

9. February 2022

“The pure heart”

*Mk 7:14-23*

*In that time, Jesus called the people to him again and said, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean; it is the things that come out of someone that make that person unclean. Anyone who has ears for listening should listen!' When he had gone into the house, away from the crowd, his disciples questioned him about the parable. He said to them, 'Even you - don't you understand? Can't you see that nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean, because it goes not into the heart but into the stomach and passes into the sewer? And he went on, 'It is what comes out of someone that makes that person unclean. For it is from within, from the heart, that evil intentions emerge: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within and make a person unclean.'*

*"Listen to me, all of you, and understand"* says the Lord to those who listen to him. He speaks these words to us too, but we will only understand them if we are really willing to listen to him, and do not remain superficial hearers. Jesus is not talking about the state of a particular heart; he is talking about the human heart in general. So we must understand that he is talking about us personally, and these words of his have consequences for our way with God!

What are these consequences?

First of all, we must draw the conclusion that the Lord makes absolutely clear to us: it is not what comes from outside that contaminates man; it is what comes out of the heart. Consequently, we must stop blaming circumstances for what goes on inside us. However complex they may be, it is not they that corrupt us; it is only what dwells in our heart and proceeds from it that corrupts us!

Therefore, the second consequence is to get on with the work of purifying our heart. This is hard and long labour, because, as the Scripture says, *"The heart is more devious than any other thing, and is depraved; who can pierce its secrets? I, Yahweh, search the heart, test the motives, to give each person what his conduct and his actions deserve."* (Jer 17:9-10a).

So, if it is the Lord who can search the heart, it must be possible for us, with His grace, to perceive what is within us, with all its abysses and obscurities. But the condition for this is that we really want to purify ourselves, and that we admit that we are in need of purification. Even if it scares us initially, it would not be the right attitude not to even try, for fear of what we might discover within ourselves. Then we will not be able to bear fruit on the way with God! On the contrary, if we perceive our faults in the light of the Lord, we can consciously bring them to Him and open them for the Holy Spirit to touch them. We will then cease to live in an illusion about ourselves, and self-knowledge will help us to grow in humility and to be more forgiving of the faults of others.

Exploring the heart is a spiritual process, necessary for the purification of the heart.

Fr. Lallemand S.I., a spiritual master who lived in the 16th and 17th century, gives us some valuable insights on the subject. He tells us: *"Purity of heart consists in tolerating nothing in our heart that is opposed even in the least to God and to the work of grace"*.

He continues, *"The devil cannot bear that we should look into our hearts, that we should explore their disorders and endeavour to improve them. Nor is there anything that frightens our own heart so much as this trial and therapy, which will show its misery and make it feel it. All the powers of our soul are in turmoil, and we are not even interested in becoming conscious of their disorder, for this knowledge would humiliate us."*

So what are we to do?

In order not to be discouraged and not to fall into scrupulous introspection in the process of knowing one's own heart, it is necessary to become aware of God's love, and to bring it always to mind. God does not love us because we are perfect! No! He simply loves us, and He wants to purify our heart through this love that He pours into it, so that we are more and more able to reciprocate His love. So we must understand the purification of the heart as a process of God's love, and not as a punishment from Him.

Those who have children know that it is necessary to point out to them, gently or sometimes severely, the things that can harm them; as well as, on the other hand, to show them those things that will help them on their life's journey. This is how children will be able to mature!

And it is the same on the spiritual path. God invites us to perceive in His light the obstacles within us, and to work to overcome them. Therefore, we should not be afraid when we discover in our hearts those inclinations that Jesus describes in today's Gospel. Rather, let us ask the Lord to purify our hearts and let us be attentive to do our part.

Let us listen again to Father Lallemand, who gives us concrete advice on how to move forward in the purification of the heart:

- 1. Pay attention to venial sins and try to overcome them.*
- 2. Observe attentively the disorderly movements of the heart and remedy them.*
- 3. Watch over the thoughts and try to restrain them.*
- 4. Seek to recognise the motions of God, His plans and dispositions, and to encourage ourselves earnestly to put them into practice.*

The deplorable state of our hearts, which Jesus describes so clearly in the Gospel, need not remain so. Rather, we are invited to cooperate with God's grace in the transformation of that heart.

We remember those wonderful words of the Lord: *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God"* (Mt 5:6).

Can there be a more beautiful invitation?