

Reflections

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The Evangelical Counsel: Poverty

No one can be holy if he/she is interiorly enslaved by earthly goods. Furthermore, according to St. Augustine, for sanctity, the ultimate and the most difficult things are love for poverty and the renunciation of goods. And why? Because greed and the attachment to material things are the devil's best arguments. One of the wounds left by original sin in our nature is the inordinate impulse to possess.

That irrational impulse makes us attach ourselves to passing things, it makes us believe that it is indispensable to live surrounded by a thousand comforts. It attaches us inordinately to earthly things. It binds us to values which are not essential. Therefore, St. Paul calls the eagerness to possess "*the root of all evils*" (1 Tim 6,10) and Ecclesiastes says that "*the covetous are like hungry dogs which are never sated.*"

What then, is the meaning of our spirit of poverty? It seems to me that the main significance is: not to attach ourselves to things in order to be free for God and, likewise, to be free for others.

Fill ourselves with God. The first meaning of our poverty is: not to fill ourselves with the things of this world, but to fill ourselves with God, to be free for God, not to obstruct God's passage through our life and through the world, because our wealth is God and his Kingdom, and, therefore, we do not need other riches. "Blessed are the poor because theirs is the Kingdom of God" (LK 6, 20).

To be poor is, therefore, to be free of self. It is to be free from the chains or barriers put in place by my selfishness. The poor..... is the man/woman capable of loving because in his/her heart there is room for God and for others; therefore, we have to break those barriers which impede us from coming out of ourselves, from our narrow world. Holiness is being free of oneself. We have to break those barriers to be able to open ourselves to the world which surrounds us and to give ourselves to God and to others.

Levels of poverty. Three levels of poverty exist and we can easily know where we are and what steps we are lacking to reach the height of this Evangelical Counsel.

1. To know how to renounce what is superfluous. Through a simple and authentic love for God, freely renounce superfluous things. What is superfluous is understood as that which does not correspond to my state of life or my social level. **What things are superfluous for me?** No one will give me an answer to this question. Only I can give the answer

2. To know how to renounce what is necessary. It is not about what is necessary for existence, but again it is about what I think is necessary according to my state of life or my social level. **Do we feel capable of renouncing necessary things in that sense?** And also here, that attitude has to come from an authentic love for God and others.

3. To conquer an attitude of pauper before God. I am aware of my total dependence on God. Applied to poverty it means: My things and my goods are God's property; He has lent them to me. I am simply their administrator.

But then, He can again take them from me. That attitude of pauper is the highest level of poverty: inner freedom from all material things. God can do with me what He wishes, and I want to be treated like a pauper.

Questions for reflection

1. How do I practice the Evangelical Counsel of poverty?
2. What concrete action do I do for others?
3. Does it worry me to lose some material goods?

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