

A REWARD?

If you were asked: 'What are your fondest memories of school from your childhood?'
.....(... the **rewards**??)

So, rewards, prizes won, the best mark, the top spot – at the top of the class? ...

A subject we don't talk about much within the Church ... but which perhaps crosses our minds from time to time??

Now, in the way the Church operates, it's true that there isn't really a system of rewards for services rendered ... (and I'm always touched when, on the contrary, I see a sister or brother serving wholeheartedly but in complete discretion, and who certainly doesn't want to be noticed or receive the slightest reward!...).

But thinking further ahead, thinking of **eternity** ... do we ever have any particular expectations in this regard??

Here's another topic that would be very interesting to discuss during a sharing session... perhaps we might discover things we have in common, or, on the contrary, find that our perceptions differ greatly from one another!!

In the Bible, to use another term, the theme of **retribution** features very prominently: retribution in both senses, in fact – either as punishment for a fault, or as a reward for a good deed.

And particularly in the Old Testament: whilst there are two Greek words (in the New Testament) to express this concept, there are 17 in Hebrew (in the Old Testament) that fall within the 'lexical field' (as the experts say) of retribution!...

One important point to emphasise is that the recurring references to this subject in the biblical texts should be seen as evidence of God's concern for **justice**!

From the very beginning, when addressing his people, God never ceases to condemn all forms of injustice and to take the side of those most vulnerable to it.

For example, **Psalms 68:6: 'He is a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows.'** ... and many others.

God, through the voice of his prophets, has always emphasised respect for **the law**, **fairness**, and also the notion of just **proportion**, in the enforcement of a sentence, for example.

A very clear example is the famous **law of retaliation** that God prescribed for his people. This law establishes the principle of 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth', which seems almost strange to us... Yet whilst this provision may indeed seem severe to us today, it is in fact an important **measure of justice**!!

Through this law, God did not in any way encourage revenge... He **limited** it!!

We know full well that when we take revenge for an offence, we instinctively tend to return two, three or ten times as much!...

I do not wish to enter into a debate on this subject, but the facts clearly show us even today that, even amongst nations, it is not fairness that prevails! For every blow received, one tends to return double, if not a hundredfold!!...

So, this law of retaliation, the principle of ‘an eye for an eye’, was indeed a measure of justice and fairness that God commanded His people to follow, and which was meant to set them apart from all the surrounding peoples!

This serves as a reminder, then, that in all the provisions and laws God gives to his people, there is a constant concern to uphold the most scrupulous honesty in everything owed to others.

Jesus, moreover, takes up this principle, adding a further warning: ‘**You will be measured by the measure you have used**’, reminding us that whilst we expect God to be just towards us, He, for His part, expects us to commit ourselves to being just towards others! (‘Forgive us our trespasses **as** we forgive those who trespass against us’)

In any case, many biblical texts therefore speak explicitly of **just reward**, or indeed of **an inheritance**, for the child of God:

- First of all, an example not to follow (!) :

Matthew 6:5: ‘And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street-corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.’

Here, Jesus clearly shows that religious pride brings its own **immediate reward**: those who seek only to be admired by others receive what they seek straight away; they do not have to wait for anything from God and so any heavenly reward does not concern them!

- But ... one might think of the **parable of the talents**, where Jesus specifies the reward given to each servant according to his faithfulness and zeal
...

- And then, **Matthew 10:42: ‘And whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, truly I tell you, he will by no means lose his reward.’**

These words of Jesus are a tremendous encouragement to all those who feel they they are doing ‘so little’ for the Lord!!

- And also, **Luke 6:35: ‘Love your enemies, do good, and lend without expecting anything in return. And your reward will be great ...’**

- 1 Corinthians 3:8: ‘The one who plants and the one who waters are equal, and each will receive their own reward according to their own labour.’

-2 John 1:8: “Watch yourselves, so that you do not lose the fruit of your labour, but may receive a full reward.”

So, it is clear that the reality of a **future reward** for us Christians is perfectly biblical!

THE BIG QUESTION

And so, in this assurance of God’s righteousness and with all the promises we find in His Word, what are our expectations for the world to come?

