



8. July 2024

God's love is courting us

Hos 2:16,17b-18,21-22

Thus speaks the Lord: I am going to seduce her and lead her into the desert and speak to her heart. There I shall give her back her vineyards, and make the Vale of Achor a gateway of hope. There she will respond as when she was young, as on the day when she came up from Egypt. When that day comes- declares Yahweh- you will call me, 'My husband', no more will you call me, 'My Baal'. I shall betroth you to myself for ever, I shall betroth you in uprightness and justice, and faithful love and tenderness. Yes, I shall betroth you to myself in loyalty and in the knowledge of Yahweh.

In the previous days, we had heard how God expressed His love for His people through the prophet Amos. In His promises, God's original intention for His people was made clear.

Today we encounter a new aspect of God's love, which is shown here in its spousal dimension: God courts His people, just as a man courts his beloved. This tender love of God for His people could already be experienced in the Old Covenant and is even more clearly manifested in the coming of Jesus into the world.

We could aptly express it in these human terms: God never tires of courting His people! All the unfaithfulness of His people cannot move Him to give up conquering them. This is the reality that gives us hope, on which we can always count and which is ready to show itself to us at all times.

The promise we hear today, continuing in this language, affirms that the people are legitimately betrothed to God and break their illegitimate and unfaithful relationship with Baal. This comparison is very expressive and, as Catholics, it will not be difficult for us to understand. We know that as long as there is a validly contracted marriage, any other relationship involving specifically conjugal acts is illegitimate and therefore constitutes a break in the marriage covenant.

The same also applies to the Church: she is betrothed to the Lord! If the Church neglects the mission entrusted to her and allies herself with the spirit of the world, she commits a kind of spiritual adultery.

God, on the other hand, wants to seal a covenant with His people, a covenant that embraces every creature. God promises Israel marvellous gifts: the end of war, rest, security... The Lord's promises remain ever valid! He will never abandon man, neither in time nor in eternity!

A particularly beautiful statement in this text is when God says, "*I shall betroth you in uprightness and justice*". He establishes a "dowry" for the legitimate betrothal to His People: the price is His justice and righteousness, love and mercy.

What applies to the whole people also applies to the soul of man: When it turns away from sin and returns to God, it enters into the rightful relationship of the creature with its Creator. As long as the soul remains in sin, i.e. in the kingdom of darkness, it lives in an illegitimate relationship with Baal. It is committing adultery! But when it is converted and calls upon God as its Creator and Redeemer, then divine grace can penetrate it, bringing it all those gifts mentioned in today's text. The inner warfare comes to an end and the soul finds rest and security. Then God adorns it with His righteousness and clothes it with love and mercy. An everlasting covenant is sealed; God declares Himself in favour of His bride.

In so many ways God expresses His love for His people, that is, for us humans. At all times He wants us to understand that this love of His never rests and is always waiting for our response. And as soon as this response arrives, God's love becomes a reason for the people to celebrate. Then God can fulfil His desire to save us, and we call Him by His true name and increasingly recognise His great love for us.