

1. September 2024

Be doers of the word

Jas 1:17-18,21b-22,27

Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures. Therefore put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

The Apostle James clearly reminds us that our faith must lead to concrete works, otherwise it risks remaining a dead faith (cf. Jas 2:17) and may even become a cause of condemnation for us. Indeed, faith teaches us how to live, and the Holy Spirit who dwells in us urges us to put it into practice. If we do not follow His instructions, the impulse may be there, but it is not "incarnated", that is, it does not become a tangible reality.

So the question that arises for us who wish to follow the Lord is: how can we better understand the promptings of the Spirit and put them into practice?

The reading gives us a clear indication: *"Put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."*

Here we are told to purify our hearts, to restrain our passions, to strive for meekness and to assimilate the Word of God. These are good dispositions to better hear the voice of the Holy Spirit and to put into practice what He wants us to do.

The impurity and evil within us, whatever it may be, makes us insensitive to the delicate presence of the Holy Spirit and prevents Him from working in us. Our inner freedom is blocked and influenced by the dark side! For example, when we give in to anger or other strong negative feelings, they dominate us. But it is not the way of the Holy Spirit

to raise His voice so loudly that these negative feelings are 'drowned out'. On the contrary, He will teach us to restrain them so that we become receptive again. Central to this point is the mention of meekness in today's reading, to which we should all aspire.

Meekness, as opposed to unbridled anger, is a very spiritual attitude. It is not at all the apathy or indifference of our natural temperament, which is exalted by nothing and shows no interest in anything.

We need to practise meekness and learn to recognise the causes of our anger, because it is certainly not always a 'holy anger' that comes over us. Often it is rather impatience, because things are not happening as we expected, or as we would like, and so on. If these are the causes of our anger, it means that we are 'bound' to ourselves, especially if the anger and displeasure persist for a long time.

Meekness, on the other hand, renounces this kind of 'self-assertion' and seeks the truth of the objective situation, i.e. it does not take what our feelings tell us, but reality as it is. In this way, meekness restrains us, orders our overflowing feelings and seeks what is appropriate for true peace. It is important to clarify that it is necessary to have made a spiritual decision beforehand, because anger always justifies itself and believes that it has reasonable motives, since it is driven by feelings. Therefore, a decision is needed not to contain it and not to justify it.

But how can anger be corrected in time, and not wait until the fierceness and exaltation that it produces has subsided?

This is where the apostle's advice comes in: *"receive with meekness the implanted word"*. If we apply this to the case of unbridled anger, it would be important, for example, to internalise the words of Scripture which say that *"the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God"* (Jas 1:20).

Then we should think about this sentence again and again, meditate on it and repeat it. If we notice that feelings of anger easily arise in us, we could even recite it to ourselves as an ejaculation, as a 'prayer of the heart'. And the Word of God, as the Apostle tells us today, has the power to save our souls! In our example, this would mean that the

Word comes to counteract our disordered feelings and passions and to strengthen us for good.

In this way we become "hearers of the word" who also put it into practice.

If we go through these inner purifications and work seriously within ourselves, not only will we more easily follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit, but we will also more naturally and easily practice the works of mercy, because it is one and the same Spirit that guides us and gives us the strength to do good.