

Scripture Reading

A Reading from the Gospel according to Mark (Mark 7: 20-23)

But what comes out of a person, that is what defiles. From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile. The Gospel of the Lord. R. Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection – The evil coming from within us is what defiles us

We can choose to be untouched by the evil around us but we are definitely defiled by the evil WITHIN us. It is easy to recognize and condemn the evil we see around us but much harder to detect it within ourselves. Usually, it is the result of the application of a double standard with the more lenient one applying to ourselves accompanied by false justification. Such is the subtle deception Satan has planted in our minds. *How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove that splinter in your eye,' when you do not even notice the wooden beam in your own eye? You hypocrite! Remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother's eye (Luke 6:42).* Whilst we are rightly concerned about the evil we see around us, however, we should be doubly concerned and vigilant about the evil that exists in our mind and heart. The evil around us cannot affect our salvation but the evil within us can.

We are called to renew and guard our mind (cf. Ephesians 4:23-24). The Kingdom of God is being fought in the hearts and minds of people. Thus, the mind is a very important battlefield of Satan. His diabolical expertise is the deception of minds. The devil personified by the serpent asked Eve in the Garden of Eden: "Did God really say, 'You shall not eat from any of the trees in the garden' (cf. Genesis 3:1). His temptation in human thoughts and minds sows confusion and doubt about the truth and imparts lies and falsehoods. Without the light of truth of the Holy Spirit, it is hard to discern diabolical deception for what it really is. The discerning of the truth of the difference between good and evil in our recent age is even harder given the popularity and widespread acceptance of false ideologies such as moral relativism that says there is no absolute right or wrong. Such is the deception of Satan. He is cunning, knows our weaknesses and leverages on our pride and selfishness. He presents evil clothed in goodness, and false justification. He sows in our mind doubts and confusion so that we cannot see the truth clearly. Negative thoughts should not be allowed to remain in our minds. We can guard our conscience by submitting it to holy discipline and forming and shaping it by the immutable truths of the teachings of Jesus Christ, the Eternal Truth.

We are called to renew and guard our hearts. *With all vigilance guard your heart, for in it are the sources of life (Proverb 4:23).* If we are not vigilant in protecting our heart from evil, evil can enter and take root in our heart. *From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly (Mark 7:21-22).* Like the mind, our heart must be formed and ruled by the truths of our faith. Adhering to God's commandments on love will protect our heart from pride and selfishness which is the source of many evils and sins. If our heart is not strong in the virtues of holy love and humility, we can easily be tempted to be led by our passions and feelings instead of by our faith alone.

We are called to exercise self-control through our prayers and fasting. *For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control (2 Timothy 1:7).* Sincere prayers coupled with fasting will strengthen us spiritually to listen to, discern and follow the gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit within us. God's immense power through His graces is available to us to deal with any evil in us so that we can emerge victorious over our sins and weaknesses if we open our hearts to cooperate with His grace. By our own human power, there is nothing much we can do to fight against the evil within us. But by true repentance of our sins and a firm resolution for amendment, accompanied by ardent prayers and sacrifices such as fasting, the heart will be softened and opened to receive God's graces, the channel for God's power for which nothing is impossible. Jesus teaches us that some evil can only be driven out by prayer and fasting (cf. Mark 9:29).

Conversation with Jesus: Precious Lord, I consecrate to You my heart and mind. Please purify my heart of all pride, selfishness, anger, unforgiveness, unholy and useless desires, restlessness, woundedness and anything which does not come from You. Fill it with Your love and guard it with Your humility. Please purify my mind of all darkness, deception and wrong way of thinking. Fill it with Your light, truth, wisdom and understanding. It is only Your truth that will set me free of all lies, falsehood, deception and eternal condemnation. Mary, Mother of Salvation, pray for me. Thank You, Jesus. Praise You, Jesus.