

3. October 2023

Justice and mercy

Lk 9:51-56

'Now it happened that as the time drew near for him to be taken up, he resolutely turned his face towards Jerusalem and sent messengers ahead of him. These set out, and they went into a Samaritan village to make preparations for him, but the people would not receive him because he was making for Jerusalem. Seeing this, the disciples James and John said, 'Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to burn them up?' But he turned and rebuked them, and they went on to another village.'

It is not always easy for us to understand how God acts. The disciples themselves had to learn that their indignation could not be the criterion for God's action. Certainly the attitude of the Samaritans towards Jesus was not right, and so they deprived themselves of the grace that God was offering them in His Son. But Jesus came to call sinners, not to judge them (cf. Jn 3:17). The disciples had to learn this lesson over and over again, and so do all of us who follow the Lord.

But where is justice then? Is God so merciful as to overlook everything and even consider that sin is not so serious? Is it not so necessary to try with all our might to lead a pure life? Far be it from us to have such a conception of God's mercy!

Divine justice is always present, acting as a compass of true life. Sin does not cease to be sin, and, as such, brings with it the respective consequences. Sin separates us from God, destroys relationships with other people and also with ourselves. Therefore, we could say that sin brings in itself judgement, and if we remain in it, then it is only right that its consequences are felt in our lives. How empty and meaningless life is when there is no conscious relationship with God! It lacks the essential, which is to accept God's fatherly love and to feel "at home" in this love.

God Himself is the one who most mourns and suffers because of sin, when He sees how man fails to reach his goal and is heading towards self-destruction. That is why He does everything to save man. If the Lord allows him to feel the consequences of his sinful life, it is with the intention that he will recognise his error, repent and turn to God.

The demands of righteousness have not been abolished, but God Himself took them upon Himself in the Passion and Death of Jesus, who became sin for us (2 Cor 5:21). If we accept this indescribable offer of grace, if we respond with faith and begin a life of constant conversion, then we already pass through the judgement of God (Jn 3:18), so that we can look forward to a glorious future in eternity.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son can serve as an illustration of this (Lk 15:11-32). The younger son, who wastes his inheritance and sins against heaven and his father, experiences the misery of sin when he feels its consequences in his own flesh. Then he turns, acknowledges his mistakes and confesses them to his father, who was already waiting for him with longing. In his mercy, his father comes out to meet him and welcomes him with joy. When the older son, who had always been close to his father, does not understand why he welcomes his brother with such kindness, his father teaches him the essence of mercy. The father assures his eldest son that, since he always stayed with him, everything belongs to him. He did not have to experience the misery of sin and its consequences; he always lived in communion with his father.

This is the great difference when a person sincerely strives to avoid sin and to live in the Will of the Father. He who does so remains in communion with the Father and in Him has his home. This is his reward!

Sinners are called to convert and return to communion with God. The Lord forgives their faults, welcomes them with joy and adorns them with the robe of grace. They have been through hard things, therefore they carry burdens and will have to go through some purifications.

Divine justice has not been abolished, but it is overshadowed by His mercy. That is why the Lord's disciples have to be rebuked again and again, so that they understand the ways of God's true mercy, which does not relativise the gravity of sin, nor does it rigidly apply the divine law. God's mercy inhales the spirit of truth, the good odour of right doctrine and right practice.