

15. October 2020

“Asceticism”

Part 3

The fight against our disorderly tendencies cannot be limited to the sensual sphere, which must be circumcised and tamed so as not to weaken us and possibly even make us more ready to sin. It must also be applied to disordered spiritual inclinations, for these also burden the soul.

A very important aspect of spiritual asceticism, and thus of spiritual struggle, is the handling of the word and I add - even more subtly - the handling of thoughts and feelings. We all know: Good words build up and strengthen.

The Book of Ecclesiasticus (21:26) says: *“The heart of fools is in their mouth, but the mouth of the wise is in their heart.”*

First of all, it is a matter of curbing the disorderly rush to speak. If you immediately say what you think and feel without subjecting it to an inner examination, you have the "heart on your tongue". One might think that one is particularly open and honest with such behaviour, but misjudges the metaphysical situation of the human being. As a rule, none of us human beings is so purified in our hearts that every word from our mouths - and even less so when there are many - builds up and teaches the other person in the right way. *“No foul word should ever cross your lips; ...do good to your listeners;”* (Eph 4:29) is said in the Holy Scriptures and this is the standard for us.

We must therefore learn to keep our tongue and to tame, which, as the Apostle James says, *“is a pest that will not keep still, full of deadly poison.”* (Jas 3:8) James goes even further and says that no man can tame it. So what is to be done? Hopeless?

Asceticism is not only a human effort! When we use it in relation to God in order to better serve him, it is inspired by the Holy Spirit, i.e. he will support and assist us in all our efforts and confidently tackle this difficult work of taming the tongue. So we can respond to the apostle and say that with God's help it is possible and call out to the Lord: *“Yahweh, mount a guard over my mouth, a guard at the door of my lips.”* (Ps 141:3)

First of all, before we examine the quality of the words, by which I mean perceiving whether there is anything in them about negative feelings, reproaches, accusations, arrogance, etc., it is important to reduce the number of words. A person who talks continuously can neither listen properly, nor is he the master of his speech, nor will he perceive sufficiently whether his words are healing and good for the other person.

It does not always have to be just unpurified words from our mouth, but also many useless words. Many words that are only about natural things weaken the resilience of the soul, because they are a form of "letting oneself go", leaving oneself to a drive that becomes increasingly dominant without us controlling it.

But words are something immensely important and we are also held accountable for our words: *"I tell you this, that for every unfounded word people utter they will answer on Judgement Day, since it is by your words you will be justified, and by your words condemned."* (Mt 12:36-37).

Those who want to make progress on the spiritual path must learn to deal with their words in the Spirit of the Lord. This does not mean that you have to be mute, but that you have to prove your words well, both in number and in "quality".

This, with God's help, requires our effort. Above all, we must first of all realize that we need to restrain our urge to speak and not just consider it as belonging to us and as part of our natural temperament. It should be remembered that asceticism does not mean loss of life, but restraint and circumcision, so that what is right can grow and the superfluous, harmful or even poisonous can be overcome.

Let's try it: to speak less and more consciously before the words come on the tongue to consider them in the heart (*"the mouth in the heart"*).

Today I talked more about the number of words. Even more important is the "quality" of the words. About this and how we can deal with the dark sides of our heart, so that they do not determine our words to the outside world, will be the talk tomorrow!

One more wise word at the end!

When we notice that we do not have a good grip on talking and that we are always talking too much or that we hurt others by doing so, in other words that we are

"fools". Here the Book of Proverb gives us good advice (17:28): *“If the fool holds his tongue, he may pass for wise; if he seals his lips, he may pass for intelligent.”*

So there is always a way! St. Teresa of Avila would certainly agree!