

12. January 2025

THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN  
"Born of the Spirit"

Jn 2:23-25; 3:1-8

*Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did; but Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man.*

*Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him." Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit."*

Through the signs He performed, Jesus began to convince more and more people. They saw that God was working through Him and His fame was spreading. But the Lord knew men: He knew how easily their convictions are shaken and how quickly they are swayed, as we saw later when the Lord was condemned and crucified. Jesus did not want His testimony to be confirmed by men, but by His heavenly Father, who authenticated everything the Lord said and did.

One of the Pharisees and teachers of the law called Nicodemus went out at night to seek Jesus. He had realised that the signs He was doing could only come from God. So he approached Him confidently, and Jesus spoke surprising words to him, which Nicodemus could not understand at the time. He told him that in order to enter the

kingdom of God, a man had to be born again or, to be more precise, born from above, from God.

As believers, we now know what the Lord meant by these words. We know that Holy Baptism is the visible act of being born again in the name of the Triune God. In this way, the seed of new life, which comes from God, is planted in us after the forgiveness of our sins: "all sin and all personal sins, as well as all punishment for sin" (cf. DS 1316). In those who have been reborn nothing remains that would impede their entry into the Kingdom of God, neither Adam's sin, nor personal sin, nor the consequences of sin, the gravest of which is separation from God." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1263).

Nicodemus sought an explanation for the Master's unusual words, asking how anyone could enter his mother's womb again and be born.

But the Lord made it clear to him that man cannot enter the Kingdom of God by natural means, for "which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit".

All this obviously remained a mystery to Nicodemus. But do we really understand better today what it means to be born of the Spirit? We are certainly familiar with baptism, but are we familiar with the life of the Spirit? What is the difference between a life of the Spirit and a life according to the flesh?

St Paul makes this difference clear by pointing out the works of the flesh and the fruits of the Spirit:

*"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."* (Gal 5:19-25).

The life of the Spirit fights, with the grace of God, against the inclinations of the "carnal man", sometimes in prolonged battles. The inclinations of the "old man" (cf. Eph 4:22) are still present after Baptism. But with all the graces given to us in Baptism - the birth of water and the Spirit - we can be freed from the bondage of our disordered inclinations and the fruits of the Spirit can grow in us.

"The Most Holy Trinity gives the baptized sanctifying grace, the grace of justification:  
- enabling them to believe in God, to hope in Him, and to love Him through the theological virtues;  
- giving them the power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the Holy Spirit; -  
-allowing them to grow in goodness through the moral virtues." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1266).

Unfortunately, there are probably very few people who consciously live according to the Spirit and in whom baptismal grace can unfold. Sometimes they may even be incomprehensible to others, because their motivations do not derive primarily from the desires and appetites of human nature, but from the Spirit of God. Then what the Lord says at the end of today's text can apply: *"The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit"*.

Tomorrow we will continue to listen to what Jesus says to Nicodemus.