

4. January 2023

## “Jesus undoes the work of the devil”

1 Jn 3:7-10

*Children, do not let anyone lead you astray. Whoever acts uprightly is upright, just as he is upright. Whoever lives sinfully belongs to the devil, since the devil has been a sinner from the beginning. This was the purpose of the appearing of the Son of God, to undo the work of the devil. No one who is a child of God sins because God's seed remains in him. Nor can he sin, because he is a child of God. This is what distinguishes the children of God from the children of the devil: whoever does not live uprightly and does not love his brother is not from God.*

One thing that characterises St John is the clear language he uses. His statements are compelling, and today we would not easily pronounce them in the same way; rather we tend to express ourselves in a differentiated way. Of course it is not wrong to differentiate things, but one should never weaken the truth at its core.

Today we are told very clearly: whoever commits sin is of the Devil, and Jesus came to destroy the works of the Devil.

In fact, the sin into which the Devil led us was a real seduction for man. The Devil seduced us with the same temptation with which he had been tempted: to want to be like God.

This is the deepest core of sin! It is a rebellion; it is a rebellion against God; it is the overstepping of the boundaries that God, in His Wisdom, laid out for us. In the Book of Genesis the original sin is clearly described: it is a sin of pride.

The Devil tries to involve us in his own rebellion against God and tries to make this rebellion spread further and further. He wants us to sin, for through sin he can exert his influence over us. Moreover, he also seeks to inflict suffering on God in this way, for he knows that God suffers for the person who sins.

It is worth clarifying that God suffers because of His love for us, because sin distances us from Him and prevents Him from remaining in us as He would like to. Sin

prevents man from fully accepting the love that He, being a loving Father, would like to give to His creature, to His son, to His daughter... Sin blocks our willingness to accept the fullness of this love.

Through sin, man remains closed in on himself and under the influence of the Devil. The Devil distorts the true image of God in us and does everything he can to make us see him not as a loving Father, but as an authoritarian dictator, as someone who envies us or deprives us of something, as someone who does not want our true happiness. The Devil presents us with a God who wants to deny us the most beautiful and pleasant sides of life.

This image of God that is to be generated in us is terrible and unjust. According to the Devil's intentions, man is to remain trapped in this deception and never know God as He really is.

But Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil!

If we learn to listen to Jesus and accept His offer to forgive our sins, then the spirit of evil can no longer dominate us as it did before. We then learn to restrain our destructive passions, which were often under the sway of the spirit of evil. The Holy Spirit helps us to get rid of false thoughts, to free us from error, hatred and envy, and to overcome other unclean things in our hearts.

Jesus overcomes the Devil's influence over us and makes his Spirit work within us. This Spirit leads us to aspire to the virtues, to carefully avoid vices, to seek the nearness and the will of God, to flee from sin and even to detest it, to identify ever better the works of the Devil and to reject them.

In many ways God comes to our aid: he instructs us with his Word and through the authentic Magisterium of the Church, he offers us the sacraments and in everything he comes to our aid. The Holy Spirit works more and more intensely in us as we listen to him and follow his instructions. He introduces us more deeply into prayer and true neighbourly love, enables us to recognise the entanglements in which other people find themselves, whom we learn to love and regard more and more as our brothers and sisters. He invites us to practise the works of mercy!

We need to know that the road ahead is a long one. Sin has left a deep mark on us and has disfigured us. It is true that it did not succeed in destroying everything, but it has had a terrible influence on human life. Our will was weakened and our understanding clouded and, as a consequence of original sin, we lost our original life of grace. What a terrible loss!

But God has had mercy on us and wants to build his Kingdom in us and in all people, as we pray daily in the Lord's Prayer. The more his light shines, the more the darkness vanishes.

Today's biblical text emphatically calls us to brotherly love and justice, for it also reflects the presence of God. The Devil, on the other hand, acts unjustly towards God and humanity. He envies humans because of the grace that God has bestowed on them and pursues them out of hatred.

But Jesus triumphed over the powers of evil and called us to be his brothers and sisters! Now, God's seed is deeply rooted in us and his Spirit has been given to us. It is this Spirit that cannot sin, because He Himself is God. If we abide in Him or return to Him after every failure, we will succeed, by His mercy and the power of His grace, in abandoning the works of the Devil altogether and in growing more and more in love for God and mankind.