

16. February 2024

## LENTEN ITINERARY

### Day 3: "Do everything with your eyes fixed on the Lord"

The Gospel presented to us today in the lectionary of the Traditional Mass offers us important warnings for our holy journey towards the Feast of the Resurrection.

Having set out, marked with the cross of ashes, determined to deepen our conversion and to integrate fasting as an important aid on the spiritual journey, the Lord warns us today in the Gospel of an inclination that we must overcome with His help:

*"Be careful not to parade your uprightness in public to attract attention; otherwise you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven" (Mt 6:1).*

Jesus then exhorts us to give alms in secret, without seeking to be praised by men. Then *"your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you" (v. 4).*

Let us recall the prayer of St. Nicholas of Flüe with which we concluded the first meditation of the Lenten itinerary on Ash Wednesday. The first part of the prayer said: "My Lord and my God, take from me everything that distances me from You". This supplication expresses what in mystical theology is called the "purgative way".

According to the Lord's warnings in today's Gospel, what is it in us that needs to be purified? It turns out that we have an ingrained tendency to want to please people, to want to assert ourselves before them, to be concerned about our own honour.

Of course, in principle, there is nothing to object to people respecting and recognising the good deeds they see us doing, if we try to serve people and live in peace with them. That would be the right thing to do.

However, what the Lord is thematising in this gospel is the seeking of praise and recognition. In this case, the good work of almsgiving may be abused as a means of gaining recognition.

We can easily apply this example to other situations. For example, it is the seeking of recognition when we make sure that our own merits are mentioned and highlighted again and again. Behind this attitude may lie the problem that we measure our value as a person according to the recognition we receive from others. This underlying problem may be difficult to overcome, because we may have adopted it at an early age, at home or in our social environment.

But if this is the case, it creates a considerable imbalance in our lives, which can lead to a great lack of freedom or, in extreme cases, even to inner slavery.

So what can be done to overcome this?

First of all, it is essential to internalise that we receive our value from God. We are His beloved children and that is our dignity, which no one can take away from us. God's declarations of love for us are so rich and diverse that they become our deepest security. We are loved by God! The whole Gospel testifies to this, and in the Passion and Death of our Lord His love becomes palpable for all: *"For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son"* (Jn 3:16). And this in a sinful world! We must meditate and interiorise this certainty, in order to base our whole life on it.

When we try to do everything with our eyes fixed on God, we acquire true freedom. This is also the advice the Lord gives us in today's Gospel. It is the Father who rewards us for our good deeds. If we do them for His sake, we receive as an added bonus the freedom not to become dependent on the praise of men.

The heavenly reward is sure! We should not jeopardise it!

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Meditation on the reading of the day: <http://en.elijamission.net/2021/02/19/>

Meditation on the Gospel of the day: <http://en.elijamission.net/2022/03/04/>