

14. December 2024

The Mystical Way

Lk 14:25-33

Reading from the memorial of St. John of the Cross

Great crowds accompanied Jesus on his way and he turned and spoke to them. 'Anyone who comes to me without hating father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and his own life too, cannot be my disciple. No one who does not carry his cross and come after me can be my disciple. 'And indeed, which of you here, intending to build a tower, would not first sit down and work out the cost to see if he had enough to complete it? Otherwise, if he laid the foundation and then found himself unable to finish the work, anyone who saw it would start making fun of him and saying, "Here is someone who started to build and was unable to finish." Or again, what king marching to war against another king would not first sit down and consider whether with ten thousand men he could stand up to the other who was advancing against him with twenty thousand? If not, then while the other king was still a long way off, he would send envoys to sue for peace. So in the same way, none of you can be my disciple without giving up all that he owns.

To love God in the first place - this was the path that St. John of the Cross chose when he decided to follow the Lord in the Carmelite Order. His subsequent meeting with St. Teresa of Avila was very important for him, and together with her he reformed Carmel, which cost him much misunderstanding and even persecution. He was canonized in 1726 and in 1926 was named Doctor of the Church.

His legacy is mainly the mystical school, which teaches us how the soul can reach God, how God works in it, how the soul can cooperate with this work that He performs in it, to get closer and closer to the goal, which is unification with God.

This is the primary content of the mystical teaching. We could also define it very simply: it is essentially growth in love.

Unfortunately, in our Church very little is said about this path. This lack could lead one to think that the interior way of following the Lord does not exist in the Church, so that certain people in search of spirituality believe they have to seek mystical experiences outside the Church and thus enter into problems.

In its classic form, the mystical path is usually described in three ways: the purgative, the illuminative and the unitive.

The purgative way refers to the purification of all that does not correspond to the love of God, of sins and imperfections. In this process, we are called to cooperate, placing before the Lord all that we discover within ourselves that still needs to be purified, and renouncing it with our will.

In this context, it is only worth mentioning that the path of purification goes very deep. It does not seek to overcome only those faults and imperfections that are evident; but also the more subtle egoisms, hidden pride, stubbornness, etc...

The illuminative path is usually a consequence of purification, for once the Holy Spirit carries out the purification, He will find more and more room in the soul. Then, in its light, we will begin to understand Sacred Scripture better, to listen more clearly to its indications and its voice that speaks to us within, to understand more deeply the Being of God...

Purification and illumination prepare the way for unification, for our will is increasingly strengthened, so that it is easier for it to recognize the will of God and to fulfill it without delay.

This is only a brief description of the inner path, through which love of God grows and, consequently, also love of neighbor. St. John of the Cross, as well as St. Teresa of Avila, described this mystical path with great precision. It is certainly valid first of all for Carmelites, but it has many elements that can be applied also by people outside the Carmelite Order. It is important for us to know that there is an authentic spiritual path in the Catholic Church, and that these two Doctors of the Church (St. John and St. Teresa) did a great service both in following it and in making it known.