

22. May 2024

Listening to Wisdom

Sirach 4:11-19

Wisdom exalts her sons and gives help to those who seek her. Whoever loves her loves life, and those who seek her early will be filled with joy. Whoever holds her fast will obtain glory, and the Lord will bless the place she enters. Those who serve her will minister to the Holy One; the Lord loves those who love her. He who obeys her will judge the nations, and whoever gives heed to her will dwell secure. If he has faith in her he will obtain her; and his descendants will remain in possession of her. For at first she will walk with him on tortuous paths, she will bring fear and cowardice upon him, and will torment him by her discipline until she trusts him, and she will test him with her ordinances. Then she will come straight back to him and gladden him, and will reveal her secrets to him. If he goes astray she will forsake him, and hand him over to his ruin.

We heard the praise of Wisdom and quickly realised that most of the verses could be applied directly to the Holy Spirit:

"He who obeys her will judge the nations, and whoever gives heed to her will dwell secure".

The ability to judge wisely depends on our ability to assimilate the light of the Holy Spirit above our merely rational knowledge. Indeed, it is the Holy Spirit who gives us supernatural insight, or in other words, enables us to see the situations we have to judge from God's perspective. That is why it is such a gift that in the Church we have a Magisterium, which in many areas helps us to discern events in the world from the perspective of faith.

The Book of Sirach exhorts us to listen to wisdom. In the German language there is a beautiful word "lauschen", which means to focus the whole attention of the mind and of the heart on what is being said to us. In this way the Word of the Lord, the seed sown by the Sower, will not be lost, nor will the devil be able to steal it, nor will the thorns and thistles suffocate it, but it will bear abundant fruit, as Jesus makes us understand in the parable (Mt 13:3-8, 19-23).

If we listen to God as we should, we will be able to enter into His inmost being and, as the reading tells us, we will be able to dwell secure. Then we find our home in Him and the Spirit of God instructs us to remain there. The more attentive we are to His word, the more it moves in our hearts like the Blessed Virgin (Lk 2:19), the more we absorb the love of God, which instructs our minds and delights our hearts.

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None of us like the temptations that test us, complicate our lives and remind us of the struggle in which we are immersed. But we can look at them from another perspective, as today's reading suggests. They are trials designed to strengthen our will and consolidate our decision to follow the Lord. If, for His sake, we reject everything that might separate us from Him, we will grow stronger and the Lord will reward our faithfulness.

In other words, God gives us opportunities to earn merit and at the same time purifies us. This is the point of the statement that the Lord will *"bring fear and cowardice"*; not to discourage us, but to make us cry out to Him in our inner anguish. Unfortunately, it is often the case that when things are going well outwardly, we tend to forget God. But when trouble and distress come, we remember Him and our hearts seek Him.

This is precisely the intention of our Father, who always has our eternal salvation in mind. When we personally, or humanity as a whole, are in danger of forgetting Him, fear and trembling, however bitter, can be a means of bringing us back to the right path and reminding us of God. For the worst thing that can happen to us is for our heart to go astray and turn away from God, so that all kinds of idols can easily take its place.

But when the heart turns back to God, He turns back to us and we perceive His loving care and closeness again and return to the right path. Then we fully regain His friendship and He can reveal to us the secrets of His love.

Then our eyes are opened and we begin to see; blindness gives way and the radiant light of the Holy Spirit enlightens us. What we then see is incomparably greater than anything the world can offer us and will help us to seek and find our fullness in our Heavenly Father alone.

When this happens, the wisdom of God begins to reign in our hearts.