

21. October 2023

The Holy Spirit: the key to standing firm

Lk 12:8-12

'I tell you, if anyone openly declares himself for me in the presence of human beings, the Son of man will declare himself for him in the presence of God's angels. But anyone who disowns me in the presence of human beings will be disowned in the presence of God's angels. 'Everyone who says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven, but no one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will be forgiven. 'When they take you before synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how to defend yourselves or what to say, because when the time comes, the Holy Spirit will teach you what you should say.'

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit... It is a difficult subject to discuss!

There may be very scrupulous souls who fear that they have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit, which, according to the Holy Scriptures, is unforgivable.

In reality, the sin against the Holy Spirit consists in the fact that, in spite of possessing the full knowledge of the truth, one acts contrary to it and persists in this evil way. This results in increasing blindness, obstinacy in sin and a hardening of the heart.

We can never know whether a person has committed the sin against the Holy Spirit, because we do not know what happened at the time of his death between him and God, and we do not know what level of knowledge and awareness he had.

What is certain is that Lucifer committed this sin, for he cannot be forgiven his guilt, nor does he ask to be forgiven. In him there is no repentance, no longing for God; but a ceaseless obstinacy in sin. He has no true knowledge of God's love. This is a most deplorable state, from which God wishes to preserve every one of His children.

A denial of the Lord, however serious, can be forgiven. In fact, we know that Peter himself denied the Lord three times; but he repented and Jesus forgave him (cf. Mk 14:66-72). The Lord did not even withdraw the mission He had entrusted to him, but established him as the head of His Holy Church. Jesus knew the circumstances of Peter's denial: He knew that he had acted out of fear of death or other existential fears; but it was not a

rebellion against God, as is the case with the sin against the Holy Spirit.

In the history of the Church, more than a few Christians have denied the Lord out of weakness, when faced with great dangers. Not all had the fortitude to suffer martyrdom. There may also have been others who denied the Lord out of convenience, and here again the judgement is different.

The key to standing firm in great tribulations is the Holy Spirit. One of His seven gifts is precisely the spirit of fortitude. This gift gives us the strength to go beyond the limits of our human weakness, so that we can profess our faith in Jesus even in the face of danger.

Only if we cling to the Holy Spirit and do not put our trust in our weak human nature, will we be able to make our "*noble profession of faith*" (1 Tim 6:12) in the great tribulation. Our own strength is not enough, as the story of Peter shows us. Instead, after Pentecost, having been strengthened by the Holy Spirit, we see him proclaiming the gospel boldly and fearlessly (cf. Acts 2:14-36), and at the end of his life he even suffered martyrdom.

This is why it is so important that we live in intimate union with the Holy Spirit, so that His gifts can be unfolded in us. The Third Person of the Trinity is often unknown, and we do not live in close union with Him. Yet He is our inner Master!

Also in the situations described in today's Gospel, the help of the Holy Spirit is needed. It is He who will teach us what to say in our defence, and we can be so sure of His help that there is no need to prepare our defence on a human level!

In the same way, with confidence in the Holy Spirit, we can also face our personal difficulties, the growing threats we face in the world and the confusions in the Church....

He will teach us what is right in every situation, and strengthen us to put it into practice. We, for our part, must seriously walk the path of following Christ, in order to have the right disposition to allow ourselves to be helped by the Holy Spirit.