

30. March 2022

The time of grace

Isa 49:8-15

Thus says Yahweh: At the time of my favour I have answered you, on the day of salvation I have helped you. I have formed you and have appointed you to be the covenant for a people, to restore the land, to return ravaged properties, to say to prisoners, 'Come out,' to those who are in darkness, 'Show yourselves.' Along the roadway they will graze, and any bare height will be their pasture. They will never hunger or thirst, scorching wind and sun will never plague them; for he who pities them will lead them, will guide them to springs of water. I shall turn all my mountains into a road and my highways will be raised aloft. Look! Here they come from far away, look, these from the north and the west, those from the land of Sinim. Shout for joy, you heavens; earth, exult! Mountains, break into joyful cries! For Yahweh has consoled his people, is taking pity on his afflicted ones. Zion was saying, 'Yahweh has abandoned me, the Lord has forgotten me.' Can a woman forget her baby at the breast, feel no pity for the child she has borne? Even if these were to forget, I shall not forget you.

This is the experience that is repeated again and again for the people of Israel and for all those who trust in God: the Lord has mercy on his people. To put it even more precisely, this is the constant experience in the life of faith: the Lord always has mercy, and mercy is part of his being. In a way, God cannot but be merciful, because he himself is love, who always finds ways to show mercy. However, it must be added that man, as well as those angels who were unfaithful to the Lord, can close themselves off from God's mercy and love, even for ever. What a tragedy!

Again and again we must become aware that we live in the "time of grace" and in the bright "day of salvation". The gates of heaven are open, and we do not know how much longer this hour of grace will last for mankind.

The Lord told us neither the day nor the hour when the Last Judgement will take place (cf. Mt 24:36), nor do we know when our death will come. But in today's text he does insist that we be attentive to the "now", to the present hour of salvation, to his desire to redeem his people and all humanity. So let us live the "now" full of joy and drink from the wellsprings of salvation.

Yesterday we meditated on the river of life, which flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb (cf. Rev 22:1); on the fountain of love that flows from the Heart of our Father. We were able to understand how much God loves us, and that we can be the recipients of that love.

In the book of Nehemiah, we heard the following words: *"Today is sacred to Yabweh your God. Do not be mournful, do not weep. Do not be sad: the joy of Yabweh is your stronghold."* (8,9b.10b)

The great "spiritual art", then, consists in living the "now", the "Kairos", the "hour of grace" in our personal life and in the history of humanity. How can we manage to wake up from our sleepiness, to move forward with agility on the path of following Christ? How can we hurry and make the most of the time that is given to us? St. Paul exhorts us to make good use of the present time (cf. Eph 5:16).

The key may be obedience to the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us as a comforter and guide. His living presence will make us ever more awake to love, because He Himself is the love that has been poured into our hearts (cf. Rom 5:5). And this is precisely the way: to grow in love, for therein lies the power of unification.

The Holy Spirit will not rest until he has reached his goal: that we listen to him with all readiness and play our part in God's redemptive work. And, since the Holy Spirit has all men in view, wanting to bring each one to recognise the glory of God and His Messiah, He will put us in a state of healthy restlessness, so that we not only co-operate in our own sanctification - though this is the first task - but also have all mankind in view and be truly 'catholic', that is, universal.

He will make us understand that we must not put off good works until tomorrow; we must do them NOW. He will put it in our hearts to pray for all men, and sometimes for particular people. He will teach us to put off our lukewarmness and to realise that NOW is the time of salvation and the hour of grace; that NOW is when we can do the good works for time and for eternity; He will teach us not to let opportunities pass us by. He will instruct us more and more subtly, until we know His voice well and can recognise with relative ease God's Will for NOW. And then the Holy Spirit Himself will strengthen us to do it.

In God's Will, which we will fulfil better and better, will be the source of constant joy. We may not always feel it emotionally, but it will be present in our spirit.

Some fathers of the spiritual life distinguish two fields in the soul: one that is more associated with the sensitive plane; and one that is more oriented towards God. This latter realm they call the 'spiritual dimension of the soul' or simply 'spirit'. And in this latter dimension one can experience joy in God, without necessarily perceiving it on the emotional plane. Let us think, for example, of a person who is undergoing great suffering. If he is a soul who loves God, he can offer it to Him as a sacrifice, and his spirit can rejoice in it; while the emotional dimension of the soul continues to feel the pain.

Let us consciously live the hour of salvation, which has been granted to all mankind, and let us be certain that God's inexhaustible love sustains and sends us.