

25. September 2021

St. Nicholas of Flüe

Mt 19:27-29

Reading for the memorial of St. Nicholas of Flüe

Then Peter answered and said, 'Look, we have left everything and followed you. What are we to have, then?' Jesus said to them, 'In truth I tell you, when everything is made new again and the Son of man is seated on his throne of glory, you yourselves will sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or land for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times as much, and also inherit eternal life.

It is not an inappropriate question that Peter addresses to Jesus. The disciples have left everything for His sake, and they want to know what reward awaits them. And Jesus gives them an answer: They will become Princes in the Kingdom of God. In fact, with this title we honour the Apostles in the Church. And Jesus goes on to say that all those who take a step like the Apostles, will obtain a great reward and inherit eternal life. The reward will be the great nearness of God, which they will be able to enjoy in eternity to the extent that they reciprocated His love. Can there be anything greater?

On this day, the Church commemorates a person who, like the disciples, left everything to follow Jesus. This is St. Nicholas of Flüe, who left his property and his family to retire to a hermitage and from there became a counsellor for many people. St. Nicholas is the patron saint of Switzerland. In his extraordinary life, the words of Scripture, which the Lord himself quoted when the Devil tempted him, became a reality: *"Human beings live not on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."* (Deut 8:3; Mt 4:4) In fact, the saint lived exclusively on Holy Communion for the last 20 years of his life.

From the rich treasure of mysticism that St. Nicholas experienced, this well-known prayer of his stands out:

**"My Lord and my God, take from me everything that distances me from You;
My Lord and my God, give me everything that brings me closer to You;
My Lord and my God, detach me from myself to give my all to You".**

In these words, St. Nicholas - also known as Brother Klaus - takes up the classic "ways" of the path of sanctification.

"My Lord and my God, take from me everything that distances me from You"

This first sentence alludes to the way of purification (via purgativa), which is

necessary for us to overcome all disordered attachments to creatures. Any disordered attachment that has not been overcome diminishes our capacity to love, because then our heart is not totally free to give itself to God, but is still attached to transient goods or disorderedly attached to people.

"My Lord and my God, give me everything that brings me closer to You"

This second part of the prayer represents the illuminative way (the path of enlightenment). In His love and generosity, God grants us everything we need to unfold a rich inner life: His Word, the holy sacraments, inner guidance, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, among many other things. All of these enlighten us, that is, God's light spreads in our soul and in this light we learn to better understand God's presence and guidance. It is the light of the Holy Spirit, which enlightens us more and more, moving us to all that is good and increasing the image and likeness of God in us.

"My Lord and my God, detach me from myself to give my all to You"

Here we speak of the unitive way (unification with God). It is about the unconditional surrender of our whole person. Brother Klaus knows how difficult this is. Many are able to give something of themselves in order to serve God, and perhaps they are even willing to give up a lot of things. But here it is a question of giving everything. We no longer plan our own life; we place it entirely in God's hands. Beyond our good will and determination, we need God's grace. That is why St. Nicholas turns to God in this prayer, that He may be the one to carry out this work.

Saints like Brother Nicholas show us what a life can be when it is placed undividedly at the service of God. Not only does the Lord promise reward for eternity, but already here on earth such a life becomes a profound joy, even if it is marked by suffering. To live according to God's will and to confidently accept the invitation to total surrender brings deep peace to the soul. Thus, already in his earthly life he finds his home in God, and looks forward to the final meeting with Him in eternity.