

17. April 2023

Be born from above

Jn 3:1-8

There was one of the Pharisees called Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews, who came to Jesus by night and said, 'Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher; for no one could perform the signs that you do unless God were with him.' Jesus answered: In all truth I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above. Nicodemus said, 'How can anyone who is already old be born? Is it possible to go back into the womb again and be born?' Jesus replied: In all truth I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born through water and the Spirit; what is born of human nature is human; what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be surprised when I say: You must be born from above. The wind blows where it pleases; you can hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

These words of the Lord are not easy to understand: "*no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above*". Jesus addresses them to Nicodemus, who in fact does not understand them either, because he remains on the plane of reason. However, reason is not enough, for it is a word whose meaning is only revealed to us through faith, thanks to divine revelation.

Being "born again" has nothing to do with the philosophy of reincarnation, coming from Hindu and Buddhist religious systems, which affirms that the human being would have several lives.

Jesus, on the other hand, speaks of another birth; one that comes from the Spirit of God and is expressed sacramentally in Holy Baptism. Hence the Lord speaks of being born "*of water and the Spirit*".

A person is born again when one leaves behind one's life of sin and turns to God, allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit. Such a person lives a new life and has been born again, as Holy Scripture expresses it. At the same time, this person is putting off the old man, as St. Paul says (Eph 4:22). This means that, by one's own

will and in the power of the Holy Spirit, one restrains one's inclinations to evil. At the same time, this Spirit strengthens us in the struggle for the virtues, so that all that proceeds from God may unfold in us.

Jesus sent His disciples to baptise (cf. Mt 28:19), i.e. to offer humanity the new birth. In baptism, sins are forgiven and all that Jesus obtained for us on the cross is received. If a person begins to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit, the new life one has received becomes more and more effective, modelling oneself on the image of God. In this way, we become what He wants us to be.

Certainly Nicodemus was not able to understand all this at first. Many of the things the Lord had said and foretold were beyond his immediate comprehension. But if our relationship with God is marked by trust and openness, we will be able to understand His words later.

There is another phrase of Jesus in today's Gospel that we can only understand with time: *"The wind blows where it pleases; you can hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

It is indeed the case that, when we allow ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit, other people will not always understand our motivations. This is because, when we do not follow the Holy Spirit, we tend to pursue certain interests, whether they are personal or correspond to the logic of the given situation. This is easy to understand on a human level.

The motivations that come from the Spirit, on the other hand, always have as their first aim the glory of God and the service of men in the Spirit of the Lord, without selfish interests. That is why they are often incomprehensible to the "natural man", as St. Paul tells us: *"The natural person has no room for the gifts of God's Spirit; to him they are folly; he cannot recognise them, because their value can be assessed only in the Spirit"* (1 Cor 2:14).

It is not easy to understand the person who acts moved by the Spirit of God, since, in a way, they are like the wind, which blows where it wills, as the Lord says.

It is a great gift for us that we can understand the meaning of these words of Jesus, and that we are invited to live as new men.