



23. February 2023

LENTEN ITINERARY

Day 10: "The struggle against gluttony"

Yesterday we reflected on the passage of the purification of the Temple, and then applied it to our "inner temple," which also requires purification.

At the beginning of our "Lenten itinerary" I quoted the prayer of St. Nicholas of Flüe, the first part of which said, "My Lord and my God, detach me from everything that distances me from You." This affirmation synthesizes the so-called "purgative way" in the spiritual journey.

In today's Gospel (Mt 5:20-26), Jesus tells His disciples that if their *"uprightness does not surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees"* they *"will never get into the kingdom of Heaven"*.

Next, the Lord gives some samples of what this greater uprightness is to be like. For example: *"Anyone who is angry with a brother will answer for it before the court; anyone who calls a brother "Fool" will answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and anyone who calls him "Traitor" will answer for it in hell fire"* (Mt 5:20).

But why does the Lord expect from those who follow Him a greater uprightness than that of the scribes and Pharisees?

"When someone is given a great deal, a great deal will be demanded of that person; when someone is entrusted with a great deal, of that person even more will be expected" (Lk 12:48).

With the coming of the Redeemer into the world, people are offered a much greater grace than that of the Old Covenant. For this reason, the demands to respond to this grace are also greater. In other words: in His Son Jesus, God has shown us a new level of love. And now we, who have been born again of water and the Spirit (Jn 3:5), are called to accept this love, to respond to it and to bring it into this world. We Christians have been given much, and in particular Catholics have been given the gift of drawing from the treasures of grace entrusted to the Church.

Now, if we apply this "greater grace" given to us in the Person of Jesus to our process of purification, we can conclude that the demand is also greater and that the purification must be all the more profound. Not only must we keep the commandments, but we must learn to perceive our evil inclinations and counteract them with God's grace.

Jesus teaches us that *"from within, from the heart, that evil intentions emerge"* (Mk 7:21). At the same time, He makes us the wonderful promise on the Mount of Beatitudes: "Blessed are the pure in heart: they shall see God" (Mt 5:8). This shows us how important it is to work on our own heart, so that we acquire a new heart and do not fall victim to our evil inclinations.

To do this, the first thing we must do is to undertake the struggle against the so-called "vices", with a healthy asceticism. To develop this theme, I will quote some passages from John Cassian, a monk and spiritual author of the fourth century. His advice is still valid today, and some of it can be adopted also by those who do not live in a monastery, but serve in the world.

Let us, then, take a look at the vices that darken our soul. Let us begin today with the fight against gluttony.

In speaking about fasting, John Cassian points out various prerequisites and then mentions the general goal:

"The common aim is that no one should be over-satiated, for not only the quality of the food and the taste to the palate, but also the excessive quantity dulls the heart's capacity to fight and, if the spirit grows fat simultaneously with the body, it kindles the fuel of harmful passions."

And he continues, "The needs of human nature are not opposed to the purity of the heart, provided they claim only what the body really needs and not what the cravings demand."

Further on, John Cassian gives us three practical tips on how to control gluttony:

- 1) Respect meal times.
- 2) Do not overfill your stomach.
- 3) Do not give in to cravings and gluttony, and avoid extravagant meals.

St. Paul exhorts us: *"Let us live decently, as in the light of day; with no orgies or drunkenness, no promiscuity or licentiousness, and no wrangling or jealousy. Let your armour be the Lord Jesus Christ, and stop worrying about how your disordered natural inclinations may be fulfilled"* (Rom 13:13-14).

In our Lenten journey, we have already dealt with the theme of fasting, considering it as "wood" to feed the fire during this time of preparation. Now this theme comes up again in context with the struggle against gluttony, showing us an important objective of moderation in eating and drinking. While gluttony dulls the fighting strength of the heart, fasting and proper handling of food strengthen it. Against this background, the Lord's statement that certain demons can only be cast out through fasting and prayer can be better understood (Mt 17:21).

From today's meditation, let us retain the following: in order to enter more deeply into the path of purification, we must learn to overcome the struggle against vices with the grace of God. We will return to this theme tomorrow, because the restraint of our sensual vices will also help us to combat our spiritual vices.

Meditation on the reading of the day: <http://en.elijamission.net/god-wants-to-forgive/>
Meditation on the Gospel of the day: <http://en.elijamission.net/the-unjust-anger/>