

4. April 2022

The story of Susanna

Because of the length of today's reading, I'll give a brief summary: it tells the story of Susanna, a respectable woman. Two of the elders of Israel tried to seduce her. But she eluded them. Thereupon they brought false charges against her that she had taken up with a young man and threatened her with death. In her distress, Susanna entrusted herself to God. The Lord raised up Daniel as her defender, who convicted the two old men of being liars. Susanna was vindicated, the two elders were put to death. The whole reading under Daniel 13.

In this story we meet very different characters. First of all, Susanna is described as a beautiful and, at the same time, God-fearing woman. There was nothing she could have been blamed for....

On the opposite side, there are the two old judges of the village, who, although they enjoy a good reputation, lead a bad life. They passed unjust sentences, harassed the daughters of Israel to be at their beck and call, and had no qualms about condemning Susanna to death for refusing their lustful desire to commit adultery with them. This proposed act was by no means a spontaneous desire, but was planned and even agreed between them. The abuse of the daughters of Israel had already become their habit, and Holy Scripture clearly states: *"They perverted their thoughts and turned away their eyes, forgetting God and His righteous judgments". (Dan 13:9)*

This statement describes exactly how one can go so far as to commit such grave sins. First he says: *"They perverted their thoughts"...* Already with the thoughts we must be vigilant, examining in the light of the Spirit of God whether or not they correspond to the spirit of the Gospel. St. Benedict, the father of monks, exhorts his brothers to dash evil thoughts against the rock of Christ. Here we must be very attentive, because sins and deviations often begin in the thoughts. It will be easier to reject them at the beginning than when they have already gained ground in us. It is advisable to immediately invoke the Holy Spirit, the Name of the Lord or some saint, to say prayers and to offer resistance to such thoughts.

Then the Scripture says that they *"averted their eyes"...* It is important to restrain our gaze, especially for men, who are easily attracted by the beauty and charm of a woman. In this context, a story comes to mind, which I will tell in my own words: It so happens that a monk's gaze fell on a particularly beautiful and attractive woman. He was totally caught and, in his heart, he was talking to Jesus about it... The Lord said to him: "You looked at her once; don't look at her a second time."

In the case of the two old judges, temptation met with no real resistance, because of the impure life they had been leading. And this very sentence expresses why they did

not know how to resist: they had forgotten God and the consequences of their actions; lust had blinded them.

Even more alarming is the malice of slandering Susanna and wanting to put her to death. What dark abysses open up in the heart of man!

Susanna, on the contrary, shines. Her fear of God gives her the strength to resist evil. In reality she was in a trap; but even without seeing the way out, she abandons herself entirely to God. Thus Susanna also shows us the way forward: No compromise with sin and, even in the most hopeless situations, unconditional trust in God. It is when everything seems to speak against you that trust is most needed.

Finally, let us also take a look at the people... They are blindly gullible and, although they have never heard such a thing about Susanna, they trust in the good name of those judges, without examining what they say.

Here again there is a lesson for us: not every accused person is guilty, and not every "authority" is trustworthy just because they are authorities. Remember the scribes, the Pharisees and even the High Priest... How wrong were the judgements and accusations they brought against Jesus! Therefore, we must avoid hasty judgments, and examine very carefully....

The prophet Daniel was called by the Holy Spirit to prove the guilt of the old judges and to save Susanna from their hands. God intervenes through him, and thus responds to the trust of that Lord-fearing woman. This is the most important passage in this whole long narrative! God permits evil for a time, but he will never withhold his help from those who call upon him in sincerity.

Thus, this story really becomes a great teaching for us, and, at the same time, calls us to be vigilant in resisting any influence of evil, whether from within or without.