

04. November 2021

Wholesome admonitions of the apostle to the nations

Rom 12: 3-13

Reading corresponding to the feast of St Charles Borromeo

'Through the grace that I have been given, I say this to every one of you: never pride yourself on being better than you really are, but think of yourself dispassionately, recognising that God has given to each one his measure of faith. Just as each of us has various parts in one body, and the parts do not all have the same function: in the same way, all of us, though there are so many of us, make up one body in Christ, and as different parts we are all joined to one another. Then since the gifts that we have differ according to the grace that was given to each of us: if it is a gift of prophecy, we should prophesy as much as our faith tells us; if it is a gift of practical service, let us devote ourselves to serving; if it is teaching, to teaching; if you are put in charge, you must be conscientious if it is encouraging, to encouraging. When you give, you should give generously from the heart; if you do works of mercy, let it be because you enjoy doing them. Let love be without any pretence. Avoid what is evil; stick to what is good. In brotherly love let your feelings of deep affection for one another come to expression and regard others as more important than yourself. In the service of the Lord, work not halfheartedly but with conscientiousness and an eager spirit. Be joyful in hope, persevere in hardship; keep praying regularly; share with any of God's holy people who are in need; look for opportunities to be hospitable.'

If the Lord warns us through a parable not to bury our talents, but to multiply them and make them fruitful for the Kingdom of God (Mt 25:14-30), in today's reading the Apostle exhorts us not to go beyond what has been entrusted to us. When each of the members serves in his or her place and with the gifts that God has entrusted to the Body of Christ, which is His Church, a marvellous harmony emerges. If we imagine heaven, we can get an idea of this harmony. There, angels and saints occupy the place and the task assigned to them by God, and praise the Lord together in perfect unity. There is no envy or anything else to disturb the harmony.

Our life on earth should already reflect this heavenly reality, even if we cannot yet experience God's beatific vision and are not yet free from our defects. But it is up to us to cooperate with God's grace, so that the life of the Spirit becomes a reality already here on Earth. The helpful warnings of the Apostle to the Gentiles point to this, showing us what we should strive for and avoid so that harmony may not be affected or hindered by the evil inclinations we carry as a consequence of original sin.

Let us notice some of his advice:

"When you give, you should give generously from the heart"

This is a way of giving that is pure and very different from that custom which always expects to receive something in return or to obtain a special advantage for what has been given. It is God's way of giving, who out of pure love showers us with blessings. Following His example, we must learn to give out of love, simply because it is good and beautiful to give and to increase this love. If within us there is still other information or other intentions and interests, our gift will not have that purity which makes it shine. If we still perceive such shadows and self-interests within us, let us bring them sincerely before the Lord, asking Him to purify us and teach us to give as He gives.

"If you are put in charge, you must be conscientious"

He who has been called to an office of leading, let him exercise it with joy and solicitude, for it is an honour to serve God and men in this responsibility entrusted to him. He who has such an office must be careful not to exercise it with discontent, making people feel that it is a burden and a great effort for him. Again and again the fervour to fulfil this mission must be renewed in the Spirit of God. For this, it will help us to see the untiring love with which God accompanies us throughout our lives. The Gospel read today to commemorate St. Charles Borromeo opens a broad horizon for those who have received the office of presiding: *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep"* (Jn 10:11). Here we find the key so that our strength can be renewed again and again! The Lord is not only the most brilliant model; but He Himself gives the necessary graces to the one who presides in His Name.

"Avoid what is evil; stick to what is good."

We can never get used to evil, even if it presents itself to us behind a mask and in disguise. It is characteristic of the devil to pretend to be an "angel of light" (cf. 2 Cor 11:14), to deceive people and even to pass off evil as good. The more common and natural evil becomes to us and the more we become accustomed to it - think, for example, of abortion - the more our horror of abominations fades. But this must not happen, for we must always know how to distinguish clearly between what is evil and what is good. By adhering to the good and striving to practice it, we will grow in love. Since *"No one is good but God alone"* - as Jesus makes clear to us (Lk 18:19) - good works will make us increasingly sharers in God's own way of being and acting. In other words, all the good we do will increase God's grace in us.