

17. August 2024

Obedience to the commandments of the Lord (Part II)

Today we want to return to the subject we began yesterday.

We know the serious problems of so many marriages, and we know that many of them were contracted in the most difficult circumstances. The Church, as a mother, also wants to turn to those who, for various reasons, have failed in their marriage and have begun a new relationship.

Indeed, it is the sick who need the doctor, not the healthy, as Jesus tells us in the Gospel (cf. Mt 9:12).

Therefore, if a Catholic finds himself in this situation, but longs to be united to the Lord and to the Church, and to witness to this union in Eucharistic communion, he has two options:

The first option is to abandon this second union and, if he cannot return to his true sacramental marriage, to decide to continue his journey with God in abstinence. This can be a painful process, of course, because sexual acts create deep bonds.

The second option offered by the Church may apply, for example, if there are children from this second union. If this is the case, there is the possibility of continuing to live together, but as brothers and sisters, i.e. abstaining from the acts proper to spouses.

The logic of this last possibility is clear, since in this case the existing marriage bond is not violated, so that the person concerned can objectively return to the state of grace that corresponds to the evangelical requirement of conversion. He can then receive Holy Communion again, because he is obeying the Lord's commandments concerning marriage.

If, on the other hand, the reception of Holy Communion were to be permitted without corresponding to the exhortation to conversion, the other faithful might be confused and this would be a cause of scandal.

Some sectors of the Church may feel that this rule is too legalistic and that certain situations should be examined on a case-by-case basis, even though the irregularity may have been committed through no fault of their own, or through little fault of their own. Advocates of this position suggest that the priest accompanying the couple should discern the particular case and then leave the decision to the conscience of the persons concerned. Furthermore, there would be situations in which, because of the circumstances, it would be impossible to prove the nullity of the marriage, but there could be a subjective moral certainty that there was never a true marriage bond. Those who defend the possibility of allowing access to Communion in such cases see it as an act of mercy on the part of God, and as a new way of reaching out to people and offering them Holy Communion as a remedy for their sins.

In the end, what all these considerations have in common is that they want to offer communion without the dissolution of the second union or without the need for abstinence. Those who defend this perspective see it as a development of doctrine and a practice of pastoral mercy.

Others, on the other hand, consider that it would be a violation of the Church's constant practice, and they stress the validity of what the Church has said on this matter up to now, so they do not want to join this new pastoral course.

It should not go unmentioned that all this has created enormous tensions in the Church, with entire Episcopal Conferences coming to opposite conclusions on this issue.

The goal of spiritual accompaniment can only be to help the person concerned to return to a state of grace, also on an objective level. Even if their personal guilt is very slight, this does not alter the fact that sexual intercourse with a person who is not one's spouse is always a betrayal and a violation of the marriage bond.

Mercy cannot ignore this aspect. In fact, true mercy is not only concerned with the personal needs of the one whom it seeks to help; it is also and above all concerned with his or her eternal destiny, so that it cannot avoid or play down the objective truth.

Even in the rare case that someone is morally certain that his marriage is invalid, it is important to take into account the second reason mentioned above, which concerns the scandal that could be caused among the faithful when they receive Communion.

The Catholic Church has a great asset to protect, because it seems to be the only one that defends the sanctity of marriage in the face of all the attacks that seek to weaken it. This is a great mission in our time, because there are so many disturbed relationships, and it is a real challenge to respond unreservedly to God's will and to bear witness to it.

There is no doubt that we can count on God's mercy if we do not fully achieve this high goal of living in conformity with God's will. But this does not mean that we can lose sight of the goal or lower our standards; rather, we must earnestly strive to reach it. The world needs this unequivocal witness more than ever, now that it has turned in other directions and strayed so far from God's commandments.