

24. February 2022

## Responsibility for our actions

Jas 5:1-6

*Well now, you rich! Lament, weep for the miseries that are coming to you. Your wealth is rotting, your clothes are all moth-eaten. All your gold and your silver are corroding away, and the same corrosion will be a witness against you and eat into your body. It is like a fire which you have stored up for the final days. Can you hear crying out against you the wages which you kept back from the labourers mowing your fields? The cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord Sabaoth. On earth you have had a life of comfort and luxury; in the time of slaughter you went on eating to your heart's content. It was you who condemned the upright and killed them; they offered you no resistance.*

The responsibility borne by those rich people who close their hearts and are only concerned with accumulating wealth is very big. Let us recall the parable that Jesus tells us about the rich man and the poor man Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31).

But their situation becomes intolerable when they also unjustly acquire these riches, cheating those who, by the sweat of their brow, earned their wages.

In no way can one draw from these words of James a legitimisation for Marxism, nor can one claim to find here a biblical foundation for the so-called "liberation theology". But the strong words of this reading do exhort us to an examination of conscience about how we handle earthly goods, what we do with the spiritual goods we have been given and how much responsibility it means to possess them.

Let us simply keep in mind that everything we do or fail to do has consequences. *"In everything you do, remember your end"*, the book of Sirach tells us (7:36a). But we tend to stop thinking about it and simply jump into action.

If our actions and words come from a good heart, which has already been sufficiently purified and is already capable of following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, then we can set out on the path with greater confidence and can generally heed our inner impulses.

But if we are not yet so advanced in our spiritual life, it is all the more important that we reflect on our words and actions, examining them in the light of truth. To do this, Sacred Scripture gives us very simple rules that we all know and that Jesus calls us to

remember. Let us remember, for example, that the Lord tells us: *"So always treat others as you would like them to treat you"* (Mt 7:12).

The key point is in the concrete application of these "maxims" of the Lord. Those rich people to whom today's reading is addressed do not even deign to think about God's precepts. Their inner self is already consumed by greed and injustice, and their conscience has become numb. Unscrupulously, thoughtlessly and ruthlessly, they reach the height of injustice, because evil tends to grow more and more and, if it is not stopped, it ends up devouring everything in its insatiability.

In order not to reach even the abyss of such darkness, it is highly advisable that we immediately oppose any form of injustice that manifests itself in our deeds or words. We should not allow anything that could further develop negatively. If we do this in all areas, always being attentive to our hearts and actions, then we will be purified in the Spirit of the Lord. And if we were weak and gave in to our negative inclinations, we should immediately put the matter right before God and, if possible, also before the people concerned.

In order to avoid any injustice and greed, the practice of the virtues, with which we consciously counteract our evil inclinations, is even more effective. Against greed, there is generosity. Against injustice, there is acting justly and mercifully. The longing for and practice of these virtues permanently strengthens us in doing good, and makes us more and more receptive to identifying the good. In this way, we also become more aware that we must handle our gifts and talents with great responsibility. For when we do good, it will unfold more and more, just as evil increases more and more when it is not stopped.