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## POVERTY OF SPIRIT THROUGH DETACHMENT

Hope, one of the three theological virtues (the other two being faith and charity) furthers our sanctification by uniting us to God and detaching us from earthly goods. We are drawn by sense-pleasures, pride, the fascination of wealth, and by the natural joys of mind and heart. Hope, based on faith, shows us these earthly joys lack perfection and permanence.

Because we are drawn by sense pleasures, we can practice poverty of spirit in so far as we mortify our appetites. This is done by denying ourselves that which may or may not lead to sin. For example, in our effort to strengthen our will, we may pass up a desired dessert or eat less than we would like. We may also practice discipline of our memory and imagination. No matter what mortifications we do, they should always be done for the love of God in Christ. There are other opportunities we might find within ourselves and without to practice poverty of spirit always mindful that true interior poverty is a renunciation of our will.

Neither success, wealth, or our state in life is perfect enough to satisfy. Having provided a short period of enjoyment, they soon bore and weary us. Our hearts are too vast and too high to be satisfied by material goods, which are but means of reaching a far nobler and holier end. "Our hearts are made for Thee O Lord", are the words of St. Augustine, "and only in Thee can they find rest". Our intellect is never satisfied until it finds the perfect friend, God. He alone possesses the plenitude of being, the perfection of beauty, goodness and the fullness of power. He who is perfectly self-sufficient is evidently sufficient for our happiness.

One way poverty of spirit or privation can be practiced is by helping those who may be worse off than ourselves as well as members of our own families who might be in need.

Even if material gifts could satisfy, which they can't, they have their day

and cease to be. We know this and this thought casts its shadow upon our joy even when we possess these goods. God, on the contrary, abides forever, and death that severs us from all earthly things, merely unites us more perfectly to God; and so despite the natural horror that death inspires, we face it with confidence because of the hope we harbor of being everlastingly united to Our Lord, who alone can constitute our bliss.

Poverty of spirit can also be experienced when we pray for others rather than ourselves. When we pray for the poor, the sick, the incarcerated, and any and all who are in need of God's special help and grace it is important to remember, though all of our acts of charity, taken alone or together are imperfect, God will supply our insufficiency provided we do our best to have the right intention. God, by His grace, does not want to suppress our activity, He desires to excite it and render it more effective. St. Paul seemed to have understood this well. "But by the grace of God I am what I am. And His grace in me hath not been void; but I have labored more abundantly than all the rest. Yet not I, but by the grace of God in me." And in another place we read, "And we hope to exhort you that you receive not the grace of God,"<sup>1</sup> Because when<sup>we</sup> labor for Christ self is forgotten and this poverty of spirit leads to greater love for God. We must be fully persuaded that in the work of our sanctification all depends on God. Still we must act as if all depended on ourselves. God never refuses us His grace, and consequently in actual practice all we have to do is to supply our own best effort.

Spiritual poverty and detachment can be experienced in many different ways. If a person listens to the quietness of his or her spirit he or she will hear the spirit of God speaking and many opportunities for growth can be experienced. For it is the Spirit of God that speaks to the quiet soul.

Remember everything is a gift. And that all good gifts come from God through the Spirit of Christ. And the more we respond to the gifts of God the more gifts God will grant us. And soon God's blessings will flood our souls like

the gentle morning dew. These gifts are lavished on us in secret. But from time to time God may reveal that we are becoming better not all at once but gradually.

Our poverty of spirit will become all embracing as our fears become less. The awareness of our sinfulness will not be a cause for us to fear but to love God more. As we draw closer to God in our poverty we think less and less of what others might think of our actions so we love more universally, pray more deeply, serve with greater loving kindness, and forgive more easily. We become humble and yet not shrink from the pain humility may cause. We forget the offender's harsh words as we pray for him and his friends and family.

Poverty of spirit presses us to seek the will of God in all things and in every act we perform. So we say with the prophet, "Lord I come to do your will" and when we say this it is the Spirit of Jesus who prompts our will to serve God in all things. This is what St. John of the Cross meant when he said: "To reach satisfaction in all, desire satisfaction in nothing. To come to possess all, desire the possession of nothing." Because when we serve others for the love of God in Jesus Christ and with no other intention than to imitate our Blessed Lord we will be surprised that we will derive great satisfaction in what we do.

The greatest satisfaction and possession we will receive is knowing that we are performing God's work and doing His will as best we know how.

Spiritual poverty or detachment is when we desire nothing for ourselves but all for God. Some might think of this as privation and <sup>they</sup> are making a great sacrifice. But when a person is in love, the forgetting of others never enters his or her mind. Love for one's beloved is all embracing and all consuming. And so it is when we fall in love with God. As this relationship grows deeper and deeper the Beloved transforms the lover. The Beloved caresses the beloved as a mother does a young child. As the relationship grows deeper and stronger, God weans us by withdrawing His consolations and challenges us to love Him for Himself alone rather than for His gifts. God weans us from our way of thinking

of Himself and of our way of thinking of holiness as well as our way of thinking of perfection. Said another way, God must wean us from our way of thinking of material as well as spiritual reality. Often what He wants for us is not what we want for ourselves. What we think is important is not what God thinks is important. So as we get close to God we are continuously being transformed and we experience more and more spiritual poverty and a deeper love for God.

The way to God is straight, very straight, more so than we think. In order for the soul to enter by this gate, which is Christ, the will must be detached in all things sensual and temporal and God must be loved above them all; this poverty of spirit opens the soul and empties it so that it can be filled with God alone.

The more the soul becomes empty and impoverished the more God can transform it into what He would have it to be. God will not do in the soul what the soul can do for itself. This is why some say that perfection in Christ depends (99%) ninety-nine percent on the soul and (1%) one percent on Christ and when the soul has done all it can, God will do the rest.

We perform the active purgation and that done by God is called passive purgation. Only God knows where one ends and the other begin. One thing for sure; purgation is a process that lasts a life time and only ends when death comes.

It should be remembered that it does not suffice to deny ourselves of worldly things without annihilating and purifying ourselves of spiritual attachments. Often when opportunity presents itself to some who may feel that they are advanced in spiritual poverty to practice detachment ~~and~~ God may withdraw from these persons His sweetness and replace it with aridity, distaste, and trial which is the true spiritual cross, and the beginner may flee from it as from death, seeking only the sweetness and delectable communion with God for such a person there is no true love of the Cross of Christ. These people are in truth, enemies of the Cross of Christ for they avoid that which is

distasteful and seek that which is delectable and inclines itself to consolations rather than suffering and desires to go free from all pain for God's sake. But all people of Christ should be ready to endure aridities and afflictions rather than to enjoy sweet communications, knowing that this is the way to follow Christ.

To live a life of spiritual poverty is a demanding one and it requires a person of solid faith and a willingness to be led into the desert by the Spirit of God and to totally trust in His merciful love. This life demands total unquestioning obedience to God's will! Let me close now and pray that we all may be lead by the Love of Jesus and that we listen only to the Spirit of God.