

On Gaining and Keeping Purity, XII

found to avail; "Flee from the danger" he says, "if you desire to triumph." "I own that I am weak" said St. Jerome, "I will not attempt the combat because I fear defeat...I fly lest I be vanquished."

Of course the danger for most of us lies not in open, voluntary occasions of grievous sin, but rather in certain conditions that conduce to lukewarmness, weariness and torpor. So fleeing from the enervating influence of frivolity, idleness, indolence and dissipation is wisdom. "He that loveth danger shall perish in it." (Eccl. 3:27)

And how do we flee? By planning first of all. Planning the day right up to those moments when we shall be most tempted to fritter away precious time, to avoid this vice, thus averting a path to a fall. But despite the best of plans, we shall still be tempted, and must run away from them. There are two temptations from which we must always flee: against the Faith and against purity. We can flee to a mystery of the Faith like the Nativity of the Lord, or to a person such as Our Lady by means of prayer, or we can physically flee to a friend by means of conversation or just being in their company. If this is not possible, then a pleasant daydream about a favorite but innocent activity is also very useful.

The way we get up in the morning cannot be overlooked. How we start something often determines how it will end. If I hit the snooze button on the alarm clock for my first conscious act of the day, then I have begun it with an act of self-indulgence. If instead I make the Sign of the Cross, then I begin the day with an act of self-sacrifice, and at the same time an adoration of God. What a difference! This is a simple, but a profound thing.

We should not neglect physical exercise. Any serious attempt at building the virtue of chastity in the soul will include good physical exercise. This might be manual labor, running, swimming, walking, or even light calisthenics. Neglect of exercise allows the flesh to seek its comfort and indulgence, which is a soil for impurity.

Nor should we neglect fun. I mean just plain fun. In our workaholic culture this is often overlooked, but much to our detriment. For this, we need several things. For example, someone might say he enjoys snow skiing, and that is his fun. But this cannot be done every day; other things should join it as a kind of arsenal – a collection of weaponry against idleness and self-indulgence. This might be growing vegetables in a greenhouse to building a model airplane. Electronic entertainment such as video games might be fun, but they will be almost useless for purity. These tend not to tame and harmonize passion with the intellect and virtue, but incite and stimulate the passions – just the opposite of what we need to do.

In fact, video games can be an occasion of sin, just like music, movies, television, surfing the internet, etc. And avoiding the occasions of sin is of great importance in the gaining and keeping of purity. One of the Desert Fathers wrote: "Whatever may disturb the purity and tranquility of our mind, however useful and necessary it may appear, must be avoided as harmful."

And as St. Philip Neri once said, "In the matter of purity there is no greater danger than the not fearing the danger; when a man does not distrust himself, and is without fear, it is all over for him."

So of the means to keep and gain purity, I suppose it goes without saying that sorrow for sins is necessary. The more sorry we are for sins, the less inclined we will be to commit them. This is where mental prayer is so crucial, since true sorrow will come from it. But we have to ask for it. This is one reason why so many don't have the grace of repentance – because they don't ask for the grace. I mean really ask – day and night.

And of course frequenting the sacraments not only for the removal of sins but also for the prevention of them. Going once a month is a good practice, but with habitual sin one might need to go once a week or even once a day (this would not apply to those who are scrupulous).

We should not ignore the power of the Holy Eucharist (worthily received) to both remove and prevent sin. St. John Cassian wrote, "When the Eucharist is received by a person, it burns out, as it were, by a kind of fire, the spirit that occupies his members and that is trying to hide in them, and it flees. But the enemy will revile the one whom he is besieging all the more when he sees him cut off from the heavenly medicine, and the more he thinks he is removed from the Spiritual remedy the more fearlessly and frequently he will make trial of him." So if we take advantage of this greatest of all sacraments, then we will attend the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, receive Holy Communion, and adore the Blessed Sacrament outside of Mass. The more frequent we do this, the stronger we become against sin.

Resentments fuel self-pity which in turn seeks an outlet in some self-indulgence, since we would prefer to feel good about ourselves. So if we put our mind on get-

ting rid of resentments, by turning the memory of them into prayer for example, they can be overcome. But we must do something, as any kind of self-pity and self-indulgence (which go hand-in-hand with resentments) create a soil for impurity.

We should also strive to stay close to the Mother of God. St. Paul once wrote "Men sin because they love the darkness." The only way to be impure is to leave her side, her presence, her love. We have to leave her and go into darkness – which in this case is deliberately shutting out God and His most pure Mother. Stay close to her like St. John did at the crucifixion, and you won't fall into mortal sin. Thus, the daily Rosary, consecration to her Immaculate Heart, wearing the Brown Scapular and kissing it each morning, and attending Mass on her feast days are various ways to stay close. Just going to her in our minds lifted up in prayer will do wonders.

And we should not neglect the sacramentals. Wearing a Miraculous Medal, a St. Benedict's Medal, a Brown Scapular; always having a blessed rosary on our person; having a supply of holy water at home (and using it!); looking at a good crucifix and kissing it; having a nativity scene in the house and using it, having good pictures or paintings of holy things and looking at them...we would be fools not to use the sacramentals.

When the enemy who assails us threatens our chastity, let us never forget that our urgent duty is to flee from him. St. Augustine, who had so cruelly suffered from such attacks, warns us again and again in the course of his writings to use the only means which he, by sad experience, had