

Downward Ascent 6: Blessed Impurities

‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’ (Matt. 5:8)

Lent is an extended season of exposure. For 40 days, God tends to reveal the thoughts and intentions of our hearts; He highlights what is in our hearts rather than what we would like others to think. For example, this Lent God is exposing the folly that I am in truth a merciful person. Yes, I am inclined to show compassion to sexually broken people. But toward traditional men with a regional Midwest mindset I am in truth arrogant and unforgiving. I love partially, at best.

I expect God to level me at Lent. I need to be. So does Desert Stream. He disciplines those He loves. He loved us enough this year to reveal division in our ranks, petty unspoken judgments that threatened to become rifts on our small staff. One year He revealed sexual compromise, another year financial and administrative ones, the next year our failure as a ministry to tithe. We have learned to accept the revelation of our impurities as a terrible gift.

No-one likes to be humbled. But to be emptied again in order to be filled with mercy and power from on high—smells like Jesus, a fragrance that frees us once more to stay true to Him. Accepting the truth of impurities invites us to welcome the Pure One who alone has power to cleanse us. So purity hinges on the exposure of our impurities.

Maybe we need to rethink ‘exposure’. Though the term naturally invokes shame-- the dread of being found out--we may want to turn that around. Perhaps our awareness of impurity is actually a sign that we are becoming pure: less tolerant of falsehood and more sensitive to what pleases Him. Awareness of impurity may actually be a sign that we are becoming more like Him.

C.S Lewis thinks so. He writes in *Mere Christianity*: ‘When a man is getting better, he understands more clearly the evil that is left in him. It is when we notice the dirt that God is most present; it is the very sign of His presence.’

Realizing impurity is a sign of intimacy with Him; submitting that impurity to Him can serve to deepen intimacy all the more. What the devil wants to use to destroy a soul or a ministry, God transforms into an occasion for holy love.

The most winsome Christians I know are those who are painfully aware of their propensity to sin and deeply reliant upon Jesus and His friends as the basis for their purity. I smell the fragrance of holiness in them: holiness sourced in mercy and gratitude.

Purity is a gift from God to persons who respond to the revelation of impurity by plunging and remaining in the mercy pool at the foot of the Cross.

Might we be less shocked by Lenten exposure and more grateful? Let the Spirit of St. Teresa of

Avila fill you. When opponents accused her of being sexually impure, she responded: 'If they really knew me, they would say far worse things about me than that!'

Jesus said that the heart is the source of murder, adultery, lying, theft and slander (Matt. 15:19). Blessed are those who welcome their Source at the source of sin. Purity results: the freedom to see the One who sets us free. For such freedom, the 40 days of Lent may not be long enough!

PRAYER for Monday March 31st: 'Father, we ask for the grace to behold whatever impurity You want to expose in us this Lent.'

PRAYER for Tuesday April 1st: 'Father, help us to know our hearts in regards to such exposure. Do we tend to turn away, tempted to hide, or do we turn to You? Reveal the source of our disquiet: is it fear and shame, pride or presumption? Help us to accept inspired exposure as a gift, not a punishment.'

PRAYER for Wednesday April 2nd: 'Father, renew in us the power of the confessional. May we revisit those ones You have placed in our lives to whom we can pour out the truth of sin and in exchange receive wisdom and forgiveness. Grant us a taste of the purity You offer us in the place of impurity.'

PRAYER for Thursday April 3rd: 'Father, show us persons in our lives who manifest holiness born out of mercy and gratitude. Help us to be more like them, more like Jesus.'

PRAYER for Friday April 4th: 'Father, reveal to our loved ones the love that exposes. In kindness, reveal their inspired need for the purity and integrity only You can give them in exchange for their sin.'

PRAYER for Saturday April 5th: 'Father, reveal how we tend to dismiss our sins in light of the more obvious violations of fallen loved ones. Show us our smug religious pride. Please free us from self-satisfaction; free us for loving hearts and deeds toward the lost born of mercy and gratitude.'

PRAYER for Sunday April 6th: 'Father, make us Your pure Church, born out of honest reckoning with our impurities. Help us to see You. We welcome Your exposure as You prepare us to become a radiant Bride, without stain or wrinkle (Eph. 5: 27).'