

18. May 2022

To be purified in order to bear fruit

Jn 15:1-8

Jesus said to his disciples: I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more. You are clean already, by means of the word that I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a branch - and withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire and are burnt. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for whatever you please and you will get it. It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit and be my disciples.

Our great vocation is to remain in the Lord and bear fruit. Therefore, it is important that we grow day by day in faith, hope and love.

Jesus assures us that we have been purified by accepting his word. Now this divine word must permeate us with its truth, its purity and its beauty, so that we bear fruit. To explain this, the Lord uses the comparison of the vine and the branches, which represent us.

In spiritual teaching, the concept of purification is known as a prerequisite for growth. In turn, for this process to take place, it is necessary that we strive for the sanctification of our life. Do we really want to be as close to the Lord as possible? Do we want to bear fruit a hundredfold, if possible (cf. Mt 13:23)? Do we want to become new creatures, moulded in the image of God?

The great philosopher Dietrich von Hildebrand devotes the first chapter of his book "Our transformation in Christ" to the readiness to change that we must have. He describes how necessary it is for us to be transformed or, better still, to allow ourselves to be transformed by God. If there is no desire in us to become more and more like the Lord, we will not be able or will find it very difficult to accept the purifications that are necessary for that to happen.

In reality, even if we do not perceive it that way, the purifications are a great sign of God's love for us, for they show that He takes us seriously and that He wants to lead us to perfection. He can only give bland nourishment to children, but He can satisfy those who really want to follow Him with solid food (1 Cor 3:2).

So what does the purification of our soul and heart consist in?

If we are not totally blind to ourselves, we can become aware of our selfishness. Selfishness is a self-oriented love: the will is primarily concerned with one's own person. By God's grace, we will be able to recognise more and more clearly that there are many deep-rooted self-centred attitudes in us, which are contrary to the exhortations of the gospel. However, it is not so easy to get rid of these egoisms and to begin to have God's will and the good of others in view when we act.

Besides the decision of our will, we need above all prayer, to want and to do what is right and just in the eyes of God. He will help us, and in Him we will learn to broaden our perspective and to act according to His will. Those who truly want it, will find opportunities every day to train themselves in it. Every little denial of self, every decision in favour of the greater love gradually undoes the entrenched selfishness. This is how we cooperate in our purification. After all, it is love that drives us on this path.

However, our own efforts will not be enough, for, as today's Gospel says, it is the Father who purifies the branches. To do this, God allows circumstances and difficulties in life that we have not willingly chosen. This is what is often called "passive purification". Through it, the process of transformation goes even deeper than through active purification. As we learn to accept those difficult and painful situations from God's hand, and as we endure and bear them in His Spirit, love grows even more. In this way, we are purified from attachment to ourselves and can give ourselves more deeply to the Lord.

The processes of purification, especially the so-called "passive" ones, are often difficult for us to cope with, because in them we detach ourselves from ourselves, from material things, from people... The greater the attachment, the more difficult it is to detach ourselves. However, we must never forget that the purifications are a manifestation of God's love, for He wants us to bear fruit. This is our Lord's intention; He does not want to cause us pain and suffering!

The purifications help us to abide in the Lord, to allow ourselves to be more and more permeated by His love and to be deeply rooted in Him, so that from this intimate union

may come the abundant fruit that the Lord promises.

Our primary task, then, is to cultivate our relationship with the Lord, to cooperate in the processes of purification and to allow the Holy Spirit to work in us, so that we may be fruitful in the vineyard of the Lord!