

16. October 2024

Fighting without losing heart

Gal 5:18-25

Bretheren: if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

The struggle against the works of the flesh and the effort to attain the fruits of the Spirit will accompany us throughout our lives. All those who desire to follow the Lord and have made up their minds to do so must engage in the struggle against the 'old Adam'. Although we have become a 'new creature' in Christ and no longer live under the bondage of sin, we still have a long way to go before we reach perfection. The struggle against our evil inclinations will haunt us until the hour of our death. Even if, by God's grace and our cooperation, we emerge victorious from this struggle, at the end of our days we will always humbly confess to the Lord: "Without you it would have been impossible. I would have sunk into the torrent of so many temptations and succumbed to my own inclinations".

It is good that we become aware as soon as possible of how much we need the Lord. "Without me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5), He tells us when He explains that we must remain in Him as branches in the vine, which is Christ Himself. Let us therefore acknowledge our weakness before the Lord and, in response, entrust ourselves even more to Him and to His guidance.

The key to escaping and even overcoming temptations of all kinds that come our way is to listen to the Holy Spirit and to obey His promptings steadfastly. In this way, the Spirit loosens more and more of the chains that still bind us to the works of the flesh. Indeed, these are loosened not only by certain acts of our will - namely, the firm

determination to turn away from evil ways - but also, and even more so, when we respond to the promptings of the Spirit and draw ever closer to God. Then the true and the beautiful begin to attract us, the world of values is revealed to us in its radiant light. In this way a profound process of inner transformation begins. Whereas in the past certain works of the flesh could seduce and bind us, now they lose their power and hold over us.

But this will not be possible without a battle. Although God, in His goodness, sometimes rescues us from a terrible fight that has been tormenting us for a long time, He usually allows us to fight other battles.

Why does the Lord not simply free us from these struggles, which, because of their intensity, can sometimes turn into tormenting plagues?

It turns out that the inevitable struggles to overcome our evil inclinations and to choose the guidance of the Spirit strengthen our will. If we don't give up, we become more and more consolidated in the will of God. This also happens when, after suffering defeats, we get up and continue to fight. In this context, this quotation from St Francis de Sales can help us: Only those who lose heart are defeated. Those who continue to fight are victors.

The Lord will take into account our perseverance in the struggle, because it is in the struggle that we demonstrate our fidelity to Him. He includes all these struggles in His plan of salvation. If He did not, He would not leave them to us.

Moreover, the Lord does not only have us in mind personally. We must understand that each of the battles we fight for the Lord, because we do not want to offend His love, is at the service of His Church. In this sense, we fight not only for ourselves, but also for others who are in danger of succumbing to the lusts of the flesh, or who are already caught up in them. This should encourage and motivate us all the more to face with determination the battles entrusted to us.

We, who belong to the Lord, have crucified the flesh and thus its passions and cravings. We have already made the fundamental choice to be led by the Spirit and not by our evil inclinations. Let us then consciously engage in this battle in cooperation with the

Holy Spirit and listen attentively to His promptings. This will please the Lord, serve the Church and be counted as merit.