

Do not underestimate the power of lesser sins (Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



Let us consider those sins that some people call ‘lesser’ and which are not, of course, mortal, but still bear a certain weight of guilt. We sometimes fall into these through inattention or ignorance, sometimes through languor and weakness of will, and, on other occasions deliberately, with our full knowledge and will. The greater weight of guilt belongs to the last category.

A sin can be considered lesser when we compare it to a mortal one. But it’s not to be taken lightly when we see it in isolation and for itself. For example, a lake may be called small in comparison to a vast expanse of sea. But it’s not small in itself, since it contains a great deal of water. In the same way, a lesser sin seems small in comparison with a mortal one.

But, in itself, it’s still a great evil. Since a small and a great sin are both equally transgressions against the divine law, as Saint John the Evangelist says: ‘Everyone who commits a sin, commits lawlessness also; sin is lawlessness’ (1 Jn., 3,4). According to Saint James, the Brother of our Lord, if someone observes the whole of the law and errs in only one thing, then they’re breaking the whole of the law. ‘For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it’ (James 2, 10).



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How then can we consider our ordinary sins to be small? 'White' lies, anger, impiety in church, sorrow or jealousy over the good fortune of a neighbour, idle talk, much joking, laughter and teasing, filling the stomach, adorning the body and so many other ones. How is it possible for us to describe as minor those sins which, if only we knew their full weight, would terrify us? Let's not think that by committing them we aren't going against the will of God and that we're not losing the glory of the kingdom of heaven.

We're deceiving ourselves if we believe, for example, that the venial sin of idle talk isn't displeasing to God when His word is clear: 'I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every idle word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned' (Matth. 12, 36).

And how can we say that we're not contradicting the will of God with unrestrained laughter, when the Lord Himself never laughed as a man, though He did weep four times. With His own mouth He warned us: 'Woe to you who are laughing now, for you shall weep and mourn' (Luke, 6, 25). Basil the Great, in fact, imposed a penance of exclusion from communion for a week for a monk or nun who joked or laughed improperly (in his Digest of the Canonical Ordinances).

How can we claim that lying and feasting aren't against the will of God, when the Lord warns that He will destroy all liars (Ps 5, 7) and curses those who are well-fed: 'Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry' (Luke 6, 25)?

And, to speak in general terms, how can we claim that minor sins don't deprive us of virtue and divine Grace, when the Holy Spirit, speaking allegorically through the mouth of Ecclesiastes, says: 'Pestilent flies will corrupt a preparation of sweet ointment' (10, 1)? The Fathers interpret this in this way: when flies fly over an

aromatic ointment without settling on it, they don't alter it., but if they stop and fall into it, they'll die, stink and spoil the fragrance. In the same way, if minor sins don't stop for long in a devout and virtuous soul they won't do it much harm. But if they remain there, then the soul begins to incline towards them of its own volition, in which case they deprive it of the purity of virtue and the fragrance of divine Grace, preventing it from reaching perfection. These sins make the soul abominable to God: 'The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord' (Pr. 15, 26). And if wicked thoughts separate the soul from God- 'perverse thoughts separate from God' (Wisdom of Solomon 1, 3) how much further is the wretched soul that sins separated from the love of God?

(To be continued)

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