

Anthony: Let us now consider, in like manner, what great worldly benefit is afforded to people by high positions, offices, and authority-to those worldly-minded people, that is, who desire them for no higher purpose. Afterwards we will speak of those who do desire them for a higher purpose.

The great thing that most people like best about these things is the idea of getting to rule, command, and control other people while living uncommanded and uncontrolled themselves. Yet this advantage is something that I myself used to think very little about. I had, in fact, no idea how great it was until one day a good friend of ours laughingly told me how his wife had, in a fit of anger, taught him this lesson. When her husband not only showed no desire to go very far up in the world, and not only refused to strive for a position of authority, but even went so far as to turn down a very high position that was offered to him, she really took him to task, he told me. She scolded him severely and said to him, "What is it you want to do, that makes you not want to put yourself forward as other folk do? Do you want to just sit by the fire and make figures in the ashes with a stick, like children do? I wish to God I were a man-then you'd see what I would do!" "Why, wife," said her husband, "what would you do?" "What? By God, go forward with the best! For as my mother used to say (God have mercy on her soul), it is always better to rule than to be ruled. And therefore, by God, I would not, I guarantee you, be so foolish as to be ruled where I might rule." "Upon my honor, wife," said her husband, "in this I dare say you speak the truth. For I have never yet found you willing to be ruled!"

## 2. "The Carpenter's Wife that would be Killed"

There was here in Budapest, in the days of King Vladislav, a certain woman who was married to a good, poor, honest man. This woman was so fiendish that the devil, perceiving her nature, put it in her mind deliberately to make her husband so angry that he would kill her, so that he would then be hanged for taking her life.

Vincent: This was a strange temptation indeed! What the devil did she hope to gain from that?

Anthony: Nothing but the satisfaction it gave her spiteful spirit to think, ahead of time, about her husband's getting hanged for it. And really, if you look around in the world and seriously reflect on what you see, you will probably find more than a few such spirits. Have you never heard some furious person say, straight out, that to see so-and-so suffer such-and-such a misfortune, they would be quite willing and content to lie in hell for as long as God lives in heaven?

Vincent: I have, indeed, heard some people say things to that effect.

Anthony: Their mentality is not much less crazy than that of this woman. Actually, of the two, theirs is perhaps the crazier, since the woman may not have anticipated an outcome as disastrous and long-lasting.

But let me tell you now to what good completion her charitable intention came. As her husband, who was a carpenter, stood hewing a piece of timber with his chip ax, she started into her usual practice of reviling him. Finally he got so angry that he told her to get herself in the house or else he would hit her on the backside with the handle of his ax. He also said it would not be much of a sin if he were even to chop off, with the head of the ax, that miserable head of hers that carried within it such a venomous tongue. At that, the devil saw his opportunity. He whetted her tongue against her teeth, and when it was well sharpened, she swore to her husband in ferocious anger, "By the Mass, bastard husband, I wish you would! Look, here's my head!" And with that she laid her head on that same piece of timber. "Unless you whack it off," she said, "I curse your bastard heart!" Then, as I heard it told, while the devil stood at her elbow, her "husband's guardian angel stood at his and gave him spiritual encouragement, bidding him to be bold and do it. So the good man picked up his ax and with one whack did chop off her head.

There were other folk standing by, who had thought it good fun to listen to her tirade. Little had they guessed what would happen; the deed was done before they had any chance to prevent it. They did say, though, that they heard her tongue babble in her head and call out "Bastard! Bastard!" after her head was already off her body. At least that's what they all afterward reported to the king. All, that is, except for one-a woman, who she said she did not hear that.

Vincent: This really was an amazing occurrence. Uncle, what became of the man?

Anthony: The king pardoned him.

Vincent: Indeed, he could in good conscience do nothing else.

Anthony: But then something further almost happened. It was proposed that a statute be made that in such cases, a pardon should never again be granted. No husband in similar circumstances, provided that he could prove the truth of them, should need any pardon. He should just be allowed by the law to follow the example of that carpenter and do what he did.

Vincent: How did it happen, Uncle, that that good law did not get enacted?

Anthony: How did it happen? The same way it happens, Nephew, that so many other good laws, almost as good as this one, do not get enacted. This happens both here and

in other countries; and sometimes worse laws are made instead. But as I heard it, that law was quashed by the queen, God forgive her soul. It was the biggest thing, I think, that this good lady had to answer for when she died. For she surely was, except for that one thing, a thoroughly holy woman.

But let's set aside the matter of that law. The point is that for this carpenter's wife, the temptation to procure her own death was, as far as anyone could tell, no tribulation at all. She very much enjoyed thinking about it; she even longed for it to happen. So if she had told you or me ahead of time what she had in mind, and how eager she was to make it happen, we would have had no opportunity to comfort her as someone in tribulation. We could only have counseled her to restrain and amend that malicious, devilish impulse of hers.

