CHASTISEMENT AS PART OF GOD'S MERCY

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Today we hear the parable of the prodigal son, which sets before our eyes God's pedagogy, which shows how the Lord God raises His children. And we must refer to what I told you yesterday. Punishment, chastisement, is part of God's pedagogy, part of the way in which the Lord God raises His children, Catholic souls; the very thing that today's so-called Catholics, and indeed a whole mass of so-called traditionalists, would like to forget, to erase. And what we Catholics should always keep before our eyes is this: sin always has consequences. Sin is always bound up with punishment, with this salutary chastisement. For when the Lord God sends or permits various kinds of punishments and temporal misfortunes, He does so for a very specific purpose: to rouse us to amendment, to bring us to conversion.

BODILY AND SPIRITUAL HUNGER

The hunger we hear about in the Gospel has a twofold dimension. On the one hand it is bodily hunger, a terrible thing, one of the greatest misfortunes that can befall a man. Many years ago I had the opportunity to meet an elderly priest who, as a priest, had been sent to the concentration camp at Dachau. He survived, and the old man always carried in his cassock pocket a crust of dried bread, and this drew mockery from younger priests. They tapped their foreheads: grandfather has got something mixed up, the shops are full, the shelves are groaning with goods, and he has got it into his head that he must keep a piece of dried bread on him. When he heard this mockery, he would wag his finger and say: "You don't know what hunger is." Hunger is something terrible for the human body, because food is necessary for us to keep the body alive. Without food, after a certain time a man simply dies.

So on the one hand the prodigal son experiences this hunger of the body – perhaps even the greatest of the misfortunes that can befall a man – but at the same time he also experiences spiritual hunger. He realises that he has lost everything, he realises that he has been left alone. He realises that he has no grace of God. And this hunger, my dear brethren, is surely even worse than bodily hunger. When a man realises that he is deprived of God's grace, when he realises that he is alone, that he has no merciful, divine, fatherly hand to support him and lead him.

When the prodigal son experiences hunger, experiences misfortune, a turning point comes in his life, and this confirms, and sets before our eyes, what I told you in yesterday's sermon: God's punishment is a consequence of sin, but God's punishment is meant to bring a man to amendment, to shake him, to make him convert, to begin to think in a completely different way. And this is what happens with the prodigal son. After all that time full of sin, when hunger strikes him, he begins to think in a completely different way than before. He realises that he has gone astray, that he has sinned. He realises his misery, the hopelessness he is experiencing. And then a thought is born in him: "I will arise and go to my father." A thought is born of conversion, of returning to his parental home. And this thought of returning is joined with sorrow and with a purpose of amendment: "I will arise and go and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee. I am not now

And the parable we have just heard shows this in a beautiful way. The prodigal son leaves his father's house with a part of the estate and goes to another country, where he squanders the whole estate, everything he received from his father. The prodigal son is a figure of the sinner, who receives an estate from his father, a true treasure – he receives sanctifying grace – but goes to a foreign country, goes to the devil, commits sin and loses the whole estate, grace. And what happens then? Then, my dear brethren, in that far country to which he went, where he lived riotously, a great famine arises. And so the prodigal son begins to suffer want. This, my dear brethren, is the punishing hand of God, the hand of justice. This hunger arises there for a very specific purpose: in order to bring the prodigal son to conversion, to bring him to return to his father's house.

worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants." The divine chastisement he experiences leads him to conversion, leads to sorrow for sins, a purpose of amendment. And we read in Holy Scripture: God does not desire the death of the sinner, but that he should be converted and live.

THE FATHER'S WELCOME

We see, my dear brethren, in the example of the prodigal son, how God's punishment works, how this hand of justice leads the straying soul back to the father's house. And as he resolved, so he does: rising up, he went to his father. And what happens then, when our heavenly Father sees the prodigal son? He sees the prodigal son, who is sorry for what he has done, who longs to return to Him. He does something that, humanly speaking, none of us would probably have expected. "And when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him." God sees every soul that turns away from evil and longs to return to Him. And He helps that soul in returning. He helps. *Misericordia motus* – moved by mercy – the father runs to meet the prodigal son. He runs to welcome him, to embrace him. So this grace which helps us in conversion, this resolution of ours, this sorrow of ours, lead to the Lord God helping us to return to Him through His grace.

And then, when the prodigal son has returned to his father, what does the father command? He commands that the best robe be brought, so that the son may be clothed anew. In the New Testament the wedding garment is a figure, a sign, of sanctifying grace. And so the son regains the grace which he lost, regains the grace which he lost as a result of his sin.

REMBRANDT'S TWO HANDS

There is a beautiful painting by Rembrandt illustrating this parable: the prodigal son kneels before his father, the father embraces him, but when you look closely, the father's hands differ. One hand is, we might say, a man's hand, thick, hard-worked, powerful. This is the hand of God's justice, the hand that punishes us. And the other hand, one might even say a woman's, delicate, the gentle hand of mercy. This is, my dear brethren, what the modern world wants to forget: that the Lord God punishes in order to be able to show mercy, that the chastisement which falls upon us, of which we spoke yesterday – pestilence, famine, war – serves our conversion. This is why the Lord God punishes man, this is why He tries him on earth: so that we, my dear brethren, following the example of the prodigal son, may see our own misery, feel the hunger for God, and long for what we have lost. And this chastising hand of God, the hand of justice, leads us to the hand full of mercy; the hand which, while we are still far off, the Lord God already stretches out to us, to bring us back, to help us, to lift us up from the fall into which we have fallen.

