

17. July 2022

Contemplative attitude

Lk 10:38-42

In the course of their journey Jesus came to a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. She had a sister called Mary, who sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to him speaking. Now Martha, who was distracted with all the serving, came to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Please tell her to help me.' But the Lord answered, 'Martha, Martha,' he said, 'you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part, and it is not to be taken from her.'

We know well this passage of Sacred Scripture, and it is often interpreted as saying that Mary's attitude represents rather the contemplative life; while Martha's attitude relates more to the active life. In this situation, the Lord affirmed that Mary's attitude was the better one.

In fact, Mary had better understood what the presence of Jesus meant, before which we should have a receptive attitude, listening to Him and allowing Him to enrich us with His gifts. As we look at Mary's example, sitting at the Lord's feet and listening to His word, we receive a valuable guideline for our spiritual life. It is not primarily our actions and our efforts that unite us most deeply to the Lord, but the attitude of welcoming all that He wants to give us.

Let us think, for example, of the sacred precincts of a church. There, in the tabernacle, the Lord dwells in our midst in the mystery of his Eucharistic presence. How do we welcome this presence of His? We can immediately notice that, in order to be receptive, silence and an open heart are required. When we remain in silence before the tabernacle, the Lord can speak to us and thus touch our hearts. All unnecessary conversation and noisy behaviour will disturb this encounter, and will not allow us to assimilate the Lord's presence properly.

In a contemplative attitude, on the other hand, which consists more in receiving and welcoming, we learn to restrain our tongue and our often merely natural way of acting.

In this way we give more space to God and become more receptive to his presence. Indeed, with a more contemplative attitude, we will know how to discover and perceive this presence of his everywhere?

But how can we acquire such an attitude?

One important aspect is to learn to make good use of words. We are often used to a way of speaking that simply expresses our feelings and thoughts, and we no longer know the language of silence. Thus, we easily lose the sensitivity to perceive when it is time to listen and to receive, and when it is time to speak.

Today's example clearly shows us the priority of listening to the Lord. If Jesus speaks, we must be attentive. We have to learn to restrain our desire to speak, and not to be always commenting on everything we hear and see. We must also be careful not to give too much importance to earthly things. These are fleeting, while the Word of God remains (cf. Mt 24:35).

In our Catholic Church we are in danger of losing an immense treasure, perhaps without even realising it. I am referring to the silence in the temples, which expresses man's reverent listening to the mysterious presence of the Lord in the tabernacle. Unfortunately this silence is being lost almost everywhere, as we have had to observe in our missions. Unnecessary words diminish the silent dignity of holy places.

Therefore, my concrete proposal to all those who listen to my daily meditations is that we stop saying unnecessary words in the churches, that in the churches we do not make use of media, such as smartphones, which want to draw our attention to them. Let us use words consciously, so that our churches once again become places of silence, of listening to God and of praise.

This proposal is simple and practicable, and can be very important in that, by our example, we can also help others to rediscover and recover silence. Let us remain before the Tabernacle in an attitude of listening, let us receive the Word of God and thus sit at the feet of Jesus. Then the Lord will also tell us that we have chosen the better part and will express his joy that we have taken the time to be with Him.