

7. July 2024

“My grace is enough for you”

2 Cor 12:7-10

Wherefore, so that I should not get above myself, I was given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger from Satan to batter me and prevent me from getting above myself. About this, I have three times pleaded with the Lord that it might leave me; but he has answered me, 'My grace is enough for you: for power is at full stretch in weakness.' It is, then, about my weaknesses that I am happiest of all to boast, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me; and that is why I am glad of weaknesses, insults, constraints, persecutions and distress for Christ's sake. For it is when I am weak that I am strong'.

We can understand this biblical text more deeply when we consider the great danger that pride brings with it. Pride encloses a person in himself and subjectively elevates him to a greatness that makes him feel powerful. Let us remember the pride of Satan, who did not want to serve God but, on the contrary, to build up his own dominion.

There are two dangers into which we should not fall. One is presumption, that attitude which seeks to appropriate spiritual things and positions beyond measure. The source is pride and, therefore, the attempt at self-aggrandisement. The other danger we must beware of, is that of failing to correspond to the possibilities God has entrusted to us. He who falls into this is like the man who buries his talent and does not multiply it for the Kingdom of God (cf. Mt 25:14-30).

In Paul's case, it is the sublime revelations that could put him in danger of becoming proud. That is why God leaves him suffering, from which Paul first of all asks to be freed. Three times he asks the Lord, and this reminds us of the threefold prayer of Our Lord in Gethsemane, asking that the cup may pass without the need to drink it (cf. Mt 26:39-44). But now the Apostle understands that God uses this suffering as a remedy against pride. And then we hear how Paul accepts all the crosses that stand in his way, so that the Lord's statement to him becomes a reality: *“My grace is enough for you: for power is at full stretch in weakness”*.

This passage of Sacred Scripture requires us to delve more deeply into God's ways with His followers. From our human understanding, it is not easy for us to recognise God's mercy and wisdom in that "*angel of Satan*" who slaps Paul, or in the insults, needs and persecutions he has to suffer. But it is precisely there that it manifests itself!

God has in view the real evil that harms man, and His action is intended to lead men to eternity, to be with Him. And, as we have already said, pride closes a person in on himself and even jeopardises his eternal salvation when he persists in this attitude. Because of the sublime revelations he had received, Paul could easily have boasted, feeling superior, more graceful and more intelligent than the people around him. Knowing this danger, God allowed him to face all kinds of struggles, so that in them he would feel his weakness. It is in the midst of these weaknesses that he opens himself to God and realises that everything comes from Him: "*My grace is enough for you*".

This lesson is of utmost importance for our spiritual life and gives us the key to a deeper understanding of God's love. The first thing we are asked to do is to trust, precisely when things get difficult and we have to suffer because of various circumstances. God knows how to make use of everything and to include it in His plan of love for us!

We can certainly ask God to remove an evil from us. But if, despite our insistent pleading, He does not do so, then it is because in this cross we have to carry, His desire to save us is at work, even if we do not realise it at first. He expects us to accept this cross and deal with it in the right way. The first thing God wants to heal is our moral ills, and for this he uses all the circumstances of our lives.

From this perspective, we may be able to understand that certain sufferings can be used by God for our salvation, and that by carrying a cross, we can also bear fruit for the good of others.

It would be advisable to make an act of trust like St. Paul did, giving our "yes" to all that God allows for our salvation, because His love and wisdom are especially manifested in the fact that He can use all the painful circumstances of our earthly life as stairways to perfection.