

Day Four: *The Concupiscence of the Flesh*

“For everything in the world—the lust (concupiscentia) of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.” (1 John 2:16)

There is no easier way to define worldliness or a worldly spirit than to turn to the words of St. John the Evangelist quoted above.

Everything that belongs to a worldly spirit can be summed up in these three characteristics: concupiscence of the flesh, concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life. Today we will meditate on the first.

Concupiscence of the flesh implies more than just impurity. Turning to the teaching of St. Paul we discover that the “works” of the flesh are manifold: “immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like (Gal 5:19-21).”

The works or concupiscence of the flesh can be summed up in one word: pleasure, and better yet, the disordered love of pleasure.

St. Louis de Montfort writes, “The wisdom of the flesh is love of pleasure. This is the wisdom shown by the worldly-wise who seek only the satisfaction of the senses. They want to have a good time. They shun anything that might prove unpleasant. Usually they think only of eating, drinking, playing, laughing, enjoying life and having a good time. They must always be comfortable and insist on having entertaining pastimes, the best food and good company” (*Love of Eternal Wisdom*, 81).

Don’t be too quick to judge these words of St. Louis de Montfort as being outdated or pessimistic. Along with the perennial teaching of the Church he understands pleasure to be a natural good, but at the same time he is fully aware of our fallen condition due to original sin. We too often laud the first and neglect the second. But truth be told, original sin affects us all. Granted that we have removed its grip on us through Baptism, its effects remain. These effects are what we call concupiscence.

In relation to our bodies and our senses this concupiscence makes them rebel against right reason. Instead of using our senses and directing our passions in an orderly way—a virtuous way—we often give in to their desires and go beyond the right measure. “Having a good time” for example has its place; but if that is all I seek in life, if that becomes my criteria of judgment in making decisions, then I’ve got things backward. I am living in the worldly spirit.

So, for your reflection: What is at the basis of your decision making? Do you choose according to pleasure or according to reason? Do you make decisions on the basis of comfort or on the basis of virtue? Is your hope for happiness being overly placed in pleasure, comfort, parties, escapes, and the like? What needs to improve so that you no longer allow the concupiscence of the flesh to dictate your life’s choices, but rather allow God’s will to guide you?

- Today’s Prayer -

O Jesus living in Mary,
come and live in your servant
in the Spirit of your holiness,
in the fullness of your gifts,
in the perfection of your ways,

in the truth of your virtues,
in the communion of your mysteries.
Subdue within me the power of flesh and
demon
by your Holy Spirit, for the glory of God the
Father. Amen.