

26. June 2022

Called to be free

Gal 5:1,13-18

Christ set us free, so that we should remain free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be fastened again to the yoke of slavery. After all, brothers, you were called to be free; do not use your freedom as an opening for self-indulgence, but be servants to one another in love, since the whole of the Law is summarised in the one commandment: You must love your neighbour as yourself. If you go snapping at one another and tearing one another to pieces, take care: you will be eaten up by one another. Instead, I tell you, be guided by the Spirit, and you will no longer yield to self-indulgence. The desires of self-indulgence are always in opposition to the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are in opposition to self-indulgence: they are opposites, one against the other; that is how you are prevented from doing the things that you want to. But when you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

Today's reading shows us the importance of spiritual combat and how necessary it is to keep a watchful eye on our inner life.

First of all, the Apostle points out that, in Christ, we have become free men; that is, we are no longer subject to the law, which had served as a "teacher" to the people of Israel before the coming of the Messiah (cf. Gal 3:24). With the coming of the Lord, direct access to the Father has been opened to us in Christ. But this in no way means that we can now let ourselves be carried away by our inclinations, nor does it mean that the observance of the Lord's commandments is no longer so important. On the contrary! *"When someone is entrusted with a great deal, of that person even more will be expected"* (Lk 12:48). If, then, in Our Lord the fullness of grace has come (cf. Jn 1:16-17), we should be able to confront the appetites of our flesh even more resolutely.

But this can only happen if we proceed according to the Spirit; if we seek to live ever more deeply united to the Lord. This does not only apply to the more carnal sins, such as unbridled sexuality, although in this area temptations can be very intense for some people. We must already watch over our thoughts, over our words, over the movements and reactions of our heart... Let us focus totally on God, always being careful not to derail and dwell on the superficial aspects of life.

Of course we do not live all the time in prayer, in inner recollection; but there are many impressions bombarding us from outside, demanding our attention. But this is where it is necessary to distinguish very precisely whether we allow ourselves to be too caught up in things or encounters; whether we allow ourselves to be too much determined by them, beyond the right measure; or whether, on the contrary, we simply give everything its place, integrating it as it should be in our life oriented towards God.

Let us take a simple example: We have set ourselves the task of praying for an hour in front of the Blessed Sacrament. But it so happens that, while walking to church, we meet an acquaintance, who is happy to see us and starts talking. At the beginning of the conversation, we are still aware that the goal was to go to prayer and that the Lord is waiting for us. What this person tells us is not really of great importance either. But for fear of hurting her, we don't dare to stop the conversation. To make matters worse, he or she has just touched on a subject that does interest us, so that our curiosity has been aroused...

In this example, we see two elements that deprive us of the inner freedom to do the right thing: On the one hand, it is human respects, which are a great lack of freedom; and on the other hand, it is the curiosity that has been aroused, so that we lose sight of the Lord and the purpose we had taken up takes second place.

If we proceed according to the Spirit, as the Apostle suggests, we would not lose sight of the "hierarchy of things" in a situation such as the one we have set up in the example. In this case, nothing should take precedence over prayer, and, in order to reciprocate courtesy and love, it would have been enough to greet the person we met briefly, so that the encounter would have been integrated into the journey, without making us lose the "thread", so to speak.

A fundamental principle for a fruitful spiritual journey is to respect the hierarchy of values: What is most important, what can be integrated after what is most important, giving each thing its rightful place. The cravings of the flesh, whether at the level of the senses or at the level of encounters with other people, generate spiritual disorder when they are not modelled and ordered by the Holy Spirit.