

14. October 2020

**“Asceticism”
Part 2**

As we saw yesterday, asceticism is about becoming more docile to the will of God and not allowing ourselves to be dominated by the inclinations of our fallen nature. It is therefore a means, a necessary effort, which is linked to a goal, namely to improve our disposition to unite ourselves with the will of God. From this point of view, ascetic exercises and asceticism get their deeper meaning and dignity.

St. Paul says in *1 Cor 9:24-27*:

“Do you not realise that, though all the runners in the stadium take part in the race, only one of them gets the prize? Run like that -- to win. Every athlete concentrates completely on training, and this is to win a wreath that will wither, whereas ours will never wither. So that is how I run, not without a clear goal; and how I box, not wasting blows on air. I punish my body and bring it under control, to avoid any risk that, having acted as herald for others, I myself may be disqualified.”

We know very well from sport what Paul is referring to here: the discipline and efforts of sportsmen and women, the sacrifice they make to achieve an earthly goal.

Our goal is a different one: to concentrate everything on God out of love for him and to take up the fight against that which hinders it. When this is before our eyes and the Spirit of the Lord constantly reminds us of it, then we do not run around aimlessly and fight somehow and somewhere, but know what we have to do.

In this context, a word to the “Balta-Lelija warriors”: Any spiritual resistance against anti-Christian powers is carried out in the cooperation of the heavenly Church with us (the Lamb and his army!) In the Holy *Revelation 17:14* it says:

“And they will go to war against the Lamb; but because the Lamb is Lord of lords and King of kings, he will defeat them, he and his followers, the called, the chosen, the trustworthy.”

The ascetic practice of disciplining the body and not abandoning oneself to its disorderly inclinations is a necessity in order to foster spiritual alertness, to strengthen the willingness to respond to God's will and thus be able to say to our Lord: Here we are! What should we do?

I recall two reflections that I gave on 6 and 7 February 2019 (<http://en.elijamission.net/?paged=3&m=201902>). They were about spiritual struggle and asceticism. In particular, I spoke about the efforts for chastity and the virtue of temperance.

We all know how especially chastity is attacked and the spirit of fornication attacks many people. Even in Catholic circles chastity is not always encouraged. Unfortunately, it can even happen that sins against chastity are relativized.

In the reflection of February 6th I wrote:

“There is the most conspicuous and widespread temptation not to deal with the sex drive in the way it is thought by God and taught by the Church. It is a powerful drive, and not a few people are often under its dominant influence and the sins of the flesh in this regard are innumerable! Admittedly, it can be affirmed that the sins against chastity are often rather sins of weakness and not, like pride, directly connected with the will. The latter close the heart more deeply! But the effects of disordered sexuality are devastating.”

Here it is necessary to sincerely accept the struggle and not to compromise. After all, disordered sexuality is not just about moderation of the sensual sphere, as with excessive eating and drinking, but about avoiding sin. All sexual activity outside marriage separates us from God and makes it impossible for grace to penetrate the human being. It is therefore irresponsible to relativize this sphere. How can one enter into battle if one thinks that disordered sexuality is not so bad after all, and that in this way one is no longer guided by the truth of Holy Scripture and Church doctrine? So it becomes clear that any weakening of the true teaching or the practice of letting it fade into the background has an effect on the striving for holiness. The person is weakened, loses his clear-sightedness and falls into a fog.

It is different when one is sincerely struggling for chastity and suffers defeats again and again. This is where the mercy of God with its bright beauty comes to meet us. The adulteress in the biblical example is embraced by the Lord in his mercy (*cf. Jn 8:1-11*). But he admonishes the woman not to sin any more. Here we encounter love based on truth and thus true mercy. Everything else leads to deception!

The pursuit of the virtue of moderation (the right measure) is very important in order to permanently learn to deal with disorderly tendencies and to curb them with the means of asceticism (<http://en.elijamission.net/?p=357>).

The virtue of temperance becomes an inner guardian to use the good gifts of God correctly so that they do not interfere with the life of the spirit. However, this cannot be done without renunciation, which in the biblical text is called to “*put to death the habits originating in the body*”, mortification (*cf. Rom 8:13*).

There are other virtues associated with moderation, such as sobriety, chastity, abstinence, modesty. If we look at each of these virtues, we see their inner relationship, because all these virtues are at the same service: to protect and promote the life of the spirit and thus to grow in love.

There is one more point. If we practise the virtue of moderation, for example, which is done by the application of our will, then we not only reject the immoderate behaviour, thus avoiding serious dangers, but this virtue then has a moderating and healing effect on the restlessness of our sensual desire in the long run.

Asceticism, of course, does not only refer to the sensual sphere, which we first turned to because we deal with it every day, but also refers, for example, to more spiritual goods about which we will then talk tomorrow!