

13. February 2024

To resist temptations

Jas 1:12-18

Blessed is anyone who perseveres when trials come. Such a person is of proven worth and will win the prize of life, the crown that the Lord has promised to those who love him. Never, when you are being put to the test, say, 'God is tempting me'; God cannot be tempted by evil, and he does not put anybody to the test. Everyone is put to the test by being attracted and seduced by that person's own wrong desire. Then the desire conceives and gives birth to sin, and when sin reaches full growth, it gives birth to death. Make no mistake about this, my dear brothers: all that is good, all that is perfect, is given us from above; it comes down from the Father of all light; with him there is no such thing as alteration, no shadow caused by change. By his own choice he gave birth to us by the message of the truth so that we should be a sort of first-fruits of all his creation.

Today's reading deals with the great theme of temptations. The Apostle James' intention is, in the first instance, to dispel all false images of God.

God does not tempt; He never wants to harm man. But this world has been darkened by sin and lives far from God. Now, the Lord makes use of these circumstances, allowing temptations as trials. All who trust in Him, assisted by His grace of God, will be led through temptations to greater faith and holiness.

So, there is a big difference between saying that God leads into temptation or that He allows temptation. In the Old Testament texts, this distinction is sometimes not very clear. We have to distinguish between God's active will, which is always directed towards good ("*Make no mistake about this, my dear brothers: all that is good, all that is perfect, is given us from above; it comes down from the Father of all light; with him there is no such thing as alteration, no shadow caused by change*"); and His permissive will, which is that which God allows to happen, such as temptations.

In today's reading, the Apostle James insists that temptations come from ourselves, from our concupiscence. When we do not overcome it, this concupiscence "gives birth to sin", and sin brings about spiritual death. This is what we call a "life of sin".

These warnings of James should spur us to take the fight against sin seriously, and not to lose heart; and to equip ourselves with all the spiritual means to resist it. Not for nothing does the Lord promise us the crown of victory, for in resisting sin we are showing our faithfulness to Him! Indeed, this is the deepest motivation in this struggle, for sin can be so seductive to the senses that it is truly hard to remember that the Lord is not pleased with it. At such times, we must simply cling to God and thus show Him our great love.

Venial sins and voluntary imperfections are also obstacles to growth in the way of following Christ.

Let us suppose, for example, that I have a habit of being unkind in certain circumstances, and I let myself get into a bad mood. Although I regret it, I do not make an effort to change it and improve. In this way, I am hindering growth in love, because kindness, in all its greatness, is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Another example: Suppose I spend a lot of time in worldly things, beyond the healthy and legitimate moments of recreation. In reality, I know that I should not spend so much time on the internet and other forms of unnecessary communication. I know that this time could be better spent, dedicating it to the Lord or doing worthwhile work. But my curiosity does not allow for change, and I myself am not willing enough, because I have already got used to it and somehow seek - or at least allow - distraction.

It is clear that these kinds of ingrained habits prevent certain dimensions of following Christ from developing, because they are held back by our voluntary imperfections.

We could give many more examples, also from community life, such as when one takes certain "liberties", which are neither foreseen nor previously agreed upon. These "freedoms" end up becoming chains, which do not allow us to move forward.

Without scruples, we should accept the challenge presented by today's reading, and take advantage of the approaching Lenten Season to re-order and re-examine our spiritual

life. This can be very helpful in reaching the goal of our spiritual life: to grow in love for God and people!