

25. October 2023

The dominion over sin

Rom 6:12-18

'That is why you must not allow sin to reign over your mortal bodies and make you obey their desires; or give any parts of your bodies over to sin to be used as instruments of evil. Instead, give yourselves to God, as people brought to life from the dead, and give every part of your bodies to God to be instruments of uprightness; and then sin will no longer have any power over you -- you are living not under law, but under grace. What is the implication? That we are free to sin, now that we are not under law but under grace? Out of the question! You know well that if you undertake to be somebody's slave and obey him, you are the slave of him you obey: you can be the slave either of sin which leads to death, or of obedience which leads to saving justice. Once you were slaves of sin, but thank God you have given whole-hearted obedience to the pattern of teaching to which you were introduced; and so, being freed from serving sin, you took uprightness as your master. '

As children of God, all of us are called to freedom (cf. Rom 8:21). It is important that we understand the term "freedom" properly. There are secondary freedoms, such as, for example, being able to decide what colour we want to paint our house, or other such things.

However, true freedom is man's ability to choose what is right. And for us Christians, doing the right thing means doing the Will of the Father.

In today's reading, St. Paul shows us the main obstacle that prevents us from doing God's Will: it is sin. As we know, sin - which unfortunately reigns in our mortal body - is rebellion against God, against His Will. That is why it is so important to fight sin with the power of God's Spirit. Here we must act with great resolve and firmness, for we can never minimise the destructive dimension that sin brings in itself. We are well aware of our inclination to sin; therefore, we must not only avoid sin as such, but also work against the evil inclinations of our heart.

This is an arduous task, which will take time, for sin, with its disastrous consequences, has corroded our heart, so to speak. We need much perseverance, and again and again we will have to return to the source of divine forgiveness, in order to restrain our evil inclinations

and overcome them with God's grace. Spiritual teachers tell us that this battle will last until the end of our lives. But it is important that we take it seriously.

Let us take an example: We discover that there is envy in our heart, and we may notice that this feeling arises whenever we have the impression that the other person enjoys a privilege that we ourselves have not received. This envy can relate to both material and spiritual things.

The first step is to say "no" to the envy in me. This repudiation arises from the realisation that envy is evil, that it does not correspond to God's Will, that it disfigures our being and that it is a quality of the Devil: "*Death came into the world only through the Devil's envy*" (Wis 2:24).

In order to see the ugliness of envy even more clearly, we need to become more and more aware of its essence, and to notice how it prevents us from dealing freely with our neighbour. Instead of looking at him with the eyes of the Lord and gratefully appreciating his qualities as a gift from God, we envy him and find it almost impossible to see any good in him. The heart has become darkened and we find ourselves bound to ourselves!

Now we must constantly lay this darkness and attachment to ourselves before God, asking the Holy Spirit to infuse His light and love into our darkness. We must also try to thank the Lord for the qualities of the other person, even if we have to go against our own feelings. This is not an easy task, because envy, which is a spiritual force that negatively takes over our feelings, will try to prevent this and will even want to convince us that we are being quite hypocritical in such acts.

We, for our part, must hold fast to the words of St. Paul: sin must not reign over us, neither as regards the temptations of the flesh nor those of the spirit.

The word "reign" indicates that a change of leadership must take place in us, for which we have to fight a long and hard battle. Our heart and the inclinations of our senses must be brought under the sway of grace, and then, with the co-operation of our will, this change of command can take place, so that we serve righteousness.