

“God, I thank you that I am not like other men ...”

Crumbs of love for the gospel, during the reflection on Friday:

We often say that lack of gratitude is the source of many evils and it is so. The pharisee seems to have that in his prayer, because he gives thanks for what he does and who he is. And yet, as we enter the Triodium period today, we pray and hope that during this time we may experience a change and resemble more the humility of the tax collector.



However, the way we approach lent resembles rather the attitude of the pharisee. We are concerned about how much we should fast, how much we should give and how we should pray in order to express gratitude. And through all this, we have the same goal as the pharisee: we want to know what we should do in order to become better human beings. But at times, during lent, we realise that this is a mirage and we rather fail more than anything else. And we realize, hopefully not too late, that maybe the goal is not to become better during lent but rather to find hope that we could become more humble, that lent would teach us humility, as it always does. For the sake of not leaving Christ alone after he enters Jerusalem, not leaving Him alone in the garden while He prays, not leaving Him alone when He is seized and betrayed, not leaving Him alone when He is judged and condemned, not leaving Him alone on the cross. There, on the cross, only humility could keep the community together at the feet of the one who is “Christus Humilis”, in order to be exalted with him at Pascha, to be “at peace with God” (as the Portuguese translation of today’s gospel reveals the meaning of the word “justified” – as Freddie noticed on Friday during the reflection). The heart of the publican, the prayer of the one who approaches God in humility and asks for mercy, receives the peace of the resurrection, the communion with Him, because it has received His forgiveness for crucifying and oppressing the one who is poor and naked, hungry and abandoned. Now

we know where we should wait for the light at Pascha to rise, and that is within the heart that has harmed the one who loved it dearly. Within the heart that is going to experience what it really means to be forgiven for the first time. Because, while sinful, the heart prayed for mercy.

Humility, a young volunteer revealed to us on Friday, is the only way we can enter into communion with one another. Pride, she thought, cuts us off. She talked from her own experience. When she was younger, she thought that she was above others until she fell many times. And some of those falls made her come to her senses. And that was painful. But it helped her understand who she is as a human being. She was convinced that only through humility can we have communion and approach one other. Freddie noticed that at the end the pharisee is not punished, but that he will only be humbled. The younger volunteer helped us understand why that is, namely for the sake of communion and restoration of humanity, for the sake of building up the church.

What stands against humility that brings about communion is the captivity of the self. Man talking to himself only, as Carlos noticed on Friday. Today, this produces much sorrow. The projection of strength and power, the decision to die yourself, because you want to control your life until the very end, the hate and the lack of understanding for the other. Roma said that the polite and cold self discourse of the pharisee was concealing a hate for his brother. He was hiding it because, Roma thought, it was forbidden in the law to hate your neighbour. And so, the pharisee was talking using his words carefully. But underneath those words, there was hate. Today, we often see this hate exposed without shame. It is a hate that does not know the brother, because if it did, it would turn into love, purged and sanctified, justified with joyful peace of communion, for which there is no end.

It is ironic, Jacob thought on Friday, that the religiosity, that is supposed to open man up to God and to one another, had an opposite effect on the pharisee. As it often does on us. "Why? Because he did things mechanically", Jacob thought. What is the solution? Roma says the solution is "to do things from the heart". "How do we do that Roma?" "It is like mopping the floor at the mission. You keep mopping it until it shines. It becomes all clean and shining. That's what it means to do things from the heart."

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

(Romans 8:28-39 today’s gospel)

We enter the time of the triduum today looking for humility, praying for mercy. Mopping the floor at the mission. We do that because, as somebody was confessing during the week, we feel powerless as a child when we are facing the suffering of the homeless brother who begs for money on the street, sleeping in cold weather, begging in the subway on his knees. “You do not know what to do and how to act. It feels that whatever you might do, it’s going to be the wrong thing.” It appears we are predestined



to fail in this time, within the gulf that separates us from each other. We are not even dead yet, and we live and experience already this gulf between us and God. We experience the lack of communion, the loneliness of death while still being alive. The loneliness of the world that spreads out from the soul of the pharisee, that encompasses us all.

The one who mops the floor prays for mercy because he is not satisfied with the surface of his own soul. Not satisfied with the loneliness of the pharisee, that kills us all, neither with his own powerlessness when it comes to comforting the Bridegroom. The suffering that he sees around him, produced by his very sins, takes him deeper. He does not compromise with the surface but prays for mercy. Because within his sins he has been seen it already, and he has hope that he will be forgiven.

And he prays that God may fill up the gulf between us, that He may bring out the soul from the captivity to its own self and give dynamis to the one who is paralyzed in his sins, so that we may receive the gift, come forth and be hospitable and nourish the new life within the communal heart. This is what it means to be grateful, if we stick to the old etymological meaning of the word.

The reflection on Friday was concluded with the intervention of a new volunteer who initially refused to speak. He said that he could not understand why people would

complain about anything. He has cancer and he just had surgery. The last couple of weeks had been awful, he said. "I am not religious, but today I was received here. And I learned something completely new about life. That for me is a new beginning. A new way of living that is changing my understanding about the meaning of who I am. I have hope today because I worked with Carlos and Ozzy in the kitchen and I learned to serve other people".

The one who prays for mercy is the one who lacks mercy within his heart. And after tasting it once on the tip of his lips, he prays even harder, so that no other human soul would be deprived of it, because mercy invites the presence of the other within the heart with no deceit, with faith, gentle love and solitary prayer. That makes one to be in communion with many.



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