When we think of our **entry into eternity**, and of these promised rewards, what comes to mind?

- Do we dream of a prize, a special reward handed to us personally by the Lord Himself?... because He is just and faithful, and He cannot **'forget our work, our love, and all the services we have rendered'**, as we read in the Letter to the Hebrews!...

- Do we dream of hearing these magnificent words from the Lord's own lips (the Parable of the Talents): 'Well done, **good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Master**'?

- Do we dream of receiving the 'prize of the race' mentioned by the Apostle Paul: a crown, a cup, a medal??

- Do we dream of securing a good place on heaven's 'podium'?

- Do we dream of sitting beside Jesus (at his right or left hand) on his throne, as his disciples James and John asked?

- Or is our greatest hope simply:

- to see our loved ones again

- to meet all the biblical figures, from the patriarchs to the apostles?...

Opinions may differ on the question: 'Will we retain all our memories in heaven?'

Personally, I find it rather hard to imagine a 'break' with our earthly history! It is certainly when this history is reviewed in Eternity, in the full light of God's grace, that all our experiences will finally be truly understood and 'illuminated'!!

In any case, it is in the presence of the Lord that all the 'whys?' and the great, painful questions that have brought us to tears so many times will not only find their meaning but will be 'transformed' into eternal blessings in the light of GRACE!! (see Joseph and his brothers ...)

And with this in mind, we can trust God to bestow the promised rewards upon each of us according to His wisdom, in His love, and with perfect justice ... but:

- what, then, will be the most desirable reward for us, **above all others?**

- What will be the prize that is infinitely more valuable than anything imaginable today ...

- what will surpass in intensity even the greatest splendour of the most beautiful crown??

- TO MEET THE LORD FACE TO FACE??

Ps 58:12 'And men will say: "Yes, there is a reward for the righteous; yes, there is a God who judges on earth."

Ps 16:2: 'I say to the Lord: "You are my Lord; You are my highest good!"'

To illustrate this point a little, we all know that a small child, even whilst looking forward to a cuddle, will still readily ask their grandparents, whom they haven't seen for a long time: 'What present have you brought me?'

An adult, on the other hand, is more likely to say, 'How lovely to see you again!' Both these attitudes are perfectly legitimate!

But they are different, because they depend on the degree of maturity and on the experiences already shared with the loved ones in question... The more we love, the more our affection has deepened over time, and the more the **personal bond** takes centre stage.

So, if we are adult Christians, what is **our ultimate hope??**.....

Do we aspire – I was going to say 'simply' – to **Paradise**, to live in the greatest comfort in an ideal world, to enjoy without restraint all the incalculable blessings of heaven ...

Are we in a hurry to go 'somewhere', where everything is beautiful and perfect??... or, above all, towards SOMEONE... to be in the PRESENCE of the One who is EVERYTHING TO US!??

And there, there will be no more question of fairness, concern for justice or proper proportion!... The 'reward' will be infinitely beyond anything we could ever have 'deserved' and anything we could ever have imagined!!

Whilst the Apostle Paul does indeed speak of rewards and prizes, he makes no secret of what his greatest hope is:

Philippians 1:23: 'I am hard-pressed between the two: I have the desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better'

And the apostle John, in his vision

Revelation 21:3: 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men! He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes,...'

What if the main purpose of our lives were to **prepare ourselves for this encounter?!**

Amos 4:12: 'PREPARE TO MEET YOUR GOD'

(not at all in that context, but for us ... to contemplate the PERSON of the Lord!!)

For young people ... may Jesus be your **best friend**, your **confidant**, to whom you entrust all your **plans** ... and to whom you can say: 'It is YOU who have led me through everything

... right up to HERE!'

Those of us who are a little older... and the elderly: we cannot turn back the clock, we cannot make up for lost time... so let us make the most of the time God grants us to **enrich** our relationship with HIM in every way possible!

To get to know the Lord better and better, so that we may grow ever more **eager to be with him!!**.....

To grow in intimacy with Him, so that we may prepare ourselves for **eternal intimacy!**

To be able to say to Him at last, with a heart overflowing with gratitude: '**You died for me too!**'

Hymn: 'To See My Saviour Face to Face' (ADF 432)