

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(Jeremiah 20:10-13 / Matthew 10:26-33)
25.06.2017
God scrutinises the loins and heart

In the long history of Christian thinking, we see how it has always been difficult for believers to hold in balance the otherness of God and his proximity. For example, on one side we have St Gregory Nazianzen who sees God as “the One who is beyond all”, and on the other side we have St Augustine for whom God is “closer to me than I am to myself”.

This tension in our relationship with God is well formulated in a hymn from our repertoire, in which we sing: “He whom nothing can contain / No one can compel / Bound his timeless Godhead here / In our time to dwell”.

Today in our two readings, Jeremiah tells us that God scrutinises the loins and the heart, and, according to Jesus, God has counted every hair on our heads.

The very biblical expression “to scrutinise the loins and the heart” expresses vividly God’s intimate knowledge of who we are and what our intentions and desires are. For his part, when Jesus says that every single hair has been counted, he wants to highlight the fact that in us everything is important to God.

The image of God conveyed by these two expressions could be quite negative: is God an oppressive, inquisitive and indiscreet Big Brother?

This is what we mean when we speak of God as “the man above”. Without daring to enter into the debate about God’s gender, we must be clear that the widespread image of God as a bearded man, seated above the clouds and looking at us in a very distant way is not a Christian representation of God.

If God is faithful to his promise to come and dwell within us (cf. Jn 14:23) and if we have become temples of the living God (cf. 1Co 3:16), then we cannot continue to speak of God as “the man above” and claim that we are Christians.

Some might say that this expression is just a way of speaking without great consequences. I do not think so. Words matter and the way we picture God influences the way we relate to him.

Why is it that we prefer to imagine God being far away? It may be a way for us to prevent him from intruding too much on our lives, from demanding our attention. If God is in the clouds, we may live our lives how we want. We just have to keep him quiet by showing up once a week in church and speak to him when it suits us.

Why are we afraid of God? God’s closeness to each one of us and his intimate knowledge of all that is in our minds and hearts has only one cause and one goal: his unconditional love for us.

In fact, in becoming “God-with-us” in Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 1:23) God answers one of our deepest longings: our desire to be loved and respected for who we truly are. In our daily lives, from our childhood until our old age, we spend a lot of time and energy trying to please God and those around us, to be accepted and acknowledged by them.

What makes these efforts so painful and tiring is that often we have the feeling that they do not work. This feeling of not being acknowledged and loved is partly due to the fact that we hide too many things from God and reveal so little of ourselves to others.

The reality is that we are unsure that God and others will love us as we are, will accept and welcome those parts of our lives which are dark, and unpleasant. We surround

ourselves with secrets because we perceive truth as a threat to our ability to be loved and welcomed. The sad thing is that as Paul Tournier wrote: “Nothing makes us so lonely as our secrets”. At the beginning we think that our secrets will help us to be loved, and at the end we realise that they have prevented others from loving us in truth.

Our need to feel loveable and to be loved without having to qualify for it can be – and is – answered by God alone, because he alone knows us through and through and still loves us. God has chosen you and me, we are his first choice.

God accepts us with all that we are, all that we have done. He does not attach any conditions to his love, either achievements or conformity. Whatever he could find in our hearts and loins, whatever the number of hairs on our head, God loves us. In fact the more God knows us, the more he sees our misery, our poverty, our need for love and care, for respect and peace, the more he loves us.

To think that something in you and me would lead God to love us less is a mistake because God cannot stop loving us, he is love (cf. 1Jn 4:8).

If we believe that in our hearts there is something which makes us ashamed and unlovable, we have to remember that God is greater than our hearts (cf. 1Jn 3:20).

For us knowledge may be a blessing or a curse, we may use it to manipulate others or to help them, we may be humble or proud about it; for God knowledge is always about mercy, care, and attention. The more he knows us, the more he is spurred to love us more fully and more deeply.

Let us give thanks that God wants to scrutinise our loins and heart, that he is ready to take the time to count every hair on our head, even if it takes him more time with some than with others.

For our part, let us grow in honesty about who we are, let us love ourselves as God loves us, let us live in the truth that will make us free to relate to God and to others in joy and peace.