

22. January 2020

“A healing on Sabbath”

Mk 3, 1-6

Another time he went into the synagogue, and there was a man present whose hand was withered. And they were watching him to see if he would cure him on the Sabbath day, hoping for something to charge him with. He said to the man with the withered hand, 'Get up and stand in the middle!' Then he said to them, 'Is it permitted on the Sabbath day to do good, or to do evil; to save life, or to kill?' But they said nothing. Then he looked angrily round at them, grieved to find them so obstinate, and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and began at once to plot with the Herodians against him, discussing how to destroy him.

What is the state of a heart that is constantly looking for a reason to accuse someone? It has to be an obdurate or a very wounded heart, a heart that is confused and does not have the freedom to face things objectively.

Jesus suffers in today's Gospel in the encounter with such hearts!

He is watched suspiciously! Will he do something that is not allowed?

In fact, the Pharisees are only waiting for that moment!

The text places our attention upon a man in the synagogue, whose hand is paralyzed. Reading this passage we can feel some of the tension between those who observe the scene: will he heal him or not? The suffering of this man does not seem to be of any importance to them.

But Jesus is not deterred from doing good, from healing a man who is in great need, even if he perceives the hostile atmosphere!

And the Lord is not content with healing. Not only does he want to help the sick man, but he also wants to give a chance to those who have a hardened and sick heart. He asks them this question:

“Is it permitted on the Sabbath day to do good, or to do evil; to save life, or to kill?”

Actually one should think: at the latest now these Pharisees should be able to find the right answer, at the latest now they should change their mind. It seems most logical that it should always be lawful to do good, or do they think that under no circumstances can something good be done on the Sabbath, such as healing this sick person?

We do not know exactly what they were thinking, because they are silent!

Silence in this case means avoiding an answer that would have made the matter obvious. Jesus could have given other examples, for example that everyone leads his animal to the watering place on the sabbath!

But he does not say any more, he just looks at them one by one. How will they have felt under his gaze? Did they feel the sorrow of Jesus, did they feel his anger, that they kept their heart closed and were not ready to take a step, at least a small step?

Well, Jesus does not let their hardened heart stop him. Why should he? The will to help is greater than the fear of what might happen.

The wickedness of the evil heart is now maturing among the Pharisees! They make the decision to kill Jesus. There is no turning back with these closed hearts, the fruit of the closed heart is death! The inner death and then the death that is spread outwards. Jesus is no longer bearable for the Pharisees!

What can we learn from this Gospel? Certainly none of us wants to become the murderer of the other. Nor do we want to be, as it were, suicidal, hardening our own hearts more and more.

First of all, let us take a good look at our heart: what is in it? Jesus teaches us that all evil comes from the heart: *"There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him"* (Mk 7,15).

Let us not overlook the bad things we detect in our heart: enmity, hardness, arrogance, accusations, coldness, etc...

But how can we perceive such things if we are still blind to ourselves and do not detect what is going on inside us? We can place ourselves under the Lord's gaze: "Jesus, look at me. Is there something in my heart that is not in order? Am I able to

bear your gaze? If you look at me sadly, there is a hardness in me that closes me. Please show it to me.

To do this, we need to be sincere: Are we too legalistic, so that in everything we cling only to the Law, losing the ability to examine things in the spirit, as the Apostle Paul teaches us, saying: "*test everything and hold fast what is good*" (*1 Thess 5,21*)?

And then the question: what is the good that we can do right now? Where can I take a step that pleases Jesus?

Let us let the Lord's gaze rest on us without fear and ask him to purify our heart! Even when darkness rises in our heart, let us not run away, but let us open the darkness to the loving mercy of God!

Let us not forget: God does not expect us to be perfect already. He supports us in every stage of our life. It is better to recognize our own darkness and open it before God than to pass over it and remain trapped in it!

Jesus expects us to take the next step, just as he gave the Pharisees the opportunity to acknowledge their error. Let us seize this opportunity, so that we may live and love more and more fully. The Lord offers us the grace to be able to do this. All we have to do is respond to this grace by abandoning ourselves totally to His heart.

God is greater than our poor heart! (*cf 1 Jn 3,20*)