

18. July 2022

The right answer

Mi 6:1-4, 6-8

Now listen to what Yahweh says: 'Stand up, state your case to the mountains and let the hills hear what you have to say!' Listen, mountains, to the case as Yahweh puts it, give ear, you foundations of the earth, for Yahweh has a case against his people and he will argue it with Israel. 'My people, what have I done to you, how have I made you tired of me? Answer me! For I brought you up from Egypt, I ransomed you from the place of slave-labour and sent Moses, Aaron and Miriam to lead you.

'With what shall I enter Yahweh's presence and bow down before God All-high? Shall I enter with burnt offerings, with calves one year old? Will he be pleased with rams by the thousand, with ten thousand streams of oil? Shall I offer my eldest son for my wrong-doing, the child of my own body for my sin? 'You have already been told what is right and what Yahweh wants of you. Only this, to do what is right, to love loyalty and to walk humbly with your God.'

The Lord's plan for us is clear and unequivocal. Following Christ implies aspiring to the virtues... We are called to direct our efforts to do good, to practise justice, to love goodness and faithfulness, and to walk humbly and reverently in God's way... This is what today's reading tells us, in which the Lord engages in a "lawsuit" against his people.

In the texts of the Old Covenant, we see this lawsuit over and over again. It is always about the same thing: it is a faithful and loving God who is confronted with the unfaithful people of Israel.

In the Passion Celebration on Good Friday these words resound, which we also hear today in the reading: *"My people, what have I done to you, how have I made you tired of me? Answer me!"*

The Lord shows his People all that He has done for them, and with touching words He asks them wherein He has troubled them. The People had to recognise the wrong paths they had taken and how much they had offended God's love.

Perhaps it is not clear enough to the people that by going against God's commandments and abandoning His ways, they are hurting God's love. It is not simply a matter of failing to fulfil an obligation that has been imposed on man to secure his life, so that he may not be lost and may one day stand with a clear conscience before God.

God is not simply the Supreme Judge to whom we are accountable for our lives, although He certainly is. But, beyond that, God is a gracious Father, who dearly loves his creatures, whom He has raised up to be His children. If we human beings have a heart that can deeply feel the wounds of love; if we often react with great sensitivity to the slightest disregard of love, how much more will the One who created us and called us to life feel it?

Since we are created in the image of God, we can, by observing ourselves, draw conclusions about God's way of being. Our Father's love is offended when we ungratefully turn away from Him and fail to recognise what He does for us.

It is important that we know this personal dimension of our relationship with God, so that our hearts can be freed from all hardness. God Himself exclaims: "*What have I done to you, how have I made you tired of me?*" What a questioning for His people, what a questioning for us men!

Once man recognises that he has been unjust towards God, he will also know that he cannot make amends with burnt offerings, with animal sacrifices, as the prophet notes in today's reading. Above all, he must return resolutely to the right way. If we repent sincerely, the pain of having offended God can become an inner fire, which will drive us to strive even harder to correspond to God's love. This does not exclude that we offer Him some sacrifice. But the decisive and most important thing is to return to the straight path of following Jesus, thus showing the Lord that we recognise his love.

Thanks to our Lord's infinite act of love on the Cross to redeem us, we receive forgiveness of sins. The response to this grace can only be to continue gratefully on God's path, or to set out on it if we do not yet walk in His ways. This is what our Father wants!