

30. July

Novena to God the Father

Day 2: "Our Father's heart is wide open"

We human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26). It is rightly said that the heart is the centre of the person. Only those things that we do with our whole heart find their full and integral expression. When we do things with our heart, we put the stamp of our whole identity on them. In this way we act and speak with true conviction.

Of all the different sufferings we can experience, those that affect the heart are the most intense and penetrating. This is because the heart is, so to speak, the 'seat of love'. Our heart thirsts for love! Its happiness lies in receiving and giving love. When love is extinguished, the heart is cold and empty. It can either be wide open to God and people, or it can be completely closed to God and people.

Our heart is very sensitive and reacts sensitively to good and evil. In fact, good and evil come from it, as Jesus teaches us (cf. Mt 15:19). We can decide what we allow to dwell in our hearts, and to what or to whom we close our hearts. We must also learn to bring before God whatever darkness we discover in our hearts, so that He may touch it and transform it with His love.

On the spiritual path we speak of the 'conversion of the heart', the aim of which is to serve God willingly and without hesitation, and to cling to Him in a true and therefore lasting love.

We know that Jesus, when asked by a scribe, summed up all the commandments in this one: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."* The second is this, *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mk 12:30-31).

So when we discover in our hearts things that do not correspond to these primary commandments, we must turn our gaze to God, in whose image we were created.

God also has a heart, for He is love. Everything He does flows from and is permeated by this love. From the moment of our creation, when we were called into existence by God's loving plan, the motivation for everything was love.

So if divine love is the reason for our existence, how God's heart longs to be united with His creature, how He longs for us to accept and receive His love!

God's heart knows no darkness. He never separates Himself from love, which is His innermost essence. If we reject His love, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself (cf. 2 Tim 2:13). Through human expressions, He always makes us understand how much He loves us, how much He suffers for His people, who are always in danger of turning away from Him, their Father and Creator. With the most tender words, He wants us to understand that His heart is open to us and that it hurts Him so much when we reject His love.

God does not need our love because He has its fullness in Himself. And that is why His love is all the more true because it is free of any personal interest. His heart is pure, free from any blemish or imperfection. And He thirsts for our love so that He can give us the fullness of His riches, for only by responding to His love can all that God has prepared for us become a reality.