

23. January 2023

Blessed Henry Suso's advice for the spiritual life

Today we are celebrating the memory of Blessed Henry Suso, who is perhaps less well known in the universal Church than in the German-speaking countries. He is a reliable spiritual teacher, and we know how much we are in need of spiritual teachers in these times, which unfortunately are becoming more and more scarce. Therefore, it becomes all the more important to let speak and listen to those teachers who have been given to the Church and who are part of her incorruptible treasure. Let us listen, then, to one of Blessed Henry Suso's phrases for today's meditation:

"A serene man must not occupy himself at all times with what he still lacks; rather, he must ask himself what else he could do without."

We are often preoccupied with accumulating as much as we can. On the one hand, one takes pleasure in the things of this world; on the other hand, they seem to give us a certain security, perhaps even a kind of home... Henry Suso, on the other hand, knows that being too busy with earthly things distracts us from God. For him, the antidote consists in examining what is not really necessary, so as not to tie the heart to passing things. Moreover, the desire to possess always brings with it the danger of greed.

The Blessed uses the term "serenity" or, to put it more precisely, he speaks of the "serene man". True serenity is born of trust in God. Then one does not immerse oneself in the dynamics of negative events and does not allow oneself to be disturbed or moved by them. Rather, one begins to relate all events to God, trying to contemplate them in His light. In doing so, we are moved by the certainty that, in the end, God will use everything for the good of those who love him (cf. Rom 8:28).

There is therefore a clear difference between this attitude of confident serenity and an attitude of indifference or even so-called stoicism, which claims invulnerability and insensitivity in the face of events. Nor should this serenity be confused with an attitude of human optimism, that everything will turn out well; nor with a kind of drowsiness, which does not perceive what is going on around it. Rather, true serenity springs from a deep union with God and from having learned to look at all things

from his perspective. Thus, it becomes easier to deal with the diversity of situations that arise with this calmness....

In this same inner attitude, one will learn to discern carefully how to handle the things of this world. The gift of knowledge begins to become effective in us, teaching us that the things of this world are nothing in themselves. Therefore, our efforts to acquire them should not become predominant, but, following Blessed Henry's advice, we should rather question what else we can do without.

In His Wisdom, God arranged that the delight of the transient should not satiate us and leave us with a feeling of emptiness. There are people who try to evade this inner experience, and try to cover up the emptiness by accumulating more and more transient goods. However, this is the wrong response, for emptiness is only a clue for us to seek the One who is able to fill it.

I would express Blessed Henry's advice in my own words: "Do not cling to the things of this world. You can include them in your life, you can delight in them; but do not give them your heart and do not let them possess it. Our friend St. Paul also tells us something similar: *"Let those who enjoy this world [live] as if they did not enjoy it"* (1 Cor 7:31).

So, no unnecessary accumulation of material goods and seeking pleasure and security in them. Rather, it is advisable to walk hand in hand with God in our life, being content with little and finding only in the Lord our true and lasting happiness.