

23. April 2021

The path of purification, Part 3 “Restraining the tongue”

In preparing for this reflection, I looked at my text from 15 October 2020 for the sake of the importance of this topic. I consider it so important in our context that I am adopting a large part of it today. It is often said that repetition is the mother of wisdom. And indeed, we repeat prayers, words of the Holy Scriptures and much more in order to imprint them more deeply in our minds. In the same way, we should keep repeating essential aspects of our spiritual life. The bridling of our tongue is essential if the path of holiness is to unfold organically.

The fight against our disordered inclinations cannot be limited to the sphere of the senses, which must be pruned and tamed so as not to weaken us and possibly even make us more easily disposed to sin. It must also be applied to disordered spiritual inclinations, for these burden the soul just as much.

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 in the mouth”. 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 3:8b) James goes even further and says *“nobody can tame the tongue”* (Jas 3:8a). So what is to be done? Hopeless?

However, asceticism is not just 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".