

25. November 2019

“To exult in the hardship”
St. Catherine of Alexandria

Rom 5, 1-5

So then, now that we have been justified by faith, we are at peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; it is through him, by faith, that we have been admitted into God's favour in which we are living, and look forward exultantly to God's glory. Not only that; let us exult, too, in our hardships, understanding that hardship develops perseverance, and perseverance develops a tested character, something that gives us hope, and a hope which will not let us down, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

It is really a challenge to boast of the affliction, where we are all more likely to avoid afflictions, and that is probably an understandable reaction! Who is looking for afflictions? In this respect, the words of the Apostle seem strange at first, while of course we like to boast of hope for the glory of God!

In order to understand this challenge and to meet it correctly, we need a supernatural view, that is, a look from God, in order to understand roughly what the Apostle wants to say to the Roman Christians and thus also to us!

A very important basic idea to approach this statement of the Apostle is the theological distinction between the active will of God and his permissions. Actively, God always wants the best for us, just as he did not, of course, want the original sin of man with the consequences that result from it.

God does not want evil. But since the evil has entered the world and it is not simply eradicated, God takes the evil into service for man. This is part of his omnipotence as a special aspect of being able to integrate the aberrations and even the sins of men into his plan of salvation. Of course, this does not mean that we can sin and do not mind if we get lost, but that God himself can use this for the good of those who want to follow him.

We should have this background at present in order to understand correctly the apostle's statement. Of course, God does not want us to be pressured, for internal and external suffering to be caused, perhaps enmity from other people, etc., but he

uses this circumstance for our sake. If, with God's help, we endure the affliction, especially those we suffer for his sake, then a wonderful virtue arises from it, namely patience! And this fruit is so precious that one can even boast of the afflictions that God has allowed, and something important has been created!

This is indeed a very spiritual perspective and it usually presupposes an authentic relationship with God. One enters, so to speak, into another sphere of perception of reality, for one is not only fixated on the defense of evil, but opens the inner view to God in the situation.

A concrete example may help to understand it a little better. We are all subject to different diseases. Now, when a disease occurs, one can only be concerned with the fact that this evil disappears as soon as possible! Without failing to have legitimate health efforts, however, the disease can also become a school of patience and trust if received from the hand of God.

It can teach us infinitely: e.g. to accept our frailty, to remember the memory of the end of life, to perceive how we behave in the disease, whether we are impatient, dissatisfied, accusatory, etc.

Some misconceptions, which do not arise from the disease itself, but from dealing with it, may justify a person who does not make a spiritual claim to his life.

For a spiritual person, however, this is different. He knows that if the Lord allows such a disease (affliction), we can receive spiritual fruits from it. And if, in sickness, he learns to work on his inner misconceptions and to overcome them at least a little bit, then something much better has happened to him than it was before, and God has used the affliction to lead him there!

So it happens that the apostles makes this statement, which is difficult to understand at first, that one can boast of the affliction. We can then take this attitude with us to the next situation, in which we are afflicted!

But the fruit is not yet over, as the text reminds us, because the patience that has been given to us in the yield of affliction, leads to probation, i.e. we learn permanently to take the right attitude in the difficulties of life and are strengthened inwardly. The afflictions do not immediately overthrow us, and we do not lose the ground under our feet, nor our heads, but remain anchored in God! In this way we will be strengthened in the spiritual struggle!

Probation strengthens our hope, a hope that always reaches out to God, in no situation slips into hopelessness and does not allow us to perish. Whatever the situation in our lives will be, hope as a divine virtue teaches us that the Lord is always there and holds everything in His hands and will lead to good!