

29. January 2023

## The temptation of pride

1 Cor 1:26-31

*Consider, brothers, how you were called; not many of you are wise by human standards, not many influential, not many from noble families. No, God chose those who by human standards are fools to shame the wise; he chose those who by human standards are weak to shame the strong, those who by human standards are common and contemptible - indeed those who count for nothing - to reduce to nothing all those that do count for something, so that no human being might feel boastful before God. It is by him that you exist in Christ Jesus, who for us was made wisdom from God, and saving justice and holiness and redemption. As scripture says: If anyone wants to boast, let him boast of the Lord.*

In order to understand this text correctly, we should first pause to reflect on man's temptation to pride. Even before man, it was the temptation that caused Lucifer to succumb. He had been created by God as a glorious angel. But he looked too much upon himself and no longer wanted to owe God or serve Him. He himself wanted to be like God, he wanted to possess His omnipotence and glory, but not His goodness and love.

The story of the fall into original sin teaches us that man was also tempted to want to be like God (cf. Gen 3:5). Because of this seduction that Satan presented to man, he transgressed the divine command, which brought with it all the consequences that we suffer to this day.

Today's reading shows us that God counteracts this temptation with his own way of acting. It is not primarily the wise and powerful of this world to whom the proclamation of the Gospel comes and who welcome it. Rather, it is mostly simple people: Mary and Joseph, the shepherds in Bethlehem, later the apostles, many of whom were simple fishermen.... Even in the spread of the Christian faith in the ancient Roman Empire it was often simple people, even slaves, who first received and welcomed the proclamation of the Gospel.

Man is tempted to want to be great on his own, and all too easily forgets that all he has comes from God. Perhaps he finds it humiliating to acknowledge this, for it would reveal his absolute dependence. And this temptation often goes hand in hand with what in our time are called "self-esteem problems" or "self-worth problems".

But what is a person's true value?

If we base ourselves on the world's own criteria, the quick answer to this question would be: education, wealth, power, beauty, fame, etc.... If all these things are taken detached from God - that is, without considering that they come from Him - they easily become idols that rule man. Then our value as a person will depend on these idols, and only by aspiring to them will we have the impression that we correspond to the range of values that the world has.

But, in reality, none of this is what makes a person truly valuable. Jesus teaches us another parameter, knowing full well that we humans want to be great: *"Anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant"* (Mt 20:26). True greatness, then, does not consist in exalting oneself above others, but in serving them.

But there is something else that determines the value of a person: his deepest value is to be loved by God! People are called to live as children of God and to take their place in the Kingdom of God, helping others to find true happiness and not to become dependent on idols.

In the certainty of knowing that we are loved by God, our attitude and our vision are transformed. For then we no longer regard our dependence on God as painful and humiliating, but accept it in deep gratitude. We learn, as St. Augustine teaches us, not to put ourselves on the same level or even above God, but to submit to Him. In loving submission to God, we are granted to be sharers in His greatness. On the other hand, if we become intoxicated in our supposed greatness, we will only encounter our limitations as creatures. In submission to God, we learn to recognise more and more his love and find our home in him. And the more we recognise his love and his infinite generosity in making us sharers in his glory, the more we thank and praise him.

Against this background, today's reading is all the more understandable. The "*foolishness of the world*" - that is, simple people - are often more receptive to God's grace and their hearts are not so tied to their own supposed greatness that they easily close themselves off from the simplicity of the Gospel. No man should boast of his own greatness before God, for this does not correspond to the order of Creation. Whoever acts in this way draws the attention of others to himself, forgetting that in reality all that we have and do that is good should praise the glory and goodness of God.

An Arabic proverb says: "Recognising pride in our heart is more difficult than identifying a black beetle on a black stone on a black night". With the Spirit of God we must fight against this profound evil, which is an obstacle to the knowledge of God and can even lead to spiritual blindness.

The following points can help us in this fight:

- a) Submit to the Word of God and to all that corresponds to the authentic doctrine and practice of the Church.
- b) To thank the Lord every day for all that He gives us.
- c) Ask the Holy Spirit to show us our still hidden pride.
- d) To live our lives in a spirit of service: to serve God and our neighbour. This will make our lives truly great!