



MEETING EIGHT CALL TO PURITY

1. Introduction

Purity comes from the adjective “pure” and in the natural sense pure can be applied to things, such as pure, unalloyed 24 K gold or pure tin. It can be applied to ideas, such as pure genius or pure fantasy. It can be applied to people, as those who are clear in view, pure genius, or in musical tone, pure voice, and so on.

In the Old Testament, purity was a requirement for ritualistic observance. The priests and Levites had to purify themselves and purify the temple to make themselves or the place acceptable offerings. In the New Testament, greater emphasis is on purity of heart: the intent we bring to what we do.

Purity has also the strong connotation of chastity, celibacy and freedom from sexual defilement. It is that and much more.

2. Exemplar: Therese Chupin (1813-1896)

Victoria Therese Chupin was born in Brittany in 1813. Her family was large with six girls and three boys; they were very poor and so, from childhood, she was well aware what poverty could do to people.

As a teenager, she was unsure what to do with her life and had spoken to her confessor about entering religious life. He told her to go to Paris, to live with her brother, a medical student, and seemed quite confident that God would guide her future. He was correct. Her first indication of her future work came when a parish priest in Paris asked her to take charge of the Society of the Holy Childhood in the area. This society had been founded to help instruct girls who had little education, no money and were easily tempted to become prostitutes to survive.

Therese organized her work so well that she and the girls formed groups functioning almost like a religious community. Her talents came to the attention of the police commissioner who asked her to become supervisor of the woman’s prison at St. Lazare. The prison had been a hospital under the lazarist fathers. During the French Revolution, it was ransacked and finally made into a grim prison. Women were in one section and men in another. If they weren't criminals when they

entered, they were soon well schooled there and in all else that leads to the degradation of character.

Therese valued her own purity and spiritual life and so did not want to associate with the desperate prisoners in such a vicious atmosphere. She hesitated, prayed that Our Lady would make clear what she was to do. Her prayers were answered and she took the job.

Her personal purity and innocence should have brought jeers and derision as she enter the prison. Instead, at age 22, she began her work as though she had managed prisons for years. During. Her twelve years at St. Lazare, she was always called “benne mere” (good mother, literally, but. it has affection and trust in the words as well). She mothered those who needed special care; she instructed the prisoners, arranged for them to receive the Sacraments and also set up retreats for them. By 1848, political and social life in France was once more calm and a community of sisters could take over her work.

Her former prisoners gave her next assignment. Seeing Therese on the street, they asked her help and said they knew of eighty more young woman who would come to her if she had a place to put them. While trying to decide what to do, a Dominican priest sent her a young girl in pressing need so she made her decision there and then. Borrowing money, she rented a flat and got some help to open her refuge in Paris where she and a few young women lived on the brink of destitution. She moved with her “children” to a large house outside Paris; she had a place with no beds and no running water. She set the girls up as seamstresses to help earn money but they lived from day to day, sometimes stealing potatoes from pigs in order to survive.

In 1854, she and several companions became Dominican tertiaries. Therese took the name of St. Vincent de Paul, but was never called anything but “benne mere” and she never referred to those who came to help as anything but as her "children".

The Dominicans were concerned that her work become organized so that it could continue as a long time foundation. She viewed the whole notion of organization with suspicion. After a visit to Pope Pius IX who blessed her and her institute “until the end of time”, she accepted the notion of a permanent organization, visited the Master General and received assurance that she and her companions would be given the habit once the community was organized. By 1865, the little community was part of regular Dominican life.

Though “Bonne mere” chafed under some requirements of the new rule, she appreciated its merits. She spend her life concerned about her “children,” preserving their spirit and body from the evils of poverty. Her purity and her grace enabled her to fulfill what she certainly considered her charge: to do good without searching too keenly into the lives of the miserable; first, relieve their misery and provide for their needs and then do whatever other good one can. Her approach is best capsulated in her meeting with Alexander Dumas, the author of “The Three Musketeers” and other such stories. She pointed out to him that his books had led to the downfall of many young woman who were in her care. In justice, she suggested, she ought to use his pen for their benefit and write something that would bring much needed money for her refuge. Dumas did and remained a friend of the refuge.

She is an example of purity in its many dimensions, not just in her own purity and innocence but in her approach to the problems she faced and her surety that she was to help her “children” come to see God.

5. Theology

The question to purity gets rather short treatment in St. Thomas. He considers it under the virtue of temperance, saying that purity, properly speaking, regards sexual activity and that it is ordained or related to chastity and deals with what surrounds that activity. That places purity in the neat category that are so much a part of the plan of the Summa.

