

Piety and devotion before God in pastoral counselling work relating to the persons touched by crime

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Abstract

The article focuses on an exegetical analysis of the piety and devotion before God as the main personal qualities of a pastoral counsellor. They are revealed as the basis for making a unity with God while performing the activities of a pastoral counsellor. The article deals with the importance of the piety before God in the development of respectful relationships with peers. The understanding of a new creature in Christ is linked with the ability to build a mutual dedicated relationship between pastoral counsellors and persons under their care. Charity is seen as a service to the least brothers, concluding that in the New Testament everything related to the words poverty and suffering reveals the presence of the Kingdom of God on earth, as well as the fact that any person in our lives can become the least brother of Jesus.

Keywords: Piety and devotion before God, pastoral counselling.

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1. Introduction

Prisoners represent a wide range of people. All of them feel lonely and abandoned because they are faced with harsh realities of life, with strict limits and regime, with a coarse, rules-based mode of life and sometimes with unpleasant human rights violations; in addition, almost all of them have had unsettled or damaged relationships in the past. So, they have no positive contact with the outside world. Some of them deny it, while others make no secret of it, but everyone thirsts for human warmth and the responses to the questions of life. A pastoral employee – a chaplain, a priest or a volunteer – is one of the few persons who are allowed to have an informal relationship with these people. In this situation, a pastoral employee usually faces two challenges – the inability to give his or her attention to all those who wish to have it and the incompatibility of his or her personal values with the personal values of those who are under their care. To select a solution to overcome these challenges, let us follow God's sample. First of all, it concerns the issues on what God teaches about sacrificing and mutual self-giving relationships, about where to look for the sources of strength for their selfless and enthusiastic pastoral activities and what qualities and features of a person should be developed to overcome the misunderstandings and moments of weakness.

2. Piety and devotion before God

Piety and devotion before God form the basis for a genuine human attitude to God, thus contributing to human unity with Him. True piety is intentional and results from the experience of God's love.

Creatures are shivering with piety before God (cf. Rom 8:19), as they are completely dependent on their Creator, but man is different from other creatures because to some extent he is similar to God and is appointed to rule over the rest of creation (cf. Gen 1:27–29). It is only natural if a person has a sense of helplessness and weakness, his otherness from the Creator (cf. Job 40–42). However, to achieve genuine piety, man needs a personal experience of the relationship with God because man was created in order to build relationships (cf. Gen 2, 18.21–25).

The word *fear*, first of all, is related to the law observance (obeying the law) as we read it in Deuteronomy (6:2; 6:13) and in Proverbs (13:13). Secondly, piety has a social dimension, in relation to peers and parents (cf. Lev 19:3), the poor (cf. Lev 19:14) and the elderly (ch. Lev 19:32). In all these areas, we read the words – I am the Lord your God! God justifies the requirement to fear with obedience to authority, who has always done good to people. In this sense, *fear* is also related to the feelings of respect and reverence. In a broader sense, *fear* leads to security and salvation (cf. Proverbs 14:26–27). While in Jewish Wisdom literature, fear of God is associated with the beginning of wisdom (cf. Proverbs 1:7; Ps 111:10), but the prophet Isaiah sees in *fear* the fruits of the Holy Spirit (cf. Is 11:2).

In all these cases, we see that *fear* has been used not to frighten people, but to encourage them to trust in God, as piety before God will increase our benefit. God calls people to be in His presence, and a positive human response, obedience to God, guarantees His presence. If we trust and obey God, then soon we will hear God say – do not be afraid, because God is not a cruel and arbitrary monarch, as Satan by his malicious 'catechesis' tries to tell us (cf. Gen 3), but rather a careful father who cares for the needs of his children. Therefore, He says 'do not be afraid' to the patriarchs, when they receive His promises (cf. Gen 15:1; 26:24); to the people suffering in exile (cf. Is 41:10,13; 43:1.5, 44:2); to the prophets, when they must proclaim the will of God (cf. Jer 1:8; Ec 2:6, 3:9; 2 Kings 1:15); and Jesus says the same to his disciples when speaking about those people who will inherit the kingdom of the Father (cf. Mt 6:25–34; Lk 12:32).

