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## A SERIES ON SPIRITUAL LIFE

### Active Purification

In the classical mystical tradition, the path of following the Lord is usually described in three "ways": the purgative way (purification), the illuminative way (illumination) and the unitive way (unification).

By having lived a serious conversion, by striving to acquire the virtues and by consciously taking up the fight against our three enemies - the world, the devil and the flesh - the Lord initiates in us the process of interior purification. We are dealing here with our attachments to our passions, as well as to our own ideas, illusions, desires, etc.

The masters of the spiritual life make a distinction between so-called "active purification" and "passive purification".

Active purification means that, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we try to restrain all that is disordered in us, all that restricts our freedom. This process includes "asceticism", which we have already mentioned above. Let us remember that it is a matter of reconquering the "lordship in our own house", with the help of the Holy Spirit. As we make these efforts, the Lord purifies us, detaching us from all attachment to that which does not come from Him and is not open to Him.

As for our disordered passions, it is easy for us to understand this process. In fact, we have already spoken about it in relation to the virtue of temperance. But purification goes beyond this... It is not only a matter of overcoming every disordered dominion and regaining "lordship" over ourselves. In fact, every sin and every voluntary imperfection limits the power to love; that is to say, our capacity to respond to the love of God is reduced or even permanently affected. It is true that, with the forgiveness of sins, we are always offered anew the possibility of returning to the path of love; nevertheless, the Lord wants us to be purified of our evil inclinations and, with His help, to work on them... All our strength to love must be directed undividedly towards God, in order to be able to better fulfill the first commandment, which tells us to love the Lord with all our strength....

The concept of "active purification" emphasizes our cooperation for this process to take place. Then, we ourselves must perceive where we are still attached, where there is inner disorder, so that we can then take the appropriate measures and necessary steps. This requires decisions of the will and also putting into practice the so-called "second freedom".

The "first freedom" consists in making a firm decision regarding our spiritual path. Let's take an example... I realize that I am still too curious about worldly news and novelties. And this affects my spiritual life: it has repercussions on my prayer, it takes up a lot of my time and satisfies in me that inner craving for all that is new; without going into further analysis of other possible consequences... Therefore, with my "first freedom", I make the decision to proceed against this curiosity, to be more attentive to what is going on inside me and to change my attitude. Concretely, I decide that the time that I used to devote to satisfying my curiosity, I will henceforth use it for prayer or for reading Sacred Scripture; that is to say, I give it to God.

Now, what does the "second freedom" that we mentioned above consist of?

It turns out that the decision I made with my "first freedom" will succumb again and again under my weakness, and then there is the danger of becoming discouraged because I have again failed to achieve my purpose. This is where the "second freedom" must be applied, which is necessary to sustain my first decision. It is a matter of taking the steps that will help me to implement this purpose. In the example of curiosity, a measure would be to avoid surfing the internet "just like that", or not reading just any magazine that I have before my eyes, or not to ask questions out of pure curiosity when I am conversing with someone, nor to want to know everything, etc... This means that I set certain rules and take certain measures that support my first decision and invoke the help of the Holy Spirit to apply my "second freedom".

In all this, we must always keep in mind what is the motivation for this active purification: We do it to get closer to God! Thus, with our cooperation, the Lord purifies us, so that the attention of the heart and the senses are not directed to passing things of little value, but are undividedly centered on Him.