

The Right Action, the Wrong Intention

“*Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God*”, says St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 10:31). The season of Lent inspires us to engage ourselves in numerous charitable deeds. Our everyday life is an invitation to live out our Christian charism, impregnating the air around us with the sweet fragrance of love and charity. However, it is of utmost importance that every action of ours is done carefully with a clear conscience and a pure intention, lest the spotless white covering of good deeds that encompasses us be stained by the discolouration of the subtle and sinister workings of the evil one.

- 1) **Purity of intention:** St. Ignatius, in the Spiritual Exercises, cautions that even a holy action of prayer must be begun with an awareness of the right intention, by asking ourselves, **why do we do what we do?** We prepare ourselves for prayer by “*asking God for the grace that all our intentions, actions and operations may be ordered purely to the service and praise of the Divine Majesty*” (Spiritual Exercises No.46). Likewise, Our Lord Jesus in the Gospel speaks of “*The left hand not knowing what is being done by the right hand*” (Matthew 6:1-4) - a statement almost hyperbolic in nature, driving home the idea of a pure intention where almsgiving is concerned. Similarly, we are exhorted to exercise prudence, and have the right motivation with regards to prayer (Matthew 6:5-6) and even fasting (Matthew 6: 16-17) .
- 2) **The Deception:** “*A goodly apple rotten at the heart*” – Shakespeare. It seems unrealistic that a good action could actually prove to be a snare to our feet. The labyrinthine temptations of the evil one are generally associated with unfathomable heinous crimes. This may hold true for people who have not had the opportunity for a grounding in basic morality. However, for most people, for those who have progressed in morality and matters concerning the spiritual life, he comes instead as an ‘Angel of Light’. He furtively manipulates the good actions and intentions, and sows the seeds of sophistication, jealousy and vain honour. Before we know it, the seed has become a deeply rooted tree of pride. The sly jackal manipulates the good motivation behind a noble deed to suit his own dastardly ways. Shrewdly does he entice an entrance, like the ‘Pied Piper’, under the guise of a noble deed; we dance, in reverie, oblivious to his enchanting and hypnotic tunes, hapless victims being slyly but definitely led to the edge of the cliff, in a malicious dance of death.
- 3) **Little things that matter much :** In today’s world, largely driven by a hedonistic and consumeristic culture, we are fortunate to have people working selflessly for the welfare of others. We do not wish to pass judgement, nor discourage these heroes who generously render their services to God. Rather, we try to examine further and delve deeper into our spiritual lives. Generally, the motivation behind these beautiful and

selfless acts of service is a fraternal love for one's neighbour, and the glory and praise of God. Sometimes, good and noble deeds like working for the uplift of the poor, struggling to attain social justice, looking after the welfare of the sick and aged, almsgiving and donations, prayer and fasting, helping out with the liturgy in various ministries, or even writing an article may take a turn for the worse. The original motivation and crystal clear vision with which we began gets blurred. We, who were originally seeking God's glory, could now be seeking recognition, reputation, appreciation, vain honour anything and everything under the sun that could feed our ego with a false sense of security, which ultimately leads to our spiral downfall into the detestable abyss of pride.

- 4) **All for God's glory :** Can there be any possibility of accomplishing an act without the nagging of an impure intention ? In the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 14:8-20), at Lystra, Paul heals a man crippled from birth. The people begin to worship Paul and Barnabas, treating them as gods. Without getting carried away by the honour, Paul and Barnabas remind the people that to God alone belongs the glory.

To ascertain that our actions are governed by pure motivation and intentions:

- a) We need to beg for the grace of God fostering pure motives within our hearts.
- b) We must examine our intentions constantly, especially at the beginning, the middle and at the end of an action, always making sure that the good we intend has not been tampered with.
- c) We must be careful that our actions are not driven by the desire to seek love or to fill our empty selves with a false sense of security. Rather, we need to let our actions be governed by the fact that we are madly loved and to Him, be all the glory and honour.

So, we let our light shine before others, that they may see the good works that we do and give glory to our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16)._

(Article by Wesley D'Costa, S.J. – Jesuit Scholastic of the Bombay Province)