However, if a person chooses to disobey, then *fear* for him implies the meaning of 'dread' as God is always just (cf. Jos 24:19). Those who disobey Him, receive a fair repayment (cf. Dt 6:14–15). Repayment here shall be understood as the consequence for breaking God's Law. It relates to justice because if there exists an unchangeable law which a person is unable to change, then the person who

has broken this law is responsible for the non-compliance and unpleasant consequences, and that is fair. However, this applies only to those who maliciously do not want to follow the laws of God and are hardened by their wickedness. Conversely, those who recognise their guilt and rely on the grace of God already embody the spirit of the children of God of the New Testament, where love casts out any fear, because fear expects punishment, but love expects mercy.

In Deuteronomy 6:13, fear appears along with other indications and throws up a number of correlations between related concepts. To fear, to serve and to know can also be considered as three stages on the way to God. Getting to know relates to swear, as you cannot really swear if do not know Him, whose justice you invoke. Getting to know without piety can have severe consequences for which God warns, in Deuteronomy 5:11, and what we know as the second commandment, which forbids the abuse of God's name. Piety is the starting point that allows one to start to understand the will of God, which He has clearly expressed in the Ten Commandments. Piety helps to serve God in the best way and fruitfully. Besides, God has given specific instructions on how a person can become pious (cf. Dt 6:6–9). It means to live by the law of God on a daily basis, each of his actions subordinating its requirements. By serving God, a person gets better acquainted with God as he performs His will, and with all his essence shows how much God is important to him. True piety is the basis of the experience of God's love and leads to a deliberate and targeted practicing of charity.

In summary, we conclude that true piety manifests itself as a deliberate and purposeful search of contact with God. By wholeheartedly repeating prayers, a believer can with spiritual eyes see God and get to Him through the secret soul door. Paraphrasing, we can say that a genuine, regular prayer is the first step in the direction of genuine piety, which will give the desired unity with God.

As previously seen, a right fear of God is closely related to obedience, but it means listening to God. The apostle Paul wrote that faith comes by listening to God's word (cf. Rom 10:17). By faith man obeys and receives the experience of God's love, which is further manifested through charity. The word *listen* in Hebrew also has several meanings, which well explains its implied sense. First, as with *fear*, it is a call *to submit to* and *to obey*; secondly, it means *to respect* with a sub meaning *to hold* and *to follow*; and thirdly, *to listen to* inevitably requests *to do* or *not to do*, which is a response to this call (cf. Ex 19:8, 24:3,7). Taking into account the fact that there is a question of listening to the Word of God, is that the Word of God is inseparable from the word truth; to the Jews the word *to listen* also meant to be open to the truth, the meaning of which is a sound basis (cliff). It implies confidence in a covenant with God, taking it into our heart, obeying and executing it. In other words, by listening to God we open ourselves to the truth and do our work in truth. The scripture highlights the act of Mary, Mother of Jesus, who keeps the Word of God in her heart (cf. Elk 2:19, 51). The heart symbolises the deepest centre of human existence, the place where man chooses between good and evil. Scripture states that Mary always respected and obeyed the Word of God, so she was able to listen to it. Directly in connection with his mother Mary, Jesus also reveals the deepest link between listening and respect, 'Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it!' (Elk 11:27–28). So, the right listening to the Word of God is attributed to those who in some way are similar to God – blessed – because God is holy.

But man does not want to listen to God (cf. Dot 18, 16:19), and it is his tragedy. He is deaf to the call of God – his ears and heart are uncircumcised (cf. Jeer 6:10; 9:25; Ac 7: 51). Jesus says that 'people do not understand because they cannot listen (cf. Jan 8: 43, 47), and that they cannot listen because they do not want to follow.'

