

19. September 2022

Do good without delay

Prov 3:27-34

Refuse no kindness to those who have a right to it, if it is in your power to perform it. Do not say to your neighbour, 'Go away! Come another time! I will give it you tomorrow,' if you can do it now. Do not plot harm against your neighbour who is living unsuspecting beside you. Do not pick a groundless quarrel with anyone who has done you no harm. Do not envy the man of violence, never model your conduct on his; for the willful wrong-doer is abhorrent to Yahweh, who confides only in the honest. Yahweh's curse lies on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the upright. He mocks those who mock, but accords his favour to the humble.

How much wisdom we find in the texts of the Old Testament!

As today's reading suggests, one should not put off doing good. This tells us that, in fact, doing good is not one among many possibilities, but is part of the essence of man. When we fail to do good, we fail our human essence, because we were created for love, and by putting this love into practice, we become what we are: people created in the image and likeness of God. This brings to mind those words that Jesus tells us in the New Testament: "anyone who has, will be given more; anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he has" (Mk 4:25). This statement can be understood in relation to love: if one loves and shares this love, one will grow in love.

Thus, the words of today's reading, understood from the perspective of love, become an inner urgency, because love wants to unfold, wants to take a concrete form, and the person who we meet in need gives us the opportunity to do good.

On the one hand, we have to put love into practice, which also serves others and reflects the love of God. On the other hand, we must examine whether our heart is already willing to do good or whether it is still hesitant and closed. If this is the case, we can correct ourselves and lead our hearts to the right path.

It is important to keep in mind that love tolerates no delay: "Do not say to your neighbor: 'Go away! Come another time! I will give it you tomorrow,' if you can do it now." Perhaps

tomorrow we will no longer have the opportunity to do good. And then not only will we have offended love, but we may not immediately be presented with an opportunity to make amends. This missed opportunity may be etched in our memory until the end of our life, even though we have already been forgiven for our omission. Certainly the Lord can use such a situation, like a stinger stuck in us, so that we do not miss the next opportunity that comes our way.

I would like to illustrate this with a personal experience: Many years ago, a man came to us who was terminally ill with AIDS and wanted to die in our community. He particularly wanted to pray with me, and I, unfortunately, prayed with him far too infrequently. To this day I regret it... I simply failed to love! This experience stayed with me as a warning and I learned to be much more attentive to what people need. So, let us not waste opportunities to do good. It does not always have to be visible works; it can often be, for example, praying for someone else.

If we ask the Holy Spirit to help us to be more and more attentive to the gestures of love that are asked of us, it will become more and more natural for us to offer our immediate help to the other person. Then, the spirit of counsel will show us very precisely what is the appropriate response to the need that is presented to us. The more we obey the Holy Spirit, the more receptive our hearts will become and the more attentive we will be to identify situations that call for a work of love, so that we will also know how to respond without delay.