Some of my own servants here can tell you that no longer ago than just yesterday, someone who had come here from Vienna told us, among other things, about a certain rich widow-I forgot to ask him where this happened, but it seems that this woman, having shown throughout her life an extreme pride and cruelty (for those two virtues always tend to keep each other company), got into a feud with a neighbor of hers. And one day she decided to take into her confidence another neighbor, a poor man whom she thought she could induce with money to do her bidding. In private she opened her mind to him. She offered him ten ducats for the work of doing this much for her: Early one morning he should come to her house and, making sure no one saw him do this, take an ax and cut off her head. When he had done so, he was then to put the bloody ax in the house of that enemy of hers, in some way that would make it look as though he had murdered her out of malice. Thus, she thought, she would be taken for a martyr. She had already arranged that another sum of money should thereupon be sent to Rome, so that the pope would have the means whereby she could in all haste be canonized.

Though the poor man promised to do the deed, he had no intention of actually doing it. But when she saw that he was putting it off, she provided the ax herself and made him set an appointment with her as to which morning he should come and do it. And when that morning came, into her house he went. In the meantime, however, he had arranged that some other people should know her insane idea; he made sure these people were situated where they could clearly hear her and him talk together. And after talking with her on this subject as much as he wanted to, as much as he thought was enough, he made her lie down, and with one hand he lifted the ax. Then, with the other hand, he felt the edge and found fault with it. It was not sharp enough, he said. No way could he do this deed until he had first sharpened the ax. For pity's sake he could not do otherwise, it would put her in so much pain. And so, doing great violence to her own wishes, she kept her head still for that long. But soon afterward, because she could tolerate no more such deceptions, no more stringing along with delay tactics, she hanged herself with her own hands.

Vincent: That certainly is a tragic story. I've never heard anything like it.

Anthony: Indeed, the person who told it to me swore that he knew it to be true. And he himself is, I assure you, someone I consider very honest and truthful.

Anthony: Without doubt, Nephew, if he stays at that point and can by no reasoning be brought to do so much as doubt, and can by no means be shaken out of his deep sleep- if he insists on taking his dream for a solid truth and, as some by night get up and walk around in their sleep, is about to get up and hang himself-then I see nothing else you can do but one of these two things. Either bind him fast to his bed or else see if you can help him in the kind of way that, as the story goes, the wife of a certain wood-carver helped free her husband of such a crazy compulsion.

He told her, it seems, on a Good Friday, that he had to kill himself for Christ's sake, as Christ was killed for him. His mind was clearly made up; she knew it would do no good to argue with him. So she rightly and wisely reminded him that if he wanted to die for Christ as Christ died for him, then it would be appropriate for him to die also in the same way- not, that is, by his own hand, but by the hand of another, since Christ, by God, did not kill himself. And so that he would not need to take anyone else into his confidence (which he would never do anyway), she would make him this offer. For God's sake she herself would secretly crucify him on a big cross-one that he had made for the purpose of nailing on it a newly carved figure of Christ. Well, at that prospect he was very glad. But then it occurred to her that Christ was first bound to a pillar and beaten, and afterward crowned with thorns. So, with his consent, she bound him securely to a post, and she gave him such a beating-along with holy exhortations to suffer so much and so long-that before she finished her work and unbound him (while praying, nevertheless, that she could still put on his head and drive deep into it a crown of thorns that she had woven and brought for him), he said he thought this was enough for that year. He would ask God to spare him the rest until Good Friday came around again. But when it came again the next year, his yearning was gone; no further did he wish to follow Christ.

And many a foolish fellow, when sick, will in no kind of way meddle with any kind of medical treatment, will not send his urine to a doctor, but will send his cap or stocking to some "wise woman" otherwise known as a witch. Then she sends back word that she has spied in his stocking where, when he was unaware, he was taken with an evil spirit between two doors as he walked in the twilight, but the spirit would not let him feel it until five days afterward, during which time it has been festering in his body, and that is the ailment that is causing him so much pain. But let him not go in for medical treatment. He must not take any medicine other than good meat and strong drink, for syrups would only sour him up. But he must have five leaves of valerian, which she has put a spell on and has gathered with her left hand. Let him fasten those five leaves to his right thumb by a green thread-not tightly, but letting it hang loose. He will never need to change it, providing it doesn't fall off; he just needs to let it hang there till he gets well and doesn't need it anymore.

In such wise witches, and in such mad medicines, many souls have a great deal more faith than they do in God. As I say, Nephew, these kinds of folk do not in their times of tribulation call upon God; instead, they seek relief and help from the flesh and the world and the furious fiend. The tribulation that God in his goodness sends them for their own good, they themselves turn by their foolishness to their harm. Those, on the other hand, who in tribulation turn to God will thereby find great comfort and profit.