

14. October 2023

Listen and put into practice

Lk 11:27-28

While Jesus was saying this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!" But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!"

According to the traditional calendar, a few days ago (11 October) we celebrated the Feast of the Motherhood of Mary. Throughout the centuries, the Church has held in high esteem the special vocation of the Mother of God and has rightly dedicated a special feast to her divine motherhood.

Indeed, the celebration of Mary's divine motherhood does not contradict the words of Jesus in today's Gospel. They are to be understood in the sense that the bonds of blood are less important than those of spirit, as the Lord implies in this other Gospel passage: *"A crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside asking for you." And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother"* (Mk 3:32-35).

With these words, the Lord shows us the great community of believers founded in Him and underlines its intimate bond by comparing it to the closest family relationships. It is in the same sense that the words of today's Gospel should be understood: *"Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it"*. Here too the Lord has in mind the spiritual family of the children of God.

The connection between "hearing" and "keeping" the Word of God must be stressed again and again, as the Apostle James reminds us in his letter:

"For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing" (James 1:23-25).

Our Lord's will is not only to be heard; it is a loving invitation to put it into practice. If we do not, it remains unfulfilled and God's intended blessing cannot be fully unfolded.

This can also happen if we delay too long in fulfilling God's will, even though we have already recognised it. It is as if something remains unfulfilled, in limbo. This state of indecision consumes our concentration and our strength, instead of allowing grace to unfold and even increase by fulfilling what the Lord asks of us.

Certainly, it is not always appropriate to give free rein to our first impulse as to what we think we should do (unless it is an emergency situation), but we should examine it prayerfully and even seek the advice of a wise person.

But this prudence of action must not degenerate into a state of constant indecision. If this is the case, the word heard and what God asks of us can become a burden that weighs us down more and more. The more time that passes, the more difficult it becomes to fulfil the task before us. There is even a risk of missing the right moment to act.

By listening attentively to the Word of God - which is the first thing we must do, even before we act - we can assimilate the mission the Lord has given us. The next step would be to speak to Him in prayer about what we believe He is asking of us, taking into account the circumstances in which we live, so that our action of listening may be as fruitful as possible. The essential thing is to pray for the help of the Holy Spirit to carry out the good work, whatever it may be, to the end.

It is said of the holy angels that they carry out the will of God willingly, completely and immediately. There is no obstacle for them to set out at once, as soon as they perceive the slightest wish of their Lord. For various reasons, it is more difficult for us human beings. But the gifts of the Holy Spirit come to our aid. The Spirit of piety, for example, which makes us want to do what is pleasing to God and to serve Him with fervour, is able to kindle in us that love which enables us more easily to overcome our laziness and to become more zealous in the service of God.

This is the key to becoming capable of putting the exhortation of the Apostle James into practice in the long term. We must ask the Lord to increase love in us and decide

for it to grow. With every small step of love we nourish it and contribute to its growth. Then it will be this love that drives us to listen to the Word of God and strengthens us to put it into practice.

On this path, we cannot find a better helper than the Holy Spirit. He not only enables us to recognise God's will, but always moves us and supports us in doing it.