

12. July 2024

The blossoming life

Hos 14:2-10

Israel, come back to Yahweh your God your guilt was the cause of your downfall. Provide yourself with words and come back to Yahweh. Say to him, 'Take all guilt away and give us what is good, instead of bulls we will dedicate to you our lips. Assyria cannot save us, we will not ride horses any more, or say, "Our God!" to our own handiwork, for you are the one in whom orphans find compassion.' I shall cure them of their disloyalty, I shall love them with all my heart, for my anger has turned away from them. I shall fall like dew on Israel, he will bloom like the lily and thrust out roots like the cedar of Lebanon; he will put out new shoots, he will have the beauty of the olive tree and the fragrance of Lebanon. They will come back to live in my shade; they will grow wheat again, they will make the vine flourish, their wine will be as famous as Lebanon's. What has Ephraim to do with idols any more when I hear him and watch over him? I am like an evergreen cypress, you owe your fruitfulness to me. Let the wise understand these words, let the intelligent grasp their meaning, for Yahweh's ways are straight and the upright will walk in them, but sinners will stumble.

It is a joy to the heart to see the intimate relationship that God has with His people Israel! What touching words He uses to call them to conversion and, at the same time, to show them the great blessing that will come to them when they listen to the voice of the Lord!

The way for the people of Israel is clearly marked out: it is the way of true conversion. The first step is to acknowledge one's own guilt.

Many people find this difficult to do and seem to be unable to bear to admit their mistakes or their faults. Perhaps they still have a false image of God within them, and fear that He might make them pay for it for the rest of their lives or that He will persecute them because of these faults.

Perhaps, in recognising the guilt, the self-image they have made of themselves as flawless and perfect would also collapse. Possibly a deep-seated inner complex also manifests itself, which prevents true self-knowledge because they would then feel that they are no longer worthy, and this they would not be able to bear.

There are also certain forms of blindness and other reasons that prevent this first step in conversion. In addition, guilt before God can also be linked to faults committed towards other people, which would imply acknowledging them to them. This could be a further obstacle. But of all those mentioned, the most important obstacle is certainly that of the false image one still has of God.

Today's reading, like so many other passages of Sacred Scripture, clearly conveys the image of a loving and compassionate God: "*I shall cure them of their disloyalty*" says the Lord, "*I shall love them with all my heart*". In every possible way, God reaches out to His children to lead them to conversion.

In the light of this certainty, we could now contemplate so many stories of Sacred Scripture: from the Creation of man in His image to the Incarnation of the Son of God; His redemptive Death, His Presence in the Holy Eucharist and all the countless proofs of divine love in the lives of men... In everything we will be able to recognise His love for us!

The more we are able to discover this love of God - and we can ask the Holy Spirit to help us to recognise it better and better - the more we will also grow in repentance for having sinned against Him and against mankind. Deep repentance means recognising that one has wounded love and truth through one's own fault. This is true contrition, which transforms our heart and makes it docile to the Will of God; which makes us lose the miserable pride of constantly defending ourselves and makes us more receptive to listen to the Lord and to know Him better.

The text itself describes the result: Israel turns away from idolatry and no longer puts its trust in its own strength; on the contrary, it wants to know God as He really is, a God who has pity on the fatherless, who wants to heal unfaithfulness and, by pure grace, shows His love again!

With this conversion that has taken place, a new life begins, for now the life of grace unfolds in the person. With all the wonderful comparisons that the Lord uses to describe how this new life blossoms, He wants to make it clear to man that this is his true life, that he no longer has anything to do with idols and that he recognises the right paths of the Lord and walks in them.

All these wonderful words from today's reading invite us to understand God's love better and to entrust our whole life to Him.

Those who have already undergone a conversion should deepen their conversion and, with the help of the gift of the fear of God, perceive more and more subtly even the slightest deviations from the path of love. The gift of piety will help us to recognise what is pleasing to God and will urge us to put it into practice. In this way, our life will become more and more radiant and flourishing in the light of grace, and we will be able to joyfully fulfil the task that the Lord has entrusted to us in our pilgrimage through this world.