

The Desire of Perfection

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Mk 10:35-45

Ave Maria Catholic Church, October 17, 2021 - Fr. David M Vidal

James and John asked Jesus: *"Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left."* Jesus said to them, *"You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"*

In the Old Testament, the image of the cup can symbolize God's blessing; but in the majority of instances, the cup represents the Lord's judgment and wrath. Here, Jesus is using the words 'cup' and 'baptism' as symbols of his suffering and death. Jesus is telling the apostles, if they want to enjoy the glory of his kingdom, first, they have to suffer and die. How much of Jesus' answer did the Apostles understand? Perhaps, not much. They didn't understand what they were asking and most probably they didn't grasp what Jesus was saying either. However, they were bold enough to answer: *"We Can."*

Perhaps, that was presumptuous. However, Jesus works with that. And Jesus accepts their answer and confirms their desire: *"The cup that I drink, you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized."*

This passage of the gospel teaches us an important lesson: we shouldn't temper our desires for perfection. How can we lower our desires for perfection when Jesus himself tells us: *"Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect!"* (Mt. 5: 48).

Sometimes, the problem is that we are defeated before starting. This happens when facing challenges and adversities, we immediately say: "I cannot!" I cannot overcome this temptation; I cannot endure this adversity; I cannot go further in my service and work; and the so many other "I cannot" situations of life!

Today, we are inspired by the Boanerges, the sons of thunder, with their bold "I can" that was rewarded by Jesus's confirmation: "You will."

A great desire is the first step toward perfection. Without the desire of perfection there is no progress in the spiritual life. The Great Teresa of Jesus says: *"How important it is in spiritual life to rouse oneself to great things!* It is said that when Thomas Aquinas was asked by one of his sisters what she should do to reach sanctity, he answered her in one brief sentence: *"Will it."*

And Teresa of Jesus confirms this answer when she says: *"[We] must have a great and very determined determination to persevere until reaching the end, come what may, happen what may, whatever work is involved, whatever criticism arises, whether [we] arrive or whether [we] die on the road, or even if [we] don't have courage for the trials that are met, or if the whole world collapses,"* (The Way of Perfection 21:2).

What is the nature of this desire of goodness and perfection?

Desire in general is a movement of the soul toward the good that is absent. In the supernatural order our good desires are influenced by divine grace. The desire of perfection is an act of the will, that under the influence of grace, seeks spiritual progress.

When we desire goodness and perfection in our life, we are already tending towards it. Yes, it is a first step, but you will not have a second without the first. And when you desire to love God, you are already loving Him. A great desire makes room in your heart and prepares you spiritually to receive God's blessings.

What are the qualities of the desire of goodness and perfection?

First, it is supernatural. When we desire to be holy, we just want to have the will of God accomplished in us: *"Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* Obviously, this is God's gift. And for this reason, we pray! No wonder this petition is in the Lord's Prayer! The prayer that Jesus told us to pray! With humility and perseverance, we say: *"Lord, draw me! Make me want to love you! Make me holy!"*

Second, it is humble. The true desire of greatness or perfection does not arise from pride or vainglory. We don't want to be perfect for the sake of looking down on others. That would be childish! The desire of perfection is present in us because we have received a vocation, a call from God. God created us to be holy. This is not presumption or pride; this is a humble acceptance of God's plan in our lives.

Third, it is fundamental. All the other desires must be subordinate to this supreme good. It is simply the foundation of our existence. Would it be right to work on the furnishings of a house without having the structure of the house in place? If you don't have the layout of a house that determines your foundation, how do you know that your furnishings will fit? We need to apply this concept to our spiritual life. And here, holiness is the layout and foundation of our existence. Everything else must fit within this fundamental context.

Finally, it is practical. This is not a question of wishful thinking but of a determined determination that must be put into practice here and now, using the good means at our disposal. It is not just good intentions. It is determined determination. It is not a timid "I wish I could." It is a determined "I want it with the help of God."

And this determination is very practical. To desire goodness in a theoretical way, is to live in an illusion. Then, we pass from one delay to another, and life moves on, and we run the risk of appearing before God with empty hands.

It is so important for us to examine our lives and apply these concepts to our here and now! What must I do to bring goodness to my family life? How can I be a good father, or

mother, or son, or daughter? In which ways can I be a better professional? Is there something I can do to be a better neighbor? How can I be a better member of the Church and a better disciple of Jesus? These are not theoretical questions; these are very practical questions with practical consequences.

Perhaps the Boanerges, the sons of thunder, did not completely understand what they were asking or wishing; however, they were courageous, and moved by the Holy Spirit, they said: "We can."

We must imitate their courage, and we must start our day by saying: "I can do this with the grace of God." And God is ready to give us his grace if we humbly ask for it.

Let us never lower our desires! Let us not ask for less when Jesus tells us to look for more! The sky is the limit because the home that God has prepared for us is heaven. This goal must be our supernatural, humble, fundamental, and most practical desire!

May Our Blessed Mother help us to increase our desires for holiness. Amen