

9. April 2024

Every one who is born of the Spirit

Jn 3:7-15

Jesus said to Nicodemus: Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can this be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

"You must be born anew" This sentence sounds like a riddle to Nicodemus. But Jesus does not lower Himself, but says to him: "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this?"

Today we understand very well what the Lord meant by this sentence, because in Baptism this new birth of which He spoke takes place.

St Leo the Great, in one of his sermons, writes

"Who pays homage to Christ, who truly suffers, dies and rises, but the one who suffers, dies and rises with Him? This participation in the Lord's Passion has already begun in all the children of the Church: through the forgiveness of sins, man enters into a new life, and the threefold immersion symbolises the three days of the Lord's death. At the same time, baptism removes the layer of earth that covers the grave. With the "old man" we descend into the baptismal font and, reborn, we rise out of it. But what is begun in this sacrament must be brought to fullness by works".

Through Baptism, then, we are born again, of water and the Spirit.

Especially now, in the Easter season, we are constantly invited to live as new persons. This invitation is also echoed in the text of St Leo the Great which we have just heard. What the Lord has sown in us and given us must develop. Just as a human being is already a person from the moment of conception and from that moment begins to develop both externally and internally, so too the new man, created in the image of Christ through the bath of regeneration, must develop and come to fullness through works.

Man does not develop his true nature as a person - or even destroys it - when he does evil, when he allows himself to be carried away by his impure passions, when he does not follow or even listen to the voice of his conscience. The same can happen to the baptised Christian who, in a life of sin, denies the grace of baptism and thus loses his vocation as a child of God and a sign of His presence in the world.

He who is born of the Spirit is guided by the Holy Spirit, which is why the Lord gives the example of the wind, which *"blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes"*. The motions that he receives from the Spirit are unpredictable for the natural man, because they come from the mystery of God, and the perspective from which he views each situation is different from the way we understand it through human reason alone. He who is born of the Spirit has his eyes fixed on God, everything is directed towards Him and he understands things in His light.

The activation of the baptismal grace happens especially through the action of the Holy Spirit. We, following His guidance, must try to get rid of everything that hinders His work. He will take care of the rest, freeing us from all negligence so that we can quickly and gladly fulfil God's will, which is to live as people born of the Spirit. Other people will notice this difference and wonder what the 'mystery' or 'secret' of our lives is.