

13. November 2024

The Spiritual Life (Part II)

We had concluded yesterday's meditation with these words of the Lord: *"Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect"* (Mt 5:48).

To better understand the path of inner transformation that God works in us, let us first look back at the original state that humanity enjoyed in Paradise and see the ways our souls bore the consequences for our fall into sin.

From the Genesis accounts it is clear that in the Garden of Eden man lived in a close and unchanging relationship with God. However, after the fall into sin his person, created in the image and likeness of God, experienced a profound irruption. Whereas before he lived in integrity and harmony, both on a natural and supernatural level, as a result of sin he was separated from God and, as a consequence, a great disharmony also arose in his relationship with himself and with his neighbor. The powers of his soul were also deeply affected: the intellect became confused and the will weakened. If in his original state man was the "lord in his own house"-that is, his spiritual powers ruled over his passions and impulses-he is now often dominated by disordered passions. Even so trustworthy and holy a witness as the Apostle Paul suffered under this condition:

"The good thing I want to do, I never do; the evil thing which I do not want - that is what I do (...) but I see that acting on my body there is a different law which battles against the law in my mind. So I am brought to be a prisoner of that law of sin which lives inside my body" (Rom 7:19,23).

Thus, the cosmic drama is reflected in the interior of man... Let us remember that a part of the angels had rebelled against God, and these, by tempting man, tried to drag him and involve him in this rebellion. Thus, a part of Creation rose up against the Creator, provoking a cosmic disorder. Those who by nature were inferior and destined to the loving service of God - namely, angels and men - wanted to be themselves like God and to reign.

The same thing happened also within man: our passions and impulses ceased to obey naturally the commands of our understanding and our will, so that they are in rebellion.

The spiritual path - or the inner transformation of man through the Spirit of God - now grants us the unfolding of the grace of baptism, in which we were infused with the light of faith, though not the beatific vision of God, which only in eternity will we be able to fully enjoy. Likewise, the Holy Spirit strengthens us to regain, to a great extent, control over ourselves.

Thus, on the spiritual journey, the image according to which we were created begins to be restored in us. And all the more so because, thanks to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we can become even more deeply united to God than our first parents were in the paradisiacal state. Then, in His unsurpassable love, God not only restores all things, but makes fallen man a sharer in His own glory, clothing him with the "garment of the feast" through the forgiveness of sins and the way of sanctification, which makes him worthy to enter the "Wedding Banquet of the Lamb" (Rev 19:9). Already in our earthly life we begin to taste the glory of God, although here we can barely see God "as through a glass, dimly," in comparison with eternity, where we will see him "face to face" (1 Cor 13:12).

Before arriving there, we will first have to travel a road, on which God will guide us....

The first conversion

As long as our life does not correspond to God's commandments, He will call us to conversion, to the "first conversion", to the encounter with the living God and to the state of grace in the observance of His commandments. If we respond to this call, embracing faith in Jesus Christ and accepting His grace; if we place ourselves in God's hands and sincerely turn away from the life of sin, a new life will begin for us. It is God who calls and attracts, but it is man who follows His call, choosing Him for this life. Thus he leaves the "life of dispersion" and turns towards God; he leaves behind a life of indifference and distance from God in exchange for a life close to Him.

After his "first conversion", man begins to love God with his will and often perceives on a sentimental level the closeness of the Lord. He begins to relate everything to God and, with His help, tries to detach himself from the things and passions that still

dominate him. He begins to read Sacred Scripture, the lives of the saints and other spiritual books; he cultivates prayer and delights in religious ceremonies and content; he goes to receive the sacraments and strives sincerely for holiness and virtues. People who have experienced conversion are often very fervent and have a great fire within them.

It was the love of God that called them to conversion and brought them out of a life far from Him, a life of confusion and sin, or of lukewarmness and indifference, to introduce them into a life of closeness to Him and a determined following of Christ.

If we follow the motions of His love, the first conversion will have been only the valuable beginning of a long spiritual journey. God attracts us and we respond.

Whoever has embarked intensely on the path of faith and has come to know Jesus as his Lord, knows who it is who has called him and that it is worthwhile to follow Him. If he remains faithful to God, he will begin to walk the path that leads from the first to the second conversion.