

10. July 2022

Love of God and love of neighbour

Lk 10:25-37

And now a lawyer stood up and, to test him, asked, 'Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the Law? What is your reading of it?' He replied, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself.' Jesus said to him, 'You have answered right, do this and life is yours.' But the man was anxious to justify himself and said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' In answer Jesus said, 'A man was once on his way down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of bandits; they stripped him, beat him and then made off, leaving him half dead. Now a priest happened to be travelling down the same road, but when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. In the same way a Levite who came to the place saw him, and passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan traveller who came on him was moved with compassion when he saw him. He went up to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He then lifted him onto his own mount and took him to an inn and looked after him. Next day, he took out two denarii and handed them to the innkeeper and said, "Look after him, and on my way back I will make good any extra expense you have." Which of these three, do you think, proved himself a neighbour to the man who fell into the bandits' hands?' He replied, 'The one who showed pity towards him.' Jesus said to him, 'Go, and do the same yourself.'

In reality, the law of the Lord is very simple and entirely consistent. It should be the most natural thing for us to love the One who created and redeemed us, and our neighbour as ourselves. This corresponds fully to the truth and is therefore part of the spiritual order. No one could refute it with good arguments! And the fact that the Lord promises us eternal life in return should be a reason for us to rejoice.

But there are many obstacles to the fulfilment of this command of the Lord, which is the compendium of all the Law and the Prophets. It takes a long and intense process of purification to reach the point of putting absolutely nothing before God. It is not just a matter of a good intention or a pious desire, although this is also good, but the fulfilment of this commandment must be made concrete in daily life.... To do this, we

must examine the attachments that are still in our hearts, for the Lord tells us that "*For wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be too*" (Mt 6:21). The heart can be attached to so many things, and above all to oneself. The masters of the spiritual life - for example, St. John of the Cross - teach us that if we tolerate even one voluntary imperfection, our heart cannot fully rise to God.

What does this teaching refer to? Perhaps we have noticed for some time now that the Lord is asking us to take a certain step on our path of discipleship: perhaps it is detachment from something, or renunciation of a certain person or other circumstances that prevent us from walking our path better; perhaps it is forgiveness and reconciliation with someone, or a willingness to acknowledge something within ourselves or to admit a mistake, etc.

But, at the same time as we perceive this invitation of the Lord, we may still feel a refusal or an inner blockage to take this step, and something seems to stop us. This happens because our heart is still attached!

That an imperfection is voluntary means that, even though we are aware that we have it, we do not do what is necessary to overcome it. However, as long as we do not take this step or at least struggle to take it with God's help - and we can always count on God's help - our heart cannot be fully immersed in God's love.

Thus, there are many things that must be overcome in us, with the power of the Holy Spirit. It is He who shows them to us, while at the same time giving us the ability to let go of all that hinders us from loving God with all our heart.

Unfortunately many people do not understand that these processes of detachment can become a spiritual joy, for inner freedom grows with each step we take, and so does our receptivity to God's love and our capacity for loving surrender to Him.

The second aspect of today's text - love of neighbour - which the Lord exemplifies in the parable of the Good Samaritan, is a fruit of love for God. The more my heart is filled with love for God, the more I will be able to recognise in the other person my brother, whom God loves as much as he loves me. In this way, love for God becomes concrete in the service of others.

Even more necessary, however, than active help to our neighbour for his physical well-being, is concern for the salvation of his soul, for man has often been assaulted by bandits on the spiritual plane, and many pass him by without helping him! Love of neighbour demands both corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Here too we must work to become capable of constant and effective love.

So let us love God and our neighbour, and in this way we will fulfil the Lord's commandment. This is His wonderful invitation to us!