

19. April 2022

Genuine conversions

Act 2:14a.36-41

'For this reason the whole House of Israel can be certain that the Lord and Christ whom God has made is this Jesus whom you crucified.' Hearing this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'What are we to do, brothers?' 'You must repent,' Peter answered, 'and every one of you must be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise that was made is for you and your children, and for all those who are far away, for all those whom the Lord our God is calling to himself.' He spoke to them for a long time using many other arguments, and he urged them, 'Save yourselves from this perverse generation.' They accepted what he said and were baptised. That very day about three thousand were added to their number.

We find a transformed Peter! The descent of the Holy Spirit has strengthened him and the human love he had for Jesus has become more spiritual. We see now a witness to the risen Lord, whose words and deeds point far beyond his own person; a witness who will finally be able to lay down his life for Christ.

He now fearlessly proclaims the Good News, and his words are heard. Scripture testifies that Peter's words touch people in the depths of their hearts. And then the decisive thing happens. The listeners respond to the proclamation with a question: *"What are we to do?"* God has touched them through his Spirit, and whoever allows himself to be touched by the truth asks what is God's will.

This is the sign of a genuine conversion! The love of God and the truth kindle a light in the heart of man. Their impact is so strong that from now on the person wants to follow this light. He is aware that it is God Himself who has touched his heart.

In experiencing a true conversion, one recognises Jesus as the Son of God, and this certainty leads to the question: What should I do now? The encounter with Jesus is incomparable, it is a homecoming, it is the finding of that which is deeply longed for in the heart, as St. Augustine so aptly described it: "The heart is restless until it rests in You".

This is what happened to the Jews in today's reading. Peter's authoritative preaching had removed any resistance or uncertainty that might still be in their hearts, and now they were ready to follow Peter's instruction.

He leads them to baptism, faithful to the Lord's command: "*Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" (Mt 28:19). Thus on that day a great multitude joined the new Christian community. They were conscious of having been chosen out of a "perverse generation", and inserted into the number of the redeemed in Christ.

Since all this took place when the Holy Spirit descended, the feast of Pentecost is called the hour when the Church was born. The Risen One, together with the Father, had sent the Holy Spirit. He is now the great evangeliser who, together with the apostles and the faithful, wants to make Christ known to the whole world. He is the one who, through the proclamation of the apostles, is able to touch people deeply and cause in them that stirring of the heart which enables them to listen to God and to seek His will.

There are also cases in which conversion does not happen as suddenly as in today's story. This is particularly true for Christians who have always been educated in the faith. In this case, it is usually a process that gradually leads to a deeper conversion. In the end, however, the point is the same: to want to do God's will completely and without limits.

Conversion is a gift and an offer from God, which requires our response. In today's text, the converts ask, "*What are we to do?*" In the same way, our right question when we encounter God more deeply must be, "What is your will?" Then we will be led to the point of being able to say with Mary, "*Let it happen to me as you have said.*" (Lk 1:38).

This is the authentic word of surrender to the Will of God, which, through our conversion, becomes our nourishment (cf. Jn 4:34).