

20. January 2022

**In the school of the Fathers of the desert (IV):
"The Struggle for Purity"**

During the last three meditations, we developed an indirect advice given to us by St. Anthony Abbot, a wise desert father. In this context, we reflected on the combat in what we hear, speak and look at, and saw how necessary it is to place these important areas of human life under God's dominion and to defend them against multiple attacks.

"He who sits in the desert and seeks to have a calm heart, has been spared from three combats: that of listening, that of speech and that of sight. He has only one battle left to fight: the battle against impurity".

So, it now remains for us to deal with the struggle against impurity, which is one of the most difficult combats for man. It does not only refer to impurity on the bodily level; it also refers to disordered inclinations on the spiritual and psychological level. But this time we will focus on the bodily dimension.

St. Anthony speaks of a "combat" that is ours to fight, and we must internalise that this is so. Indeed, the Lord leaves us this struggle, to strengthen us and to give us an opportunity to show our faithfulness to Him. If we do not accept the challenge to fight, we have already lost in advance.

We all know that we live in a highly sexualised world, and that provocations in this sphere surround us almost permanently. The difference between now and other times is that today the media can bombard us with impurity. And another fundamental difference compared to other times more marked by Christianity is that today sin is no longer called by its name and the awareness of God's original plan for human sexuality is disappearing more and more.

This shadow is even looming more and more over the Church, which until now represented the counterweight to the sexualisation of society. If, for example, fornication is no longer mentioned in homilies as a sin; if masturbation is spoken of as if it were a natural act; if the tendency to regard homosexuality as a sexual choice is becoming more and more widespread, then the spirit of relativism has infiltrated the Church and people no longer receive the guidance they need. This is tragic!

There are some basics that are essential to fight this battle:

1. We cannot minimise the struggle against impurity, otherwise our strength of resistance will be weakened.

Although this area is very much related to man's weakness, its consequences are nonetheless devastating. It diminishes our capacity to love; and consequently it also

hinders fidelity. It hurts the other person, even if the impure act is committed with mutual consent. Moreover, impurity is, in the first instance, a rejection of God's love and fidelity, for it is precisely this love and fidelity that are to be reflected in pure and ordered relationships.

2. Temptations to impurity must be immediately countered; otherwise they will overcome us.

Jesus tells us that sin begins already when one "looks at a woman lustfully" (Mt 5:28). And we can apply this in many other areas: when we look at an impure picture, photograph or film, when we read literature with such contents, and so on.

3. In every temptation to impurity, we should immediately turn to God through prayer. And if the temptations are accompanied by the respective bodily reactions, so all the more intense should our prayer be, so that we can preserve our freedom in the Lord.

4. I recommend that, in strong temptations of this kind, we turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary. St. Joan of Arc and St. Agnes, who were especially noted for their purity, will also be powerful helpers.

By invoking the names of these holy women, the demons who want to incite us to impurity will be driven away.

5. Positive literature on sexuality will help to understand more deeply the intimate sphere of man.

In this regard, John Paul II's "Theology of the Body" and Dietrich von Hildebrand's "Purity and Virginity", among others, would be highly recommended.

6. An ordered life, both on the spiritual and natural level, will be a good predisposition for the struggle for purity.

Daily meditation on the Word of God, prayer and frequent reception of the sacraments strengthen the inner man and make him better able to resist.

7. Do not despair in defeat.

Get up again, examine the causes of the fall and prepare oneself better for the next fight... Although we should not underestimate the consequences of lust, we should not only focus on it.

8. Offer the struggle for purity as a sacrifice to the Lord, asking Him to deliver others from this evil, so that they too may discover and follow the way of true love.

Hoping that the counsels of the last few days have been helpful for our spiritual life, we will turn from tomorrow to the audio-novel of St. Agnes, whose memory we will celebrate tomorrow. She is a shining example of the virtue of chastity, even to the point of giving her life to preserve it. May her example and witness encourage us to fight for purity of body and soul, and to defend it resolutely with God's grace!