

"Faith casts out fear"

In his 7 February general audience, Pope Francis continued his catechetical cycle on vices and virtues, speaking about sorrow or "worldly grief."

02/07/2024

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In our itinerary of catechesis on the vices and virtues, today we will look at a rather ugly vice, *sorrow*, understood as a despondency of the soul, a constant affliction that

prevents man from feeling joy at his own existence.

First and foremost, it must be noted that, with regard to sorrow, the Fathers drew an important distinction: it is this. There is, in fact, a sorrow that is appropriate to Christian life, and that with God's grace can be changed into joy: obviously, this must not be rejected and forms part of the path of conversion. But there is a second type of sorrow that *creeps into the soul and prostrates it in a state of despondency*: it is this second kind of sorrow that must be fought, resolutely and with every strength, because it comes from the evil one. This distinction is found also in Saint Paul, who wrote to the Corinthians: "Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death" (2 Cor 7:10).

There is, therefore, a friendly sorrow, that leads us to salvation. Think of the prodigal son of the parable: when he reaches the depths of his degeneracy, he feels great bitterness, and this prompts him to come to his senses and to decide to return home to his father (cf. *Lk 15:11-20*). It is a grace to lament over one's own sins, to remember the state of grace from which we have fallen, to weep because we have lost the purity in which God dreamed of us.

But there is a second sorrow, which is instead an *ailment of the soul*. It arises in the human heart when a desire or hope vanishes. Here we can refer to the account of the disciples of Emmaus, in the Gospel of Luke. Those two disciples leave Jerusalem with a disappointed heart, and they confide to the stranger who at one point accompanies them: “We had hoped that he – Jesus – was the one to redeem Israel” (*Lk 24:21*). The

dynamic of sorrow is linked to the *experience of loss*, the experience of loss. In the heart of man, hopes arise that are sometimes dashed. It can be the desire to possess something that instead we are unable to obtain; but it can also be something important, such as an emotional loss. When this happens, it is as if man's heart falls from a precipice, and the sentiments he feels are discouragement, weakness of the spirit, depression and anguish. We all go through ordeals that generate sorrow in us, because life makes us conceive dreams that are then shattered. In this situation, some, after a time of turmoil, rely on hope; but others wallow in melancholy, allowing it to fester in their hearts. Does one take pleasure in this? See: sorrow is like *the pleasure of non-pleasure*; it is like taking a bitter, bitter, bitter candy, without sugar, unpleasant, and sucking that candy. Sorrow is taking pleasure in non-pleasure.

The monk Evagrius recounts that all vices aim at a pleasure, however ephemeral it may be, while sadness enjoys the opposite: of *lulling oneself into endless sorrow*. Certain protracted griefs, where a person continues to expand the void of one who is no longer there, are not proper to life in the Spirit. Certain resentful bitterness, where a person always has a claim in mind that makes them take on the guise of the victim, do not produce a healthy life in us, let alone a Christian one. There is something in everyone's past that needs to be healed. Sorrow, from being a natural emotion, can turn into an evil state of mind.

It is a devious demon, that of sorrow. The fathers of the desert described it as a worm of the heart, which erodes and hollows out its host. This is a good image: it lets us understand. A worm in the heart that consumes and hollows out its host. We must

beware of this sorrow, and think that Jesus brings us the joy of resurrection. But what must I do when I am sad? Stop and look: is this a good sorrow? Is it a sorrow that is not so good? And react according to the nature of the sorrow. Do not forget that sorrow can be a very bad thing that leads us to pessimism, that leads us to a selfishness that is difficult to cure.

Brothers and sisters, we must beware of this sorrow and think that Jesus brings us the joy of resurrection. However full life may be of contradictions, of defeated desires, of unrealized dreams, of lost friendships, thanks to Jesus' resurrection we can believe that *all will be saved*. Jesus rose again not only for Himself, but also for us, to *redeem all the happiness* that has remained unfulfilled in our lives. Faith casts out fear, and the resurrection of Christ removes

sadness like the stone from the tomb. Every Christian's day is an exercise in resurrection. Georges Bernanos, in his famous novel Diary of a Country Priest, has the parish priest of Torcy say this: "The Church has joy, all that joy that is reserved for this sad world. What you have done against her, you have done against joy." And another French writer, León Bloy, left us that wonderful phrase: "There is only one sadness, [...] that of not being holy." May the Spirit of the risen Jesus help us to defeat sorrow with holiness.
