

21. June 2024

A Lesson for the Spiritual Life

Mt 6:19-23

'Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moth and woodworm destroy them and thieves can break in and steal. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor woodworm destroys them and thieves cannot break in and steal. For wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be too. 'The lamp of the body is the eye. It follows that if your eye is clear, your whole body will be filled with light. But if your eye is diseased, your whole body will be darkness. If then, the light inside you is darkened, what darkness that will be!'

Where is our heart set, to whom does it belong, and what is it filled with?

With such simple but essential questions, the Lord can lead us to the spiritual path we are really seeking, if we are serious about following Him.

These are fundamental questions, because, as all good spiritual teachers and Scripture itself make clear to us, the core of all our evil lies in the heart. As Jesus explains to us, it is not the external things that make us impure; it is what comes out of our heart (cf. Mt 15:17-19).

So we are called to let God purify that heart, and to collaborate in this. Therefore, the words we hear today from the Lord's mouth are a criterion for examining our inner life again and again. Just as we make an examination of conscience before we go to confession, in order to evaluate what we have sinned, so we should subtly examine ourselves and question what our heart is still attached to.

"Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven": Here again is a clear and simple hint to make our life fruitful. We know that wonderful phrase of St. John of the Cross: "In the evening of life, we shall be judged in love".

So, we accumulate true treasures when we love, when we really do good to other people, when our heart becomes a benevolent heart, seeking good for our neighbour. This is

not just an occasional gesture or a sporadic almsgiving; it is a basic attitude of our heart, which is modelled on the Heart of Jesus.

In this context, it becomes even more evident how necessary it is for our heart to be purified, because this permanent benevolence of the heart, which reflects God's attitude towards us, must even be capable of loving the enemy, as the Lord teaches us (cf. Mt 5:44) and as we have meditated on during the last few days.

This does not mean, by any sense, that we can approve of everything that other people do, or that we should close our eyes to their bad deeds, or relativise them, or, at worst, justify them. Rather, it means that we can move towards true love, which tries to see the person in the love of the Lord and wants for them what is truly good.

However, in order to be able to recognise what is truly good and essential, it is necessary that we ourselves are not blind. Thus, the last part of this short but very significant text warns us against concupiscence, which can prevent us from recognising what is truly good; and, moreover, can be an obstacle to putting it into practice. As long as we are dominated by our desires, our eye is diseased and we are slaves to these desires. They bind us to ourselves, they entertain us and do not allow us to be totally free to respond to God's call to live in love.

We can, then, summarise in a few words how today's gospel leads us on a spiritual way:

1. We lay up treasures in heaven when we perform the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, when we seek the true good of the other person and serve them in the spirit of the Lord.
2. In order to perform these good works in the right attitude, it is necessary to examine our heart again and again, questioning whether it has already been fully opened to the love of God and where its disordered attachments are, and deciding to set out on the way of purification of heart.
3. Restraining our desires is part of the basic school of an authentic spiritual way and of the ascetic formation of our personality. It frees us from our blindness and thus opens our eyes to true love, which comes to meet us in God and which we must put into practice in our encounter with our neighbour.