

15. March 2022

## The patience of God

Isa 1:10, 16-20

*Hear what Yahweh says, you rulers of Sodom; listen to what our God teaches, you people of Gomorrah. Wash, make yourselves clean. Take your wrong-doing out of my sight. Cease doing evil. Learn to do good, search for justice, discipline the violent, be just to the orphan, plead for the widow. 'Come, let us talk this over,' says Yahweh. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing to obey, you shall eat the good things of the earth. But if you refuse and rebel, the sword shall eat you instead - for Yahweh's mouth has spoken.'*

God never ceases to call people to conversion, and He continues to do so to this day! He sends his messengers to remind and warn the nations of the importance of conversion. In this call, the Lord always has in view the most disadvantaged, those who most need help and who are easily forgotten. We humans tend to forget such people; God, however, does not. He sees the need and responds with compassion, while reminding us humans to do the same.

In contrast to the wicked and sinful behaviour of Sodom and Gomorrah, we have God's constant willingness to forgive. This is one of the most wonderful characteristics one can encounter. Through it, we can get a glimpse of God's heart, which remains open to man even when he has lost his way and practises evil. Forgiveness is a constant offer of God's love.

What human reality could help us better understand the magnitude of God's love and forgiveness? Perhaps what most resembles this basic attitude of God is the love of a mother, who stands by her child even when he or she is going astray.

We are as much in need of this divine love today as were Sodom and Gomorrah, those vice-filled cities on which God's judgement eventually fell. God does not want us to remain in a state with deplorable consequences. He does not want it for our personal life or for public life.

So what can our Lord do so that men are not eternally lost and so that even in this life they do not have to bear the consequences of their evil deeds?

First of all, we see God's patience. He never tires of calling men through His Son, whose voice resounds especially through the Church. She is and must be the school in which people learn to do good, in which they encounter the authentic voice of God, in which the family is strengthened so that it in turn becomes a school for doing good.

The Church should also be the prophetic voice in the public sphere, calling people to conversion. In this sense, it is important that sin be pointed out as sin, for God always offers the possibility of conversion, but for man to accept it he must become aware of his wrongdoing. If sin is no longer called by name, the prophetic voice is weakened and leaves man and society in the lethargy of self-deception, the awakening of which could be very bitter. Unfortunately, with the passage of time, one can become accustomed to the state of sin, so that it no longer seems so serious to us or even, in the worst case, we see it as something positive.

However, God's patience cannot be abused and the time for conversion cannot be postponed, as today's reading shows us.

But what can God do when men and nations simply do not want to be converted, but keep piling sin upon sin and do not accept God's offer of forgiveness or hear the call to conversion?

Sometimes God has no choice but to send warnings, which may help one or the other, but do not always lead to real and lasting change.

God then turns to those who have already heard his call. To these he exhorts them to do his will even better and to place their lives entirely at his service. Pope Pius XII once said: *"This is a deep mystery, and an inexhaustible subject of meditation, that the salvation of many depends on the prayers and voluntary penances which the members of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ offer"* (*Encyclical Mystici Corporis Christi*, 19).

Here again we take a look into the depths of God's most loving Heart. He does not make justice prevail that man and every people should harvest what he has sown; but his mercy impels him now to invite his own, those in whom his love can already act and grow, to do even more, to love more, to practise spiritual works of mercy in reparation for the transgressions of others and to ask forgiveness on his behalf. It is the Spirit of the Lord that prompts us to do this, for He Himself died on the cross for our sins, suffering on our behalf.

We see, then, that God uses every means to reach out to us men, and even sent His own Son, so that men might obtain forgiveness for their sins in Him.

A great problem in our time, which unfortunately is becoming more and more widespread, especially in European countries, is the blindness to what sin is. Not infrequently, importance is attached only to a certain category of transgressions, whether real or supposed; for example, environmental pollution, lack of tolerance, certain anti-democratic behaviours, among others...

On the other hand, serious sins, which have terrible consequences even for future generations, are not even considered sins, but rather are applauded. For example: abortion, other moral deviations, the relativisation and support of perverse ways of life, etc.

What else can the Lord do in these circumstances?

Here we would be entering a field that is not normally accessible to us. We do not know the ways God has to bring everything to a good end. We can only hold on to this certainty: God does not want the death of the sinner (Ez 18:23), God does not want to destroy any nation. His love exhausts all resources to reach man! However, man, for his part, must accept God's offer and not close himself up to death.

Let us place in the heart of our Mother Mary our deep desire that we ourselves as well as others may respond sincerely to God's call to conversion. At the beginning of this meditation I had mentioned that a mother's love is perhaps the human reality that most resembles the merciful love of our Heavenly Father. This is even more true for the Mother of God, who accepted His love more than any other creature! She will know ways to reach hearts, which we ignore.