

13. September 2023

## The real fight

Col 3:1-11

*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you once walked, when you lived in them. But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scyth'ian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all.*

The words of the Apostle Paul to us today would probably not be very popular in these times, but they have not lost their importance. It is a serious following of the Lord, which implies a proper asceticism. Without this, it is difficult to follow Him. The Lord has given us to fight in different areas, and one of them is not to give in to the desires of the flesh and to restrain them.

It is a tragedy when people simply give in to their disordered passions. Lust is a sin that separates us from God. Its consequences are manifold, for it causes us to lose our inner freedom and dignity, and we can become unstable. The more we give in to this inclination, the more we allow ourselves to be enslaved by it.

It is a false solution to relativise impurity and pretend that it is a normal part of life. In this way, we would be surrendering to sin and losing the battle that has been entrusted to us.

The situation is different when someone seriously tries to fight against his or her inclination to disordered sexuality and strives for purity. God knows well man's

weakness, and when he has fallen and suffered defeat, God will come again and again to meet him with His mercy. It may be a long and hard struggle, for the temptations are many... But the Lord will know how to appreciate and reward that struggle! But He will not be able to do so if we ourselves do not even make the effort to engage in the struggle, or if we give up at the first attempt.

What we have said about lust also applies to all the other vices and sins mentioned by St Paul. All of them do not correspond to the spiritual order of following the Lord and are alien to a life born of the Spirit of God. Wherever the "works of the flesh" have found a place in us, we must resolutely turn away from them and resist them through prayer, the reception of the sacraments and constant efforts to acquire the virtues.

The Christians of Colosse, coming from paganism, carried the burden of their past life, far from the Lord. Now, with God's grace, a new life had begun for them. But this new life that had been poured into them does not "automatically" produce the virtues that belong to it; it requires the cooperation of the individual.

Take, for example, the desire to acquire the virtue of purity. The fact that we are attracted by its beauty does not mean that we already possess it. It is like seeking grace, a call, an attraction of the Spirit. If we follow this invitation, we will no longer tolerate in ourselves impure actions, thoughts or desires, nor vulgar words or obscenities; rather, we will try to rid ourselves of them all. To achieve this, we will have to avoid impure films, dangerous internet sites, etc. This is where we have to make use of the so-called "second freedom"...

By "second freedom" we mean that it is not enough to have general good will and to choose purity in this case; we must also take the necessary measures to support this choice. These measures would be, for example, avoiding certain films, blocking certain websites that put us at risk, etc. In this context, it is good that we know ourselves and have no illusions about our weaknesses.

To be "new creatures" who aspire to the things of heaven is a great gift from God that we have not earned; it has been given to us by pure grace. And now we are called to cooperate with this grace, to appropriate the gift that has been given to us.

God allows us to struggle with the "old man" because, with His help, we can regain our true freedom and dignity and cease to be prisoners of our passions and disordered desires. In this way we are renewed in the image of the Creator, becoming what we truly are according to God's plan. It is the Holy Spirit who does this wonderful work in us, and as we obey Him day by day, the image of God can be increasingly restored in us. He will also give us the strength not to simply accept everything that distorts and falsifies this wonderful image, but to defend ourselves against it and to fight the noble battle.

But none of this will be possible if we do not seriously seek holiness, without which no one can see God. Without this decision to respond to God's call, we will not be determined enough to wage the necessary battle. Therefore, let us be careful when we are offered too cheap a following of Christ.

NOTE: To go deeper into the subject of asceticism as a struggle against our disordered passions, we recommend that you listen to the following lecture:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mdOw0McIGI>