

25. May 2024

Advice from the Apostle

Jas 5:13-20

Any one of you who is in trouble should pray; anyone in good spirits should sing a psalm. Any one of you who is ill should send for the elders of the church, and they must anoint the sick person with oil in the name of the Lord and pray over him. The prayer of faith will save the sick person and the Lord will raise him up again; and if he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven. So confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another to be cured; the heartfelt prayer of someone upright works very powerfully. Elijah was a human being as frail as ourselves - he prayed earnestly for it not to rain, and no rain fell for three and a half years; then he prayed again and the sky gave rain and the earth gave crops. My brothers, if one of you strays away from the truth, and another brings him back to it, he may be sure that anyone who can bring back a sinner from his erring ways will be saving his soul from death and covering over many a sin.

What can we draw for our lives from this abundance of clear words of the Apostle?

First of all, James addresses Christians in the different inner states in which they may find themselves, giving them valuable advice, which can be received by those who have already found the faith.

He begins by telling those who are suffering to pray. This is an important indication of the Apostle, and, in my opinion, experience confirms it. For example, it often happens that in the morning, when we wake up, we have disturbing feelings, and we cannot identify where they come from... I am referring to certain feelings and emotions that do not have a clear reason for being and are not the consequence of bad behaviour or a sin committed... When we notice these kinds of vague feelings, we should begin to pray. This in no way means that we are repressing them. On the contrary, we are putting concrete spiritual counsel into practice, and by turning to the luminous presence of God, the disordered feelings should subside or diminish, at least after a time.

But if the affliction arises from an unresolved problem, we can ask the Holy Spirit to find a way to set things right before God. In this way, the feelings that overwhelm us will subside and, over time, fade away.

Now, if we are joyful, the Apostle James invites us to sing God's praise as a sign of our gratitude. In this way, joy will also deepen, because it will bring us into contact with our heavenly Father. In this way, the soul will be more anchored in God and joy will be able to last longer within us.

We should also pay close attention to the following advice, which is to ask for prayer when we are sick, or, if possible, to ask for what we in the Catholic Church call the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. As Holy Scripture insists on mentioning, it will be the intensity of faith that will make healing possible.

Also important is the indication that sins must be forgiven, and, in case this has not yet happened, they may possibly be the cause of illness.

The Apostle James ends his letter with an important hint, which we had reflected on a little in yesterday's meditation. It is part of true love to help someone on the right path with God, for it is their eternal salvation that is at stake. The hour of death will come for each person, and then he will see his life in the light of God. It is not just a question of whether he can be with God forever - although that is certainly the most important thing - but it is also essential how fruitful his life is and how much he is able to serve in the Kingdom of God.

Someone who goes astray is always in danger of harming himself and also of leading other people astray. Hence the Apostle's insistent exhortation to be concerned for those who go astray: *“if one of you strays away from the truth, and another brings him back to it, he may be sure that anyone who can bring back a sinner from his erring ways will be saving his soul from death and covering over many a sin”*.