

## Mistakes of Spiritual Counseling

The first mistake is exaggerating in strictness. Sometimes, the spiritual father sees that it is beneficial to forbid the confessor from communion until he becomes sure of his repentance. The father would listen to him weekly and when he notices an improvement he would bring him back to the Holy Communion.

As for ordinary situations, wisdom is essential. For example, there could be a sick person that has to take his medicine in the morning accompanied by a piece of bread. The lord's body is for the sick as it is for the healthy. Another case is that the spiritual son may not be intending to have communion in the morning but feels that he wants that during the service. The priest must estimate what should be done in such cases. There should be flexibility in things that are related to fasting. Ecclesiastic laws that have a disciplinary touch exist for the salvation of souls. It is up to the discerning priest to manage those laws.

In general, there is a difference between teaching and guidance. We provide teaching with strictness. However, if a person fell into sin, we must use mercy with him. This mercy facilitates the return of the lost son. There should be firmness while blaming him over the sin and sympathy while lifting the sinner from the pit.

The spiritual father commits a mistake if he disparaged the sin and if he made the issue look easy in order to try and save the sinner. Reducing the grossness of the sin usually throws the confessor in a deeper pit and ruins his evaluation for things. One shouldn't say for example: "You lied, and lying is common; next time, be better". This is a killing compromise with evil. You cannot say to a married person: "You used your freedom while you were traveling. I understand this. Preserve yourself in the next time". Such words are very corrupting. To understand the person is one thing, while to excuse him is something completely different. The priest isn't a psychoanalytic to understand how things occurred. He is a teacher of the Law and this is what gives salvation.

The counselor must encounter the sin that's mentioned with the beauty of virtue that the spiritual son didn't have. He must make the virtue attractive and try to make it beloved for the spiritual son. From this aspect, the priest accompanies his spiritual son with good words towards Jesus' visage. He mustn't act like a military person or like someone that has lost his patience. He must not be surprised by any sin and not produce any groan or sigh or anger in front of what he is hearing. Any person could commit any sin. The father must hear through his mind and try to understand the reason behind the trespass and its circumstances and the weakness that led to it. He must not confront with psychoanalysis but with the divine word. He shouldn't play the role of a psychoanalytic. Analyzing is not his job, and having a minor knowledge might lead him to disasters. However, if he

really discovered that the spiritual son needs a psychiatrist, he should lead him to one.

In addition to this, the priest cannot decide anything for his spiritual son. He is forbidden to command him to marry or to become a monk for example. He could say: You are qualified to be married, however he can't exhort him to get married or to become a monk. Also, the more dangerous thing is to tell him: This girl is appropriate – or inappropriate – for you. The spiritual father doesn't carry the responsibility of success or failure in marriage. The most important thing is that he shouldn't carry a list of girls to make them the wives of his spiritual sons.

Again and again I want to assure that the spiritual son isn't a slave for the priest. The priest must listen to whoever asks for guidance. In Greek, the word "obedience" is derived from the word "listening". The main purpose of counseling is to guide the confessor to listen to the word of God so that it can change him. Therefore, no one may have dominance over the other. A loving and discerning accompaniment leads to obedience for God's words.

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