

The struggle against idols

...a time of solitude and silence...

Meeting Christ and adhering to him implies fractures and cuts: "No one can serve two masters... You can't serve both God and Mammon." (Mt 6:24).

The young man has got used to living in a society characterized by a "returning of the gods," a new polytheism; this society justifies everything, it sponsors an *et-et* culture and doesn't know the stricter *aut-aut* one. In this way the young man is tempted to make live together, in a schizophrenic way, the reference to Christ and "other" behaviours and references, which in the end will reveal their incompatibility.

The young man should consider the fact that living is choosing, and choosing always requires renunciation.

A life without interdicts, without limits, is not human and cannot be lived. Christian life is demanding! This has to be clear: deceiving the young man with worldly vocational advertising, making him believe that choosing Christ means choosing everything is purely false, and surely stupid.

The baptized man's life is characterised by renunciation from the beginning: "Do you renounce Satan and all of his temptations?". The answer to this question will be given in the course of life, and youth is the time in which training for this struggle is needed: "I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the Word of God remains in you, and you have overcome the evil one. Don't love the world, neither the things that are in the world." (1 Jn 2:14-15).

There are "noes" that must be said, but they can be said with freedom and conviction only if the "yes" to Christ and to his love are ascertained. Otherwise Christian life will be characterised by laws and prohibitions with no reason for being observed. Today more than ever Christianity is no more an obvious discourse, but it needs motivation and it is supported only thanks to a struggle against temptations. The inner struggle is harder than other struggles occurring outside of us, but it is- according to the patristic expression- "pouring blood that attracts the Holy Spirit's gift." I am convinced that the young man who doesn't want to waste his own life should put into being an "inner resistance," a spiritual struggle, and give himself a certain discipline, set "a rule of life" that will help him acquire self-control.

This rule of life requires a daily faithfulness to silence and solitude. It's a matter of assuming and organising tensions and necessities that show themselves during adolescence and youth (the need of silence and solitude), preventing them from becoming pathological forms (stubborn silence, isolation) till they become a structure of life.

1. It is vital to reserve a time to think and pray during the day. Very often this is the only way to realize how precious time- that is life- is, and to reach a more unitary view of time, compared to the fragmentary one proposed by today's quick rhythms of society. The way in which a young man confesses Christ as Lord of his own life and time is by finding time- even only a little, but fixed and constant time- to listen to God's Word till he answers Him in a simple and personal talk.

2. Solitude is not intended to avoid other people, but to meet ourselves, live with ourselves (*habitare secum*) and assume other people in their true reality. In solitude we can purify our view and our relationship with others: in solitude the others are not absent, on the contrary we can look at them with God's eyes, catching them in their own mystery and deeper vocation. In this way solitude becomes a furnace that forms our critical spirit and our purification. Always staying together is not automatically the expression of a good quality of relationships. Solitude can teach us the importance of distance, difference, mutual respect in interpersonal relationships. Otherwise there is only a fusional approach in which I make others my prey or I let myself become absorbed by them. This would be a regression to an aggressive, narcissistic and childish affectivity. This kind of relationship is typical of people who don't want to grow up and face the risk of freedom and responsibility.

3. Silence is a sort of necessary hygienic measure in this world deafened by words, sounds, noises, verbal and non-verbal messages. Silence is the only way in which an authoritative, significant, non-repetitive, non-superficial, non-slogan, non-banal word can be born. Outward silence leads to inner silence, and this one gives depth to the person. Moreover, silence not only reveals presences and voices living within us, but prepares our heart to listen to God's Word and to receive His presence to make Him live in us.

Thinking and praying in silence and solitude are weapons which a young man can practise with during his spiritual struggle. This means discerning thoughts, suggestions, images, that catch our mind and seduce our heart, stimulating a person to an action which he perceives in its negative and sinful nature, because they are disturbing and unpeaceful thoughts. It is necessary to break these thoughts on their rising without dwelling on them, without starting a dialogue that would inevitably end with an agreement; that would be the expression of an inner suggestion through a gesture, thus committing sin. If the agreement repeats, we will become prey to a vice, to a habit. It is then very difficult to free oneself of a habit.

Yes, the young man as well knows great temptations such as self-achievement and power, money and goods, absoluteness of sexuality that becomes an idol. He certainly knows the power of seduction of these possibilities, but if he knows God too, he will receive both the guide-lines to judge rightly and the strength to fight. In this way he will become

conscious of the fact that he has to pay dearly for Christian life because it is a rich, deep, human and spiritual adventure!
To undertake this adventure the young man must answer to Christ's personal call: "Who do you think I am?" (Mk 8:29).

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