The practice of piety helps to hear God's paternal explanation, which can be found in Deuteronomy (6:6–9). To record these words in one's heart (6:6), literally – upon one's heart, means to evaluate the Law of God higher than our personal opinion, beliefs and actions and to realise that they must be aligned with the Law of God. In order to successfully coordinate our thoughts with the laws of God, we must understand that they operate everywhere – in our family, walking on the road, getting up and going to bed (Dot 6:7). These four instructions include all possible human psycho physiological states in the space. 'Bind them for a sign upon thane hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thane

eyes' (Dt 6:8) means that the Law of God must be constantly present in our thoughts and it must be contemplated (between the eyes) and then it must manifest in our works (sign upon thine hand), or more precisely – on the pulse of blood because this word must be entered into our bloodstream so that it becomes a natural expression of life in certain positions, while 'write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates' (6:9) calls to ask for a blessing for each job by launching it, and thank God for completing it. Thus, the main qualities of pastoral staff which should be developed and which affect pastoral work are piety and listening to God. Piety promotes the implementation of the task for a man given by God – careful management of the world which also includes the pastoral work, as it leads a man to constant communion with God. If we listen to God, we hear the truth, and our works become purposeful and meaningful. Piety requires us to perform faithful and regular daily work with ourselves.

3. Piety before God as the basis of respect for the other person

A pious man is called to see God face to face and life together with Him (cf. Mt 5, 8, 25, 21:23; 1 Cor 13:12; Heb 4:7–11; 1 Jan 3:2), but it is inextricably linked with our understanding of self-identity. Now, we will explore how a person's identity is revealed within the context of the Love Commandment, encouraging us to unselfishness as we are called to love God, ourselves and our neighbour. The concept of the self in both the Old and the New Testament is not a limiting, it does not determine a certain person – himself or his thoughts – as a criterion, but abolishes restrictions and prejudices.

Charity about which Jesus speaks is directed to the benefit of our neighbour – it does not highlight us, but the other person (cf. Jn 8, 28). With the same zeal with which we want to fulfil our desires and needs, we must try to help other people in their needs. This means not to impose restrictions on how much one will help or devote time according to one's own understanding, but to help as much and long as the person in need needs help. This means unlimited growth and expansion of love as the person in need may be anyone who comes into our sight. More important is to think about the correspondence of our actions and behaviour to our vocation, rather than to differentiate it depending on the other person's importance or quality. Simply put, it means to dedicate one's self and time to other people to such an extent as may be necessary for them or to such an extent as we ourselves would like, if faced with similar situations. If we love our neighbour, we inevitably come to relationship with God and if we love God, we start to look for our neighbour.

God assures us that the most important is loving relationships both with Him and the people and with each other (cf. 1 Jn 4, 19–21), and He himself leads us into a life of love. We must conclude that love is the most important feature that characterises us as God's children and heirs. Love defines our individual identity, and therefore, by our actions we are able to imitate and spread it. God is love and man reflects His love because love is His work. We can find our true identity and dignity by looking at Jesus Christ, who is the very image of God (cf. Col. 1:19) and who loved to the end (cf. Jn 13:1), showing what is man (cf. Jn 19:5), and what he must do in life to suit his nature. Throughout this process, God does not confuse the boundaries between persons but respects each person's deeply personal and unique nature which reveals God's omnipotence and universality, as well as highlights human dignity. The behaviour of a God's child is a testimony of God's love experienced based in piety, and it is no longer a sentiment, but a will that helps to overcome the difficulties caused by selfishness according to the person's identity and dignity. Here we also get an answer about our ability to be selfless, self-sacrificing and open to a mutual self-giving relationship with any person. Due to a pious life and practicing the truth, the person stays with God and with already a transformed look of love sees the image of God in his neighbour and feels the ability to sacrifice himself to other people because he is united with God and God himself is present and manages the two-way process of love. Thus, the human foibles remain in the background – it also explains the ability to maintain equal and trusting relationships with people who do not deserve it humanly. Therefore, we can say that piety before God is the basis for true identity awareness and true respect for other person which is the same creature of God as we are. Due to the relationship based upon dedication, both persons – the

