

6. February 2024

The reverence

1 Kgs 8:22- 23,27-30

Then, in the presence of the whole assembly of Israel, Solomon stood facing the altar of Yahweh and, stretching out his hands towards heaven, said, 'Yahweh, God of Israel, there is no god like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, as loyal to the covenant and faithful in love to your servants as long as they walk wholeheartedly in your way. Yet will God really live with human beings on earth? Why, the heavens, the highest of the heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple built by me! Even so, listen favourably to the prayer and entreaty of your servant, Yahweh my God; listen to the cry and to the prayer which your servant makes to you today: day and night may your eyes watch over this temple, over this place of which you have said, "My name will be there." Listen to the prayer which your servant offers in this place. 'Listen to the entreaty of your servant and of your people Israel; whenever they pray in this place, listen from the place where you reside in heaven; and when you hear, forgive.

In this prayer of Solomon, we feel his great devotion to God and his humility. He, as king of Israel, calls himself a servant of God. This is a term that we do not choose so easily today when we speak to God, just as we would seldom call ourselves “handmaid of the Lord”, as our Lady did when the Archangel Gabriel spoke to her.

But it is important that we understand what the attitude reflected in these terms is, so that we can learn and imitate it. We must never forget that the Bible has also been written for our instruction. Therefore, we should always try to draw spiritual benefit from what we read in it.

I think we can notice a deep reverence, both in the behaviour of the King and in the attitude of the Virgin. They are aware of the greatness of God, and they know what it means for that infinite God to bow down to His creature. We think also of the angels and saints who prostrate themselves before God, who are allowed to see Him and are thus fully aware of His greatness.

Reverence, both towards God and towards people, is an attitude that must not be lost, as this would cause serious damage to the soul. It reflects the reality of being created by God. The person who does not show reverence towards God is fundamentally wrong, and he also misses the mark when he neglects respect towards people. Love and respect are not contradictory! On the contrary, they are two complementary and essential elements in life.

Reverence before God, which is familiar with the gift of fear, preserves us from over-familiarity and leads us to live attentively. This attention is directed first and foremost to the Will of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. From there, it extends to all areas of life and to all people. Everything that God has created is originally good. Therefore, we must treat it with respect, especially if it is a person.

King Solomon's prayer before all the people is exemplary. In it, God's greatness is glorified, and Solomon sets an example to all. By calling himself "servant of the Lord", he is implying that the greatness of whatever he does comes exclusively from God; that he does not stand before God by virtue of his own greatness, but that he has been undeservedly the subject of God's mercy. What he does is only fulfilling his duty and corresponds to the order between the creature and the Creator; to the relationship of the servant to his master, who obeys him without expecting any greater reward (cf. Lk 17:10).

This attitude is also important for us! If we render a service, we are simply doing our part, and therefore we do not need to emphasise it too much. It is God who deigns to exalt this service and rewards us with Himself.

It was natural for the Virgin Mary to do God's will. By calling herself "handmaid of the Lord", she was saying: "I place myself at your disposal, O Sovereign and beloved God". And, without doubt, there was nothing more beautiful and important to Her than to do the Will of Her beloved Father and to unify Herself completely to Him in love.

Are we aware of what it means to be invited to the House of God for the Supper of the Lamb? A holy reverence should pervade us at Holy Mass, especially when we realise that it is the unbloody actualisation of Christ's sacrifice, and not simply an encounter with the community. Does not the real presence of God in the Sacrament of the Altar demand of us a profound silence and utmost reverence? Should we not also express it

by gestures of respect and attitudes of reverence, and by making the effort to leave all earthly matters behind?

Is it not time that we in our Holy Church regain reverence, and that we take care that our temples do not become places of dispersion or even be used for events that do not befit the dignity of the House of God?

Surely Solomon would be on our side, and so would the Virgin Mary!