In another section of the Summa, however, Thomas gives a far deeper and richer meaning to the notion of purity than the brief statement above. In that statement, many later followers in discussing the question of purity found it simpler to list a whole series of “Don’ts” and “Be careful.” especially in dealing with questions raised in confession or spiritual direction. All of these lists probably did as much harm to teenagers as the casual "go for it" attitude toward sexual activity that makes up of the contemporary scene.

St. Thomas speaks in a question on sanctity that sanctity implies purity. Purity pertains to temperance, which overcomes bodily temptations. St. Thomas then goes to the Greek word for sanctity which has two elements: one means “unsoiled”, therefore the notion of purity that is well known to us; the other element means “firmness”.

In combing these two ideas, we can begin to understand how Jesus used the term in saying “you are pure because of the word I have spoken to You” and to see the implications of the notion of purity in our lives.

Purity, says St. Thomas, is necessary for the mind to be devoted to God. If we are to be united with the Supreme Being, then we must be withdrawn from lower, baser things. The one who has the virtue of purity must be devoted to the things of religion as well.

St. Thomas insists that purity, unless it is directed to God, does not lead us to holiness and is not, therefore a part of sanctity. If one pursues purity for its own sake, it leads to pride, disdain and a total lack of charity. Once directed toward God, purity becomes an ally and emphasizes that the why we try to be or to do something is more important than ticking off to ourselves each time to think we succeed. We don't succeed God succeeds within us.

Looking at other sources, we find that the notion of purity exists from Old Testament times when it was advocated to foster monotheism and a higher level of morality than the pagan world surrounding the Jewish people. This often led to a formalization of ritual and a perceptual way of looking at life. The prophets, psalmist and Wisdom literature celebrate, instead a moral purity.

In the New Testament, the early apostolic community had to warn against the sexual impurity of the pagan world and urge higher moral standards upon the new converts. This is particularly emphasized in the writings of Paul who wrote, especially to the Corinthians (I Cor. 6: 11) that because we now have the Holy Spirit indwelling within us who has cleanse us from sin, we must keep undefiled.

Purity, then requires both the undefiledness of spirit and the firmness, as St. Thomas has noted, for without the cleanness, we could not be open to the Divine and without the firmness, we could not have the courage to withstand the trials of this world and to pursue the adventure of the deeper pursuit of the Divine the “ins and outs” of our individual love affair with God.

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are seven and this is the eighth meeting so one might say, there is no corresponding gift to accompany the virtue of purity. Rather than that view, it is probably more true to say that the purity that will lead to the beatitude utilizes all the gifts of the Holy Spirit so

that we may become the blessed God wants each of us to be. Let us then look how each of the gifts interrelates to bring the virtue of purity to perfection.

As the gift of understanding perfects the virtue of temperance, its relationship to the virtue of purity is easy to grasp. Unless we understand, at least a little, by the gift of the Spirit, the depths and riches and wisdom of God that awaits us, the virtue of temperance can seem a very negative one. We Moderate or control our desires for supernatural reasons and, as we do, we gain understanding of:

1. The reason why we do so: God and
2. The goodness in doing so: our salvation and, as it turns out. The deeper, richer enjoyment we will have of all that is good in this world and its creatures.

The gift of fortitude gives us two major aids to protect and promote the fullness of purity. First, it gives us a certain sure confidence to be and/or do what we must. Secondly, it gives us the firmness to endure, to fight, withstand whatever we must to do good, avoid evil and to attain salvation.

The gift of piety assists us in the development of purity on a deeper level. By it, we have the inner innocence of the children of God who recognized Him as Father, rejoice in doing His will and grow in trust and confidence in Him. It is that wide opened eye view of the world that sees everything as though from God's view and seeks clearly to make self and all else pleasing in that Divine view.

The gift counsel is the gift that gives special assistance to purity when we must decide quickly to be/to do what is right for our sanctification. It enabled the “benne mere” to get a flat for her “children”, to talk to Dumas, to walk in an take over her job at St. Lazare with decisiveness. It will enable us to do similar things in our own situations.

The gift of wisdom correlates with the gift of counsel in that we act with surety. We know, in a supernatural, intuitive way that God is the only important treasure in our lives. He is the center and all else is reflection of Him, His glory, His gifts. The spirit that truly knows with this wisdom may have an inner sparring match about purity but the gift makes sure and certain that the Great Love will overcome it enables us to be charitable to all.

