

13. February 2020

“Vigilance must never let up”

1 Kgs 11, 4-13

When Solomon grew old his wives swayed his heart to other gods; and his heart was not wholly with Yahweh his God as his father David's had been. Solomon became a follower of Astarte, the goddess of the Sidonians, and of Milcom, the Ammonite abomination. He did what was displeasing to Yahweh, and was not a wholehearted follower of Yahweh, as his father David had been. Then it was that Solomon built a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, on the mountain to the east of Jerusalem, and to Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who offered incense and sacrifice to their gods. Yahweh was angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from Yahweh, God of Israel, who had twice appeared to him and had forbidden him to follow other gods; but he did not carry out Yahweh's order. Yahweh therefore said to Solomon, 'Since you have behaved like this and have not kept my covenant or the laws which I laid down for you, I shall tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your servants. For your father David's sake, however, I shall not do this during your lifetime, but shall tear it out of your son's hands. Even so, I shall not tear the whole kingdom from him. For the sake of my servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen, I shall leave your son one tribe.'

We are facing here one of the great problems in the times of the Old Covenant. There was always the risk of falling into idolatry, due to the proximity of many other peoples, who were usually still blind and whose knowledge of God was very limited. As St. Paul will later show us (*cf. 1 Cor 10,19-20*), it was to demons, hidden behind idols, that sacrifices were offered; in the worst cases, even human sacrifices.

Now, how could it be that Solomon, whose wisdom everyone admired, worshipped idols and built high places for the gods of his foreign wives? God had appeared to him twice and had expressly forbidden him to serve foreign gods.

The text itself gives us an answer!

Solomon no longer served the Lord indivisibly; but he turned his heart to the women and they thus gained power over him. He sought to please them; and the memory of the Lord and his precepts began to fade away... So we have to conclude

that even such a strong encounter which Solomon had with God and the outstanding wisdom given to him, was not enough for him to remain faithful to the Lord and his instructions... On the contrary, he allowed himself to be seduced...

This passage is also written to us as a warning. No one should feel too sure in his way of following Christ, for the temptations are many and some are not even identified as such. Any form of false self-assurance on the spiritual path is deeply harmful and also ignorant. Whoever believes that he is already humble and possesses many virtues is in danger of deluding himself.

An antidote is true self-knowledge in the light of the Lord! When we read some stories of saints, we repeatedly encounter the phenomenon that these people on the path of holiness considered themselves sinful and bad. One might think that this is exaggerated, since their lives used to be exemplary. However, the standard they have is different. St. Francis of Assisi once said that if others had received the grace granted to him, they would have made better use of it. The measure, then, is the love of God, and against that standard we all fall short! We only have to realize it, humbly acknowledge it, and ask God that we may grow in love.

Perhaps Solomon had increasingly forgotten that his wisdom came from God; perhaps other people's admiration made him vain, so that his gaze focused on himself, which is indeed the essence of vanity or self-indulgence. When this happens, God recedes into the background, the heart continues to turn away from him and the allure of women bewitches him all the more. Thus, the decline in the relationship with God increases more and more, until it reaches idolatry. The heart no longer belongs undividedly to God.

The same Solomon, whose humble request for wisdom was graciously accepted by God; the same Solomon, who had built a house for the Lord, becomes a promoter of idolatry in old age!

We see, then, that the heart must belong to God, in order to be faithful to him with His grace.

Vigilance is called in any way: both on a personal level and also towards what is happening in the world and in our church!