

On Gaining and Keeping Purity, IX

exposed to the pure light of the Mother of God. Why is this? It is God's secret. One would think that confession alone, or confession together with the other sacraments and the full liturgical life would suffice to deliver a man from every spiritual malady and heal him of every wound. My experience has been, nonetheless, that God reserves the treatment of certain things to the Immaculate Mother of God. She alone has a sureness and gentleness of touch that allows her to disinfect and treat wounds deep inside us without, in the process, inflicting too great a pain.

This is why the wise spiritual father will always refer those who come to him with their thoughts to the Immaculate Mother of God, the Joy-of-the-Sorrowing, as Saint Seraphim called her. This is why I have, over the past weeks, insistently invited each one of you to take up the Rosary. Heed what I have been saying. Do not listen to the dark and confusing voices from below that say, "Such is not for you. It may work for others, but you cannot be helped". Never was it known that any man cried to the Blessed Virgin out of the depths of his distress without obtaining relief, hope, and enough grace to persevere in praying and in hoping. O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.

And for a vocal prayer for this intention, again, Dom Kirby wrote a beautiful one.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, I open to thee the door of my heart and welcome thee into every part of my life. Enter in, shine thy immacu-

late brightness into every dark corner; let the fragrance of thy purity dispel the fetid vapors of my sins; change into pools of sweetness the pools of bitterness that have for so long poisoned the deep places of my heart. Too long have I tried to live without thy virginal beauty to fill my eyes, without thy maternal solicitude to wipe away my tears, and without thy good counsel to guide me in the way of peace. Abide with me, O Immaculate Conception, O Queen assumed into heaven, O Joy-of-All-Who-Sorrow, that I may begin, at last, to prefer nothing whatsoever to the love of Christ, to spend myself in adoration of His true Body, and to find in all that obedience asks of me the will of Him Who, in His inscrutable wisdom and inexhaustible mercy, has called me to this life, in this place that belongs to thee, with these other sons of thine, the fathers and brothers whom thou hast chosen for me. To all of us, show thyself a Mother and, at the hour of our death, be to us life's final consolation and heaven's open gate. Amen.

It is very, very useful to meditate repeatedly on the great truths of salvation. Remember that St. Augustine said it takes forty meditations on a parable of the Gospel to begin to really understand the truth that is in the parable.

The choice of the subject should be made sometime after night prayers or even during the day, for the meditation of the next day. But whatever time you choose to pick a subject, try to make the choice at the same time each day or evening, to gain the habit of mental prayer.

Where should you make the mental prayer? The choice of place is not unim-

mediate preparation for mental prayer basically consists of two things:

1. Being recollected at the approach of meditation. This is like Moses going before the burning bush on Mt. Horeb. He was commanded "Take off thy shoes for thou art on holy ground." St. Gregory the Great says that this act signifies for us a withdrawing or removing ourselves from worldly affairs. The shoes indicate a connection with the earth, and so before mental prayer, it is essential to put aside all our affairs (family members, work, repair on the house, entertainments, etc.) so that the only One we think of is God.

In this step we need to put ourselves in the presence of God, so that we are aware of His presence; that He is listening to what we have to say; that He is paying attention. St. Francis de Sales says that if we have to take the entire time allotted for mental prayer to accomplish this, then we should do so. Being recollected and being in His presence is essential to mental prayer.

2. In foreseeing the subject of mental prayer, the principal considerations, and the fruit that we wish to derive from it.

Picking the subject needs some wisdom. The more specific and concrete the subject, the more fruitful the meditation, is the rule of thumb. For example, if I try to meditate on something that is abstract such as goodness, then it will be very difficult to concentrate on it. On the other hand, if I meditate on the healing of Bartimaeus, then the details of the Gospel account of that healing will re-

veal the goodness of the Savior in a far more accessible way. It's sort of like having to write an essay – the more specific the topic the easier it is to write. Another aspect of picking a good topic is taking a spiritual book such as *Divine Intimacy*, which has very short chapters, and just taking the subject of each chapter as the topic for the meditation. This is wise especially if you are just starting out on meditation. Otherwise, it is good to pick a topic in accord with the needs of your soul. In the case of the need of purity, this for example could be some aspect of the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Dom Mark Kirby, O.S.B. had this to say about our subject:

There is one other thing from the episode in Genesis 3:8-15 to which I must call your attention. It is the *Proto-Evangelium*, the promise of the serpent's defeat and the salvation of man through the Woman. There are, in the interior life and in the monastic struggle, certain things that I cannot explain fully, but that I know absolutely to be true. Among these is the role of the Immaculate Conception, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Παναγία, the *Tota Pulchra*.

Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in battle array? (Canticle 6:10)

There are deep wounds in most of us that can be healed only when