

5. November 2022

Imitating the Apostle

Phil 4:10-19

As for me, I am full of joy in the Lord, now that at last your consideration for me has blossomed again; though I recognize that you really did have consideration before, but had no opportunity to show it. I do not say this because I have lacked anything; I have learnt to manage with whatever I have. I know how to live modestly, and I know how to live luxuriously too: in every way now I have mastered the secret of all conditions: full stomach and empty stomach, plenty and poverty. There is nothing I cannot do in the One who strengthens me. All the same, it was good of you to share with me in my hardships. In the early days of the gospel, as you of Philippi well know, when I left Macedonia, no church other than yourselves made common account with me in the matter of expenditure and receipts. You were the only ones; and what is more, you have twice sent me what I needed in Thessalonica. It is not the gift that I value most; what I value is the interest that is mounting up in your account. I have all that I need and more: I am fully provided, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the offering that you sent, a pleasing smell, the sacrifice which is acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will fulfil all your needs out of the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

The Apostle to the Gentiles has learned to face, in the Lord, the various situations that arise on his path of discipleship. We too will be able to do this if we learn to accept all the events of our lives from God's hand. In this way, they become an invaluable school in which the Lord forms us day by day. As the Apostle implies, we will no longer be at the mercy of our circumstances, but they will acquire a profound meaning from God, even if we cannot immediately understand them.

In this context, the distinction between God's active and passive will must be kept in mind. We must learn to understand both expressions of His will: both those things that He, in His goodness, sends us directly, and those things that He allows to happen. His

loving Providence makes use of all of these. It is easier for us to understand what is related to God's active will, while it is often a more difficult and sometimes painful process to understand those things which God permits. However, it is precisely these that invite us to make profound acts of trust, to speak to the Lord about our sufferings and to expose our inner anguish before Him. This counts all the more when we have the understanding that enduring tribulation on our own is beyond our capacity.

In these words from the Apostle resound something triumphant: "*There is nothing I cannot do in the One who strengthens me.*"

In chapter 12 of the Second Letter to the Corinthians, we can get an idea of the abundance of tribulations that the Apostle had to go through. However, nothing could frighten him to the point of making him lose his calm. He suffered much on his missionary journeys and experienced again and again the saving presence of God. His trust in the Lord was so great that he could say with certainty that the crown of victory awaited him (2 Tim 4:8).

St. Paul's words echo those that the Lord addressed to his disciples: "*Courage! I have overcome the world*" (Jn 16:33). Indeed, it is the Apostle himself who tells us: "*Can anything cut us off from the love of Christ -- can hardships or distress, or persecution, or lack of food and clothing, or threats or violence? (...) we come through all these things triumphantly victorious, by the power of him who loved us*" (Rom 8:35.37).

Now, the example of the Apostle to the Gentiles is not only to show us the victory of a saint in God, but also to exhort us to imitate him.

The school of trust is accessible to all of us, and, with God's grace, can lead us to overcome the world. The key in this is to be deeply rooted in God, so that the focus of our life is no longer centered on ourselves, but on the Lord. This path opens up when we learn day by day to understand our life situation from God's perspective. Then, it will no longer be simply a series of circumstances that present themselves to us in our life; rather, as we consciously walk this path, each day will become an assignment that we will want to fulfill with God's help and in which we will try to glorify God.

In this way, everything will serve us for our formation and spiritual growth. In this process, it is important that we always remain in dialogue with the Lord, especially in

difficult situations, without forgetting to thank Him for the many favors He grants us day by day. In general, gratitude in the face of difficulties tends to be engendered only after a long time in an authentic following of the Lord. In the meantime, however, through dialogue with the Lord and acts of trust, we can learn to deal with difficult situations and integrate them into our lives, instead of giving up or allowing ourselves to be confused by them.