

5. November 2020

“Christ at the first place”

Phil 3:3-8

We are the true people of the circumcision since we worship by the Spirit of God and make Christ Jesus our only boast, not relying on physical qualifications, although, I myself could rely on these too. If anyone does claim to rely on them, my claim is better. Circumcised on the eighth day of my life, I was born of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrew parents. In the matter of the Law, I was a Pharisee; as for religious fervour, I was a persecutor of the Church; as for the uprightness embodied in the Law, I was faultless. But what were once my assets I now through Christ Jesus count as losses. Yes, I will go further: because of the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, I count everything else as loss. For him I have accepted the loss of all other things, and look on them all as filth if only I can gain Christ.

Today's describes a problem that can become a great obstacle to us in following Christ!

It is the trust in special circumstances and advantages of our life! They can very easily lead to a false self-confidence and support our vanities! Some time ago I mentioned in another meditation the Jesuit, Père Lallemant! As a spiritual teacher, he was very sad to see a spirit enter his order, which put more emphasis on education and other values than on growth in the spirit of Christ! This is indeed fatal, because the unfolding of the supernatural life in us has a far greater significance than the natural gifts, however good and helpful they may be!

This is exactly what Paul shows us very clearly, who had many virtues, but knows very well how wrong it is to rely on them or to boast about them! He calls us never to lose sight of the essential and to understand our value as human beings from the love of God! This means that we do not look at ourselves with the eyes of the world and accept its values as the most important thing! What use is an alert mind if it does not submit to the Spirit of God and become servant to him? What is the use of special kinship, a Catholic family, the reception of the sacraments, if they do not become fruitful in the Spirit of the Lord? This list could now be filled with many more contents!

But Paul goes one step further! Trusting in certain virtues and boasting about them can not only reduce spiritual progress, but can also be such an obstacle that the apostle recognises them as a loss and even calls them rubbish! By this is meant that the wrong handling of the virtues easily tempts us to build up self-confidence, which can become a great obstacle to the supernatural life, so that Paul distances himself completely from them!

It is necessary to put all at the right place!

A bright mind, a good appearance, an artistic gift, a special talent, etc. are good, natural gifts! But they become a burden or “loss” when they make us proud and vain and do not humbly take their real place!

To acquire humility is a long school! Consciously subordinating special merits - whatever they may be - and not assigning any special value to them in terms of the knowledge of the Lord, hiding them rather than exposing them where it is not even necessary, helps to grow in humility! Especially a person as gifted as St. Paul knows this, and we would do well to listen to his advice!