

PRECAUTIONS - 9

*And if you do not guard yourself, acting as though you were not in the house, you will not know how to be a religious no matter how much you do, nor will you attain holy denudation and recollection or free yourself of the **harm arising from these thoughts**. If you are not cautious in this manner, no matter how good your intention and zeal, **the devil will catch you in one way or another**. And you are already fully captive when you allow yourself distractions of this sort.*

*Acting as though you were not in the house, signifies voluntary forgetfulness of self and self-importance. This enables a person to be in the presence of God and seek him with all one’s heart and readily go out of oneself to help others. This seeking of the Lord is going away from their own house like the anxious soul goes out of the house of senses to seek the bridegroom/beloved. We are deluding ourselves in aiming to make progress in prayer if our whole life is not marked by a deep, sincere desire to give ourselves totally to God, to make our lives conform to his will as fully as possible. Without that desire, prayer life will stall and progresses no further. God only gives himself to us if we give ourselves totally to him. This is *being not in the house* - not being selfish, self-centered, and self-absorbed. We can only possess everything by giving out everything. If we keep a sealed-off compartment in our lives, a fault for example, even a very little one, which we consent to deliberately and do nothing to correct; or a conscious piece of disobedience, or a refusal to forgive someone – it will make our life of prayer unfruitful. This is how devil plans to put us off from our spiritual journey.*

Love that purifies

St. John recommends holy indifference. This does not mean that we do not care for our brothers/sisters in our community. The truth is we often live in iniquity, which is inequality, injustice, which seeks more for me and which gives others less than they should receive. To love myself more than others is to be untrue to myself as well as to them. The more I seek to take advantage of others the less of a person will I be, for the anxiety to possess what I should not have, eventually damages my own soul’s capacity. Therefore, the man who loves himself too much is incapable of loving anyone effectively, including himself. This leads one to deprive of denudation and recollection or *free oneself of the harm arising from these thoughts*. No matter how good our intention and zeal maybe. Ultimately it is love that guides us in all our actions and intentions. If we genuinely love, then all imperfections are purified, and we can see the truth clearly.

Harm arising from thoughts

Speaking on thoughts that bother us we need to be extra conscious how they can ruin our life. There are hundreds of thoughts that interfere and disturb our life. We at times are not able to keep a check on such thoughts. We must train ourselves through meditation and reflection to keep a check on unruly thoughts that can constantly disturb our daily life and work.

To give oneself to God one must leave one's own self behind. Leaving oneself behind is possible only when we check the flow of selfish thoughts. Love is ecstatic by nature: in loving strongly, one lives in the other more than in oneself. But how could we practice that ecstatic dimension of love in our prayer, even to a small degree, if for the rest of the day we seek ourselves in our thoughts and actions? It is not possible if we are too attached to material things, our comfort, and our vanity. If we cannot forget ourselves for the sake of our brothers and sisters, it is not possible to attain perfect love.

Live in the present moment

One of the essential conditions for getting rid of selfish thoughts and obtain interior freedom is the ability to live in the present moment. For one thing, it is only then that we can exercise freedom. We have no hold on the past – we cannot change the smallest bit of it. People sometimes try to relive past events considered failures, but those imaginary scenarios are merely dreams, it is not possible to backtrack. The only free act we can make regarding the past is to accept it in the present moment just as it is and leave it trustingly in God's hands. We have truly little hold on the future either. Despite all our foresight, plans and promises, it takes little to change everything completely. We cannot program life in advance but can only receive it moment by moment.

Engaging Life

So many people go through their days feeling as though their lives are meaningless and without purpose because of their continuous negative thinking. However, when we commit ourselves to freeing our mind from useless thoughts and get into positive practices and deeper love, selfless service, and boundless compassion these practices entail, we endow our lives with meaning. We make the best use of our gifts and time well. Caring for the spiritual welfare the most profound well-being of others puts our lives in context. This is a reason to get up every morning with energy and enthusiasm. Sometimes it may feel as though we are engaged in the exhausting task of putting small drops into large buckets, but we all know that if there are enough

drops, eventually the bucket will become full. This is a way to give your life richness and purpose. This is how we can overcome our distractions and overthrow the devil’s designs. Distractions are normal in life, but if we do not control them, then they will take us as captives and imprison us.

*Recall what the Apostle St. James asserts: If anyone thinks he is religious, not restraining **the tongue**, that one's religion is vain [Jas. 1:26]. This applies as much to the interior as to the exterior tongue.*

Restraining tongue is an extraordinary task. We must understand that tongue is not only for tasting food but also extensively used for communication. Using our tongue to praise and thank God is perhaps the most vitally important quality of true prayer. It is the only valid test of our faith, our hope, and our love of God. No matter how deep our meditations, nor how severe our penance, how grand our liturgy, how pure our thoughts, how sublime our intentions, they are all useless if we do not really mean what we say with our tongue. Christ our Lord said: “this people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me”? (Mt 15.8). St. James has profound thoughts on this topic: “But no one has ever been able to tame the tongue. It is evil and uncontrollable, full of deadly poison. We use it to give thanks to our Lord and Father and also to curse our fellowman, who is created in the likeness of God. Words of thanksgiving and cursing pour out from the same mouth” (Jas 3.8-10)

Control of our speech

Our spiritual practice is vain if we do not train our tongue which is an important prerequisite for prayer. “For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of” (Mt 12.34). If we do not tame our words, we will find our prayer quite often shallow without depth. St. James warns us against the ruthless use of our tongue: “Does anyone think he is religious? If he does not control his tongue, his religion is worthless, and he deceives himself” (Jas 1.26). “And the tongue is like a fire. It is a world of wrong, occupying its place in our bodies and spreading evil through our whole being. It sets on fire the entire course of our existence with the fire that comes to it from hell itself. Man is able to tame and has tamed all other creatures - wild animals and birds, reptiles, and fish. But no one has ever been able to tame the tongue. We use it to give thanks to our Lord and Father and to curse our fellowman, who is created in the likeness of God. Words of thanksgiving and cursing pour out from the same mouth” (Jas 43.6-10). To live a healthy life in a community we need to pray with a sincere heart, and we need to take St. Paul’s advice seriously: “Do not use harmful words in talking. Use only helpful words, that kind that build up and provide what is needed, so that what you say will do good to those who hear you... Get rid of all bitterness,

passion and anger. No more shouting or insults. No more hateful feelings of any sort” (Eph 4.29-31). If we pray with beautiful words and then abuse someone in our community then we should know “he who wants to keep his garden tidy doesn’t reserve a plot for weeds” says Dag Hammarskjold.

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