

28. June 2024

Correct with gentleness

2 Tim 2:22b-26

Reading from the memorial of St. Irenaeus of Lyon

My son: concentrate on uprightness, faith, love and peace, in union with all those who call on the Lord with a pure heart. Avoid these foolish and undisciplined speculations, understanding that they only give rise to quarrels; and a servant of the Lord must not engage in quarrels, but must be kind to everyone, a good teacher, and patient. He must be gentle when he corrects people who oppose him, in the hope that God may give them a change of mind so that they recognise the truth and come to their senses, escaping the trap of the devil who made them his captives and subjected them to his will.

What wise advice not to get involved in unnecessary wars of words. How much time is spent in unnecessary discussions that lead nowhere and leave discord in their wake! A distinction must be made here between factual debates and those which primarily reflect people's opinions. For factual debates the aim is to find the best solution! In the above-mentioned disputes, it is probably more about being right!

It is a great art to rebuke people with kindness, because very quickly our temper gets the better of us, we get angry at the contradiction, and probably even more so when the other person's arguments are not correct.

How can we attain to this gentleness of which the apostle speaks?

First of all, gentleness is not a matter of temperament, but a fruit of the Holy Spirit. This means that it can grow out of an intimate life with God, when the Holy Spirit has purged from us all that is hard, impatient, bossy and even hostile. In this way, God's gentleness asserts itself in us, His way of teaching people, dealing with them and reaching even the stubborn.

Unfortunately, in arguments there is often a lack of precisely that kindness that could still reach those who are caught up in themselves. Thus, disputes can easily become bitter!

It is important to understand from the apostle's words that those who oppose the truth have been captured and subdued by the devil. So it is not just a matter of human error, but the devil himself holds the person captive. It is all the more important, therefore, that correction be done with gentleness and not be imbued with bitterness, lest our anger and impatience prevent the person in question from accepting the path to conversion that God offers him or her.

If we include the circumstance of deception by the devil and see the other person not as an adversary but also as one caught in the devil's net, we may become more sensitive in our dealings with him and ask more of the Holy Spirit for help rather than relying primarily on the power of our own reasoning!

Gentleness can then grow in us if we follow the apostle's advice:

"My son: concentrate on uprightness, faith, love and peace, in union with all those who call on the Lord with a pure heart".

Here the word "concentrate" is also significant. It shows us that a constant effort is needed to walk the path of holiness. This does not mean a cramped attitude, but a spiritual vigilance to seek the Lord. We must not slacken our efforts to do all that brings us closer to the Lord. The fruits of the Spirit - like gentleness - come from the serious way of following Christ, which we are called to do day by day. After defeats we have to get up again, overcome negligence, perceive attitudes that are contrary to love and open them to God, hold up inner closures to the Holy Spirit: "Loosen what is congealed" says the hymn of Pentecost. Our lack of charity towards our neighbour must be overcome and we must always aspire to the virtues.

The Lord will then show Himself merciful and make us able to meet people in His spirit and thus better serve His kingdom!