



Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem ©
* Knights of Malta *

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Chancellor's Update

Lenten Meditation

In preparation for Easter, the greatest feast of Christianity, the Church instituted a period of penance. During those forty days Christians are expected to ask God's forgiveness for their sins and to promise to detach themselves from worldly things. To endeavor to improve their lives and avoid sins in the future, a worthy exercise would be to study the seven capital sins, which are the sources that lead men to commit sin.

Pride (Superbia) is an excessive esteem of one's own good qualities and abilities and the failure to attribute them to God rather than to self. So man aims higher than he is rather than tending to what is proportionate to him. Pride promotes superiority over others. It leads to other sins because pride makes a man despise the Divine Law. Pride is opposed to right reason. Not to be subject to God is a mortal sin because this consists in a turning away from God. Pride is considered the queen and mother of all vices.

Saint Augustine reminds us, "*Pride, they say, is the beginning of all sin* (Ecclus. x.15). And if pride is the beginning of sin, pride is a gate of hell."

Saint Gregory writes, "To overstep the Creator's commands by sin is to rise in pride against Him: for when a man refuses obedience to God, he as it were casts off the yoke of His authority."

Saint Basil asks, "Why then, I ask you, are you full of pride, because of what you have, when you ought rather to give thanks to the Giver of what you have? ... You did not come to know God through your own excellence; but God looked upon you out of His own goodness." Again he reminds us, "Recognize yourself for what you are; another Adam cast forth from Paradise (Gen. iii. 24).

Covetousness is an excessive desire of worldly possessions. So there are some merchants who wish for scarcity so that they can sell at a higher price; those who wish to see their neighbors in want so that they themselves can buy or sell at a profit; soldiers who wish for war so that they can profit by plunder; doctors who wish for the spread of disease; and lawyers who are anxious for many more cases and litigations. *But nothing is more wicked than the covetous man* (Ecclus. x. 9). *A covetous man shall not be satisfied with money* (Eccles v. 9). *The eye of the covetous man is insatiable in his portion of iniquity: he will not be satisfied till he consume his own soul, drying it up* (Ecclus. xiv. 9). *And he (Christ) said to them: Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life doth not consist in the abundance of things which he possesseth* (Luke xii. 15). *Let your manners be without covetousness, contented with such things as you have* (Heb. xiii. 5).

Man needs to have external riches that are necessary to live in keeping with the condition of life. It is a sin to wish to acquire or to keep what exceeds this measure. Covetousness is an immoderate love of possessing; it is a sin against one's neighbor. It can lead to stealing or retaining another's property (Ezech. xxii. 27), and thus is opposed to justice. Here love of riches is greater than love of God and love of neighbor. (Ecclus. x. 10). A covetous man subjects himself to an external creature by desiring it immoderately for use, and takes pleasure in himself as possessor of riches.

Chrysostom said that a covetous man loads himself with an excess of riches. Covetousness gives

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rise to restlessness, sometimes employs force in violence, deceit, fraud, falsehood, perjury and treachery (Judas). Sometimes disgraceful means are used to make money, or usury or unjust means are used to make profit.

Saint Jerome observes, “Let the covetous, who calls himself a Christian, pay heed to this; that he cannot at the same time serve both Christ and riches.”

Envy is sorrow at another’s good fortune because it diminishes one’s own glory. *By the envy of the devil, death came into the world* (Wis. ii. 24). *Envy not the glory and riches of a sinner: for thou knowest not what his ruin shall be* (Ecclus. ix. 16).

Men usually envy those who are near to them and whom they wish to rival or surpass. If envy is contrary to charity, it is a mortal sin. It can lead to tale-bearing and detraction.

Saint Basil warns us, “The devil is evil, and the contriver of wickedness everywhere...Let us therefore, Brethren, be on our guard against the passion of envy, so that we may not become partner in the works of our Adversary; and find ourselves condemned together with him...For nothing more destructive springs up in the souls of men than the passion of envy...As rust consumes iron, so does envy wholly consume the soul it dwells in.”

“Envy is the pain that arises from another’s good fortune. And because of this the envious man is never without pain, never without grief of mind.” As he watches his neighbor, who is brave and healthy, or another, who is handsome or talented or admired, or his neighbor’s house or fertile field, “all these things are like so many wounds and blows that strike the envious to the heart.”

“He looks for but one remedy for his affliction: to see one of those he envies fall into misfortune... Then he is at peace. And when he sees him weeping, when he sees him in affliction, he is his friend...He is an enemy of things present...friend when they have perished.

“What could be more deadly than this disease, which is a corruption of life, a defilement of our nature, a hatred of the things God has given us, a contradiction of God? ...We see these very qualities revealed in Cain, the first disciple of the devil, who taught him envy and murder.”

“Let us fly, brethren, from this wickedness of soul that would teach us to war against God, this mother of murder that does violence to our nature.” Joseph was sold into slavery because of the envy of his brothers. Saul, also, was envious of David. Jesus was envied because of His miracles. The Devil, “who fell himself through envy, is preparing the same path for us by means of this same vice.”

“How are we...to avoid contracting this sickness; or should it attack us, how can we be cured? ...Let us not believe that our highest good consists of these so fleeting things, but rather remember that we are called to the enjoyment and possession of real and eternal blessings....Be just and temperate and prudent and courageous and patient in all that you suffer in serving God. For it is in this way you will save your soul.”

“You know how great an evil hypocrisy is? ...Hypocrisy is the fruit of envy. For more than any other vice, envy begets duplicity. For while showing outwardly the appearance of friendship, it will cherish hate within the heart...and of a sudden will bring disaster to the unwary...Therefore...if hypocrisy brings with it the loss of every blessing, estrangement from God, the defeat of His laws, the undoing...of all the good we have done throughout our life, then let us comply with the counsel of the Apostle: Let us *be kind one to one another; let us be merciful, forgiving one another, even as God hath forgiven you* (Eph. iv.32).” (To be continued)

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