

21. August 2022

Resist sin to the point of bloodshed

Hb 12:4-7.11-15

In the fight against sin, you have not yet had to keep fighting to the point of bloodshed. Have you forgotten that encouraging text in which you are addressed as sons? My son, do not scorn correction from the Lord, do not resent his training, for the Lord trains those he loves, and chastises every son he accepts. Perseverance is part of your training; God is treating you as his sons. Has there ever been any son whose father did not train him? Of course, any discipline is at the time a matter for grief, not joy; but later, in those who have undergone it, it bears fruit in peace and uprightness. So steady all weary hands and trembling knees and make your crooked paths straight; then the injured limb will not be maimed, it will get better instead.

Resist sin to the shedding of blood! This is a high demand, which can only be understood if we love God and His commandments more than ourselves.

It is the gift of fear of God that causes us to increasingly reject sin, and leads us to avoid offending God, our Father, at all costs. When the gift of fear and the gift of fortitude become effective in us, hand in hand with our firm resolve to put nothing before God, then our struggle against sin reaches the point where we do not want to approach it even with our thoughts, and we are ready to take up every effort to offer it resistance with all our strength. This struggle could even lead to death, if, for example, we were forced to deny the Lord or to do other acts contrary to Him.

Now, is there a link between the exhortation to *"In the fight against sin to keep fighting to the point of bloodshed."* and the exhortation to *"not scorn correction from the Lord"*? I believe that there is a link...

The Lord's correction has as its purpose the formation and education of his children, the human race. And this makes us stronger, because we are often very sensitive and react resentfully or offended when we receive correction. But if we have gone through

this rebuke, it will produce in the soul peaceful fruits of righteousness, as today's biblical text assures us. Of course, we are referring here to the corrections that come directly from the Lord or those that He gives us through those persons who are responsible for our formation. This would not be the appropriate framework to talk about how to deal with corrections that are unjust.

Then, if we overcome the first reactions that arise when we are corrected by the Lord, which are usually discouragement, sorrow and not joy, then our soul becomes more and more deeply united with Him. It realises that His rebukes come from love and notices that this love of God has several facets. On the one hand, there is His tender love, with which He always embraces us as children. But on the other hand, there is also his formative love, which brings us back to the right path when we go astray, or wants to make this path better known to us. Often we remain trapped in our own illusions and desires, so that we take a wrong course.

Through his formative love, the Lord gives us more solid nourishment, as the Apostle Paul would express it: He no longer gives us only milk, like infants! (cf. 1 Cor 3:12) Consequently, we are strengthened in our inner being. Then the Lord will carry our formation forward, according to the way He has prepared for us. In this way we grow in strength to resist temptations and all that would lead us astray, and to take up our task in the combat that has been entrusted to us.

And this, in turn, will make us more capable, with God's grace, of resisting sin to the point of shedding blood and of preferring death to remaining in grave sin.

With the formation that God offers us, the path to holiness becomes concrete. Day by day we are called to grow in love and to deepen our union with the Lord. This means that we must cooperate with his grace, that we cannot spoil it through carelessness or negligence, nor allow a bitter root to sprout. We can never slacken our vigilance in our spiritual journey, lest we yield to the inclinations of our fallen nature.