Look, the father, at the sight of his son's sorrow, does not reproach the prodigal son for what he did. He does not reproach him for any of the sins which he has repented. This is the immensity of God's mercy, which, as it were, burns, consumes all the evil until nothing of it remains. Dear faithful, let us ask fervently that, following the example of the prodigal son, we may repent of and do penance for all our sins. Let us ask fervently that we may never forget why we have crosses, toils and trials here on earth in this life. Why does the Lord God punish man? He does so because of His mercy. The chastisement that falls upon mankind is part of God's mercy. Had the prodigal son not been struck by great famine, he would most likely have pressed on further in what is evil, in what is sinful, and most likely would never have been converted to his father, would never have returned. Chastisement, punishment for sin, is part of God's mercy.

FALSE MERCY

What I am saying is certainly very politically incorrect and at odds with what the anti-church teaches, which preaches mercy, mercy, but without justice. Today's Catholics, when they think of God's mercy, think that the Lord God must guarantee them an easy, light, pleasant life, without problems, without illness, without toil, without sweat running down the brow, without work, without effort, without striving to preserve life here on earth. This is, my dear brethren, something we have completely forgotten

and which today's so-called Catholics want to forget. It is not such mercy, false mercy, that we wish to call upon. It is not for such mercy that we wish to pray, but for true mercy, the kind so beautifully portrayed by Rembrandt. In asking for mercy for ourselves, for our nearest and dearest, for sinners who do not wish to do penance, in asking for true divine mercy, we wish also to ask for God's punishment. We wish to submit to that hand of justice, to accept the punishment which we, like others, have deserved. We wish to be ready also to bear toils, sufferings, crosses for those who do not wish to do so. We are ready for the Lord God to scourge us so that we may save our souls, but also obtain by prayer the conversion of those who go astray today, who live in the utopia of false mercy.

God's mercy, true divine mercy, is inseparably bound up with God's punishment, with the chastisement of the sinful, prodigal son. And it is for such mercy that we wish to ask on this first Saturday of the month of March, fully aware that, had it not been for the punishment of God which fell upon the prodigal son, he would never have been converted, would never have returned to his father's house. And so it is with the modern world, with today's so-called Catholics: this salutary scourge is necessary for us, and without it there will be no conversion.

THE SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE

We therefore pray for the triumph of the Immaculate Heart of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, but the road to that triumph – and we must realise this – will lead through suffering. And the question is whether we, traditional Catholics, are aware of this, whether we, traditional Catholics, are ready to take this suffering, this salutary suffering, upon our own shoulders. Is there a spirit of sacrifice in us? Is there a readiness in us to give up something as reparation for our sins, the sins of our neighbours, the sins of so many sinners who today do not wish to do any penance? For I fear that this spirit of sacrifice, this spirit of reparation, is very, very much lacking in traditional Catholics today. Why? Because, my dear brethren, it is not enough to go to the Tridentine Mass in order to be a Catholic. Being a Catholic is not only rendering worship to the Lord God through the most holy sacrifice of the Holy Mass. That is only a part. Being a Catholic also means a change, a complete change, the rejection of the liberal, modernist way of thinking. Being a Catholic means conversion, deep conversion, which must be, as it were, like flaying off one's skin, all that we have grown used to, all that we have grown over with.

To be a Catholic, my dear brethren, a true Catholic, is not something easy, comfortable, light and pleasant, but we are perfectly aware that whoever is not a Catholic, whoever does not serve the true God, whoever does not remain in sanctifying grace, condemns himself to eternal damnation in hell. That is why today we wish to ask the Most Blessed Mother, the Sorrowful Mother, to help us to form this spirit of sacrifice, to help us to understand anew, in our conception, what true divine mercy is, so that we may learn to appreciate and love the cross which the Lord God sends us here on earth. For without the cross there is no salvation, without Good Friday there is no Resurrection morning. There is no shortcut that would allow us to bypass Calvary. If the devil today persuades a whole mass of post-conciliar so-called Catholics that there is, he is lying to them. He is the father of all lies, and they, following him, walk the comfortable and broad road leading straight into the fire of hell.

RETURNING TO THE FATHER

Let us not be fools, my dear brethren, but, following the example of the prodigal son, touched by the hand of divine justice, let us return as quickly as possible to our Father, who is moved by the sight of sorrow, the sight of tears shed over our sins. The beautiful words of the Gospel: *Misericordia motus* – moved by mercy. This happens every day, we ourselves have experienced it many times in our lives when approaching the sacrament of holy confession. Perhaps the road to that confession was rough. Perhaps more than once we had to feel God's [?] on our backs in order to decide at last to go to holy confession. But in holy confession we discover every time how merciful the Lord is. How merciful the Lord God is, who does not reproach but forgives, and forgives gladly, moved by mercy, moved at the sight of a sinner doing penance.

May the Most Blessed Mother help us to understand

the mystery of Christ's cross, in meditating on the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. We still have a stretch of Lent ahead of us. Let us make use of this time and consider how much the Lord Jesus has done for us and for our salvation. Let us consider how ungrateful we have been, what prodigal sons we have been in the past. And having returned to our Father's house, having beheld the immensity of His mercy, let us firmly resolve that we will not return to a sin once abandoned. Let us firmly resolve that we will become such little apostles of God's mercy, but of that true divine mercy, which is inseparably bound up with God's justice. And let us learn, my dear brethren, following the example of the Most Blessed Mother, to accept suffering, to accept toils, hardships, adversities [?] as reparation for our sins, the sins of our neighbours and for the sins of so many sinners who today do not wish to do any penance. May they too, perhaps soon, already touched by the hand of God's justice, find, set out on, the road of return to the house of the merciful Father. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.