

18. June 2024

Be perfect like your heavenly Father

Mt 5: 43-48

'You have heard how it was said, you will love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do as much? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Do not even the gentiles do as much? You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

Today's Gospel returns to the theme of love for one's enemies. This is, in fact, the highest grade in the "school of God", because we are presented with a totally different reality from what we are used to in a merely natural life. Here we are confronted with the reality of God: This is what God is like!

In these examples of how to deal with enemies the Lord sets an evidently supernatural standard. It is not surprising, therefore, that he precisely relates the love of enemies to the exhortation to be perfect like our heavenly Father.

With these words – "be perfect as our heavenly Father" - we are sent to set out resolutely on the path of holiness. Our measure cannot be the measure of the world - no! Our measure is God's own way of being and acting, which is to be unfolded in us. And indeed, through the Holy Spirit we learn to think as God thinks and act as He acts; that is, to love as He loves.

But how can we reach such heights?

Let's tell it like it is: it is impossible to do it on our own! We are realists if we stand before the Lord and say: "Lord, it is impossible for us". Many times we fail already in our first attempts and efforts to walk the way of holiness, and we easily get discouraged.

It may happen then that, resigned, we prefer to stick to certain religious practices and strive not to violate God's commandments. But we lose sight of the fact that we are called to bear fruit "a hundredfold" (cf. Mk 4:20). Perhaps we still try to produce "some fruit", or we are content with "sixty" or at least "thirty"... In the end - we might think - the most important thing is that we do not bury our talent in the ground (cf. Mt 25:24-28).

But this is not the way it should be! This is not what the Lord is telling us in exhorting us to perfection, and if He calls us to such heights, He will also give us the grace to reach them! Perhaps our problem lies there... Perhaps we focus too much on our own efforts, and that is why we experience again and again our limitations and defeats.

But the way of holiness must be followed with our eyes fixed on God! It is He who calls us to holiness, so we can ask Him for all the graces we need for this way, and we can count on them. Our "defeats" should not be a reason to throw in the towel. On the contrary, they should be like "stings" (cf. 2 Cor 12:7) that move us to abandon ourselves more and more to the Lord and not to ourselves.

In "The Father's Message" to Sister Eugenia Ravasio, which I have quoted many times, she says that after communion, for example, we can ask our Heavenly Father to grant us all that we lack in virtues.

Whenever we run up against our limits and our will is not strong enough; whenever we are hindered by feelings, attachments, lack of freedom and evil inclinations, we should turn to God: "If You, Lord, have called me to live in holiness, please help me to take the next step!"

This point is important... We have a way to go. An immense help and support on this way is the Virgin Mary. In our community, we pray every morning at the beginning of our time of silent adoration, after the Angelus, a prayer to Our Lady in which we ask her: "...guide us on the way of holiness":

There are stages in the way of following Christ in which we can take great steps. These are special moments of grace! However, it is usually the everyday way and daily faithfulness that will make us grow. To the extent that we make our hearts more receptive to God's presence, His grace will be able to work in us. It will be important

to pay attention to the subtle guidance of the Holy Spirit, who will form and shape us in this way.

Let us never forget that it is the Lord who guides us; it is the Lord who calls us; it is the Lord who gives us grace; it is the Lord who is goodness itself and the source of all holiness (cf. Mk 10:18). Therefore, in all situations we must turn to Him, when we have the impression that we are not making progress. He will answer us and show us the next step to take! When we become aware of this, our "wings of trust" will grow and our steps will become more agile.

Since love is the highest good, we can insistently ask God to make us grow in love: "Lord, we want to love like You and nothing less. For this, You Yourself must give us Your Heart; otherwise it will be impossible". Such a prayer will please the Lord very much!