

9. July 2023

Dying to sin

NOTE: We will listen today to the reading scheduled for this Sunday in the traditional calendar.

Rom 6:3-11

You cannot have forgotten that all of us, when we were baptised into Christ Jesus, were baptised into his death. So by our baptism into his death we were buried with him, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power, we too should begin living a new life. If we have been joined to him by dying a death like his, so we shall be by a resurrection like his; realising that our former self was crucified with him, so that the self which belonged to sin should be destroyed and we should be freed from the slavery of sin. Someone who has died, of course, no longer has to answer for sin. But we believe that, if we died with Christ, then we shall live with him too. We know that Christ has been raised from the dead and will never die again. Death has no power over him any more. For by dying, he is dead to sin once and for all, and now the life that he lives is life with God. In the same way, you must see yourselves as being dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus.

The life of the new Adam - that is, the life of Christ - is an important theme for the Apostle to the Gentiles. Again and again he returns to it, whether he is expounding it on a theological level or applying it in practical exhortations and instructions.

The new creation is not to be a slave to sin; rather, it is to be considered as dead to sin. How can we understand this, when we feel how sin continues to haunt us and to want to submit to its dominion? It is only possible to "die to sin" through an intimate union with Christ, when His grace unfolds in our life. He has conquered sin, and by uniting us to this victory which He won for us on the Cross, the Lord conquers sin in us as well. We know that, through Baptism, we have been taken from the power of darkness and the Father has welcomed us as His children. We know that, through the sacrament of penance, the blood of the Lord cleanses us again and again from our sins.

Thus the words of the Apostle Paul speak to us of the grace received and the objective reality that God grants us through His Son. We all still have a way to go and need to

undergo a profound purification until we are able to resist the seductions of sin and not succumb to the attraction it exerts on us, that is, until we "die to sin".

We achieve this through the increasing influence of the Holy Spirit in our souls and our attentive cooperation in His work. Now, it is easier for us to recognise the gross and obvious sins, but the more subtle ones are often not immediately apparent to us. And then there are also the voluntary imperfections, which remain an obstacle in our way of following the Lord. To counteract them, it is not enough to run away from them and avoid them, but it is necessary to practise the virtues. Often we have to fight precisely for the virtue that is the opposite of the respective sin that tempts us.

Through the grace that God gives us in Baptism and in the other sacraments, we are given the foundation on which we can immerse ourselves again and again in order to be purified and strengthened. Let us think in particular of the sacrament of penance, which is capable of renewing and strengthening us each time we go to it.

However, these marvellous gifts can only unfold their full effectiveness when we cooperate with them and seriously embark on the path of holiness. God Himself calls us to walk it, and we must not let the abundant gifts He offers us for this purpose go to waste and wither away. Then the opposite of what the Apostle of the Gentiles so convincingly announces would happen: instead of the "old man" dying and Christ living in us, the "old man" would eventually devour the "new man" and spend his life under the dominion of sin, unless the grace of conversion reawakens true life in him.

As St. Paul makes clear to us, God's plans for us are different. Already in this life we are to rise with Christ, living a spiritual life in union with the Lord. This is our vocation!