

## 7. Admitting that we are not good

What I am trying to go into more deeply with you is mainly the fact that the vows and commitments that we take on to follow Christ in the vocation that God has reserved for us personally have meaning and can bear fruit only if we understand them as an aid to passing from our own interests to the interests of Christ, and of the Father, and of the Spirit, that is, our salvation, the fulness of our life through participation in the divine life of the Son of God in the Trinity.

But to arrive at such a way of understanding the vows and commitments that we promise to undertake in every form of vocation, starting with the baptismal vocation, whose commitments we renew at every Easter Vigil, it is necessary for us to experience that this shift from our interests to those of Jesus Christ is not the fruit of our ability, of our effort, but of a grace of the Holy Spirit that comes to aid our weak freedom and will.

Jesus tells us something very important when he speaks of prayer in the Gospel according to Luke: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Lk 11:13).

Once I told a nun that she was wicked. She got a little angry. But I told her: "Yes, you are wicked, as I too am wicked, and also the abbess and all your sisters. The Pope too is wicked. I'm not the one saying it: it is written in the Gospel, hence it must really be true, even if to you or me it does not always seem clear that we are wicked!"

I do not know if I have made myself understood, but I realize more and more that one who does not let himself be told by Jesus that he is wicked, will never be able to become good, because he will continue to want to obtain goodness from the cracked cistern of his own will, of his own effort, and he will not truly ask it from God, from the good Father.

In fact, Jesus says to the rich, young man who calls him "good Master": "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone" (Mk 10:18). It is incredible, even Jesus does not want to be considered good! He wants only the Father to be considered good. For He too does not want to live from his own goodness, even if it is divine and infinite like the Father's, but he prefers to transmit the Father's goodness, which the Spirit communicates to him constantly, and which He asks the Father for, as if breathing it continually.

You know that all the virtues, too – which, however, are all recapitulated in charity, which is the goodness of God – are not possible unless one feels oneself empty and incapable, offering to God the space of humble prayer, of constant requesting, which permits the Spirit to fill us with every virtue, with every goodness, with charity.

In fact, what does St. Benedict ask of us right away in the Prologue of the Rule? "First of all, every time you begin a good work, you must pray to him most earnestly to bring it to perfection. In his goodness, he has already counted us as his sons, and therefore we should never grieve him by our evil actions. With his good gifts which are in us, we must obey him at all times that he may never become the angry father

who disinherits his sons, nor the dread lord, enraged by our sins, who punishes us forever as worthless servants for refusing to follow him to glory” (RB Prol. 4–7).

In this passage of the Rule, in which he insists much on continual and insistent prayer, St. Benedict speaks several times of good and evil, of the goodness and wickedness that there can be between us and God. The good is above all something that we seek, something toward which we journey and want to reach. At the same time, there are some goods of God that are put at our disposal and which we must obey, which we are responsible for to the Father. If this does not happen, God will be saddened by our wicked actions, or he will even be so irritated as to condemn us to eternal punishment as most wicked servants (“*nequissimos servos*”). But why are these servants so wicked? Because they did not want to follow the Lord to glory, the glory of the sons of God.

The fulfillment of the good work that we must therefore ask from God with very insistent prayer (“*instantissima oratione*”) is the glory of God which we shall be granted to participate in as sons in Christ by the working of the Holy Spirit that Jesus asks us to request from the Father with all confidence in order not to be wicked but rather children of the good Father.

God is not bothered by our weaknesses, by our failings, by our incapacity to be good like Him. That would be like if a father got bothered with his two-year-old toddler for not knowing how to earn a living for himself by going to work. What saddens and bothers God – but in Him every sadness or irritation is always an expression of his love –, is that we do not admit that we need Him in order to change, to grow, to be converted from wickedness to goodness, from egoism to charity that “seeks not what is its own” (1 Cor 13:5).

We all need this conversion, this truly Paschal passage that makes us pass from death to life, because the man who is turned in on himself, who loves himself, dies, dies to the divine life for which he has been made, which is the charity of God. We do not live if we do not pass from the egoism of original sin to the charity that does not pursue its own interest, literally: which “seeks not what is its own,” in which one does not seek what is one’s proper possession, what is for oneself, but what is for God and for all, what our heart is made for, the love of charity for which we have been made, for which we have been given life.

If we do not understand each commitment of our vocation, like our vows, within this movement of passage, we get everything wrong, we go off the road, and our vocation does not reach the end for which it has been given to us, that is, we do not follow Christ to the glory of the Father, which was the whole point of his life and mission, and hence the whole point and the fullness of our life and vocation.