
OCTOBER 25, 2019

Friday of the 29th Week of Ordinary Time

Weekday

Rom 7:18-25a

Ps 119:66,68,76,77,93,94

Lk 12:54-59

Mention was made above of Paul's assertion that the Law was a reason for the proliferation of sin, and of the criticisms brought against Paul by his adversaries. The Apostle's goal, however, is simply to point out that the Law does not have, in itself, the power to transform and save a person; it only shows what is right and what is wrong, and so ends up highlighting all one's shortcomings. This is why Paul says without a shadow of doubt that the Law is good and holy, but the problem is that through it sin, the transgression of the commandments, manifests itself in all its gravity. The Law places before the people the way of life and the way of death.

Paul knows very well the inner drama that every person lives, especially when we strive to follow the path of perfection. Through reason and will, the human being understands and wishes to do good, according to the commandments, but encounters a tendency, an impulse, to do evil. This shows that we are slaves and need a liberating force that we do not possess. We are not born in personal guilt, but we bear the signs of sin and cosmic disorder, and we suffer its consequences. In fact, says Paul, "I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want" (Rom 7:19). The human being experiences this dramatic contradiction and asks: who can free me from my own puny, carnal "I," to experience the new, healed "I" that pleases God? Paul knows that Jesus is the only source of grace and redemption. Therefore, he exhorts us to praise and give thanks to God, together with

him, so we can pray with the psalmist, saying: “Let your kindness comfort me / according to your promise to your servants.... / Let your compassion come to me that I may live” (Ps 119:76-77).

Whoever observes the law faithfully must be very careful not to fall into the grave sin of pride, like the Pharisee in the temple who, despising others, considered himself right before God, contradicting what the Scriptures say: “Before you no one can be just” (Ps 143:2). It may also be that he does not have the courage to proceed to the next step, where the Law itself leads. The one who observes the commandments is on the path that leads to eternal life, as shown by the episode of the person who asked Jesus, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Lk 18:18). The Lord confirmed that the young man was on the right path. The point is that this journey had led him to Jesus to continue his search, since Jesus himself was the “way” to life (see Jn 14:6) and the “door” to enter the kingdom (see Jn 14:6). When Paul, through the light of grace, understood this, he did not hesitate to follow the way of Jesus with all his strength, all his heart, and all his mind. But the young man, who was very rich, did not have the same courage.

When Jesus speaks to the crowds, who know how to discern the signs of nature with their experience and intelligence, he reproaches two shortcomings: the inability to discern the present time and the inability to judge what is right. They can interpret chronological and meteorological time, but they cannot perceive the presence of saving time. In his programmatic speech in the synagogue of Nazareth, quoting the prophet Isaiah, Jesus had declared that he was inaugurating the year of the Lord, the “today” of salvation, in which the promises of the Scriptures reach their fulfillment (see Lk 4). Starting from there, all that Jesus said and did was a tireless mission of evangelization. Many people who listened to him and saw his works were astonished and, giving glory to God, said, “We have seen incredible things today” (Lk 5:26). To the disciples of the Baptist, who asked him if he really was the Messiah or if they needed to wait for another person, Jesus responded by pointing to the fruits of his evangelizing work: “the

blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them” (Lk 7:22). And if, on one hand, Jesus is troubled by the persecution and opposition from the political and religious authorities, from the powerful and the landowners who know no repentance and refuse any opportunity for conversion, on the other hand he is delighted to see the joy and the simplicity of the humble who welcome the light of his word and become his disciples to enter the kingdom. Therefore, exulting in the Holy Spirit, Jesus bursts forth in praise and thanksgiving to the Father, who has hidden these things from the learned and the wise and has revealed them to the little ones.

Given that the stakes are high, one should be less concerned about interpreting natural phenomena and take greater care to discerning the time of history and the time of God. This latter approach would be less harmful than the one criticized by Jesus. Since it is essentially a matter of the grace of the messianic revelation, it is urgent and decisive to welcome it at the very moment it presents itself, to open oneself as fully as possible to the fruits of the salvation it bears. This can only happen by responding in freedom and obedience to the special appeals for conversion, addressed by the Lord on his way to Jerusalem. It is also necessary to pay due attention to the particular signs of this time that the presence of Christ enriches with an absolute novelty, giving it an incredible historical and providential significance for our salvation.