



29. February 2024

LENTEN ITINERARY

Day 16: "Retrospection and perspective"

During the last days of our holy journey towards the Feast of the Resurrection, we have taken a look at the vices that besiege our soul and want to subjugate it. By resisting and fighting them, as the masters of the spiritual life vividly teach us, we are actively cooperating in the process of inner purification.

The struggle against vices does not cease throughout our lives, and in this way God forms us in the most diverse aspects. On our part, tenacity and perseverance are required, so that we never give in to our evil inclinations, for that would mean giving up.

We will have to suffer defeats in this struggle, but God even makes use of these. On the one hand, they make us see how needy we are of grace in our journey of following the Lord. On the other hand, they protect us from the worst of all evils: pride.

Today's reading from the Lectionary of the Novus Ordo expresses our reality very well: *"The heart is more devious than any other thing, and is depraved; who can pierce its secrets? I, Yahweh, search the heart, test the motives..."* (Jer 17:9-10).

In the process of purification of the heart, the struggle against vices is central to approaching the goal. The condition, however, is that we know how to get up again after our defeats, trusting in God's mercy, and that we continue on our way. This is our contribution in this struggle, which is inescapable. If the Lord sees us struggling sincerely, He will purify our heart through the so-called "passive purification", beyond what we could achieve through our efforts in "active purification". More on this later...

But the Lenten journey is not only to rid ourselves of evil in its many guises; it is also, through the attainment of the virtues and the priceless gifts of the Holy Spirit, to produce in our lives those fruits which give glory to God and serve mankind. It is these that adorn our souls with their true beauty and mould us in the image of Christ: *"God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him"* (Gen 1:27). This image, according to which the Lord created us, He wants to see re-established in us.

Each one of us bears this image within himself or herself, and our Father, being the "loving and divine artist", wants to be pleased with His work and bring it to perfection. Let us remember how the Creation story ends: "*God saw all he had made, and indeed it was very good*" (Gen 1:31).

But man was seriously wounded by the fall into sin and, so to speak, "*fell into the hands of bandits*" (Lk 10:30).

That is why we need a Redeemer and a Saviour; a Deliverer and a Good Shepherd, who leads us in all wisdom along the paths of salvation, who opens our eyes to truth and frees our hearts to love. In the Person of Jesus, the One we need has already come into the world to fulfil the Will of the Father. In Him "*we gain our freedom, the forgiveness of our sins*" (Eph 1:7).

Therefore, we lack nothing in order to become what God has destined us to be: His children, whom He wants to keep with Him for eternity, once He has accomplished His work and we have done our part. There, in eternity, we will be able to behold Him face to face, in unceasing joy, in communion with His own. Towards this goal we are on pilgrimage!

After having focused in the last days on our part in the purification process, fighting against all that distances us from God, we will now focus on that which brings us closer to Him, according to the second part of the prayer of St. Nicholas of Flüe: "My Lord and my God, grant me all that brings me closer to You".

Just as we cooperate with our free will in the struggle against vices, so we can also do in the attainment of virtues, counting, of course, on God's grace. In the context of our Lenten journey, we will not be able to go in depth into every single virtue, about which much can be found in the literature. But I will address some of the virtues, starting with the cardinal virtues, which are necessary as a healthy foundation for our spiritual life.

In addition, the virtues help us to directly counteract certain vices. An example would be the virtue of temperance, which helps the powers of our soul to fight against gluttony.

Tomorrow we will see how the cardinal virtues of prudence and fortitude help us in following the Lord, strengthening our path and strengthening our soul.

Meditation on the reading of the day: <http://en.elijamission.net/2021/03/04/>

Meditation on the Gospel of the day: <http://en.elijamission.net/2022/03/17/>