

29. November 2022

The spirit of the fear of the Lord

Is 11:1-10

A shoot will spring from the stock of Jesse, a new shoot will grow from his roots. On him will rest the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of wisdom and insight, the spirit of counsel and power, the spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord: his inspiration will lie in fearing the Lord. His judgement will not be by appearances, his verdict not given on hearsay. He will judge the weak with integrity and give fair sentence for the humblest in the land. He will strike the country with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips bring death to the wicked. Uprightness will be the belt around his waist, and constancy the belt about his hips. The wolf will live with the lamb, the panther lie down with the kid, calf, lion and fat-stock beast together, with a little boy to lead them. The cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie down together. The lion will eat hay like the ox. The infant will play over the den of the adder; the baby will put his hand into the viper's lair. No hurt, no harm will be done on all my holy mountain, for the country will be full of knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. That day, the root of Jesse, standing as a signal for the peoples, will be sought out by the nations and its home will be glorious.

Thanks to this biblical passage, we know the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are so important in the path of sanctification. Indeed, when these gifts begin to work in us, what is described in today's reading happens: we will no longer "judge by appearances or judge by hearsay"; rather, we will begin to see things more in the Spirit of God and His light will enable us to judge properly.

The spirit of the fear of God teaches us not to do anything that would offend the Lord. This gift is already a great fruit of love, and if we pay attention to its motions, we will become very sensitive and careful. A healthy spirit of fear will permeate all our thinking, because it will intervene and correct us whenever we are in danger of offending God with our thoughts and, of course, also with words and deeds.

It can lead us to the point of avoiding not only serious affronts to the love of God; but even the most subtle offenses... Here it is in no way a matter of encouraging scruples, which take away freedom from the person and put him in a state of constant tension. On the contrary, it is an attentive listening to the Holy Spirit, who does not tolerate any offense to love, neither towards God nor towards people.

Here we have touched on a next point of great importance: The gift of the fear of God does not only affect our relationship with God, although this obviously comes first; it also affects our relationship with our neighbor. It will teach us to treat our neighbor attentively and respectfully, not to be unjust to him, not to offend him, etc... It will teach us to protect the freedom of the other person and, as today's text says, to judge the weak with justice and the poor of the earth with righteousness.

Indeed, an authentic relationship with God necessarily leads to a more loving relationship with our neighbor. The latter even becomes a "touchstone" for examining our relationship with God. That is to say that in our dealings with our neighbor we have a criterion for measuring how our relationship with God is.

The delicacy that is born from the gift of the fear of God will free us from any lightness and frivolity. This does not mean that we should have a tense and fearful attitude towards life, for this would be incompatible with love. But we will be able to perceive more subtly within ourselves if with our words and gestures we are putting ourselves in danger of offending love. Thus, we will identify our lightness as a messenger of pride. Finally, today's reading offers us those wonderful promises, which describe a paradisiacal reality. If they allude to a concrete earthly existence, we can easily see that these times have not yet arrived.

But the promises can begin to be fulfilled within people! There where love and reconciliation reign, there where differences are overcome, there the heart is increasingly purified under the influence of the Holy Spirit, that heart from which all evil is cast out (cf. Mt 15:19). That is why, with God's grace, little by little, evil will lose its power and, in its place, good will be practiced. Crimes will cease and the knowledge of the Lord will grow.

Within those hearts who allow themselves to be guided by the Spirit, the Lord is already reigning from his throne and is already the "standard for the peoples".