

30. September 2023

Salvation in the Cross

Lk 9:43b-45

While they were all marveling at everything Jesus did, he said to his disciples, "Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of man is to be delivered into the hands of men." But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, that they should not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask him about this saying.

It was difficult for the disciples to understand what Jesus meant when He said that He would be "*delivered into the hands of men*". Even today it is one of the most difficult spiritual lessons to understand God's motives in allowing His Son to be handed over to the cruelty of men.

In fact, it will only be possible to understand it in the light of faith, when we begin to understand how great is God's love for us human beings; when, thanks to what faith teaches us, we begin to get an idea of how God wants to redeem us. At that time, the disciples could not understand... They first had to accept that salvation would not come through the triumphal march of their Master, but through His passion and death, freely accepted, through His sacrifice of love on the Cross.

But even without understanding them, the disciples were to remember these words at the moment of their fulfilment. That is why the Lord insisted that they listen attentively and take them to heart.

Understanding the Cross and God's work through it, as well as holding fast to its words, are two essential elements in our way of following Christ.

In this context, I think of Saint Joan of Arc, who was called to liberate France from the English occupation. At the beginning of her mission, she succeeded in driving out the English with great military triumphs. But then she was betrayed and had to complete her mission through suffering, even martyrdom.

The same happened to many saints, including the Apostles. Their preaching was very successful and many people accepted the faith. But of the twelve apostles, eleven suffered a cruel death for the faith, just like their Master. In a way, it can be said that their mission was crowned by the Cross.

This is the depth of the mystery of redemption. The abysmal evil of sin, the destructive power of darkness, the worst rejection of God is overcome by Christ's supreme act of love on the cross. There can be no greater love than that which is willing to bear the cross. Never will we be more united to the Lord than when, even in the midst of pain, we do not turn away from Him but bear it for His sake. Never will our faith be stronger than when we cling to His Word in the most difficult and darkest hours.

From this perspective, we can understand why some saints longed for the Cross and even asked for martyrdom: they wanted to show the Lord the greatest love and enter into the mystery of the Cross! Surely they were also convinced that in this way they could contribute most effectively to the salvation of souls.

With this conviction that participation in the Cross is a great act of love and gives us the opportunity to show our love to the Lord, our view of the Cross can be transfigured, even if it is always painful and disturbs our human plans. It is the same when we realise that by consciously bearing suffering we can contribute immensely to the salvation of souls.

In general, what we fear most is a cross that might befall us. That is why, for example, we immediately resort to every means at our disposal to ward off illness. Without doubting that health and physical healing are a great good and that medicine is a gift, it happens that, in this eagerness to be healed, one easily overlooks the message that the illness might give, for example, that it reminds us of death or that the Lord wants to make us see something that we do not notice in the normal course of our life.

Every kind of cross that comes to us has, in one way or another, the character of death itself; it represents, in a sense, a loss of life, be it spiritual, psychological or physical. Our natural reaction is therefore to reject the cross.

But death is inevitable, and Sacred Scripture points out that it is wise to contemplate our end (cf. Sir 7:36). Let us then, with God's grace, accept the message of death

contained in the Cross, and then we will begin to consciously integrate death into our lives.

As Catholics, we know by faith that death will be the step towards eternal union with God, towards the infinite beatitude that knows no end... Our soul knows this because it longs for it. With the acceptance of the Cross, which usually happens step by step, our inner being becomes more God-centred and our soul more oriented towards its eternal destiny.

In this way, our lives are increasingly freed from that inner burden that can weigh us down immensely: the fear of death. And if we also come to understand that from the Cross flows a missionary power, accepted out of love for Jesus, then the temptation to think that suffering is meaningless will also disappear and our soul will be strengthened. Thus we see that even in the suffering that God allows us to endure, His wisdom is present: in addition to being able to collaborate in the salvation of souls, He uses the cross that we have to bear for the healing of our own souls. What wisdom and what goodness of God!