

28. February 2022

Strengthened by the tests

1 Pet 1:3-9

Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into a heritage that can never be spoilt or soiled and never fade away. It is reserved in heaven for you who are being kept safe by God's power through faith until the salvation which has been prepared is revealed at the final point of time. This is a great joy to you, even though for a short time yet you must bear all sorts of trials; so that the worth of your faith, more valuable than gold, which is perishable even if it has been tested by fire, may be proved - to your praise and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. You have not seen him, yet you love him; and still without seeing him you believe in him and so are already filled with a joy so glorious that it cannot be described; and you are sure of the goal of your faith, that is, the salvation of your souls.

Times of trial are difficult for us and we long for their end. This reaction is quite understandable, for it corresponds to our human nature. Indeed, we know that in eternity there will be no more such trials. Thanks be to God, we will then be able to contemplate Him face to face, without ever being attacked again, without the slightest disturbance. Towards that reality we are heading and our soul rejoices - or at least it should in spirit - at the very thought of it.

However, the Apostle Peter, in his wisdom, not only exhorts us to set our sights on eternity; but, precisely with this vision of eternity, he encourages us for the present. Trials should not rob us of joy! When we overcome them, they even become a merit for us.

This is a very important perspective. God gives us the grace to turn these adverse circumstances in our earthly life - the persecutions, sufferings and temptations - into "gold" or even "more precious than gold", as the Apostle says. To some extent, it depends on us how close we can be to God in eternity; it depends on our waging the struggle that is part of the journey of faith. By consciously accepting this struggle, we show the Lord our love, and with each trial we overcome, this love grows and strengthens.

On our spiritual journey we strive for perfection in love, i.e. unification with the Lord, which happens precisely in love.

We can understand this very simply: The Lord created us out of love, redeemed us out of love and sanctifies us in love. There is no other motivation for Him, for He is love itself. Therefore, the goal of our spiritual life is to be eternally united with Him in this divine love, in which our purified human love also has a place. This is the marvellous work that God wants to accomplish in us, for which we can never thank Him enough. This work of salvation is completed by the Holy Spirit, who has been poured into our hearts (Rom 5:5) and carries out in them the great task of our inner transformation.

Now God gives us the opportunity to contribute to the increase of this love, not only through our praises, the reception of the sacraments, good works and all kinds of authentic religious practices, but also through spiritual combat. It teaches us to face temptations and trials in such a way that they strengthen us (because we are testing the "quality of our faith") and, at the same time, weaken the power of the Evil One, who wants to take advantage of our weaknesses and disordered inclinations to make us fall, i.e. to turn us away from God.

Against this background, it becomes clear why the Apostle does not merely pity us for being exposed to such trials, but shows us how God uses these trials for our good.

This is the decisive guideline: learning to see how God sees things and what His plan is for His people when He permits evil. This applies to the personal dimension, but it also applies to evil in the world and in the Church.

With the help of the Apostle Peter, we should be able to remember this in the concrete situation when we are attacked, and invoke the Holy Spirit so that we do not fall prey to the Devil's schemes or allow ourselves to be seduced by the world and our own cravings.

If our faith is strengthened, we will be able to stand in all trials, and the Lord will be pleased when we come into His presence one day.