



9. November 2021

Series on the unfreedoms

Part 1: The fear

If you are familiar with my daily meditations, you will notice that I try to offer a help to deepen the way of following Christ, based on Sacred Scripture and the authentic teaching of the Church. Occasionally, I interrupt the usual rhythm of the biblical meditations to deal with a theme that I consider important in the form of a "series". In this way, certain topics related to the spiritual life can be dealt with in greater depth.

On this occasion, I will deal with a topic that - as far as I know - is not often dealt with in the context of the spiritual way. It is the so-called "unfreedom", which prevents our faith from expressing itself in all its beauty and consequently also obscures our witness of life, which should be an invitation for others to find the way to God.

For the first meditation in this series, I have chosen the theme of fear, which is one of these unfreedoms. It will not be a psychological reflection on fear, but on how we should deal with it in faith, so that it does not dominate us or cloud our lives.

Indeed, fear is one of the great unfreedoms and represents a strong restriction for people. In these times in particular, there is a great fear of catching a virus. This fear, which is reinforced by the respective media coverage, often leads politicians and the people concerned to take irrational measures. Someone recently gave me a booklet with the title: "Trust in God instead of fear of the coronavirus". These words are very accurate for the current situation, and also point the way out of so many manifestations of fear, which lead us to a great unfreedom and want to dominate our lives.

Fear as an unfreedom - and we are not referring here to justified precautions in the face of real dangers - can be an enormous attack on the individual. To counteract it, we are not supposed to be "heroes", who fearlessly rush onto the battlefield, without considering the circumstances and the consequences. But neither should we ever allow ourselves to be paralysed by fear to the point of becoming unable - or feeling unable - to do our part. Fear, then, must not dominate us in such a way that we are on the run, avoiding the situations that come our way, rather than facing them with confidence in the Lord.

In this context, I am not talking about a chronic or pathological fear; rather, I am referring to that attitude that lacks freedom and that arises because we have given in to fear, without counteracting it.

The author Dietrich von Hildebrand, in his book "Our transformation in Christ" - which, by the way, is highly recommended reading - poses a rhetorical question regarding this issue:

"It is a fact that even convinced Christians, who seek Christ in all sincerity, may sometimes lapse into a state of anxiety which palsies their free response to value. How does this happen? How does it come about that our souls, even though Christian, may benumbed into a kind of spasm in which they are unable to look at anything except a certain evil, the dread of which fascinates us to the point of caring about nothing but our escape from that evil? How can we so much fall under the domination of that fear that we stoop to considering everything from this one point of view only? (...) How is it possible that, having received the message of the Gospels and giving credence to it, we should still tremble sometimes before even comparatively puny evils?"

Faced with this rhetorical question, Hildebrand comes to the following conclusion:

"The chief reason lies in our habit of submitting to the sovereignty of a self-evident purpose like that of avoiding an obvious evil, which causes us to omit confronting that evil, taken in its actual content, with God. We no longer consider the question as to what, after all, it would mean to us if we had to endure that calamity, but formally erect its avoidance into an unequivocal and autonomous aim. (...) Thus, the evil in question acquires an enhanced significance which is out of proportion with its real import. (...) Anxieties of this kind (...) not seldom afflict us with far heavier distress than would the thing we fear itself, were it really to happen"

To put it simply: Instead of turning to God with our fear; instead of opening to Him in prayer our tense attitude (because fear introduces us into a tension that makes us revolve around ourselves); instead of re-nurturing our trust in Him, we allow ourselves to be drawn into the negative dynamics of fear. We are then so preoccupied with avoiding what we fear, that we look for solutions that are in turn determined by fear. Not infrequently it happens that even our understanding is confused, so that we may act irrationally and create "avoidance strategies".

It is important to remember the words of the Lord, who tells us: *"If the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free."* (Jn 8:36); and also to meditate on this statement of His: *"In the world you will have hardship, but be courageous: I have conquered the world."* (Jn 16:33).

The antithesis of fear is trust in God, which has to be activated especially in those situations where fear wants to dominate us. This happens through intense prayer and also through corresponding acts of will. If we turn to the Lord, He will lead us and bring us through this fear.

Tomorrow we will return to the subject...