

22. April 2021

The path of purification, Part 2 “Asceticism”

I have dealt with this topic quite extensively in 2020 from 13-17 October and recommend reading it again:

Part 1: <http://en.elijamission.net/asceticism-part-1/>

Part 2: <http://en.elijamission.net/asceticism-part-2/>

Part 3: <http://en.elijamission.net/asceticism-part-3/>

Part 4: <http://en.elijamission.net/asceticism-part-4/>

Part 5: <http://en.elijamission.net/asceticism-part-5/>

However, in the context of this theme it makes sense to go into it again, because asceticism accompanies us throughout life in order to keep our lives in a fruitful order.

Asceticism (effort) is the term we use to describe the struggle, or curbing first of all, the inclinations of our senses. We must learn to curtail them, to give them an order in which these vital forces can develop positively and not become destructive. To do this, we must be aware that these forces often go beyond what is healthy if one simply abandons oneself to the natural impulses. If this happens, then the strength and concentration of the soul is weakened. The “excesses” must be repaired now. One has become distracted, it has to be made up for and the “broken pieces” have to be collected.

The strength and concentration of the soul: What is meant by this expression?

Let us realise that our soul has its home in God. It wants nothing more than to be with God. There it will also live in eternity - completely purified, endowed with a changed body in the everlasting contemplation of God. But she also longs for communion with God already on earth. She would most like to grow “spiritual wings” so that she can easily soar up to the Lord.

Her strength and concentration is strengthened by everything that has to do with God: by prayer, the Word of God, the sacraments, the careful inner path, and so on. However, the soul is weakened when the natural needs become unreasonably and excessively effective. The soul then sticks to the ground, so to speak, bound up in the sphere of the senses.

It is necessary to practise asceticism in order to wisely put the reins on fallen nature; so that the soul in its powers of understanding, memory and free will can more easily follow God's instructions. Our spirit should be the rider who steers the horses so that they do not run away with us. By restraining the desires of our senses, with God's help, we regain dominion over ourselves and become masters in our own house. An original order is now re-established that was disturbed by the Fall. Our spirit was supposed to determine the direction of our will under God's guidance and to use our natural impulses for this purpose. This can now arise anew - although with effort.

In relation to our theme, asceticism is therefore the so-called active purification, which we carry out with our will under the initiative of the Holy Spirit. Everything that now comes under our dominion again, makes us more flexible to follow the impulses of the Spirit of the Lord.

Let us take an example: the Holy Spirit invites us to get up earlier in the morning to pray in silence. My laziness and distraction prevent what God actually wants to give me with the morning prayer time. But the Holy Spirit does not let up and calls me again and again. Now I decide to follow this invitation with my will and educate myself to stand up. Immediately I notice the change. The day begins differently, I am closer to God. Now I resolve to follow God's invitation consistently, work on my laziness and thus also strengthen my will. The more this happens, the easier it becomes with time. Now the Holy Spirit can work and it becomes clearer to me in His light how much I have missed through my laziness. It hurts me, but this pain now becomes the impetus for me not to give in any more and, if it has happened out of weakness, to repent of it immediately and get back on the path. I increasingly notice that this pleases God and that gives peace. The gift of piety has awakened more and enlightened me.

The love of God, the Holy Spirit, has acted on our capacity for love, namely our will, to remove the obstacles that stand in the way of His growing influence on us and has led us to a new freedom in Christ. This example may stand for many in how we participate in the purification of ourselves through asceticism.