Scripture which says that *"God's saving justice is never served by human anger."* (Jas 1:20)

Then, we should reflect again and again on this phrase, meditate on it, repeat it and even, if we notice that feelings of anger easily arise in us, we could recite it in our interior as an invocation, as a "prayer of the heart". And the Word of God, according to what the Apostle tells us today, has the power to save our souls! In our example, this would mean that the Word counteracts our disordered feelings and passions, and strengthens us for the good.

Thus, we become "hearers of the Word" who also put it into practice.

If we go through these interior purifications and work seriously within ourselves, not only will the promptings of the Holy Spirit reach us more easily, but we will also practice more naturally and easily the works of mercy, because it is the same Spirit who guides us and gives us the strength to do good.