

1. September 2023

Called to holiness

1 Thess 4:1-8

Finally, brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from unchastity; that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself[a] in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God; that no man transgress, and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we solemnly forewarned you. For God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

We are called to holiness and, in fact, following this path is the most important task after a true conversion. The path of sanctification means that we begin to obey the Holy Spirit, who becomes the guide of our spiritual life.

In order to please God, we leave behind the old selfishness; that attitude in which we tend to revolve around our own 'self'. Instead, we ask the crucial question, "Lord, what is it that pleases you?" If we say it sincerely to Him, we will understand God's answer to us better and better, for He loves this question, which seeks His greater glory.

On the human level, we know how beautiful it is to meet someone who sincerely asks us, "What can I do for you? That person will quickly win our affection! This is even more so when the question is addressed to God, whose generosity is unsurpassed. In fact, the question "How can I please you?" is already the effect of the gift of piety, which is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit that serve to transform us entirely according to God's will. If this question becomes the guide of our life, it will give us direction and we will begin to detach ourselves from our ego in order to focus more and more on God.

Today's reading suggests that the Christians in Thessalonica were already on the path of sanctification, and St Paul invites them to continue. This tells us something very important: there is always room for progress on the path of following Christ. In other words, it is possible to grow in love.

This is what the way of sanctification is all about, because God has poured the Holy Spirit into our hearts (cf. Rom 5:5). And since the Holy Spirit is a divine Person, it is God's own love that is now at work in us. This love is perfect and invites us to overcome our imperfections, to avoid sin and to let ourselves be moved by the motions of the Holy Spirit.

This way is not as difficult as it may seem at first, far from being unattainable. Let us remember that it is the Holy Spirit who reminds us of all that Jesus said and did (cf. Jn 14:26) and also gives us the strength to put it into practice.

Let us imagine a good teacher who instructs us in our work. He will tell us how to do things; he will give us advice; he will encourage us when we are about to give up; he will correct us when we are wrong; he will insist that we listen to his instructions and pay attention when he speaks to us... If we value our teacher at work and trust him, it will be easy for us to accept his teachings and carry out the tasks he gives us.

From this point of view, it will not be difficult for us to understand how the Holy Spirit works, because that is what He does, because He is the true teacher of the inner life. As well as teaching us, He gives us the strength to develop the supernatural life within us, strengthening our will and enlightening our understanding. In this way we can grow in love day by day.

In today's reading, the Apostle to the Gentiles exhorts us to make good use of the gift of sexuality. It seems that in the community of Thessalonica there were still difficulties in restraining the sexual instinct according to the demands of true love. On the one hand, Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to put away fornication, for sexual contact outside of marriage is not the will of the Lord. But neither should sexual life within marriage be dominated by lust. This means that pleasure, which is a gift for the conjugal union, must not become an end in itself, to be increased and increased, leading to unworthy and immoral practices.

In our time, it remains a great challenge to live conjugal sexuality in a dignified and holy way, knowing how to integrate sexual pleasure appropriately into the conjugal relationship. This challenge is perhaps especially addressed to the man, who is generally more prone to give in to concupiscence in this area.

Sanctification involves the whole person, who is called to be conformed to the image of God, so that what the Lord has sown in him or her may develop and shine forth in all its beauty, to the greater glory of God.