

3. January 2024

## True justice

1 Jn 2:29 – 3:6 (Reading from the Novus Ordo)

*If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that every one who does right is born of him. See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him.*

God is the just, the holy... To imitate Him is to fulfil His will and to live according to it, both in thought and in deed. Justice also includes the right behaviour towards our neighbour; respect for what is due to him.

If we act in this way, we can hope to be born of God and to live in this world as His children, thus fulfilling our vocation. In order to live according to this noble vocation, it is necessary to immerse ourselves again and again in the love of our Father. From Him we receive the strength to live up to our vocation as Christians. We must make room in ourselves for the Holy Spirit, who has been poured into our hearts (cf. Rm 5:5), so that He may mould us into the image of Christ. To do this, we must follow His motions and His guidance.

One way of immersing ourselves in the Father's love is to meditate with gratitude on His works, which Sacred Scripture presents to us again and again. Indeed, His works bear witness to His goodness and glory, to His untiring concern for humanity, even to the point of sending His own Son (cf. Jn 3:16), and to all that He has done for us.

The meditations on the Nativity that we hear throughout the Christmas Octave are an invitation to give ourselves completely to the God who loves us, as a well-known German carol says: *"I want to immerse myself in His love; I want to give Him my heart and all that I have to give Him"*.

When we give ourselves to God, when we are ready to give our hearts completely to Him, allowing Him to purify them of everything that prevents us from loving Him unconditionally, we are doing justice to God. At the same time, we are also doing justice to people, because they need to meet someone who lives as a child of God, who is filled with His love and who testifies to Him in word and deed.

To practise justice, then, is to imitate God, who gave Himself for us and set no limits to His love. To imitate God is to witness to Him, as He has witnessed to Himself. For us Catholics, imitating God and practising justice means making the Lord known to people, thus fulfilling His mission of taking the Gospel to the whole world. If we do not do this, we are not doing justice either to God or to others. To neglect or weaken the mission would be a great injustice before humanity and before God, who wants all to be saved (cf. 1 Tim 2:4).

In order to grow in God's love and to become more aware of it, it is also very helpful to recognise the works that He does in our own lives and thus to acquire a grateful heart. A grateful heart discovers the love of our Father everywhere and can therefore surrender more and more to Him. We know how gratifying it is when people are grateful; the whole atmosphere changes for the better! On the other hand, we also know how difficult it is to deal with ungrateful people, who are always in a posture of accusation.

Today's reading reminds us that the world does not recognise the children of God because it does not know God. So we should not expect Christians to be always and everywhere welcome. Rather, we must be aware that if we stand firm in our faith and do not compromise with the spirit of the world, our deepest identity will often not be recognised, and we may even suffer rejection and persecution.

All the more comforting, then, is the certainty that God knows us and that what awaits us is even more wonderful: *"it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure"*.

Saint Paul also assures us: *"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood"* (1 Cor 13:12). Only when we reach this vision of God in eternity will our deepest and fullest identity be revealed. Then we will be recognised in Him, and in His light our full dignity as persons will become visible.

This perspective can help us when we realise that we are often misunderstood and

judged. God knows us, He knows our hearts and it is His judgement that counts! Let us stay with what is written at the end of this text: that we must remain in the Lord and thus avoid sin with all our vigilance and all our strength, because sin is a violation of the law and is contrary to justice in the highest degree. The struggle against sin is entrusted to us, and in this way we can serve justice. In this struggle we can count on God's mercy.

This wise saying of St Thomas Aquinas gives us guidance: "Justice without mercy is cruelty, but mercy without justice is the mother of all dissolution". (Summa Theologiae I, q. 21, a. 3 ad 2.) Indeed, mercy does not abolish justice; rather, it is the fullness of justice.