

## Curiosity (January 7, 1996)

It is called prying for people meddle in affairs not of their concern. Ethicists accepted the concept of scientific curiosity, which is seeking the knowledge of what lies in the universe, in history and the general knowledge in everything, for knowledge of this world shall release us from the rigidity of mind. However, ethicists do not wish for us to probe into people's affairs and concerns; for this shows disrespect for others. Everyone has their own friends and their own spiritual father. As for us knowing the sins of others and endeavoring to know them by all means, it shall harm us as it shall harm them. And if we are to distract ourselves with the sins of others, we shall fail to examine our soul and to mend it. We meddle often in other's affairs in order to defame and tattle about them, and this is the beginning of gossiping.

Instead of keeping their sin to ourselves and forgive them in advance, we spread it and our brother would be hurt because of us and would feel desperation and be ashamed of himself. Tattling does not lead others to repentance, but it deepens their sin, puts them in misery and lets them belittle themselves and loath us. It has been mentioned in the ascetic literature: "What would you do if you saw your spiritual father committing adultery?" It has been later said: "I shall cover him". I do not wish to see his weakness. If we seek the imperfections in people, we shall most likely commit the same. Therefore, our fathers have advised us not to mention a misdeed we had committed, for in mentioning lies the power of attraction and recurrence.

Also in the ascetic literature, it has been said that hermits have complained about a hermit among them bringing a woman into his cell, but the convent's chief did not pay any attention to what they have said even though they reiterated their complaints. The chief came suddenly upon the hermit while he was at his cell and he saw the woman. He took her and placed her in the necessities' box. He later called upon the hermits, sat on the box and said to them when they arrived: "Where is that woman?" The sinned hermit felt ashamed and repented, and the others hermits repented of gossiping as well.

We have our eyes on people's actions. We care to know where did so-and-so go, where did he stay, at what time did he enter this house, who was with him in the car, who sent this letter, and what did the letter say? We are obsessed to know how people live under their roof, where they have spent the night, at what time did they come back, what happened there and what one told the other.

What is wrong with this? First and foremost, curiosity is to take pleasure from the sins of neighbors and colleagues. No one seeks a misdeed done by others unless he was attracted to the misdeed itself. Therefore, to push away his guilt, he enjoys knowing that others have committed the same. Whoever describes the misdeeds of others shall do the same.

The greatest danger is that we shall neglect our own soul, for mending it would cost us too much trouble. The one who repents is the one who watches over his soul in order to mend it. Our sins are numerous and repenting of them shall take all our time. Watching over ourselves leads us to become quiet and calm, whereas curiosity arouses agitation in us. Silence is the best frame for chastity because it puts us right before our soul.

It has been said in the prayer of Saint Ephrem the Syriac in fasting: "...Free me from idleness and curiosity." Curiosity emanates from idleness. He who does not have anything to do shall enjoy watching others. And he who finds himself watched shall be hurt, isolated and even hateful. There is no spiritual depth in someone who corrupts and burns the world with his tongue. As for the one who places his soul under divine examination, he shall be occupied with

repentance. Pay attention to the good deeds only, for they shall make people's faces shine, and when we see their beauty, God's face shall also shine to us.