

26. June 2024

The way of your precepts

Ps 119:33-37.40

*Teach me, Yahweh,
the way of your precepts,
and I will observe them.*

*Give me understanding
and I will observe your Law,
and keep it wholeheartedly.*

*Guide me in the way of your commandments,
for my delight is there.*

*Bend my heart to your instructions,
not to selfish gain.*

*Avert my eyes from pointless images,
by your word give me life.*

*See how I yearn for your precepts;
in your saving justice give me life.*

With great conciseness, the psalmist points out to us in his petition to God the way of an authentic following of Christ. In brief words, we are told what we must do and what we must avoid so that we do not stop on our way or even go astray.

"The way of your precepts" - Without the commandments of the Lord, nothing is possible. They are the absolute reference points in our walk with God. Their slightest breach will cause our steps to falter, and a permanent transgression will lead us astray. Jesus describes this path of God's precepts even more precisely. It only takes one inordinate glance at the seduction of sin to connect us with it and darken our soul (cf.

e.g. Mt 5:28). Thus, it penetrates already on the objective level into the field of alienation from God.

We are all called to walk the path of the Lord's commands to the end. This can have a double meaning: on the one hand, to remain faithful to His commandments until our death; on the other hand, to fulfil them in their full meaning and in all that each one implies. To recognise this meaning in depth, we ask God to give us understanding. This is one of the 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit, which enables us to penetrate the inner beauty of the Lord's commandments. Then they will no longer be for us a burden or a mere obligation that we have to fulfil, but we accept this way wholeheartedly, i.e. our heart awakens in the love of God and understands His wise guidance.

The spirit of piety is also at work in us, as we find more and more delight in following the path of God's commands, focused on willingly serving and glorifying the Heavenly Father. The Spirit of the Lord will watch jealously over us and with us, so that nothing that is contrary to the Will of God can remain within us.

Our heart - from which all evil proceeds, according to the unequivocal words of the Lord (Mt 15:19) - is called to turn wholly to God, who draws it to Himself. He Himself frees it from all greed, whether it is directed to material or spiritual goods, wanting to possess them for oneself, no longer considering them as a gift from God.

With great vigilance we must turn our hearts away from vanities. They not only captivate the soul, but also obscure the expression of our life. Moreover, they make us foolish, exposed to a certain ridiculousness. How foolish it is to lean on transient things and expect happiness from them! How foolish it is to be puffed up by one's knowledge or outward appearance!

In this respect, Cohelet gives us the right guideline (Eccl 1:2): "*Sheer futility: everything is futile!*" -except serving God.

The word of the Lord gives life - blessed is the one who meditates on it, interiorises it and acts on it. Then His word awakens in us the desire to know the Lord even more, and at the same time it satisfies our soul. Thus it ceases to wander in search of lush meadows, only to find hollow cisterns; it receives true nourishment. If the soul is wise, it will do as the desert fathers advise: it will ruminate on the word of God until it unfolds

all its sweetness and flavour; it will imitate the Virgin Mary, moving the word in the heart until it penetrates it completely (Lk 2:19).

Meditation on the wisdom and justice of God gives new strength to the soul to follow and persevere in the way of God's precepts.

To conclude this brief reflection on Psalm 119, let us make it clear that we too, like the psalmist, must ask God to enable us to follow this path. On our own we would not be strong enough to resist everything that wants to keep us off the path, but God never leaves us alone! He knows our weaknesses and limitations and offers us all kinds of help to get us up again and again and to keep us going.

With the coming of His Son into the world, He is closer to us than in the times of the Old Covenant. "*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (Jn 1:14a). In the holy sacraments He always offers us His grace anew, so that each one of us may walk with sure steps along the path of His commands, obeying the Lord and accepting His inestimable help.