

20. August 2022

The true reverence

Ez 43:1-7a

In those days, the angel led me to the gate, the one facing east. I saw the glory of the God of Israel approaching from the east. A sound came with him like the sound of the ocean, and the earth shone with his glory. This vision was like the one I had seen when I had come for the destruction of the city, and like the one I had seen by the River Chebar. Then I fell to the ground. The glory of Yahweh arrived at the Temple by the east gate. The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; I saw the glory of Yahweh fill the Temple. And I heard someone speaking to me from the Temple while the man stood beside me. He said, 'Son of man, this is the dais of my throne, the step on which I rest my feet. I shall live here among the Israelites for ever; and the House of Israel, they and their kings, will never again defile my holy name with their whorings and the corpses of their kings.'

The glory of the Lord! Holy Scripture describes it to us through many visions, and it always arouses great reverence in those who experience it.

True reverence is one of the indispensable pillars of a proper attitude towards God. An irreverent man loses sensitivity to the holy, a sense of worship, awe at the works of God, wherever they are manifested...

What, then, is true reverence, and how does it differ from distortions of it?

First of all, let us dwell on reverence before God, for this will define all the other forms of reverence we are to have before the various realities of life. Reverence before God lies, on the one hand, in our condition and limitation as creatures, who find themselves before a God whom they cannot grasp with their senses. Our evident limitation is confronted with the infinitude of God; our creaturely nature with the Creator; our ignorance with the omniscience of God; our sinfulness with the One in whom there is no stain or sin.

In the face of this reality, various wrong reactions can arise: One can simply evade it and not perceive it, overlook it and, consequently, not give the adequate response that this reality demands of us. One can even fight against this truth, because it reminds us of our limitation and opposes our pride.

The right response, instead, would be one of gratitude-filled awe, which gladly submits to this reality and prompts us to express in every possible way the honour and adoration that God deserves. In today's reading, the prophet's response to seeing the glory of God is expressed in these terms: "Then I fell to the ground". We see that here the man responds with a profound gesture of reverence. We also find such gestures in the New Testament, when it is said, for example, that people prostrated themselves at the feet of Jesus (cf. Lk 5:8; 17:16). Here man implies that he recognises the greatness of God, that he bows down before it and accepts his own limitation. Here, then, lies the second reason for reverence: it is the very greatness of God.

Reverence, which consists in fully and freely acknowledging God's majesty, also leads man to be attentive to all that proceeds from God.

In this context, it is important to emphasise that reverence for God is intimately linked to the dignity of the person. In fact, reverent bowing before Him is not produced out of fear of a tyrant who could decide according to his whim over life and whose arbitrariness is to be feared. This form of reverence would lack true dignity, because it is not voluntary, so that it seems to oppress the person.

True reverence, on the other hand, comes from God's truth and is the dignified response of the creature loved by Him. God does not want false reverence, which distorts His true image and gives rise to a wrong idea of Him, robbing man of his freedom. True reverence ennobles the person, brings to light his transcendence and makes him sing freely the song of Creation called into existence by God. False reverence, on the other hand, gives rise to disharmony and lack of freedom, and can even easily lead to rebellion and mistrust.

Let us think, for example, of the behaviour we should have in church, especially when the Lord is present in the tabernacle. How attractive is the reverent attitude of the priest, of the altar servers and of the faithful, all aware of God's presence in the Sacrament! What silence and attention arise here, and how easy it is for the Lord to communicate

to us in such an environment! This true reverence before God also creates a certain unity among all the faithful.

If, on the other hand, we think of the irreverent attitudes in the sacred precincts, we can immediately notice the difference. While reverence gathers and opens the heart, irreverence disperses and closes it.

If we adopt an attitude of true reverence before God, it will teach us to be reverent also towards all other realities that bear God's imprint: towards the world of values, towards other people and even towards all God's creatures. Reverence thus becomes a basic attitude in us and even teaches us to treat ourselves with the reverence that is our due, inasmuch as we are created in the image of God. It will teach us to be attentive, to be careful, to put aside the coarseness in us and, whenever we are in danger of neglecting ourselves, it will remind us of our dignity.

Then we will no longer want to lose this attitude, for it generates a true inner nobility, brings us more and more into the full reality of our existence and leads us with dignity to where God's immense love meets us, so that we can joyfully experience how this mighty and majestic God welcomes us into his arms and fills us with true joy.