

4. October 2021

Love of God and love of neighbour

Lk 10:25-37

'And now a lawyer stood up and, to test him, asked, 'Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the Law? What is your reading of it?' He replied, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself. 'Jesus said to him, 'You have answered right, do this and life is yours.' But the man was anxious to justify himself and said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour? 'In answer Jesus said, 'A man was once on his way down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of bandits; they stripped him, beat him and then made off, leaving him half dead. Now a priest happened to be travelling down the same road, but when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. In the same way a Levite who came to the place saw him, and passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan traveller who came on him was moved with compassion when he saw him. He went up to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He then lifted him onto his own mount and took him to an inn and looked after him. Next day, he took out two denarii and handed them to the innkeeper and said, "Look after him, and on my way back I will make good any extra expense you have." Which of these three, do you think, proved himself a neighbour to the man who fell into the bandits' hands?' He replied, 'The one who showed pity towards him.' Jesus said to him, 'Go, and do the same yourself.'

In reality, the Law of the Lord is very simple and consistent. It should be most natural that we love the One who created and redeemed us, and our neighbour as ourselves. This corresponds to truth and is therefore part of the spiritual order. No one could seriously refute this truth. And the fact that the Lord promises us eternal life in return is a reason for us to rejoice.

But there are many obstacles to the fulfilment of this command of the Lord, which summarises the whole of the Law and the Prophets. It takes a long and intense journey of purification to reach the point of putting absolutely nothing before God. It is not just a matter of a good intention or a wish, which is also good, but this commandment must be put into practice in our daily lives. To do this, we must perceive the attachments that are still in our hearts, for the Lord told us that *"For wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be too."* (Mt 6:21) The heart can be attached to so many things, and above all to ourselves. The masters of the spiritual life, such as St. John of the Cross, teach us that if we tolerate even a single voluntary imperfection, our heart will not be able to rise fully to God.

What does this mean? Perhaps we have noticed for some time that the Lord is asking us to take a certain step on our path of discipleship: perhaps it is a detachment from something, or the renunciation of a certain person or other circumstances that prevent us from walking our path better, or forgiveness and reconciliation with someone, or being willing to acknowledge something within ourselves, or admitting a mistake, and so on.

At the same time that the Lord invites us to take this step, we may feel within us a refusal to do so, and it is as if something is holding us back. This happens precisely because our heart is still bound.

The willfulness of an imperfection means that, although we are aware of it, we do not do what would be necessary to overcome it. However, as long as we do not take this step or at least struggle to take it with God's help - and we can always count on God's help - our heart cannot be fully immersed in God's love.

Thus, there are many things that have to be overcome within us by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is He who shows them to us and, at the same time, gives us the ability to get rid of everything that hinders us from loving God with all our heart.

Unfortunately, there are believers who do not understand that these processes of detachment can become a spiritual joy, since inner freedom grows with each step we take, and so does our receptivity to God's love, together with our capacity for loving surrender to Him.

The second aspect of today's text - love of neighbour, which Jesus shows us with the parable of the Good Samaritan - is a fruit of love for God. The more my heart is filled with love for God, the more I will be able to recognise in the other person my brother, who is as much loved by God as I am. In this way, love for God becomes concrete in the service of others.

Even more necessary than attention to the physical well-being of our neighbour is concern for the salvation of his soul. For also on the spiritual level man has been assaulted by bandits, and many pass him by without helping him. Love of neighbour involves both corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Here too we have to work, so that we become capable of loving our brothers and sisters constantly and concretely.

Then, if we love God and our neighbour, we will have fulfilled the Lord's commandment - a wonderful invitation from Him!