

19. September 2024

Love above all

Lk 7:36-50

*One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house, and took his place at table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "What is it, Teacher?" "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*

As if the Lord wanted to underline once again the theme of yesterday's meditation, He gives us such a moving scene today in this Gospel. A gesture that can almost only be imagined by a woman, a gesture that corresponds to her capacity for self-giving and expresses it in such a wonderful and meaningful way. How tenderly a woman can love when her heart has been awakened to love! And Jesus not only welcomes this gesture, but turns it into a profound lesson for the Pharisee Simon and his guests.

But let us stay for a moment with this loving woman in her encounter with the Lord... According to the Gospel account, she was a sinner. However, it is clear that she was not closed; rather, the encounter with the Lord opened her heart wide. We do not know whether she had already heard a lot about Jesus and whether the testimonies of others had awakened her trust in Him without knowing Him, or whether it was just this moment of direct encounter with Him.

In any case, it was the presence of the Lord that touched her heart, perhaps without the need for great words. Her heart understood that He was someone she could approach, someone to whom she could open her depths; someone who loved her without personal interest; someone before whom she need not fear to be judged as a person; someone in whose presence she could give herself completely...

And so her eyes filled with tears: perhaps a mixture of repentance and joy. Repentance in the presence of the Holy One, before whom the ugliness of sin becomes even more evident. But at the same time she experienced the joy of knowing that she was accepted, that she was not rejected in her sin and would not remain hardened in it; the joy of seeing before her a new life in the love of the Lord. Her heart overflowed with gratitude and she seemed to want to show Jesus all her love: *"Since I entered, she has not stopped kissing my feet"*, Jesus told the Pharisee.

She showed her love to Jesus and her many sins were forgiven.

The authority of Jesus is an authority of love. Anyone whose heart is not closed will recognise it and be ready to serve Him willingly. Jesus awakens in us what is deepest in us: our capacity for self-giving as a response of our love. It may be expressed differently in men and women, but the source is the same.

Now the Lord wants us to share in this authority. Perhaps this hint is especially addressed to us men. We can win people over if they know that we love them. A man who truly loves inspires trust. His authority does not come so much from an office or a position he holds in society; rather, true and lasting authority is the fruit of love put into practice, of the Lord reflecting Himself more and more in our being. We cannot even aspire to such authority directly, nor will we achieve it through the efforts of our will. Rather, it will be the fruit of our surrender to Jesus and of our transformation into the image and likeness of God.

The world needs men and women in whom the love of Jesus is revealed. They will be able to become fathers and mothers in faith, and they will be able to facilitate the return of sinners to the Father's house. In general, people like to submit to an authority that comes from love and truth, because it lifts them up. Jesus' presence brought out the best in this woman, and she never ceased to show her love for Him. The same can happen when people experience the grace of conversion, when they find the Lord in us.