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# WINNOWING FAN

The Spiritual Life according to the Fathers and Saints of the Catholic Church in preparation for Christ's Second Coming.

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Year of the PRIEST

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YEAR OF THE PRIEST - Meditation 10 - The Role of Asceticism

The word 'asceticism' conjures ugly images of skinny hermits, starving monks, bald nuns and dirty saints. Asceticism is none of the just mentioned. It is an activity of the soul and, therefore, invisible to the senses. It is an invisible spiritual activity of the soul. Only the ascetic and God can know anything about its on goings.

Most, if not all, seminarians were baptized, most come from Catholic families and some had studied in prestigious Catholic schools. Why would the Holy Father as Cardinal speak about a crisis of Faith in the Church?

It is like this. Most Catholics were baptized as babies. With baptism they received sanctifying grace that made them children of God. And Catholic education is supposed to help them maintain and develop into maturity that state of grace. That is the life of Faith, Hope and Charity that merits for us eternal life.

The reason for baptism is to give the baby (still without actual sin) who naturally knows and loves God the grace necessary to maintain and rise up to a supernatural knowledge and love of God. The sacrament with its sacramental grace helps the child to grow into the maturity of Faith, Hope and Charity. With the baby in this innocent state and filled with the grace of baptism, we have a creature that is geared for great holiness.

Multi-Part Year of the PRIEST SERIES

The *Winnowing Fan* hopes "...to do what little it could do solve the evils that beset the Church."
St. Teresa of Avila



But sadly, almost immediately after baptism, the baby learns evil, commits sin and losses his sanctifying grace. Unless he recovers he is in danger of going to hell.

Imagine this child struggling to recover the grace and innocence or in short 'trying to be a child again' or trying to be born again. Imagine his goal of reaching Faith and becoming a child of God again ....and the thousand other hurdles blocking his road to faith. How can you expect him to pass through that narrow road that is like going through the eye of a needle that leads to salvation?

The seminarian has to remove those obstacles and hurdles. Everybody has to do this. These obstacles are vices that prevent us from obtaining Faith, Hope and Charity. These are removed by means of asceticism or acts of repentance. Asceticism consists of acts by which we receive the moral virtues that will facilitate the reception of the theological virtue of Faith, the beginning of the contemplative life.

Essentially, asceticism is what Christ did while He was subject to Joseph and Mary. He did that to instruct us. His being subject consisted in physical acts mainly consisting in acts of physical obedience. While contemplation is when Christ was spiritually subject to His Father in heaven, the message He gave us when He was lost in the temple at 12. The former subjection is called Asceticism. The latter subjection is called Faith or contemplation. When we first enter a monastery or religious house it is to live a life of physical obedience or an ascetic life.

Obedience is both physical and spiritual. The physical aspect is asceticism. The spiritual aspect makes up the virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity....or contemplation.

As Pope Benedict exhorts priests to be contemplatives he is in fact telling them to finish their life of repentance before doing anything else. Pope Benedict is well acquainted with repentance because of his exposure to the Benedictines in Bavaria. The Benedictine monastic spirituality is a life of repentance like all religious life. It is a life of asceticism where obedience to the superiors is similar to the life of Christ when He was obedient to Joseph and Mary. This way of life is a preparation for the life of Faith. People enter monasteries and convents to repent and then enter the Church through the door of Faith. And this is

commonly referred to as the ascetic life which is necessary for the forgiveness of sins. It is sometimes referred to as the virtue of penance (different from the Sacrament of Penance) and is a preparation to receive the virtue of Faith (Hope and Charity).

A very common defect is to jump into Charity without passing through Faith; or jumping into Faith without passing the ascetic life or repentance. Note how common this mistake is in most lectures, retreats, spiritual talks and writings, causing much frustration when a soul finds out he cannot reach Charity because he neglected the life of repentance, Faith and Hope.

## YEAR OF THE PRIEST - Meditation 11 - Meditation vs Contemplation

Meditation is an act of the intellect wherewith in a natural way the mind tosses a religious thought around, looking at it from all angles and getting the most out of it. Contemplation is an act of the free will by which it relishes the natural truth the mind had played around with. The free will is what moves the intellect to continue to seek the truth after the intellect had first perceived the truth. When the free will loves the truth which the intellect had previously perceived, the free will command the intellect to further investigate or pursue the truth which the free will had learned to begin to love. This way the intellect increases in the knowledge of the truth and the free will in loving the same truth. It is not the knowledge of truth that gives joy but the contemplation of truth. So even if there is much suffering a soul that contemplates the truth remains happy.

Since in the active life or the life of repentance a soul must give up many physical and worldly things unnecessary for salvation, he must be able to contemplate the truth to experience joy in denying himself. Without this contemplation of truth no amount of knowledge in the intellect can give joy to the soul. The giving up of many worldly things unnecessary for salvation becomes unbearable if the soul does not at the same time contemplate the truth. It is the contemplation of truth that enables the soul to possess the truth that results in joy or happiness.

Meditation and contemplation influence and interact with each other one causing the other continuously to rise up to the heights of the Beatitude.

The purpose of meditation is to discover the good. The object of the contemplation is to love and possess the good. The two together produces 'devotion' which is an act of the will by



which a soul promptly gives himself to the service of God. Pope Benedict reminds us in the Year of the Priest that we priests must contemplate, not merely meditate, on the teachings of the Church. This is the only way we could be of service to the Church.

We see the insurmountable situation that impedes the diocesan priest from meditating and contemplating. The religious have less reasons for not being able to do so. But when their ignorance is the 'hypocritical' kind wherein they chose to remain ignorant so they do not have to be engaged in such seemingly useless activity that will lessen their life of indulgence, then we have a great crisis even a 'Year of the Priest' will not solve.

## SIN AS HUMAN ACTION

Sin as a human act has two parts. The first is the fact that it is still a human act. The second is the fact that there is a deprivation from that human act, making it less human.

The first is always God's act. The second is our act. In the first we need God's help. In the second we do not need God's help

In the first we are still within God's providence. In the second we have left the sphere of God's providence.

The first is God's good work, the second is our evil work. God does not will the evil we do. He permits us to do evil but continues to do good by getting something good out of the evil.

Both the good and the evil that men do are human acts. The difference is that the first is a good human act without deprivation, the other is an evil human act with a privation.

*Occupations that are necessary and result from God's ordinance are inevitable, but untimely occupations should be rejected, and preference given to prayer; especially should we reject those which involve us in great expenditure and acquiring superfluous possessions. For in so far as a man limits them for the Lord's sake and cuts off their superfluous substance, he restrains his thought from distraction... he gives room for pure prayer and shows sincere faith in Christ. But if someone cannot do this through lack of faith or from some other weakness, let him at least know the truth and press forward as muh as is in his power, accusing himself of infancy.*

**St. Mark the Ascetic**



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