pastoral employee and the person under their care – become partners for some time to get God’s transforming love experience passed from one person to another. This unity in love of God helps us understand each other, it helps to listen carefully, to respond accordingly, to suffer compassionately and to rejoice truly because God himself tells us of His pain, joy, frustration or hope through the fulfilment of the other person’s life events. Thus, due to the mutual self-giving relationship both participants undergo changes.

Summarising this section, we can conclude that in order to soothe the thirst of the sentenced persons for human warmth and to help them to find answers to their essential existential questions, we need a personal, a regular practice of piety in order to fulfil the actions of a pastoral worker with the truth and relationships – with God’s presence. If a pastoral worker is distracted or otherwise experience some weakness, he must with meekness and peace submit to remedial action of God’s will. God often uses our human limitations to perform unimaginable things. Without God’s sanctifying presence, the favourable changes of a person irreversibly oriented to the image of God would be impossible. We have also found out that a mutual self-giving relationship implies a multidirectional movement and it leaves an impact on all the participants, but what happens as a result of this interaction, we will explore in the next section.

4. Charity as a service to the least brothers

The aim of pastoral care is to break all the barriers and obstacles which are in the way of the persons under their care for opening new horizons of life with new opportunities. This is an internal release process based on the power of God; Jesus is the one who restores human identity, so involvement of Jesus in pastoral work includes restoring the person’s inner freedom.

All of us have our own forms of oppression that split and fragment us – pain, blindness, sadness, sins or deformity. During the pastoral process, the person meets with the Gospel values that offer integral and consistent ethical and moral standards that restore the wholeness of the person. In the middle, there is a free personal choice. This choice can also be destructive. Liberation means a radical personal transformation in the person who is ready to take a serious and healthy decision corresponding to the nature of a child of God. As previously mentioned, both participants of a mutual self-giving relationship – the pastoral employee whose personal sacrifice is deliberate and the convicted person who allows another person to enter into their life – undergo changes in their personal life. God’s love is completely selfless and as an answer requires the same unselfishness. On the contrary, the human nature is selfish because it is injured by sin. Selflessness is not pleasant, so on its own it cannot accept God’s transforming power of love and surrender to it. A constant position of love in man develops gradually. It is a long-term process, which is the training for the human nature weakened by sin, where the coach is God himself, the training partners – people, but the methods – the practice and perfection of virtues.

Through the interaction of God’s grace and the man’s piety, a new creation in Christ is born. Jesus says, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance’ (cf. Mt 9, 13); by these words He said that grace is greater than justice. The life of a new creature in Christ is based on truth, which can be called justice. Jesus stressed that He has to come to sinners, to those who do not justify themselves, thus usurping the righteousness of God with power, or who are not able to justify themselves because they are too weak. His disciples were the sinners who admitted their guilt before God and whose sins he forgave, transforming their human nature and restoring their similarity with God. God’s grace is the other feature of a new creature in Christ that reveals the true power of God’s love (cf. Mt 9:6). Jesus taught his disciples to pray: ‘Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors (Mt 6:12),’ otherwise they were like the ungrateful servant in the parable of Matthew (cf. Mt 18:23–35). St. Paul later explained it in detail, referring to the leading role of mercy in interpersonal relationships (cf. Rom 14:13–15). Jesus also points to the opportunities and benefits that await the disciples when they show mercy to a person in need (cf. Mt 25:31–46). In the parable of the small child (cf. Mk 9:37), by which each disciple is called to pick up and cuddle the

