

18. September 2024

The royal path

1 Cor 12:31-13,13

Earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

It is love that makes all things shine! It is love that gives splendour to all things and brings them into their final order, for by love we were created, by love we were redeemed and by love we are sanctified.

Love is so essential that without it nothing can flourish or really grow. Without love, God's gifts cannot unfold their true beauty and goodness. We can say that it is love that gives true life to everything and confers a delicious flavour to everything. In short, love enlivens everything, while the absence of love empties everything of its deepest meaning. It is a true spiritual joy when man lives more and more in the truth, for then the Spirit of God forms him into what he really is and is called to be. The deepest motivation for this process of inner transformation is divine love, which does not rest until man is formed in the image of Christ, until the divine splendour is made visible through his life, and until God's love is manifested in His children.

Given the immense importance of love, we can understand why St Paul measures everything else by love. If the ultimate motivation for our actions is not love, then even the most wonderful gifts of God will be robbed of their deepest meaning and become mere *"noisy gong or a clanging cymbal"*.

Love never ends," the Apostle tells us, while everything else is temporary and imperfect. We can therefore say with Saint Paul that, thanks to love, what we do acquires eternal value. In the evening of life we will be judged by our love," St John of the Cross teaches us, and we have enough examples from the New Testament to show us clearly that at the Last Judgement we will be called to account for the love we have practised.

So if love is the ultimate measure of the value of any action, then this is the way to live. Everything can be measured and tested in terms of love! This becomes even clearer when we consider that everything God does is out of love, because there is no other motivation in Him. This even applies to His justice.

Thus the words of St Paul remind us of the fundamental choice of following Christ: Love is the measure, and everything we say and do must be judged by this criterion. Do we act out of love? Are our words imbued with love? Is our very being a message of love to others?

In order to evaluate ourselves, we must always remember this standard, understand better and better what true love is and enter into its school. For example, when it comes to our neighbour, love is not only concerned with his physical well-being, but first and foremost with his eternal salvation. Love focuses on the true need of man, who does not live by bread alone, but must come into contact with the love of God (cf. Mt 4:4).

From this meditation we must learn to do everything out of love for God and for others. As we go deeper and deeper along this path, love will grow, it will become more and more natural and it will permeate us more and more, so that we will be freed from self-centredness and love will be able to shape our inner self more and more, showing us its ways.

God's love has been poured into our hearts: it is the Holy Spirit Himself who dwells in us (cf. Rm 5:5)! Let us ask Him to bring about our inner transformation and let us listen

to Him attentively. His joy is to see us grow in love, because then we will come closer to our goal, which is to glorify God and serve others, becoming witnesses of His love so that they may come to know their loving Father through us.