

## On Gaining and Keeping Purity, IV

which plays the decisive role. Change your disposition and the change in your actions will follow!"

Back to St. Thomas, "Now, the movement whereby one moves away from something is contrary to the movement whereby one approaches it; thus, whitening is contrary to blackening. Consequently, the will must abandon sin by moving in a contrary direction from those movements whereby it was inclined toward sin. Now, it was inclined toward sin by appetite (desire) and enjoyment in regard to lower things. Therefore, it must move away from sin by means of certain penances whereby it suffers some injury because of the sin that it has committed. For, just as the will was drawn toward consent to the sin by means of pleasure, so is it strengthened in the detestation of sin by means of penances."

This point is crucial to understand. To move away from impurity, to walk in a different direction necessarily means willing, choosing, desiring to do things that are the opposite of the direction of the sin.

More from St. Thomas:

Again, we observe that even brute animals may be drawn back from the greatest pleasures by means of painful blows. But he who rises again from sin must not only detest past sin, but also avoid future sin. So, it is fitting that he suffer some affliction for his sin so that in this way he may be strengthened in his resolution to avoid sins.

Besides, the things that we gain as a result of labor and suffering, we love more and preserve more carefully. Thus, those who amass wealth by their own labor spend less money than those who get it without work—say, from their parents or in any other way. But for the man who is rising again from sin, it is most necessary that he maintain the state of grace and the

love of God carefully, for he lost them by sinning through negligence. Therefore, it is proper for him to endure labor and suffering for the sins that he has committed.

There is no way around this. There is no shortcut, no easy way out of impurity. We might wish there were – just pray a novena and be done with it – but this is not real. We must choose the harder path, deliberately, with reflection, and long to change our hearts.

Moreover, the order of justice demands that a punishment be assigned for a sin. Now, the wisdom of the governance of God becomes evident from the fact that order is preserved in things. So, it belongs to the manifestation of the divine goodness, and of the glory of God, for punishment to be the payment for sin. But the sinner, by sinning, acts against the order that is divinely established, thus trespassing against the laws of God. So, it is fitting that he should pay for this action by punishing himself because he had formerly sinned; indeed, in this way, he dissociates himself entirely from disorder.

In other words, it is only fair that there be a punishment; that there be consequences for impurity. It would be unjust to travel down the path of impurity and expect little or no effort to retrace our steps to get back to innocence. But the good news is that many, many souls have done just this. Legions of saints have turned their backs on sin, let Christ into their hearts, and started to walk a different way.

“The pure soul is a beautiful rose, and the Three Divine Persons descend from Heaven to inhale its fragrance.” Saint John Vianney.

Continuing with what St. Thomas wrote in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*: "Now, man renounces sin in his will provided he repents his past sin and forms the intention of avoiding it in the future. So, it is necessary that a man who is rising again from sin both repent for past sin and intend to avoid future sin."

Notice how this has to do with the heart. In the Old Testament the inspired writers incessantly stress the truth that God does not look so much to our exterior actions, the prayer of the lips, and sacrifice. Much more does He look to the "heart," as to the genuine sentiment of love, of obedience, penance. God does not complain so much about the perverted actions of the Israelites as about their "hardened heart," about their adulterous perverse dispositions (cf. Is 6:9f). The summit of the great Messianic prophecies is reached in God's promise to wash away the sins of His people, give to them a "new heart," and instill fear of Him and love for Him in their hearts.. "And I will give them one heart, and will put a new spirit in their bowels: and I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh." (Ez. 11:19) God does not desire the rending of garments, but the inner sentiment of penance. "Rend your hearts, and not your garments." (Jn. 2:13)

The heart is the seat of disposition, above all the seat of love. Not merely our actions must be well ordered, but first of all the seat, the organ of love. This must be "pure," that is, it may not be filled with false love and defiled through perverse dispositions. Of its inmost nature, the heart that is pure will turn to the true objects of its inner sentiments. Here in this life already it will look lovingly to

God, and in eternity will behold Him face to face.

The Pharisees severely condemned the external infraction of petty human prescriptions, the Lord castigated the "evil heart," the base disposition, from which, as from a polluted spring, all evil flows (cf. Mt. 15:18). Without good disposition, every action of ours, even sacrifice and prayer, is worthless before God. Christ complains, as did the prophets, about the cult which was mere lip service because it lacked the interior disposition and good will (Mt. 15:8). The most bitter reproach is St. Peter's accusation of Simon Magus: "Thy heart is not right before God." (Acts 8:21)

Conversion and acceptance of the faith presupposes a change of disposition. "Repent and believe in the gospel." The Greek word used here is *metanoiein*, meaning an inner change of thinking, or an utter interior reorientation.

St. Paul, like St. Stephen, demands "the circumcised heart" instead of external circumcision – an inner disposition of a life of penance and change of life. The essence of the imitation of Christ then, is to assume the inner spirit of Christ. "Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus." (1 Tim. 1:5) This new inner spirit is made possible, not merely through conformity with the example of Christ, but also and much more through the indwelling of Christ in us. Christ dwelling in us is the actual source of power for this renewal within us.

This has always been taught in Holy Mother Church. St. Augustine once wrote, "It is not the exterior accomplishment, but the moral disposition that