



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

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Chancellor's Update

Lenten Meditation – Part II

While in more recent centuries **lust** has been described as an excessive indulgence in sexual pleasures, in earlier centuries it was understood in a broader sense. *Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal body, so as to obey the lusts thereof* (Romans vi. 12). Also, Saint Mark in relaying Our Lord's explanation of the seed sown among thorns wrote, *these are they who hear the word...and then lust, entering in, choke the word, and it is made fruitless* (Mark iv. 18-19). Thus, in a general sense lust is a passionate or overmastering desire, such as a lust for power or gold. **During the previous century mankind witnessed such lusting for power by Hitler, Stalin, Mao and others.** In this century such lusting is evidenced by bureaucrats and political ideologues who lust after other people's money and possessions, and resort to heavy taxes, burdensome regulations, financial ruin or muckraking to eliminate or silence opposition in their quest for power.

In the more particular sense lust is especially concerned with venereal pleasures, as openly practiced in today's culture. It is the greatest havoc in a man's mind. Lust exceeds the order of reason regarding venereal acts, so it is a sin similar to gluttony. When the lower appetite of concupiscence is vehemently moved by lust, the higher powers, namely reason and will, are most grievously disordered. It is sinful because it is contrary to the order established by God.

Anger is an excessive desire of revenge or punishment of another because of perceived injury. The angry person's reason is blinded. Paul admonished, *I will that men pray in every place, lifting up pure hands, without anger and contention* (1 Timothy ii. 8). *Be not quickly angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of a fool* (Eccles. vii. 10). *Anger hath no mercy, nor fury when it breaketh forth: and who can bear the violence of one provoked* (Prov. xxvii. 4)? *Let not the sun go down upon your anger* (Eph. iv. 26).

In discussing "The Folly of Anger" Pope Saint Gregory the Great writes that for the angry man peace of mind is shattered, wisdom is lost, justice is abandoned, pleasantness of social life is lost, peace and mutual concord are disrupted, the light of Truth does not shine, and **the Holy Spirit is shut out from the soul.** Sometimes the hands are used and often the tongue bursts out malediction. For others the angry man becomes silent and the pent up anger devours that man more severely.

Saint Basil offers his description of the angry man. "For once this passion, reason set aside, acquires dominion over the soul, it changes a man into a beast; and does not even permit him to be a man, since it deprives him of the help of reason. As poison is to those who are poisoned, so is violence of feeling to those provoked to anger. They become rabid like dogs; they dart like scorpions...For they who are ready to destroy one another and to injure their fellow creatures may well be looked upon as wild beasts and reptiles; in whom by nature there is an implacable hatred against man..."

"Tongues become unbridled, mouths unguarded: hands without control, insults, accusations, slanders, blows...are the evil fruit of this violence of feeling. Through anger the sword is sharpened, the hand of man dares to take human life...brother will forget brother, and parents and children the ties of nature."

From St. Thomas Aquinas we learn that because it is contrary to charity and justice, fierceness of **anger may cause a man to fall away from love of God and love of neighbor**. It may lead him to blaspheme God or injure his neighbor, even to the extent of killing.

Gluttony is excessive love of food and drink by partaking of them in excess or devouring them voraciously. It is inordinate desire or concupiscence, not regulated by reason. Saint Gregory teaches us, "Our ancient enemy set himself against the First Man, our parent...He tempted him through gluttony when he put before him the forbidden fruit of the tree, and persuaded him to eat it." Saint Thomas Aquinas reminds us that sins caused by gluttony were responsible for the deluge and the punishment of the people of Sodom. In later times the shameful orgies and bacchanalia often combined gluttony with sexual lust. Saint John Chrysostom warns us, "And if you would wish to know the diseases of the soul it (gluttony) causes men, you will find that from here arises covetousness, sloth, melancholy, dullness of mind, impurity, and every incontinence. For after the excessive delights of the table, their souls are like asses that are being torn asunder by suchlike wild beasts."

Gluttony is a mortal sin if it turns one away from his last end, which is the love of God, Who is to be loved above all things.

Sloth is laziness of mind and body, which causes one to neglect his duties. So, the slothful one shuns exertion in performing the duties of his state of life. Also, if one avoids the labor necessary to practice the virtues, he risks separating himself from God.

Sloth shuns spiritual good as toilsome or troublesome to the body or as a hindrance to the body's pleasure. Sadder yet, how many misfortunes and evils abound because of sins of omission caused by sloth?

According to the Council Fathers at Trent, "It was by yielding to the enervating influence of idleness that the Sodomites plunged into the most shameful crime of criminal lust (Ezechiel xvi. 49)." Biblical scholars in interpreting this verse state that, besides pride and gluttony, idleness led to all kinds of lusts that resulted in the destruction of Sodom. Scripture warns, *He that tilleth his ground shall be filled with bread: but he that followeth idleness, shall be filled with poverty* (Proverbs, xxviii. 19).

Saint Basil warns us to be fearful, "lest in the day of judgment He Who gave us the power to work shall also require of us works worthy of the power He has given us. For He says: *Unto whomsoever much is given of him much shall be required* (Luke xii. 48)."

Further, he reminds us that Saint Paul recommends *working with his hands at what is good, that he may have something to share with him who suffers need* (Ephesians iv. 28). For those who use prayer and reciting psalms as an escape from work he reminds them that, while their hands are engaged in their tasks, their tongues can be engaged in praising God.

Prayer

O my God! I love Thee above all things, with my whole heart and soul, because Thou art all good and worthy of all love. I love my neighbor as myself for the love of Thee. I forgive all who have injured me, and ask pardon of all whom I have injured.

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