

## On Scrupulosity, V

If you are watching how you are praying, then you are watching and not praying. Worrying about whether this prayer was said perfectly or that one was incomplete or whether you were too distracted can result in your looking at yourself too much, and not God. Contrast this worry with the instruction of St. Paul:

“Be nothing solicitous: but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your petitions be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4.6-7)

This little passage contains the basics of what is needed for good prayer. That is, once a man puts himself in God’s presence as best he can so that he is not concentrating on worldly things, then he is not to be solicitous in anything (not having any anxiety at all), and with prayer (adoring God) supplication (asking God for the favors needed at that time) and thanksgiving (expressing gratitude to God which drives out anxiety), then the man praying will experience much peace.

“Fear not, only believe.” Christ once said to a ruler of a synagogue (Mk. 5.36). Fear is an excellent thing, very useful, and necessary for many. But for a man who suffers from scrupulosity, he must concentrate on belief in the mercy of God, and not on his own inadequacies. Besides, everyone needs to learn the lesson

of St. Peter who, while running on the water, took his eyes off Christ to concentrate on the waves (all the troubles of life) which caused him to sink and cry out in terror at the thought of drowning.

The tripartite enemies of the soul: The world, the flesh and the devil, are not to be taken lightly as if they do not exist. But the scrupulous – and everyone else for that matter – should not *worry* about these enemies. We should not stew, and be anxious about these enemies. Instead, we should keep our eyes on Christ. Stew about the world, and it can make an armed sort of survivalism your chief occupation in life; reading constantly about what is wrong with the government, stocking up ammunition and potable water. Stew about the flesh, and you might carry nutrition to an extreme, constantly worrying about getting enough anti-oxidants. Stew about the devil, and you might load up your house with crosses from top to bottom.

Look at the story of Saints Martha and Mary in the house of Lazarus (Lk. 10.38-42).

“Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain town: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who, sitting also at the Lord’s feet, heard his word. But Martha was busy about much serving. Who stood and said: Lord, hast thou no care that my sister

hath left me alone to serve? Speak to her therefore, that she help me. And the Lord answering, said to her Martha, Martha, thou art careful and art troubled about many things: But one thing is necessary. Mary hath chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

Martha is not a saint yet here; she seems somewhat obsessed with *doing* things for God and *earning* His love. Mary on the other hand is at peace, because she is *being* a child of God and *letting* Him love her. The scrupulous man focuses on not sinning, and easily does “not sinning” become the object of worship, and not the Lord Himself. He must learn to turn to God, and worship directly as Mary did.

But it seems as if the scrupulous man does turn to God doesn't it? He prays for deliverance from his condition, he confesses his sins, receives communion, etc. But he can still be plagued with erroneous thoughts of God. So in addition to following the advice/commands of his director, he must ask for the grace to believe that God will take all his thoughts, no matter how blasphemous or flat-out evil they may seem. The sooner he learns to give all his thoughts to God (Who can see them and knows of them anyway), the sooner he will be healed. He must trust God,

who desires his company, his conversation, Who desires him.

All of us should remember that thoughts are not sinful in themselves. And while the notion of giving evil thoughts to God may seem odd or inappropriate, we should remember the 136<sup>th</sup> Psalm, verses 8 and 9: “O daughter of Babylon, miserable: blessed shall he be who shall repay thee thy payment which thou hast paid us. Blessed be he that shall take a dash thy little ones against the rock.”

On the surface, it looks like pure Jewish vengeance against the Babylonians; which given the way the Babylonians behaved, is not a surprise. But the most important sense of Scripture is the *sensus plenior*, or the fuller sense. In this, as St. Benedict tells us, the precious baby whose head we are to dash is our favorite sin. Another meaning of the fuller sense is that Christ is the Rock, and He is the one against whom the destruction of the temptation can take place, before it reaches maturity, or a full blown sin. The scrupulous man can then give (in the sense of smashing) his sinful thoughts to Christ once a day (doing it over and over is a mistake), and Christ will do the rest.