

10. August 2024

To hate one's own life in this world

Jn 12:24-26

Reading for the Feast of St. Lawrence

At that time Jesus said to his disciples: "In all truth I tell you, unless a wheat grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies it yields a rich harvest. Anyone who loves his life loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me, must follow me, and my servant will be with me wherever I am. If anyone serves me, my Father will honour him".

At first, these words of the Lord that we should hate our life would seem to be contrary to the great gift of life, which we are to care for and protect.

However, their meaning will be revealed to us when we understand that natural life itself is not our goal; but that each person has a task to fulfil, which is the true goal of his life: it is to attain eternal life and to be in perpetual communion with God and his own.

So we must subordinate our life to a higher meaning. When we discover this deeper meaning of existence, our whole life will be ordered according to it; or, in other words, it will be at the service of this noble goal. Many people sense that their life has a deeper meaning and, realising that the natural life does not satisfy them, they set out in search of something more.

By subordinating all our desires and illusions in relation to our earthly goals to that great goal of living already here and now in conformity with God's Will - as far as possible - we will be "hating" the natural life in comparison to our great goal. In this sense, we will be able to "lose" our life.

Even when applied to our earthly realities, this word of the Lord is understandable. Let us take the example of a sportsman who wants to win a gold medal. He will be able to subordinate everything to this goal, because he longs for the honour that this triumph

would bring him. Thus, he will know how to renounce certain pleasures of life, i.e. he will "hate" them.

Priests, for example, who are called to follow Christ in a special vocation, must leave behind the natural life and practise everything that serves their path. Everything must be subordinated to this goal, in order to fulfil the vocation God has given them. Thus, they are to despise the worldly life in order to attain the spiritual life.

Therefore, one cannot set out on the way of following Christ and believe that one can continue to enjoy all the things of the world that bring joy, or that appear and promise to bring joy. Even those "pleasures" that are licit and not in themselves dangerous must be handled with prudence, lest they become an obstacle in our way of following Christ, lest we become too preoccupied with them and end up hindering the growth of our supernatural life.

This does not mean practising an obscure asceticism, rejecting all natural things in themselves. Rather, it is about the vigilance with which we are to conduct ourselves in our spiritual life, according to the call that God has addressed to us.

The following of the Lord, to which He Himself invites us, teaches us what is essential and wants to lead us to live our vocation as persons to the full. It is a call to serve Christ, who gave His life for us. Jesus Himself is the grain of wheat, spoken of in today's Gospel, who fell to the ground and died.

Jesus came to serve us (cf. Mk 10:45)! In serving Him, we will also serve people in Him. At this point, we should make an important distinction. Service to people is always valuable; but this value will be incomparably greater when it is done in the Spirit of the Lord. In Him, we learn to see the person in the love of Christ and thus recognise what truly helps him beyond his passing needs.

The Lord's promises to us in today's Gospel are very encouraging: if we serve Him, the Father will honour us. And this reward should be enough for us!