

27. June 2022

Grave sins

Am 2:6-10.13-16

"Yahweh says this: For the three crimes, the four crimes of Israel, I have made my decree and will not relent: because they have sold the upright for silver and the poor for a pair of sandals, because they have crushed the heads of the weak into the dust and thrust the rights of the oppressed to one side, father and son sleeping with the same girl and thus profaning my holy name, lying down beside every altar on clothes acquired as pledges, and drinking the wine of the people they have fined in the house of their god. Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, he who was as tall as the cedars, as strong as the oaks; I who destroyed his fruit above ground and his roots below. It was I who brought you up from Egypt and for forty years led you through the desert to take possession of the Amorite's country; Very well! Like a cart overloaded with sheaves I shall crush you where you stand; flight will be cut off for the swift, the strong will have no chance to exert his strength nor the warrior be able to save his life; the archer will not stand his ground, the swift of foot will not escape, nor will the horseman save his life; even the bravest of warriors will jettison his arms and run away, that day! -declares Yahweh!"

Today's reading presents us the grave transgressions committed by the people of Israel. One of them, which God reproves time and again, is the exploitation of the poor, which represents a profound injustice. It is precisely the Lord who teaches us not to despise the little ones, and to give them their due. Although in our time the slave trade is no longer practised in the way it was in former times, there are many subtle forms of exploitation. While it is a mistake to idealise the poor and turn poverty into an ideology, it is true that it is precisely those in need who have been entrusted to us in a particular way. The poor remind us that, in their need, they are under God's special protection and that He entrusts them to our care. To do injustice to a poor person is even more serious than to do injustice to a strong man, because in the first case there is the added fact that he is more needy and defenceless. Let us remember Jesus' reproach to the Pharisees for devouring the widows' property (cf. Lk 20:47). A very weighty accusation of the Lord!

The next transgression for which God rebukes Israel concerns impure acts, which profane the name of the Lord. Today, we are often no longer well aware that lust is an offence to God. We tend to categorise these sins as part of human weakness, which in some cases

isn't untrue. However, on an objective level acts of lust are always a grave fault; a sin that disfigures the beauty and dignity of the gift of sexuality.

We have probably already become too accustomed to sexualisation to even criticise the indecent dress of women, for example, which does not stop even in holy places! Few people still consider this an offence to God, because sensitivity for the sacred has been lost, and chastity seems to have been swept away by a current of impurity.

The desecration of altars and the abuse of offerings for one's own interests, which in the worst cases, as the reading describes, end in drunkenness, also weigh heavily. We, as Catholics, would be pained to hear that, for example, our offerings have been used for other purposes. What is the order of the day in corrupt politics and is also a terrible abuse, is even more serious when it happens in the religious sphere, which should be directly focused on God. Just as we are particularly pained by the impure acts that occur in the Church, the same applies to other forms of abuse in the "sacred precincts".

It would be fatal if we were under the illusion that the sins of today, similar to those mentioned in today's reading, are less serious than those of the time of the prophet Amos.

Jesus even states that the righteousness of his disciples must be greater than that of the Pharisees (cf. Mt 5:20)! This means that, on the basis of the grace given to us in Christ, we possess a greater knowledge of God's will. But this also implies a greater responsibility, and we are called to be even more vigilant that no injustices occur, that those in need are helped, that the beauty of the gift of sexuality is not defaced and objectified, and that funds which are to be used for God's purposes are not misused!

Even if the Lord, in his love, is so patient with us, such acts are still very serious and must be redressed.

Perhaps one or another who strives to lead a life of faith before God will be moved by this reading to make reparation also on behalf of others. In view of the many sins that are committed in this world, this would certainly be a very important work.