

15. October 2019

**“Ways of Purification”**

St. Teresa of Ávila

*Joh 15, 1-8*

*I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more. You are clean already, by means of the word that I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a branch -- and withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire and are burnt. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for whatever you please and you will get it. It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit and be my disciples.*

St. Teresa of Ávila is a church teacher and her teaching was especially related to the spiritual life. She complained that so many believers do not understand that they have to go through the cleansings on their way with Christ, so that God can penetrate the soul in order to unite her with him.

Today, the text of the Gospel also speaks of the purification. What do the cleansings on the path of following Christ mean and why are they so important for the fertility of the spiritual path?

First of all, it is important to lose the fear that people often get when they hear about the inner purifications. They must learn to understand that such cleansings are inevitable in order to enter the kingdom of God. Whoever avoids them remains spiritually a child who does not want to grow. The danger is that if one does not want to grow, the spiritual life can also develop back. From a spiritual point of view, one not only remains a child, but one may also lose what one has already received in the spiritual life.

The purification process is a process of God's love. We hear that the Father himself cleanses the vine so that it may bear more fruit; in other words, so that it remains all the more deeply connected to the vine - that is the Lord Himself.

In the encounter with God and with a true conversion to the Lord, God begins the work of our inner transformation. The Holy Spirit - who is the love between Father and Son - enters us with His Light. It is the divine love that is poured into us (*cf. Rom 5,5*). This love wants to penetrate all areas of our lives and encounters various obstacles.

There are disorderly passions within us, not infrequently a strong binding to the sensual world, which impedes our inner freedom and occupies our love to transient things. The Holy Spirit will draw our attention to this point, because “*where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*“ (*Mt 6,21*).

It is not the case that we should despise the visible world in such a way that we have nothing to do with it. This might be a way for special ascetics, and they too must take care that extreme attitudes do not spread, for God has created his creation well.

It is about disorderly inclinations, i.e. that certain ephemeral things are too important to us, that we hang on to them, that we give them too much attention.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to transfer everything in us into a spiritual order. This spiritual order means that first and foremost love for God should dominate our lives. When the Holy Spirit lives and let us know that something binds our capacity for love in a disordered way, which is supposed to be more directed towards God, then He invites us to transfer these things into a proper order and, if necessary to take ascetic steps of renunciation.

Take, for example, an excessive attachment to food, convenience, wealth, sensual pleasures, etc. They burden our soul more than we think, because our inner attention is then too much related to the transient enjoyment. The Holy Spirit wants us to preserve the beauty and dignity of our souls and to fill her with God Himself, so that our soul awakens to all its beauty and does not become dull and less receptive to God.

The purification process not only refers to attachment to the sensual world, but also touches other areas of our soul that require purification. We will come back to this subject at a different time and then expand it accordingly.