

24. April 2021

“The Path of Illumination and Unification”

It is certainly the “path of purification” which is in the foreground at the beginning and which we will have to deal with throughout our lives. That is why I have devoted most of my attention to this area. This path also includes what in mysticism is called the “dark night of the soul”. It should be added, however, that this night - if it occurs at all - usually comes at a later point in the spiritual life and that probably not so many people consciously experience this kind of purification. It should also be added that the scheme of purification, illumination and unification should not be understood as a rigid rule, but that the Lord always remains sovereign in how He leads the individual soul. But it may be helpful to get at least a small impression of how the transformation of the soul by the Holy Spirit proceeds.

The path of illumination: *“My Lord and my God, give me everything that brings me closer to you.”* (St. Nicholas of Flüe)

On this path of intensive following of Christ, the Lord gives abundant graces so that we are always strengthened by Him. When we have walked the paths of purification and the Lord has already purified many things in us, then the Word of God begins to speak to us even more deeply. Prayer becomes more intimate and lasting, we receive the holy sacraments more consciously and their effect reaches into a greater depth of the soul.

Everything that has already attained greater freedom in us through purification has become more transparent to the love of God, which gives us more and more light on the value and beauties of faith. The supernatural splendour of faith unfolds more strongly in our soul and we learn to recognise everything more and more in the light of God, which surpasses and illuminates our human understanding. All that the Lord has already given us in His grace to enlighten us, now intensifies and the Word becomes more and more flesh in us.

It is a process that we cannot directly bring about. Enlightenment is a fruit of following the Lord, if we remain faithful to our path and cooperate with the graces the Lord gives. The Lord can never be surpassed in His generosity when we ask Him to give us all that brings us closer to Him. But it is up to our attention and faithfulness to make the Lord's gifts fruitful.

The path of unification: *“My Lord and my God, detach me from myself to give my all to you.”*

The greatest obstacle to becoming fully united with God is neither the attraction of this world, the weakness of our flesh or the attacks of the devil, but the attachment to our deep-rooted self-will. Often we are not really aware of this, but we act according to this self-will as a matter of course. In order to overcome it more deeply, we need not only the so-called active purification in which we try to tame it, but what in mystical theology is called the “passive purification”.

In this purification, God brings about circumstances that we did not choose and that we learn to accept in Him. These can be illnesses, unexpected turns of life, sudden persecutions, to name but a few possibilities. It is when these contradict our life plans, for example, and we overcome ourselves and accept them as formation from the Lord, that we begin to unite more deeply with God. With each step of overcoming, which we understand as “self-denial”, it will become easier and easier for us to accept and do the respective recognised will of God!

This too is a process of love through the working of the Holy Spirit, for we will only be able to meet the Lord in eternity if we are completely transformed. If He offers this to us already on earth on the path of holiness, then it is both a preparation for the union in heaven and for the greater fruitfulness on the earthly walk.