smallest, most vulnerable, Jesus reveals that this is an opportunity to pick up God himself, to drink from the very source of love that each child of God wants most of all, because of being thirsty (cf. Jn 7: 37–38). An active relationship with God further strengthens the person's faith and makes him able to accept Jesus and a way of life of servant hood required by love of God (cf. Mk 10:43–45), and to live like children of God. Each decision to love is fortified by the grace of God. Accepted in faith, it becomes possible, as it comes from Jesus who works through the piety and obedience of the disciple (cf. Gal 2:20). Jesus calls us to be creative, and the words go, and do thou likewise (Lk 10:37) means – be creative, think according to your life situation, only take into account the principle of life for every child of God – the commandment of love (Jn 15:12–13), which gives a person clarity before making any choice. Jesus spoke in parables, in order to awaken the mind of the surrounding people, to unleash their freedom and creativity, imagination and spontaneity, in other words, all the talents which man has received from God, so that freed from the grip of sin, man could fully serve Him.

The worldview and relationship attitudes of a new creature in Christ radically change. The worldview change is associated with the inevitable judgment of God and the assessment of human condition in eternity which is largely linked to the human treatment of the least brothers of Jesus (cf. Mt 25:31–46). The concept of the least brothers of Jesus in the context reads as follows: 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me' By studying the text, we see that service to people in their needs is equivalent to the relationship with Christ, but do not completely clear to whom the word connection *the least of these brothers and sisters of mine* refers. In light of the tradition which teaches that Jesus was the only child of Mary and Joseph, as well as the use of the Greek word *Adelphi* in other places of Matthew's Gospel, two explanatory directions appear. In the fragments of Mt 12:48–50; 18: 15,21,35; 23:8; 28:10, the word *brothers* refers to the members of the Christian community, while in the fragments of Mt 5:22–24,47; 7:3–5 – to any person as the object of ethical obligation to object. However, it remains unclear what is meant by *the least*.

Serving people in their needs means assisting in difficulties, caring for the infirm, oppressed or marginalised etc. This service is the indicator of the relationship with Jesus. Jesus calls us to love God, and we know that 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life' (1 Jn 4:9). It follows that by taking care of people in need we confirm that we love Jesus, which is the first conclusion. Secondly, we conclude that Jesus' brothers can be both Christian community members and any other person. Jesus' least brothers are his disciples who are in difficulty. Following this comment, the criterion of the Court is my responsibility for how I have treated the messengers of the kingdom of heaven who are the least brothers of Jesus – His disciples who suffer. St. Teresa of Calcutta in her ministry used the motto from the Scriptures – 'whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me' (cf. Mt 25, 40). 'The people who have forgotten what is love, what is human love because they have no one to love them, are also the poorest of the poor.' So, it is what about Jesus' least brothers says St. Teresa of Calcutta. Here, we discover the true meaning of the word *the least*. *The least* is synonymous with *the poorest*, but they, in turn, are the people who have been separated from God's love, which in a paradoxical way is received and given to people as the care for one another, without selecting and indiscriminately, but assuming every person as our neighbour.

Thus, identifying the least brothers of Jesus and revealing the worldview of the restored person, we conclude that everything associated with the words *poverty* and *suffering* reveals the presence of the Kingdom of God on earth. To God, the most important is the merciful attitude of the restored person for fellow human beings – our neighbour, because Jesus' least brothers can be any person in our lives, depending on our attitude towards him. The determinant is the right choice of the restored person in relation to the offered for him opportunity to practice charity every life situation 24 hours a day. The responsibility of the restored person (Jesus' disciple) for the treatment of God's offered love is growing. Therefore, to assert the identity of the child of God in the day of judgment and receive eternal life, the restored person – a new creation in Christ – must implement his faith through the

works of charity (cf. Mt 25:31–46), because as Mother Teresa has claimed, ‘Faith in action is love, and love in action is service.’

Man is free to choose God or reject him, but a pastoral employee is obliged to be united with Jesus, who is the witness of God’s love for all – not just those who are pleasing. What a lot of good can be done within a few minutes and in so inhumane conditions!

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