The gift of fear is almost the precondition for the virtue of purity to flourish. We may fear God's justice or may fear to offend His loving mercy, but because we have the gift of fear, we recognize our weakness, our sinfulness and our need for help. We are humbled. The other gifts assure that help is there and so we are graced to act with firmness to become truly purified.

The gift of knowledge enables us to detach ourselves from distraction, the same distractions that could affect the virtues of purity, and concentrate on faith, our belief that the truths we have learned and those that the gift of knowledge imparts to us are truly the only thing that life, here and hereafter, is all about. It is that faith, leading to hope and emblazoned by charity that makes us different and should make everything we are and do an reflection of that faith.

Beatitude: Blessed are the pure in heart for they (we) shall see God.

As we have seen, the virtue of purity begins the work of overcoming distractions, particularly those of our desires. The virtue does more than that as the ancients and the scholars tell us. By the virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit perfecting it, our purity is more and more bodily purity; it is the purity of our heart or spirit. In ancient times, the heart was thought of as the center of the inner person, of the mind and will, of what gives the person the source of life. If Christians reflect, we know that the source of life in us is the Holy Spirit. If we allow that Spirit to be truly our source of life, we are interacting with God in all we are and do. We are most true to our real nature because we are most true to God. If we have this awareness of God acting within us, then we have an openness of action, much as we say of children, “you never know what they’ll do next.” Children who have this spontaneity of action act in an almost God-like way. They act for and in the present moment. That present moment seems to go on and on as they continue to act.

They are reflecting what we, too, must if we will let God act freely in us. We will then have a special freedom of action that lets us act with the same spontaneity, which seems to combine both wonder and intensity of concentration but more accurately reflect the Spirit working within us with purity of intention.

The reality of the Spirit working within us makes of everything a mystery because it combines all that we can know with what is beyond us and gives us a surety that is beyond our limited capabilities. The pure in heart can see more clearly than the rest of us. They perceive the good where we might be overwhelmed by the outward defects that hide it. Such purity enabled Mother Theresa to see the essential good in the sinner and not really be concerned with anything except augmenting that goodness in any and every way.

The good that the pure in heart perceive has its source in God. They skip the intermediary steps between seeing the good and reflecting that the good they see is from God, no matter how evil the person or the situation may appear. They just see God in everyone and everything. They accept the disorder, the imperfection, the sin; they draw the good out and see God first and foremost. They really don’t worry that much about in what surroundings He shines through. After all, God Himself gave us the constant example in Jesus’ life. From the disorder surrounding His birth in Bethlehem to the wickedness surrounding His death on the cross, God shines through.

If we would become pure in heart, we must be concerned with God, see Him, as He is, our source of life. If we do, all else falls into place around Him. We have a new energy (as do those in love or as children have) that vitalizes us. It may make us impatient or angry with things or people that impede our concern for God and our acting with and for Him. As we surrender more deeply to His power and allow the Spirit to act more freely within us, even this impatience or anger is overcome by the love of God within us. The pure in heart do see God in all, even here in life on earth. Those who would be pure in heart strain and seek to see Him in all. How blessed will we be as our search is fulfilled!

**HOMEWORK
YEAR TWO
LESSON EIGHT**

<u>DAYS</u>	<i>SCRIPTURE</i>	<i>CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH</i>	<i>DOMINICANA</i>
FIRST WEEK			
	Isaiah cont'd		
MONDAY	29-30	2716-2724	
TUESDAY	31-32	2725-2728	
WEDNESDAY	33-34	2729-2733	
THURSDAY	35-36	2734-2741	
FRIDAY	37-38	2742-2745	
SECOND WEEK			
MONDAY	29-40	2746-2751	
TUESDAY	41-42	2752-2758	
WEDNESDAY	43-44	2759-2764	
THURSDAY	45-46	2765-2772	
FRIDAY	47-48	2713-2776	
THIRD WEEK			
MONDAY	49-50	2777-2785	
TUESDAY	51-52	2786-2793	
WEDNESDAY	53-54	2794-2802	
THURSDAY	55-56	2803-2810	
FRIDAY	57-58	2811-2815	
FOURTH WEEK			
MONDAY	59-60	2816-2821	
TUESDAY	61-62	2822-2827	
WEDNESDAY	63-64	2828-2837	
THURSDAY	65-66	2838-2854	
FRIDAY		2855-2865	

On a separate piece of paper briefly outline your thoughts or questions on the articles you have read for your homework, to be turned in next time we meet