

Getting Ready for the Lent

Today, before entering the Lent, we read from Matthew: “For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you”. This means that you wouldn’t be fasting if you didn’t love your brother, and one of the most prominent factors in this love is forgiveness because without it there is no communion, the communion of the Holy Spirit that unites you. To clarify this meaning, He says: “But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins”. This starts by having a soft heart because some do have cruelty. After this, you shall have conciliation. I remember confession in my childhood when the priest used to ask before confessing: “Are you having any problems with someone?” It was common among us that conciliation is a condition for Holy Communion because Communion is sharing between the members of the community.

The second part of this chapter is a call for happiness on the day that the Jewish person fasts and forgives. When the Lord said “do not look somber as the hypocrites do”, he probably meant the Pharisees that love to appear for people to say good things about them. In Christian fasting, your first relationship is with God and you do not need attestation from anyone as we all are in a state of happiness. And if any of us invited the other for a meal, you should show that you are fasting and your guest must share this with you. It is meaningless to give the guests a choice and prepare two kinds of food – Lenten and normal – if the number of guests was big. If a person wouldn’t accept to abide by your fasting, do not invite him.

The passage from Matthew starts its third part by saying: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven”. This is a prohibition from “the love for silver” as we call it in the Lenten book known as Triodion. This isn’t a prohibition from having a personal wealth. Big economical activities require having lots of money whether in the form of trusts or real estates.

These words aren’t Jesus’ whole teaching about money, this teaching that our fathers talked about saying that money is something you are trusted for and is between your hands as a trust that you should be ready to distribute to the needy or use for the sake of who needs it. Jesus didn’t ask all believers to become poor in order to enter the Kingdom of heaven; however he did ask them not to be attached to earthly things. The Lord wanted to clarify that you cannot serve God and money, because if money enslaved you, you won’t be able to love Christ.

He clarified this at the end of this passage when He said: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”. The whole story is a story of the heart and its movement. Where is the direction of your heart? If it was directed towards passion for money, then there will be no place left for the poor in your heart. If you

were wealthy or rich, do not give a big stature for what you own. You don't rise through what you own. You rise through your love for God and His love for you; you are independent from everything on earth. As much as you become liberated from your slavery to what you own, you become a slave for God.

Getting out of your drowning in the sea of money is a condition for the Lent that starts tomorrow in God's mercy and the flow of his graces on us.

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