

1. September 2022

Not to live in self-delusion

1 Cor 3:18 -21

There is no room for self-delusion. Any one of you who thinks he is wise by worldly standards must learn to be a fool in order to be really wise. For the wisdom of the world is folly to God. As scripture says: He traps the crafty in the snare of their own cunning and again: The Lord knows the plans of the wise and how insipid they are. So there is to be no boasting about human beings: everything belongs to you, whether it is Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, the world, life or death, the present or the future - all belong to you; but you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God.

In the first words of this reading, St. Paul gives us an important hint, with which he introduces his later reflections: "*There is no room for self-delusion*" he says. This is indeed a very important topic for the spiritual life!

Next, St. Paul tells us about the wise men of this world, whose thoughts are vain. It turns out that those who think they are wise or intelligent, and who consequently think they are superior to others, are trapped in an illusion about themselves and have become victims of their vanity, which is a form of self-exaltation. They are in danger of becoming intoxicated with their own reasoning, and believe themselves to be all the more intelligent the more complicated their way of expressing themselves. They build an illusory self-worth on their apparent wisdom, and think they discover their own greatness in their intelligence.

What a tremendous self-deception! One can even spend a lifetime immersed in this illusion... However, self-deception is not limited to the field of intelligence, but is an evil into which more than a few people fall in various fields. This is where a theme that we often touch on in our daily meditations comes into play: self-knowledge and the humble acknowledgement of one's own guilt, mistakes and limitations, in the awareness that we are in the presence of a loving and merciful God.

In this context, it is particularly important to emphasise that we have a loving and merciful God, because not infrequently there is still a false, distorted or imperfect image

of God, so that the person does not dare to unveil his ultimate depths and is not able to perceive his shadows in order to bring them before God. Thus, he is in danger of repressing his own darkness and thus living in a false self-image, which corresponds to what he would like to be or how he thinks he should be.

In this way, something artificial and forced is generated in his being, and the person lives in a form of self-deception. This illusory self-image will be consolidated, and as long as he does not find a way out of this self-deception, he will lack a healthy realism and will not know himself. It is obvious that, in such circumstances, it is difficult to make a balanced appreciation of other people, and one falls into the extreme of idealising them or, on the contrary, despising them when they have not corresponded to this ideal.

But under the influence of the Holy Spirit any form of self-deception can be dissolved. We can ask God to teach us to see and perceive ourselves in His light. Precisely the invitation to approach God as we are - and not as we think we should be - is a way out of this inner prison, leaving behind the pretence and illusions we have about ourselves.

We can attain true wisdom when we learn to see everything from God's perspective, when we get everything from God's hands, when we do not idealise ourselves or others, when we dare to be simply children of God and try to understand the world and ourselves with our eyes fixed on Him.

Our first reaction may be: "I don't know if I am living in self-deception". We may even be frightened by the idea that we might be. Indeed, Holy Scripture tells us: *"Who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults"* (Ps 19:13). This means that we are often blind to ourselves. That is why I would like to emphasise at this point the help that the Holy Spirit offers us. He knows us, and - as long as we ask him and allow him to act - he will, with inexhaustible patience, lead us out of all illusions about ourselves, out of all inner imprisonment... Step by step, the Holy Spirit will remove the false images we have of ourselves, so that we become more and more what the Lord intended us to be. This brings great inner freedom, because we will recognise that everything good in us comes from God.

If you want to go deeper into this important topic, I recommend listening to this lecture on self-knowledge: <https://youtu.be/i9QDNBvER3I>