

DESIRES OF THE HEART

The heart is the seat of our emotions and sentiments, feelings and desires, longings and dreams. There we nurture love or hatred, we harbor affection or resentment. Bold ambitions and wild fantasies are born in the heart. We make or break friendships in the heart. Its gives color to our thoughts, flavor to our words. The heart is the cradle of sundry relationships. Our plans, priorities and endeavors show what we carry within. In essence, you and I are what our heart is. It's all there. It's the root of our personality. That's why we point to it as the ultimate arbiter, as when we say, "I love you from the bottom of my heart" or "you know that I'm sincere deep in your heart."

Can you recall those times when your disordered appetites got the better of you? You felt like being a prisoner of your lower self. When our will is weak, we are at the mercy of our whims and caprice. We become slaves of our fickle heart. It sways us according to its moods. We lose self-control. Very little is left of our self-dominion.

Anything that we value so much may not really be that useful after all. It just ends in regrets. It may be costly, but only because the market says so. And price tags are no indicators of real values. Besides, things swiftly depreciate. Today's top of the line products will soon be old-fashioned. Many pockets are drained in the rush to acquire a status symbol, leaving out more important needs. Greed and vanity drive us to make little gods out of earthly things.

If our heart can cleave to material things, more so to human beings. You know that you are attached to someone because you give him or her too much attention. You go out of your way to please that person and you cannot get him or her off your mind. Almost instinctively you excuse, defend, comfort, flatter and praise your hero, who can be a classmate, a cousin, a colleague or a neighbor next door. When we have no one else to turn to, we come up to our soul mate. It is natural that we lean on someone we trust, buddies who never let us down, friend with whom we can share secrets. But left unchecked, intimate associations can be harmful. When that friendship leaves out the others, it tends to slip into a muddled affair.

Take the following case. A young lady who worked as a staff in a public library got to know a graduate student who often came to do research. The first time they met she just helped him looked for reference materials, part of her routine job. Grateful, he invited her to a cup of coffee. Next they swapped emails and phone numbers. And when he offered her a ride home, she couldn't refuse. On her birthday she got a nice gift from the man. Before she knew it she had fallen for him. It looked like a perfect match, 'til she found out that he was married. She "wanted" to move away, but in her own words, "I got hooked, I just couldn't." She found herself in hot water due to an unguarded heart. She eventually managed to wrench herself out of his arms, but only after a difficult interior struggle, aided along by a family friend who brought her back to her senses.

It is not wrong to treasure something or cherish someone. What is foolish is to give them the value they do not have. Unless we are ready to let go of those ties, we will not be truly happy. There is peace when there is freedom. And there is freedom when we are the lord, not the slave of creatures. Dominion requires self-mastery, strength of will, purity of heart, self-discipline, sobriety and temperance. Its gauge is shown in our reaction to adversities. When we are upset because we do not get what we want, it is a sure sign that our heart is fastened to something. On the other hand, we stay cool and unruffled when we are above the quirks of people and the vagaries of life. Serenity is the benchmark of inner freedom.

People guard their valuables using keys, deadlocks, passwords, security codes, and pin numbers. We secure our home from intruders through high walls, burglar alarms, window grilles, shutters and bars. But do we adopt similar measures to protect our heart from possible attacks? So

many lives are ruined precisely because they left their hearts unguarded. Or because they were so naïve as to think they were invulnerable. They did not know themselves. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?” (Jer 17:9).

Too often we focus on the externals, judging things and people from the outside. We size them up and label them at first sight. But we cannot fathom the depths of a person. The inner self is the real self, partly exposed by one’s actions, partly hidden by our intentions. God is concerned a lot more about what goes on in the inside of a person than what he or she displays outside. No wonder the word “heart” appears hundreds of times in the Sacred Scriptures.

A longing for God is mysteriously rooted in the human heart. We may go errant, rebel against heaven and hurl our faith, but no matter how vicious we may turn, we cannot quash altogether that yearning for the Absolute deeply imbedded in our heart. Sin may harden our heart, but it would still retain a certain capacity for good. “There is no human heart,” says St. Josemaría, “no matter how deeply immersed in sin, which does not conceal, like embers among the ashes, a flicker of nobility”.

The heart has a vocation to love. It cannot be otherwise for it was created for that purpose. Deny your heart of a pure love and it will likely cringe and go off-track. Here we are not giving tips to the forlorn, busted and broken hearted, young men or women who try their luck with short-lived relationships in the hope of finding the “perfect partner.” Pure love certainly includes the clean, mutual affection of sweethearts and the proper intimacy of couples. But it goes beyond human love to partake, so to speak, of the love of God.