

26. September 2024

The limitation of the created

Eccl 1:2-11

Sheer futility, Qoheleth says. Sheer futility: everything is futile! What profit can we show for all our toil, toiling under the sun? A generation goes, a generation comes, yet the earth stands firm for ever. The sun rises, the sun sets; then to its place it speeds and there it rises. Southward goes the wind, then turns to the north; it turns and turns again; then back to its circling goes the wind. Into the sea go all the rivers, and yet the sea is never filled, and still to their goal the rivers go. All things are wearisome. No one can say that eyes have not had enough of seeing, ears their fill of hearing. What was, will be again, what has been done, will be done again, and there is nothing new under the sun! Take anything which people acclaim as being new: it existed in the centuries preceding us. No memory remains of the past, and so it will be for the centuries to come - they will not be remembered by their successors.

It is very valuable to come to understand that things are passing and cannot satisfy man. The cycle of natural events, which are always repeating themselves, must teach us to raise our gaze and seek the imperishable; that which will remain.

We can understand this reading well in relation to the gift of knowledge; that special gift of the Holy Spirit that teaches us that created things are nothing in themselves. They can never be our goal, nor should we allow them to be an obstacle in our walk with God; which happens when we have a disordered relationship with them...

The masters of the spiritual life consider disordered love for creatures as a significant danger to spiritual advancement. And spiritual advancement goes hand in hand with growth in love; and the first love must be for God! Our spiritual path consists of learning to love everything in God. But when creatures assume God's rightful place in our hearts, we are reducing our capacity for love. That is why the Lord lets us experience that creatures are nothing in themselves, but that their value comes only from Him.

In the deepest processes of purification, God cleanses us of everything that does not occupy its rightful place in our lives. This purification is the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, He comes to our aid, surpassing our understanding and our efforts, so that

we really put God in the first place. And He does so precisely through the aforementioned gift of knowledge. So it is not just a matter of intellectual knowledge or a conclusion derived from faith; rather, the spirit of knowledge enables us to see and experience from within and with complete clarity the vanity of things, so that there is no longer any doubt in our minds.

Now, if we draw the conclusions corresponding to this truth recognized in God, detaching ourselves from all disordered attachment to creatures, and giving the Lord the place that He alone deserves, then the beauty of creatures will no longer be able to seduce us to the point of entering into competition with God; but they will become a bridge that brings us closer to Him, inasmuch as we will praise the beauty of the Creator in His creatures.

At this point, we should understand that in the processes of purification it is not God's intention to take away all earthly pleasures, much less to deprive us of the joy of life. How could this be the intention of our Father?

What He wants is to free us from attachments and disordered attachments, so that we can follow the call to the greatest love. That is why - even if it is humanly understandable - it is absurd to be afraid of purification processes. It is absurd, because in reality every disordered love or affection causes suffering and makes it difficult for us to reach the deepest dimension of love and freedom, or deprives us of it completely.... We have the tendency to put the lowest before the highest. Then, it is the love of God that attracts us to seek the noblest and makes us feel the insufficiency of passing things.

Against this background, we can understand the words of Qoheleth that we hear in today's reading, without falling into an attitude of pessimism. The text leads us to this clear conclusion: God alone can satisfy the hunger of our soul! All other creatures live and depend on Him! Only eternity can give us true joy in full and, therefore, only in it will we experience our total fulfillment! The path that leads us through this time is fleeting, even though, thanks to the encounter with the Lord, it can become a foretaste of eternity. For this reason, we should not give to creatures or to the temporal course of our life the attention and love that only God deserves.