

## On Gaining and Keeping Purity, XI

1. I could focus on the fear, and be anxious and skulking and fretful that I might be found out.

2. I could focus on the joy I could give God and my angel and patron saint by my good actions.

Obviously, the second is preferable. So if I receive an impure thought, and even slightly move away from it, then a victory is won in the spiritual combat of the day. And if I just lift up my mind and heart a little to God at 9 AM, and say "Glory to God," then I have won a victory. If at 10 AM I lift up my mind and heart and say "Lord, you know my heart" then I have won a victory. So throughout the day it is very possible, doable, simple, and very efficacious.

So if you find you can't do mental prayer for some reason, you can at least practice recollection. May each of us do so. The practice will build up the Kingdom of God, and will take mortal sin away from us.

The next thing to cover is the subject of fraternal charity, which also does wonders to keep us pure. St. Thomas continues then from the *Summa Contra Gentiles*:

“But the things that we can accomplish through the efforts of our friends we seem to do ourselves, for friendship makes two persons one in love, and especially in the love of charity. And so, just as a person can make satisfaction to God by himself, so also can he do it through another person, especially in case of necessity. Indeed, the punishment that a friend suffers for oneself one regards as if it were suffered by oneself. Thus, one does not escape punishment provided one suffer along with a

suffering friend—and all the more so, the more one is the cause of his suffering. Besides, the love of charity in the person who suffers for a friend makes his satisfaction more acceptable to God than if he suffered for himself, for in the one case it is prompted by charity; in the other, by necessity. It may be taken from this that one person can make satisfaction for another provided both abide in charity. Hence, the Apostle says in Galatians (6:2): “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so you shall fulfill the law of Christ.”

In another epistle (I Cor.) St. Paul says "Each one carries the other's burden, and in this way we fulfill the law of Christ." Every effort to help a neighbor by prayer or labor or encouragement or by whatever means, will result in advancement in the virtue of purity. Just having pity on those who have fallen is a good means to stay out of sin. As St. Philip Neri once said. "To be without pity for other men's falls, is an evident sign that we shall fall ourselves shortly."

We need friends to spur us on to victory over sin. Develop then, healthy relationships. Find those of sound moral character and solid faith. Such people will act as an inspiration for doing good (the opposite are an occasion of sin). Chances are good that you will meet such persons at the parish.

And on the negative side of friendship if you will, we must overcome resentments. I'll pick that up in the next insert.

At the end of our time of mental prayer, it is a blessed and good thing to make a spiritual bouquet. Like a small batch of flowers which you might carry with you to put up to your nose and inhale the scent, a spiritual bouquet is a thought or maxim taken from the time of meditation such as a verse from Holy Scripture or a saying of a saint. It should be brief, such as one sentence.

Then throughout the day (presuming the meditation is made in the morning), recall it, bring it to mind even if very briefly, and this will give you great benefit and help in keeping contact with God. That's the key – contact with God. This frequent contact throughout the day cannot be overemphasized in maintain the virtue of purity.

Here is an example. If you were to take a passage from the 7th chapter of the Rule of St. Benedict – just one paragraph which takes little time to read – but read it slowly and reverently more than once, then meditate on it for a time, it will bear great fruit (I chose this passage for one of my meditations recently). I'll use the translation of Abbot Justin McCann.

The first degree of humility, then, is that a man keep the fear of God before his eyes, altogether shunning forgetfulness. Let him ever remember all the commandments of God, and how hell will burn for their sins those who despise him; and let him constantly turn over in his heart the eternal life which is prepared for those that fear him. And guarding himself

always from sins and vices, whether of thought, word, hand, foot, or self-will, and checking also the desires of the flesh, let him consider that God is always beholding him from heaven, that his actions are everywhere visible to the eye of the Godhead, and are constantly being reported to God by the angels. The prophet teaches us this when he represents God as always present in our thoughts: God searcheth the heart and the reins; (Ps. 7:10) and again: The Lord knoweth the thoughts of men; (Ps. 18:2) and again he saith: Thou hast understood my thoughts from afar; (Ps. 138:3) and: The thought of man shall praise thee. (Ps. 75:11) In order then that he may be careful regarding his wrongful thoughts, let the good brother say constantly in his heart: Then shall I be spotless before him, if I shall have kept myself from my iniquity. (Ps. 17:24)

You can easily imagine how different life would be with just working on the first degree of humility (there are 12 in all). Packed into that one paragraph is food for many meditations, and recollection.

So for example, if I just took one line from the Rule – my actions are constantly being reported to God by the angels – and tried to remember that throughout the day, then my life would change. This is not a morose thought in any way. The slightest act of virtue, benevolence, generosity or kindness is immediately reported to God with great delight and joy. So the line could be taken in several ways.