

21. February 2023

How do you deal with the trials?

Sir 2:1-11

My child, if you aspire to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for an ordeal. Be sincere of heart, be steadfast, and do not be alarmed when disaster comes. Cling to him and do not leave him, so that you may be honoured at the end of your days. Whatever happens to you, accept it, and in the uncertainties of your humble state, be patient, since gold is tested in the fire, and the chosen in the furnace of humiliation. Trust him and he will uphold you, follow a straight path and hope in him. You who fear the Lord, wait for his mercy; do not turn aside, for fear you fall. You who fear the Lord, trust him, and you will not be robbed of your reward. You who fear the Lord, hope for those good gifts of his, everlasting joy and mercy. Look at the generations of old and see: whoever trusted in the Lord and was put to shame? Or whoever, steadfastly fearing him, was forsaken? Or whoever called to him and was ignored? For the Lord is compassionate and merciful, he forgives sins and saves in the time of distress.

Whoever wants to serve the Lord must be prepared for trials, as today's reading begins by telling us. Holy Scripture presents reality as it is. In order to be able to be with God and His saints in eternity, it is necessary to accept and cooperate with the grace received.

When we hear the term "trial", we easily become uncomfortable, inwardly rebellious or frightened. But Scripture exhorts us to face such trials with courage and fortitude.

When we face times of tribulation it is important to look to God's intention. Trials serve to purify us, to make our faith firm, and to teach us to abandon ourselves to the Lord alone. In addition to the personal dimension, the endurance of tribulations makes us participants in a spiritual battle that goes beyond ourselves. In this way we can cooperate with the Lord in weakening the forces of evil.

Let us consider, then, the appropriate attitudes for facing trials. Today's reading presents us with courage and steadfastness.

The more a soul loves the Lord, the more courageous it will be. Fear of effort, suffering, dangers or trials paralyzes a man's soul. Courage can be trained by the will. It will not necessarily eliminate these fears, but courage enables us to do the right thing in every situation, in spite of fear. Thus, courage overcomes fear and leads us to do the right thing.

It is possible to be courageous in trials! Of course we can ask God to help us, we can expose our fears to Him and beg Him to strengthen us. At the same time, we must make the decision to persevere in trials, so that the gift of fortitude that the Holy Spirit gives us can become effective. This gift makes up for what we lack in courage, especially in the difficult trials of life.

"Cling to him and do not leave him, so that you may be honoured at the end of your days"
Sirach tells us.

In times of trial it is even more important to cling to the Lord, that is, to seek Him in prayer, in His Word and in the sacraments. It is precisely at such times that we are tempted to neglect prayer, to be distracted by other things, etc. Even if we do not feel anything inside us or if we feel that our heart is cold, however troubled we may be, let us cling to the Lord, as a little child clings to its mother's arms and, come what may, does not let go. We must not be ashamed of being little. Even in the stage of adulthood and among people who have been in the way of the Lord for a long time, there may be periods when we feel weak, like little children. Blessed is he who then seeks refuge in his loving Father or in his Mother in Heaven! It is better to be aware of our weakness and seek our refuge in God, than to do with courage what has been entrusted to us, than to trust in our own strength and in the hour of trial end up abandoning the Lord.

One more verse from today's reading we are to listen carefully: *"Whatever happens to you, accept it, and in the uncertainties of your humble state, be patient."*

What wisdom there is in these words! Of course, this does not prevent us from discerning what it is for us to do on our part in every situation; otherwise, we would be in danger of becoming passive and feeling powerless in the face of whatever comes our way.

This passage refers to those trials that the Lord commands or permits. Accepting them and allowing ourselves to be purified by them, facing them in a spiritual way, will bear great fruit. So, let us not resist trials and tribulations; but let us learn to face them in the right way, keeping this always in mind: *"You who fear the Lord, trust him, and you will not be robbed of your reward."*