



13. June 2022

Overcoming greed

1 Kgs 21:1-16

Naboth of Jezreel had a vineyard close by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria, and Ahab said to Naboth, 'Give me your vineyard to be my vegetable garden, since it adjoins my palace; I will give you a better vineyard for it or, if you prefer, I will give you its value in money.' Naboth, however, said to Ahab, 'Yahweh forbid that I should give you my ancestral heritage!' Ahab went home gloomy and out of temper at the words of Naboth of Jezreel, 'I will not give you my heritage from my ancestors.' He lay down on his bed and turned his face away and refused to eat. His wife Jezebel came to him. 'Why are you so dispirited,' she said, 'that you refuse to eat?' He said, 'I have been talking to Naboth of Jezreel. I said, "Give me your vineyard.(...)" But he said, "I will not give you my vineyard." 'Then his wife Jezebel said, 'Some king of Israel you make! Get up, eat and take heart; I myself shall get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.' So she wrote a letter in Ahab's name and sealed it with his seal, sending the letter to the elders and notables of the city where Naboth lived. In the letter, she wrote, 'Proclaim a fast, and put Naboth in a prominent place among the people. There confront him with a couple of scoundrels who will accuse him as follows, "You have cursed God and the king." Then take him outside and stone him to death.' The men of Naboth's city, the elders and notables living in his city, did what Jezebel ordered (...). They then sent word to Jezebel, 'Naboth has been stoned to death.' When Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death, she said to Ahab, 'Get up! Take possession of the vineyard which Naboth of Jezreel refused to sell you, for Naboth is no longer alive, he is dead.' When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he got up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth of Jezreel and take possession of it.

How much evil can arise from greed and abuse of power! In the story of today's reading, these two elements come together in a deadly combination that does not even stop at the thought of murdering an innocent man.

Sacred Scripture, with the great realism that characterises it, does not hide from us the dark abysses that dwell in the human heart, and invites us to learn the lesson: "*The heart is more devious than any other thing, and is depraved; who can pierce its secrets?*" (Jer 17:9) Jesus himself also points out that everything evil comes from the human heart (cf. Mk 7:21-22).

So what can we say about greed?

In today's text, we see that King Ahab was unwilling to accept the reasons why Naboth refused to sell him his vineyard; even though they were noble motives, for he wanted to honour the inheritance of his fathers. Naboth's refusal clashed with the king's "want to have"; that is, with his self-interest. When his wish was not granted, Ahab reacted resentfully, as if he had been offended. This means that he had not restrained, much less conquered his greed; he ended up accusing the person who stood in the way of his desire.

How can we deal with the greedy inclinations we may still have in our hearts?

First of all, it is important that we know how to perceive them. It is worth clarifying that greed is not only limited to material goods; it can also extend to intellectual or spiritual goods. The "want to have", which, in its extreme, becomes greed, is accompanied by the fact that too much importance is given to oneself and one's expectations for life. Through the Apostle Paul, Holy Scripture gives us good advice on how we can counteract this attitude. Thus he writes in the Letter to Timothy:

"Religion, of course, does bring large profits, but only to those who are content with what they have. We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it; but as long as we have food and clothing, we shall be content with that. People who long to be rich are a prey to trial; they get trapped into all sorts of foolish and harmful ambitions which plunge people into ruin and destruction." (1 Tim 6:6-9)

The awareness that our time in this world is brief, and that nothing of it can be carried into eternity, will help us to give earthly goods their rightful place. Even disordered

attachment to these goods harms us, for it robs us of our freedom. But the harm is even greater when we become greedy and seek our security and happiness in material possessions, which turns out to be a bitter illusion.

Thus, the Apostle's advice will help us to curb our greed: "As long as we have food and clothing, we are content". Whenever we feel that anxiety of "wanting to have", or, even more so, when we have given in to it, we should remember these words of St. Paul.

The same applies to intellectual and spiritual goods. However good and important these may be for us, they must not be tainted by the stain of inner greed or take first place in our lives. It would be particularly tragic if this were to happen within religious orders or seminaries, putting intellectual knowledge above the spiritual formation of the person, thus reducing the transcendental dimension of such a vocation!

A spiritual-psychological problem of greed is an inner emptiness, related to a lack of self-esteem. The excess of material goods and the greed to possess them seem to fill this inner emptiness and give the person a certain value that finds recognition in the world. The same applies to intellectual goods....

If we want to get to the root of all evils - which, as St. Paul says, is greed - then we must also overcome the inclinations that lead us in that direction. We cannot fill our inner emptiness either with material goods or with intellectual goods! Deep down, our soul will remain empty and unsatisfied... Only through prayer and inner union with God - together with all the help He offers us, such as the sacraments - will our depths be filled with the presence of the Lord, and then that painful emptiness can be overcome. God allows us to feel this emptiness (as long as we are not constantly covering it up), so that only in our relationship with Him do we find the true answer.

Our personal value does not derive from the material and intellectual goods we possess. Rather, our greatest and deepest value consists in the fact that we are created in the image of God and that we are loved by Him. Only in this certainty can we find the true security of our life, and only in this certainty do we gain the freedom to use the things

of this world without them harming us, but rather serving us; and without measuring our personal worth by our possessions or placing the security of our life in them.

We are called, therefore, to let this truth take root ever more deeply in us, so that we counteract every manifestation of greed already in its first outbreaks, and overcome it with God's help.