

15. October 2021

Purification processes

Jn 15:1-8

Reading corresponding to the feast day of St. Teresa of Avila

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more. You are clean already, by means of the word that I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a branch - and withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire and are burnt. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for whatever you please and you will get it. It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit and be my disciples.'

St. Teresa of Avila is a Doctor of the Church, and her teaching was particularly focused on the spiritual life. She lamented that many of the faithful do not understand that it is necessary to undergo purifications on the spiritual path, so that God can fully communicate Himself to the soul and unify it to Himself.

Today's Gospel also tells us about purifications and abiding in Christ. Now, what do purifications mean on the path of following Christ and why are they so important for the fruitfulness of the spiritual life?

In the first instance, it is important to lose the fear that people often feel when they hear about inner purifications, and also to come to understand that they are unavoidable for entering the Kingdom of God. The one who avoids them will remain a child on the spiritual plane, who does not want to grow up. And the danger when one does not want to grow up is that one can regress in the spiritual life. Then, not only will one remain a child, but one may even lose what one has already achieved on the spiritual path.

The process of purification is a process of God's love. In the Gospel we hear that the Father himself cleanses the branches so that they will bear more fruit. In other words, he does it so that the branch is all the more united to the vine, which is the Lord himself.

Having met the Lord and experienced a true conversion to Him, God begins the work of our inner transformation. The Holy Spirit, who is the love between the Father and the Son, enters into us with His light. He is divine love, which has been poured into our hearts (cf. Rom 5:5). And this love wants to permeate all areas of our life, and that is where it

encounters various obstacles.

There are disordered passions in us, and we are often very attached to the world of the senses. This limits our inner freedom and binds our capacity to love by directing it to fleeting things. The Holy Spirit will bring this to our attention, *“For wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be too.”* (Mt 6:21)

It is not that we have to despise the visible world to the point that we no longer want to have anything to do with it. This could be a path for particularly ascetic people, although here too we must be careful not to fall into extremes, for God created all things well (Gen 1:31).

What we have to fight against are the disordered inclinations, which make us give too much importance to certain passing things: we become attached to them, we give them too much attention and we cannot let go....

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to place everything in us in its spiritual order. In this spiritual order, love for God must take first place and dominate our life (cf. Mt 22:37).

Now, if the Holy Spirit finds in us something that binds that capacity to love, which should really be more God-centred, then He will invite us to put what we are attached to in its rightful place. This will also involve taking ascetic steps of renunciation.

Let us suppose, for example, that we are too attached to food, to comfort, to wealth, to the delights of the senses, and so on. This is a greater hindrance to our soul than we realise, because our inner attention is too much focussed on passing pleasure. The Holy Spirit wants us to preserve the beauty and dignity of our soul, and wants to fill it with God, so that it shines in all its beauty and is not dulled by the lack of freedom, thus losing its receptivity to God.

The process of purification does not only concern the attachments to the world of the senses; it also touches other areas in our soul that need to be purified. At another time, we will return to this theme and expand upon it...