

27. November 2019

Answering Questions
„The Contemplation“

The month is drawing to a close and, as usual, I would like to answer questions from those who follow the speeches on a daily basis. Two of these questions relate directly to spiritual life and therefore fit well into the task of the speeches.

Today, the first question concerns us.

1. How can those who have a "normal" lifestyle be contemplative?

I would like to answer this question in two sections. Today more some aspects of the contemplation theoretically and tomorrow more practical, how to realise a contemplative lifestyle in normal everyday life.

First of all, we note once again that there is a direct contemplative vocation, which usually unfolds in the so-called contemplative orders, in hermitages or similar forms of life.

If we look into the life of some saints, however, we see that from a contemplative life there have also been many activities which have not weakened contemplation, but have given its special imprint to action. Let us take, for example, Saint Teresa of Avila, who was par excellence a contemplative soul, but also carried out many external activities in the power of the Lord.

From this we can conclude that there can also be contemplation in a "normal lifestyle", although certainly shaped differently than if the whole life is geared towards it.

When we look at the Lord Himself as an example, we see that there have always been times when He retreated alone to pray (*cf. Lk 5,26*) or spent forty days alone in the desert (*cf. Mt 4,1-2*).

Taking Jesus himself as an example and then deriving what our life situation allows, is always the best way to find orientation, because the life of the Lord also determines intensive activities and not only a purely restrained contemplative way of life. In addition, the view of other people in which the life of the Lord is

reflected in various ways, which also led the outwardly active life out of a great interiority, also helps us. One will find enough saints who have gone such a way.

Let us first look at what contemplation is and come across meditation. Normally, contemplation is preceded by a longer phase of meditation and many kinds of oral, liturgical and other ways of prayer. Contemplation - let us call it "sinking into God" or "God's direct influence into the soul" - can be prepared from us until God makes Himself experienceable in a special way to the soul.

The influential spiritual author and founder of an religious order, Francois de Sales (1567-1622) distinguished between meditation and contemplation. He compared meditation to the flying of the bees collecting nectar, and contemplation to the enjoyment of honey in the hive. Meditation is exhausting, contemplation effortless and joyful. Contemplation is not a beginner's thing, but requires practice in meditating.

Francois de Sales taught a way of meditation and contemplation, the core elements of which were also spread in broad lay circles. The idea of the omnipresence of God and in particular his presence was cultivated in the viewer's own heart. In the spiritual currents of the 17th and 18th centuries, the practice of God's presence became of great importance. It also found appreciation outside the Catholic world.
(1)

For our above question, we summarize: Contemplation is an intense inner perception of God's presence, or in other words; God Himself takes over the direct perceptible guidance of our lives, and through the Holy Spirit the life of grace unfolds.

In contemplation, one becomes more and more an inner person, who defines himself less by what he does and does to the outside world, but how the love of the heart to God is awakened and nurtured. He acts less of his own power, but follows the impulses and guidance of the Holy Spirit, which - as it is above the Saint Francois de Sales says correctly - makes life more effortless and joyful. This also includes external activities.

From what has been said so far, it becomes clear that the path to contemplation - which God, in his wisdom, gives at his discretion and cannot be acquired by us through our own efforts - usually needs various steps, which are related to the concrete path of holiness.

(1) We will come back to the practice of God's presence in our hearts in the practical application of the theme.