

28. September 2024

The heart anchored in God

Eccl 11:9-12:8

Young man, enjoy yourself while you are young, make the most of the days of your youth, follow the prompting and desire of heart and eye, but remember, God will call you to account for everything. Rid your heart of indignation, keep your body clear of suffering, though youth and the age of black hair are both futile. Remember your Creator while you are still young, before the bad days come, before the years come which, you will say, give you no pleasure; before the sun and the light grow dim and the moon and stars, before the clouds return after the rain; the time when your watchmen become shaky, when strong men are bent double, when the women, one by one, quit grinding, and, as they look out of the window, find their sight growing dim. When the street-door is kept shut, when the sound of grinding fades away, when the first cry of a bird wakes you up, when all the singing has stopped; when going uphill is an ordeal and you are frightened at every step you take- yet the almond tree is in flower and the grasshopper is weighed down and the caper-bush loses its tang; while you are on the way to your everlasting home and the mourners are assembling in the street; before the silver thread snaps, or the golden bowl is cracked, or the pitcher shattered at the fountain, or the pulley broken at the well-head: the dust returns to the earth from which it came, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. Sheer futility, Qoheleth says, everything is futile.

One should not turn a deaf ear to the warnings to be aware of God's presence and thus avoid any levity in life. In reality, we know very well that everything earthly is transitory, and Qohelet wants to make this clear to us once again. Emphasizing the transience of things is not an expression of a negative or pessimistic worldview, as it might seem at first glance. On the contrary, it is about showing us clearly where we can find the only true security. This lesson will be essential for us!

Humankind is in danger of seeking false supports and building our lives on false foundations; foundations that cannot stand when the storm comes (cf. Mt 7:21-29). From a spiritual point of view, all this is mere illusion. To awaken from such illusions, clear words are sometimes necessary. Is it not better that someone should speak clear words to us rather than confuse us in the tangle of our own illusions? Do not sickness,

death, suffering and catastrophes become our teachers when we correctly interpret their message?

If we anchor our hearts in God and seek Him first (Mt 6:33), the lessons of Qoheleth will become clear to us.

Love teaches us to put nothing before God and to accept everything from His hand. Love gives us the necessary distance so that we know how to treat all that we encounter in this world, having found our freedom in being children of God. The beauty of created things will no longer be able to captivate us, but will rather point us towards the lavish love of our Heavenly Father; wine will gladden the heart of man (Ps 104:15), but will no longer be a snare for him. Material riches will no longer serve him to build up a supposed security, but will aid him in doing good; misfortunes will no longer be a reason to fall into despair, but a lesson to mature in the school of God.

By anchoring our hearts day by day in God, we will learn to see with His eyes and to act in His love. In this way, we allow the Holy Spirit - our "inner Teacher" - to carry out the separation of the spirits, to rid us of a merely human way of thinking.

In the light of God, our vision of life changes and we learn to distinguish what is essential from what is not. With gratitude we will be able to contemplate the beauty of Creation and, at the same time, be aware of its transience. We will be able to rejoice in human relationships, without forgetting the limitations of people. We will be able to recognize our deepest vocation in the light of God, knowing, however, that we are in great need of God's help to become what He has ordained us to be.

Qohelet wants us not to lose ourselves in the wind that comes and goes, and which is nothing but "vanity of vanities"; but to anchor our hearts where there is no wind, only true life.