

10. October 2024

Series on the unfreedoms Part 2: Human respects

I am doing this series of meditations on the "unfreedom" because, in my opinion, it is important that our Christian witness be permeated by that freedom which only the Lord can grant us: "if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free..." (Jn 8:36). Even if we try to live in the Will of God - and this is what every person who has lived a true conversion desires - there may be certain weaknesses that prevent us from fulfilling His Will willingly, completely and immediately. Although not all of us may be affected by each of the weaknesses of freedom that we will discuss in the next meditations, it is important to take note of all of them. Perhaps in this way we can help others whose freedom is restricted by all kinds of fears and other shortcomings. To develop this theme, I take some guidelines from Dietrich von Hildebrand's book "Our Transformation in Christ", especially from the chapter called "True Freedom".

Yesterday we had reflected on how we Christians must deal with fear, which threatens our freedom and wants to imprison us. Like all other deficiencies of freedom, fear has to be controlled or, better still, overcome with God's help. Let us remember that for this it is important, as we have said, not to let ourselves be carried away by the impulse of fear and to counteract its negative dynamics through intense prayer and concrete acts of trust in God. In this sense, it is necessary to revive in our memory those words of the Lord: "*In the world you will have hardship, but be courageous: I have conquered the world*" (Jn 16:33). I recommend that we invoke the Holy Spirit when feelings of fear concretely appear, so that we can be freed from that tension that is created by fear, which binds us to ourselves.

Let us look today at another lack of freedom, which is basically also connected with fear, but is expressed in a particular way in relation to people. This is the so-called "human respect".

In this case, the lack of freedom consists of a strong dependence on people. This is compounded by a false complacency, which is often accompanied by false compassion. In this way, a kind of "debt account" is easily created in the person in question, i.e. he feels guilty towards others and believes that he has not done enough for them.

The person with human respects becomes dependent on what other people think of him, or what he thinks they think of him. In an extreme case, there is even a great danger of

doing things that are morally unacceptable, just to please other people. Thus, it becomes evident that the other person becomes too important in their life. Here, too, an attachment to oneself is manifested, because one wants to please the other person and seeks a false harmony. However, this attitude makes the person in question less and less able to cope with conflict, because he cannot stand not looking good in front of others and, as a result, tends to pretend and disguise his true nature. It can go so far that he finds it very difficult to profess the truth, because he knows that such a confession could lead to displeasure and disadvantages in relation to other people. One does not want to be seen as stupid, foolish, backward, ridiculous, rigid....

Another form of human respects arises when one exaggerates in "putting oneself in the shoes" of the other person or the environment in which one moves. In other words, there is an excess of empathy. Thus, one easily loses sight of what is objectively correct for the given situation, and one's own point of view becomes too dependent on the reactions it might evoke, or one fears it might evoke. We want to avoid any misunderstanding, to the point that we fail to do what the Lord expects of us. The more often we act in this way, the more we allow ourselves to be enslaved by human respects.

As an antidote, it is essential that we summon the courage to say and do what we consider right from God's perspective, without depending on the opinion of other people and our environment. If we frequently do such acts of courage, this bondage will be broken and we will have regained some freedom.

Other freedom deficits that are similar to human respects are strong feelings of inferiority, which can even become a complex. The basic feeling is created in us that we believe ourselves to be inferior to other people, which in turn will mark our behaviour towards them. This also leads to a great lack of freedom. I do not want to go into detail about the "substitute" acts that a person with an inferiority complex can perform in order to compensate for his difficult and humiliating situation.

In these circumstances, it is important not to make our value dependent either on the opinion of others or on our social position. It is our loving Father who gives us our value as human beings, having accepted us as children in Christ. We must internalise this reality again and again, meditating on the corresponding biblical quotations that speak to us of His love. This counts even if we have sinned grievously against God and man. By returning to Him and receiving forgiveness for our sins, our dignity is restored. We must constantly seek to overcome feelings of inferiority, unmasking them as a lie and holding fast to the truth.

What all the above-mentioned lack of freedom have in common is the fact that the person in question is too self-centred and consequently loses sight of God. Thus, we also see the way out of these chains: we must overcome our attachment to ourselves and constantly look to God, asking Him for the right answer to the given situation. In the end, it is God's judgement of us that counts. Whatever I do or say must be done, in the first instance, with God in mind. Only then will I be able to look at people in the right way. For those who are strongly affected by human respects, this must be the main issue: to do everything with an eye to God and talking to Him. In this way, we will be able to get out of the bondage of human respects and live in the freedom of the children of God.

To be continued tomorrow...