

22. September 2024

Overcoming evil with good

Wisdom 2:12,17-20

“Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions; he reproaches us for sins against the law, and accuses us of sins against our training. Let us see if his words are true, and let us test what will happen at the end of his life; for if the righteous man is God’s son, he will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries. Let us test him with insult and torture, that we may find out how gentle he is, and make trial of his forbearance. Let us condemn him to a shameful death, for, according to what he says, he will be protected.”

Malice blinds; goodness, on the other hand, opens our eyes. Indeed, if we allow ourselves to be carried away by the evil inclinations of our fallen nature, we become blind, unable to recognise God's ways, for they enslave us and thus limit our horizons.

As we look at today's reading, we see that darkness cannot bear the light because its way is evil. Evil is incapable of tolerating anything good; darkness wants to overshadow the light, to swallow it up and make it part of itself. The reason for this absolute rejection is that the light "brings to light" the darkness, if you will forgive the redundancy.

In the words of today's reading, we can easily see the enmity that the Lord had to face from those who did not want to convert. Everything He did and said was an accusation against them and their way of life. And so their hostility turned into hatred and a desire to destroy, because they could no longer bear the Righteous One.

How different is the reaction of those who are in the service of good! They know how to deal differently with the evil of other people. Instead of persecuting or cursing them, they try to conquer them for good, at least through their prayer. The good person wants the bad person to become good and is willing to do everything in his power to make this transformation happen.

In this attitude we find an essential aspect of our Christian faith: the renunciation of revenge, the renunciation of returning evil for evil. It is an attitude capable of bearing injustice without ceasing to call evil by its name. When the Spirit of God has penetrated even deeper into a heart, it can even come to see those who do evil with different eyes: it begins to feel compassion for them because they have blinded themselves to true values and are thus totally at the mercy of their evil inclinations. This compassion may increase if one has in mind the prospect of eternity and fears that such a person may be damned forever. And the more one lives in the presence of God, the more one can imagine the horror of an eternity away from Him.

This is a motivation to intercede for the wicked person, in the hope that he will one day accept God's offer of grace and not be eternally damned.

Given the degree of evil described in today's reading, courage is needed to follow the path of goodness to the end. The Christian faith has always been, and still is, a source of scandal. In the countries of the West, which long ago received the proclamation of the Gospel, there is less and less faith. Unfortunately, the attitude towards Christianity is becoming more and more hostile. First there is indifference to Christian values, then rejection, and finally hostility. At this point, even persecution motivated by hatred can be reckoned with. This is the result of the fact that the persecutors themselves have turned away from God, as the Book of Wisdom goes on to say: *"they did not know the secret purposes of God, nor hope for the wages of holiness, nor discern the prize for blameless souls"* (Wis 2:22).

As Christians, we must face the increasing alienation of God in the world with a deeper and closer relationship with Him. We must face our enemies with an even greater love, as the Lord taught us. He Himself destroyed enmity! This is the standard by which we should be governed. When we meditate on the life of our Lord, we see that He Himself put into practice all that He taught us.

In the midst of the darkness of this world, God sends His own Son as an offering of His grace. The Lord meets the hostility and wickedness of men with self-sacrifice and forgiveness. We always have the means of prayer to intercede for those who will not listen. God does His part to overcome and eradicate enmity by transforming the evil heart.

But man's part is the decision to accept grace to turn away from his wickedness.