

FOR THIS IS THE WILL OF GOD, YOUR

Sanctification

1 THESS 4:3



Reflection:

September 2021

For the newly baptized believers of Thessalonica who had converted from paganism and a culture with loose ethics, the warning of St. Paul would have been hard to comprehend. “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality...For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life” (1 Thes 4:3-7). Slowly but steadily, the Gospel of Christ expelled the lax moral standards prevalent at that time and heralded a new era. Sadly, the decline of Christian influence is progressively manifested in declining moral standards worldwide. It is no wonder that there is a growing indifference to the demands of the Gospel among the youth, who mostly have been brought up in a culture of hedonism and self-centeredness. Yet it is in this very culture that we, as Jesus Youth, are called to hold aloft the banner of truth that sets people free.

There are two ways, described by Jesus, through which a person can journey in this world – the narrow way that leads to life and the broad way that leads to destruction. (Mt 6:13-14). Even though we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, God out of the great love with which he loved us, redeemed us in Christ and lavished his sanctifying grace upon us to live a life worthy of our new stature as children of God. It is this empowerment that enables us to gaze at God’s will to be holy and respond in humble yet strong faith “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”.

To respond to God’s challenge to flee all immorality, especially sexual immorality, each one of us has an important part to do – to learn to control our bodily desires in holiness and honour (1 Thes 4:4). Everyone experiences passions and desires that give glory to God and those that do not. One needs to learn to continually encourage the former and restrain the latter. No one is born with the gift of self-control. It must be developed. Only then can we be like Joseph, who was able to flee from the allurements of his mistress. We are constantly bombarded with sensual stimulations which gleefully offer a welcome distraction for our hearts. Unless we are careful about what we think, watch, and how we use the Internet, we too will embark on a dangerous and downward spiral. Esau wept bitterly (Gen 27:34) for not learning how to control his desires. His flirting with momentary pleasures had cost him God’s blessings. God does not want us to fail like him. His grace is prompting and equipping us to take custody of our hearts by training our eyes, thoughts, imaginations, and memories. How blessed is the person in whom the reins of sexual powers are guided by faith and right reason! Whether single or married, the waters of his carnal urges are being transformed into wine of pure, self-giving love through a beautiful and continuous intermingling of grace and effort.

God is infinite truth, goodness, and beauty. Anyone drawn to God should be drawn to these. That is why St. Paul condemns all kinds of immorality, which is against God’s standard of truth. He ceaselessly writes in his letters to turn one’s hearts from the broad way of immorality that leads to destruction to a new way of living that leads to life. Like Paul, are we keenly holding on to these godly values in our lives or do we compromise like Esau for momentary pleasures and gains of life? Are we nurturing our conscience in truth so that it helps us to flee from moral compromises? Are we constantly striving to grow in virtues so that our peers and family members notice the integrity in our character? Consciously or unconsciously, people are looking for truth, goodness, and beauty. Only if these attributes are visible in our lives can we in the Jesus Youth Movement and in the Church be able to attract them and draw them to experience the truth, goodness, and beauty of God himself. Yes, God’s will for us is to be holy like Him – nothing less; nothing else. Can we embrace this call wholeheartedly?