

This alone is the point. In the heart self must stand pure in battle array against the impurities that proceed from the heart. When the distinction is ignored between the self that believes, and the inequalities that prevail in the heart, you are lost. For then you identify yourself with these impurities. Then you sink away in the evil waters of your own heart and are drowned in your sinful inclinations.

If, on the other hand, in the inner chambers of your heart you are bold, heroic and determined in your stand of bitter hatred against your sinful inclinations, as against your mortal enemy, the heart may remain full of impurities until death, but you are pure of heart, and by God's grace you triumph again and again over the sin that attacks you in the heart. Then Satan is not your tempter, but God is your confederate. Then the struggle which is never given up brings you the closer to God, and in the midst of battle there are moments when with the vision of the eye of the soul, you see, as it were, your God.

77

**"IN THE NIGHT I COMMUNED WITH  
MINE OWN HEART."**

Sleep and prayer have this in common that both he who prays and he who sleeps closes his eyes, and retires from light into darkness. But they are not the same. He who prays will close his eyes, in order not to be distracted by what is seen around him. If possible he would stop his ears in order not to be distracted by noises from without. There is also prayer with others to which other considerations apply. But by itself

one who prays seeks strength in retirement. This is expressed in what Jesus told his disciples: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet and shut the door behind thee"(Matth. 6:6). And he set us the example, as often as he withdrew himself for prayer into the solitude of the wilderness, or into the loneliness of the mountains. Even in Gethsemane the Lord seeks solitude for his last agonized prayer, and leaves his disciples at a distance, that he might pray alone.

Insofar as this expresses a desire for rest and quiet in prayer, it agrees with what we seek in sleep. But with this the likeness ends. With prayer we withdraw from the world that in our fellowship with Almighty God we may be more fully awake to the higher order of things. In sleep, on the other hand, we retire from the world, in order to lose ourselves in unconsciousness and in forgetfulness of self. At least, such it is, when everything is normal. In Paradise it would always have been so. But in stern reality prayer and sleep are continually confused in a two-fold way. They are confused in such a way that prayer is overtaken by what belongs to sleep, and when we lie down to sleep the soul passes into the attitude of prayer. Not as though in prayer many actually fall asleep. That this happens sometimes when prayer is too long, is granted. This, however, is always exceptional. But what frequently happens is, that he who with others prays with him who leads in prayer, either allows his mind to be diverted or unconsciously lets it rest. And that the night, which was intended for sleep, frequently ends in prayer, see it in the case of Asaph, as in Psalm 77 R. V. 2, 5, he complains:

“My hand was stretched out in the night to my God in prayer. Thou, Lord, held mine eyes watching. In the night I communed with mine own heart; and my spirit made diligent search.”

When we close our eyes for sleep, or for prayer, we go out from light, by excluding the same, into desired darkness. We do this with respect to sleep, that with our spirit we may sink back into the darkness of unconscious life; and with respect to prayer, that, shut out from light of day, we may seek in clearer consciousness the higher light which shines around the throne of God.

In nature, light is not disturbed by darkness, for darkness is there of itself, and it is only by increasing light that darkness is overcome. At first there was no light, but darkness. “The earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep;” and in that darkness light broke forth by the creative word of God. And when, later on, darkness again covers the earth, it does not obtrude upon light from without, but is there of itself, as soon as light withdraws itself. This is so in the world of matter, and spiritually it is not otherwise. There was darkness in nature, and so it remained until God created light; and so soon as God withdraws the light of sun, moon and stars, darkness returns.

So in the mind of a new-born child there is at first entire unconsciousness and ignorance. This continues until the light of the consciousness awakens in the soul, and gradually gains in clearness. But this clearness of the consciousness can fade again into darkness. This happens when one faints, or is hypnotized, in part also with the insane

and the dotage of old age. The same happens moreover every night. Sleep is the passing of the light of our consciousness into the twilight of slumber, and finally into deep, sound sleep. At night the light of day without, and the light of self-consciousness within, set in darkness and unconsciousness. It may even be said that the more absolutely the light of the self-consciousness passed out, the better and more healthy was sleep. Not to know anything on waking of the seven hours we slept, is the most normal operation of nature.

In paradise, before he fell, the first man slept like this. So the young child still sleeps at mother's breast. So the weary day-laborer of little intelligence in part still sleeps. But such sleep is no longer the rule. Our sleep is all too frequently restless, either when physical causes of sickness or excesses disturb it, or when the mind is too excited to allow the self-consciousness to pass into entire forgetfulness. And so we come to dreams or to half or entire sleeplessness.

Dreamlife is a dark domain which has been investigated but little. It is enough that we know what anxiety and agony it can occasion; how in sinful imagination it can soil the consciousness; how prophecies and premonitions sometimes loom up in it; and also how God has used it more than once as a means by which to execute his holy Counsel.

Next to dreamlife, however, and more distressing, is the woe of a sleepless night, when cares keep the heart awake; when the mind is too much on a tension; when a task, which awaits us in the morning prevents us from sleep, or when sickness

holds back the passionately longed-for sleep from our eyes. Sleeplessness is a part of human misery, which is foreign to younger years, but which in later years few escape.

As in good prayer the mind excludes itself from the world, but is the more clearly awake to the higher world of thought, so it can also be in the dream and in sleepless slumber. In sleep the mind should sink away in forgetfulness, but on the contrary it lives the more intensely in terrifying or in holy dreams. And in place of rest the mind finds in sleepless slumber only a greater tension and far more pressing and wearing activity. And the Lord is also in this. Asaph expressed it with fervent piety: "Thou holdest mine eyes watching."

This spiritual recognition, that it is not chance, but the Lord who holds our eyes waking, shows that dreamlife and sleepless slumber serve a purpose. By means of them the Lord intends to do something; and when at night the heart communes with itself, and the spirit makes diligent search, this, too, is a part of our life for which we are responsible. Sin consists not only of words and deeds, but also in thoughts, also in what goes on in the mind. We are responsible even for our dreams. Not for what happens to us in our dreams, but for what we do in them. We do not all have the same dreams. Every one dreams according to the content of his imagination. And however little we may be lord and master over our dreams, every one feels, that in case our Savior has known a dreamlife, it can not have been otherwise than perfectly holy. In the night itself we can not make the dream dif-

ferent from what it is, but purifying our imagination and cleansing our thoughts will in time transport our dreams into sinless domains.

Our responsibility for what our mind does in sleepless hours of night is of necessity far greater. For in the darkness of night our spirit can invite the world, or it can meditate and ponder on holy things. It can also toss itself about in us without will and without aim. What our spirit then must do in the darkness, is to open the door to holy things and dwell in a higher world. Even when in the midst of sleep there is a quarter of an hour of wakefulness the mind can and should engage itself with God. The first thought on awaking must be again of God. "O God, Thou art my God: early in the morning will I seek Thee" (Ps. 63:1 Dutch version). For him who so understands it, sleepless slumber is a spiritual gold mine.

In such sleepless nights many people have been wonderfully enriched in spiritual things. Here also is Divine mercy. Sleeplessness is occasioned by our misery, but this misery also God by his grace transposes into supreme mercifulness. In such nights God has remembered his own with such spiritual benefits that a night of sleep has sometimes seemed a loss. Divine work goes on through the hours of night in the souls of his elect in a way that glorifies his name.

78

"I WAIT FOR THEE ALL THE DAY  
LONG."

The Spirit, with the Father and the Son, maintains all power, and causes it to work not only in