

OCTOBER 15, 2019 Tuesday of the 28th Week of Ordinary Time

Memorial of Saint Teresa of Jesus

Rom 1:16-25

Ps 19:2-5

Lk 11:37-41

In the first reading, the loss to which humanity has condemned itself against the will of God is re-read by St. Paul through a sort of history of sin that he offers to the believers of Rome. Created by God for truth and justice, the human person turned to impiety and injustice. While contemplating the world and having the ability to grasp through the work of creation the invisible perfections of the Creator, humanity became lost in its own reasonings and ended up in the blind alleys of impurity, subjecting the body to all sorts of pleasures until the body itself became an object, and of idolatry, worshiping and serving creatures instead of the Creator. It seems that this loss has been permitted by God so that humanity learns to trust not in itself but in the One who alone makes right. Paul re-reads this story of sin to show that, although humanity was worthy only of God's wrath because of our prideful foolishness, God chose to love humanity anyway and therefore to justify us, to save us. The righteous will live by faith; the human creature has no trial to undergo before God, but an undeserved love to receive, a love that initiates an extraordinary transformation because it makes the sinner righteous and the perverse redeemed. This Gospel, heard and received, is a true dynamis, a power that expands the heart, opens it to faith, and communicates salvation. It propagates itself in an irresistible way. It is contagious to the ends of the world, like the witness that the heavens give to the earth and to the whole cosmos, to reach every space and every time, as the responsorial psalm recalls. Even the heavens, full of this redemption, sing the glory of God.

The Gospel reading, taken from Luke, invites us to contemplate, further, an obstacle to the spread of the living and energetic word of the Master: the excessive attachment of the Pharisees to traditions, an attitude that prevents them from grasping the universal salvific reach of the presence and actions of Jesus.

While Jesus teaches the crowds, a Pharisee invites him to lunch. Being invited to someone else's table is a gesture of acceptance, as well as esteem and approval. Between two who share a meal together, there can be no barriers, only familiarity and intimacy. Jesus accepts the invitation of the Pharisee, as he had that of publicans, and sits at the table, but he scandalizes his host by neglecting the practice of ablutions that the Pharisees performed before lunch. In fact, the relationship of Jesus with the Pharisees was always very difficult. In Lk 7:36-50, a Pharisee is offended because Jesus lets himself be touched by a sinful woman, whom he praises her for her love. In Luke 14:1-6, he rebukes the formalistic observance of the Pharisees who, while respecting the Law, ignored the demands of love, which is the synthesis and compendium of the Law (see Mt 22:37). In Lk 20:45-47, Jesus warns against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who flaunt their justice by carrying out sterile and meaningless gestures.

Traditions, practices, and customs, when they are imposed and observed in an inflexible way, move away from their secondary and instrumental finality to educate our weak and impressionable hearts to do good and to love. But they can become real barriers of separation and opposition. Only the recovery of conversion to loving dialogue with Christ, who is not afraid of overcoming barriers, sterile precepts, and empty traditions, can generate life and new relationships of communion, within which even the law and its precepts can help us live well and in a manner ordered to the newness of salvation. From the exteriority of preservation, one passes to the interiority of the heart in love with God, united with Christ, who is not afraid of risking anything, even life, to remain in communion with him and to invite anyone to this banquet of life and joy.