

## PRECAUTIONS - 5

***Do not think about others, neither good things nor bad. Flee them inasmuch as possible. And if you do not observe this practice, you will not know how to be a religious, nor will you be able to reach holy recollection or deliver yourself from imperfections. And if you should wish to allow yourself some freedom in this matter, the devil will deceive you in one way or another, or you will deceive yourself under some color of good or evil.***

Every day we come across a lot of people, but our natural tendency to pass judgements on each of them goes on in our minds unless we put a voluntary stop to such a process. We can never know a person fully because we cannot afford to know a person’s family, social, psychological, ethical, and moral background fully; that is the truth. But our weakness continues as we often make irresponsible judgements on people. Jesus said, “judge not so that you may not be judged” (Lk 6.37). Judgement belongs to God alone. St. John substantiates, “we have experience of this all the time. We observe that as often as people begin to think about some matter, they are moved and aroused over it, little or much, according to the kind of apprehension. If the apprehension is bothersome and annoying, they feel sadness or hatred, and so on; if agreeable, they will experience desire and joy, and so on. Accordingly, when the apprehension is changed, agitation necessarily results. Thus, they will sometimes be joyful, at other times sad, now they will feel hatred, now love. And they are unable to persevere in equanimity, the effect of moral tranquility, unless they endeavour to forget all things. Evidently, then, this knowledge is a serious impediment to the possession of the moral virtues” (*Ascent* III,5,ii).

### **Our Life with Another**

We need God’s grace and His experience to deal with others in a responsible way. God’s tremendous and merciful love is the basis of our life with one another. The lover enters relationship with the beloved. The beloved enters the world of the lover. Because God is love and He loves us, He gives us a gift to build a sincere relationship with others around us. This gift is nothing less than the gift of the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity dwelling in all of us. At Baptism, our bodies are consecrated as temples of the living God. This grace enables us to share His nature. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit come to live, love, and dwell within our souls. This is a supernatural gift — the gift of grace. We are divinized by God Himself. That is why everyone is sacred ‘temple of the Holy Spirit’. Unfortunately, our faith is often too weak to be aware of the divine

life operating within. In fact, God is within, but we are living outside. We will never find God until we learn to find Him within ourselves in that gentle, inward movement, with the glance of faith, love, and hope. When we move within ourselves, we are capable of resisting thoughts and judgements about others. We stop thinking bad about others because we can know others as God knows us as His children. This enables us to keep away from imperfections of improper thoughts.

In order that we may be freed from imperfections of thinking about others, most importantly we need to be humble ourselves before God's presence. St. John says, do not think about others; we may ask 'why shouldn't I think about others?' It is normal we think of others, but it should be done out of love, care, and concern. If there is selfish motive in our thinking about others, that will certainly scar our spiritual progress: "As long as we love one another God will live in us and his love will be complete in us." (1John 4.16). St. John's affirmation "*do not think about others, neither good things or bad...*" literally means that we stop judging people around us.

***Flee them in as much as possible...***

Basically, it is not just a question of thinking about others' good or bad rather, accepting the difficulties they bring about instead of hardening ourselves against them. This idea can be applied to the difficulties that arise by someone else's fault in a community. How should we react to all the sufferings caused by such people around us? Difficult to say, but better to accept them, keeping in mind the love of God we have received. It is not a question of being merely passive all the time. At times we must confront someone whose actions have made us suffer and help him/her realize what has been done and put it right. We have a right to react firmly against unjust situations and protect ourselves or others against harmful actions. But there will always remain a certain amount of suffering that comes from those around us and that we can neither avoid nor correct. This will lead us to accept it with hope and forgiveness. On some occasions we may react badly, but sooner or later when we realize that we made a terrible mistake, that is the moment we need to reconcile and only then we will be able to flee the *thinking* as much as possible.

We need to learn to forgive other people for making us suffer and even to turn the problems they create for us as graces and blessings. This attitude is neither spontaneous nor natural but can be practiced through the grace provided. It is the only one way by which we can achieve peace and interior freedom.



## Letting go

Delivering ourselves from imperfections is the ultimate requirement to attain union with God through prayer. But to free oneself from imperfections is not easy. Well, when we learn the art of sharing then we can to a certain extent liberate ourselves from our deep-rooted imperfections and attachments. The act of sharing means that we are beginning to let go of our clinging and greed; we are loosening our tendency to hang onto whatever we have. There are many kinds of things, both outer and inner, that we can give. We can learn to let go on many levels; some of our most valuable gifts, of course, are inner gifts "of spirit and love", which are best enjoyed by being shared. The more we have, the more we must give. And the more we can give, the more we receive, as everyone knows. At the same time many of our imperfection either are purified or are removed from us through this process. This way we can deliver ourselves from further imperfections.

*In doing what we said you will have security, for in no other way will you be capable of freeing yourself from the imperfections and harm derived from creatures.*

## Emptiness

What St. John has expressed here is clearly a way how we can keep ourselves free from imperfections and harm to dedicate exclusively for God and to his kingdom. Here we find the feature of St. John’s doctrine on ‘emptiness’ one which deserves special notice in our age so hopeful of finding efficient spiritual solutions. It is fundamentally sheer grace of God rather than a matter of a person’s own spiritual planning. The process of emptiness itself falls under that constant spiritual law by which human resources ultimately stand in need of redemption. It involves a dialectic of active asceticism and passive sanctification. Thus, the first moment or phase is of deliberate, free, unconditional striving “The soul must empty itself” (*ha de vaciarse*) perfectly and willingly.... So far as it is able (*Ascent II,4,ii*). The second, passive, moment envelopes and completes the first “but the soul must be emptied” (*se ha de vaciar*) of every kind of thing which can fall within its capacity (*Ascent II,4,iv*).

One of the most beautiful passages from the New Testament can help us understand this section better: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you... Lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High...Be merciful even as your heavenly Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the

measure you get back” (Lk 6.27-38). The parable of the good Samaritan is another powerful example of how we can direct our thoughts and feelings towards God through love of neighbour. These words are very demanding, but we need to understand the demand as a magnificent ‘gift’ God wants to give us. God gives what he commands, and this text (Lk 6.27-38) contains a promise. God can transform our hearts to the point that they become capable of loving despite the hurts and pains experienced, with a love that is as pure, freely given, and disinterested as God’s own Love. God wants to give us the gift of relationship and gift of forgiving as he alone can do, and so make us like himself. St. John affirms: “When the soul has attained to purifying and emptying itself of all forms and imaginings that can be grasped, it will remain in this pure and simple light... For the enamored soul, lacking what is natural, is then infused with the divine, so that there may be no vacuum in nature” (*Ascent II*,15,iv).

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