



8. October 2022

A SERIES ON THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

The Asceticism of Thoughts

(Part I)

NOTE: During these days we will be developing in our meditations a theme for the spiritual life. For those who would like to listen to a meditation based on the reading of the day (Gal 3:7-14), we leave the corresponding link here: <http://en.elijamission.net/the-law-kept-us-under-guard/>

“Perverse thoughts separate people from God.” (Wis 1:3)

With the virtue of temperance, we try to order, with God's help, the disharmony which our senses have generated in our life. In this process, the so-called "asceticism of the thoughts" plays a fundamental role, so that we may also regain control over our thoughts, and not be helpless at their mercy.

As in all other ascetic practices, we must first understand the deeper meaning of the asceticism of thoughts. It is a matter of separating ourselves from the great dispersion of thoughts, of freeing ourselves from the control that they often exercise over us so that, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can progressively acquire mastery over them. It is love for God that moves us to want to submit even our thoughts to His will. Therefore, the more we advance in this ascetical practice, the more we will grow in our love for God and, consequently, also in our love for our neighbor.

Already many centuries ago, the father of monks, St. Benedict, spoke of the need to banish from our hearts every insinuation of the devil and to grasp even the smallest thoughts in order to dash them against the rock that is Christ.

If we want to follow the Lord in a vigilant attitude, we cannot allow ourselves to be carried away by evil thoughts, nor by those that simply invade our mind. We must know how to discern which thoughts are worthy of our attention and which are not; and distinguish the thoughts that are worth deepening and developing from those that are not worth dwelling on. We must also learn to determine the opportune moment for a particular thought. If one is trained in the asceticism of thoughts, one will become more

and more sensitive to perceiving how even useless thoughts are detrimental to the strength and concentration of the soul.

From the spiritual point of view, thoughts will be all the better and more fruitful the more deeply and intimately they unite us to God. Therefore, if we acquire a spiritual way of thinking, we will be concretely fulfilling the first commandment: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your strength"* (Dt 6:5).

If we begin to put into practice the asceticism of thoughts, we will quickly notice how many false, harmful, illusory, self-centered and vain thoughts want to dominate us and are reflected in our daily thinking. These contribute significantly to our inner disintegration. How many discussions and meaningless conversations take place within us; how many chimeras are to be found there! By the term "chimeras", the Desert Fathers meant that torrent of delusive thoughts and unbridled fantasies; the unreal products of our imagination with which we must contend within ourselves.

And this torrent of thoughts is not even usually voluntary; it invades the person without their wanting it. It is a great hindrance to prayer and inner reflection, and is capable of weakening the state of the soul.

In tomorrow's meditation, we will talk about how to concretely undertake the asceticism of thoughts...