

17. October 2020

**Asceticism
Part 5**

Today we turn to the subject of how to deal with thoughts and feelings in the sense of spiritual efforts, in which asceticism is included.

“Perverse thoughts, however, separate people from God” (Wis 1:3) “for the holy spirit of instruction... recoils from unintelligent thoughts” (Wis 1:5).

It is first of all important to realise that thoughts also require asceticism. They must not rule over me by spreading without my consent. Even if we are not master of what thoughts come to us, we are master of whether we think them and carry them on or not!

In spiritual formation one must free oneself from thinking that one can simply let one's thoughts run free and that this is an area of freedom of our humanity in the sense of a German song that says: “Die Gedanken sind frei” (The thoughts are free). Like everything else, the thoughts in fallen man are to be measured against the truth. As a rule, thoughts precede evil deeds: *“But I am afraid that, just as the snake with his cunning seduced Eve, your minds may be led astray from single-minded devotion to Christ.” (2 Cor 11:3)*

So what is needed is a “asceticism of our thoughts”. St. Benedict taught his monks that they should crush evil thoughts immediately on the "rock of Christ" as soon as they rise. So it is not necessary to pay attention to them and give them space, but to carry them immediately in prayer to the Lord. This is sometimes quite an exhausting exercise, because many thoughts come over you and in addition we do not always identify evil or wrong thoughts immediately.

It may be even easier with direct evil thoughts, which are even directed against God or our neighbour. They may be a torment, but they are also easier to identify. It becomes more difficult with thoughts from the semi-darkness, i.e. half-truths. Thoughts that carry something right in them, but at the same time also wrong, and we cannot immediately distinguish them.

It will be clear to those of us who are in the following of Christ that we must immediately reject thoughts against faith, morals, the teaching of the Church, etc. We should do this without entering into an inner discussion. But we should also be

aware if our faith is indirectly attacked, somehow called into question. Here too it must be clear: I do not think these thoughts any further, because in the end they are directed against God and darken my soul. Again, prayer, especially for the Holy Spirit, is essential.

One should ask the Holy Spirit to help us to make the necessary discernment, to warn us when our thoughts are slipping and to give us space when they are not helpful for discipleship. It is not only about the hidden lies and obscurations that come through wrong thoughts that we should pay attention to, but also about not giving space to useless thoughts.

This subject is very broad and I have written about it in more detail elsewhere (<http://en.elijamission.net/?paged=3&m=201902>). What I have said about thoughts also applies to sensations. It is not easy, but they too must come under the rule of Christ, and we must not simply leave negative dark feelings, but, as I explained yesterday, carry them to God and ask the Holy Spirit to touch them.

Finally, a few words that apply to everyone and in particular to the “Balta-Lelija warriors”.

If the antichristian darkness continues to increase, which is unfortunately to be feared, we must expect that the demons will have a stronger influence on people. This will happen a lot through thoughts. Therefore it is all the more important to have a clear order in our inner house. All the remarks I have given on asceticism are intended to encourage us to be more open to God and to turn away from everything that prevents us from being attentive to God.

The spiritual battle is at first hand not a physical battle and often not visible (*cf. Eph 6:12*). The fallen angels and their human co-workers (most of them probably unconsciously) want to divert us from pure devotion to God, or in some way diminish it.

Asceticism, which in this context - as mentioned - can only be treated rudimentarily, is our equipment for the fight. If we do not discipline our body, our tongue, our thoughts and feelings, then corresponding attacks from the darkness will always weaken us very much. But then it becomes more difficult to counterattack with the “*sword of the Spirit*” (*Eph 6:17*). We will not be able to wield the sword with great purity if there are still too many unpurified things living in us and binding our attention to ourselves.

In this respect, the last five considerations represent a training to strengthen the readiness for the spiritual struggle.

One more word at the end:

Do not be afraid if we still perceive our weaknesses and limitations! Who does not have them? The Lord does not expect us to be perfect, also not in the “army of the Lamb” (*cf. Rev 14:1-5*). But what He certainly wants is for us: to stretch out with our free will to fulfil our mission on earth!