

PRECAUTIONS -6

The Second Precaution

7. *The second precaution against the world concerns **temporal goods**. To free yourself truly of the harm stemming from this kind of good and to moderate the excess of your appetite, you should **abhor all manner of possession** and not allow yourself to worry about these goods, neither for food, nor for clothing, nor for any other created thing, **nor for tomorrow**, and direct this care to something higher-to seeking the kingdom of God (seeking not to fail God); and the rest, as His Majesty says, will be added unto us [Mt. 6:33], for he who looks after the beasts will not be forgetful of you. By this practice you will attain silence and peace in the senses.*

Hope Strengthens us

We are never free until we live in pure hope. For when our hope is pure, it no longer trusts exclusively in human or visible means, and does not rest on any visible end. He who hopes in God trusts God, whom he never sees, to bring him the possession of things that are beyond imagination. When we do not desire the things of this world for their own sake, we are able to see them as they are. We see at once their goodness and their purpose, and we can appreciate them as we never have before. As soon as we are free of them, they begin to please us. As soon as we cease to rely on them alone, they can serve us. Since we depend neither on the pleasure nor on the assistance, we get from them, and they offer us both pleasure and assistance, at the command of God. For Jesus rightly said, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and His justice and all these things will be given to you..." (Mt 6.33). Supernatural hope is the virtue that strips us of all things to give us possession of all things. We do not hope for what we have. Therefore, to live in hope is to live in poverty, having nothing and wholly trusting in the providence of God and if we thus abandon ourselves to economy of Divine Providence, we have everything we hope for. The tenth commandment forbids greed and the desire to amass earthly goods without limit. It forbids avarice arising from a passion for riches and their attendant power. It also forbids the desire to commit injustice by harming our neighbor in his temporal goods: When the Law says, "You shall not covet," these words mean that we should banish our desires for whatever does not belong to us. Our thirst for another's goods is immense, infinite, never quenched (Sir 5.8). But practice of hope enables us to possess God without sensibly feeling His presence. If we hope in God, we already possess him, since hope is a confidence which he creates in our souls when no other love can impede our desire to love God.

True Joy in God

The damage to authentic prayer experience occurs only when actively knowingly and willingly centering our joy in temporal goods rather than in God. It is true that every true joy has its source in God and comes from God. But joy for the sake of joy ignoring the source of joy can be detrimental to real disposition for prayer. John writes: “many today, in various ways belong to this category of seeking *joy in temporal objects*. Out there in the world, their reason darkened through covetousness in spiritual matters, they serve money and not God, and they are motivated by money rather than by God, and they give first consideration to the temporal price and not to the divine value and reward. In countless ways they make money their principal god and goal; and give it precedence over God, their ultimate end. Likewise included in this category are all those miserable souls who value earthly goods as their god and are so enamored by them that they do not hesitate to sacrifice their lives when they observe that this god of theirs undergoes some temporal loss. They despair and commit suicide for wretched reasons and demonstrate with their own hands the miserable reward that comes from such a god. Since there is nothing to hope for from him, they despair. And any one whom he does not pursue right up to death, the ultimate injury, dies from living in the affliction of anxieties and many other miseries” (*Ascent* III,19,ix-x). This is what happens when we start placing our security and hope in temporal things, consequently and gradually the focus of our will shifts, and God’s love becomes secondary. Despite our deep desire for God in prayer, if our priority is temporal things, this desire for God remains a desire in our wish. In our will we give precedence to temporal things. These temporal things may be innumerable: money, friends, alcohol, possession of material things, craving for people, affection, approval, appreciation, recognition, status, power etc. We cannot serve world and God at the same time. One will be rejected. When importance is given to the world and to its pleasures normally our attention to God in prayer dims and weakens day after day. The result is, we cannot pray. We only think of the ways of getting these petty pleasures. Even during prayer our mind automatically turns to persons, things, and the craving increases, as Jesus said, “where your treasure is there will be your heart also” (Mt 6.21).

Freedom of the Heart

St. John from Chapter 16-20 of the *Ascent* III, recommends how one should deal with the temporal goods and keep the emotion of *joy, hope, fear and sorrow* exclusively reserved for God alone by not allowing one’s heart to become attached to temporal goods. These emotions towards temporal goods prevent one from attaining union with God because of the dullness it creates in us. There is another

exceptional and principal benefit of detachment from these emotions towards temporal things which is a preparatory condition for all the favors God will grant to the soul and without which He does not bestow them; it is *freedom of the heart for God*. “The favours are such that for each joy the soul renounces out of love for God it will receive a hundred fold in this life, as promised in the Gospel [Mt 19.29; Mk 10.30]” (*Ascent* III,20,iv). Any attachment to temporal things is ultimately a distancing of ourselves from God. How many have lost their faith through attachment to property, money, wealth, and other temporal goods? An examination of our life will reveal that our poor prayer life may have the deeper roots in our attachments to temporal things. Any inordinate craving for temporal objects and goods is a shutting our door to God.

Fulfilling Spiritual Potential

Life is an amazing opportunity filled with freedoms and choices too wondrous to describe. Material prosperity is a desirable and essential feature of a good life, but neither obscene wealth nor abject poverty is productive of human capability. Avoiding extremes is what makes one happier. It would be a shame to waste this wondrous opportunity of life by engaging in useless and meaningless activities; it would be a pity to waste this life by not fulfilling one's spiritual potential. The chances that exist for each of us today to be more loving, kind, helpful, and compassionate should not be squandered or thrown aside. Attachments to things lead us to gradual desperation and spiritual deterioration. To this all have innate wisdom and goodness; this life provides extraordinary opportunities, great and small, to be wise and virtuous. When we keep this in mind at every moment, we turn toward truth. In fact, attachments to things bring us heaviness and boredom but our spiritual pursuit will enlighten and lift us up. That is why St. John affirms in this part of the precautions: “, you should ***abhor all manner of possession*** and not allow yourself to worry about these goods, neither for food, nor for clothing, nor for any other created thing, ***nor for tomorrow***, and direct this care to something higher-to seeking the kingdom of God”.

Fr. Rudolf V. D'Souza OCD