

*The*  
CONQUEST OF HEAVEN

*by*  
*Frederick Porter S.J.*

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# THE CONQUEST OF HEAVEN

PERFECT CHARITY AND CONTRITION

BY FREDERICK ROUVIER, S. J.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY  
SISTER FRANCIS OF THE SACRED HEART  
AND  
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*"Men do not know the love of God and not  
knowing Him, they are afraid of Him and  
withdraw from Him."—FENELON.*



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## INTRODUCTION

LETTER FROM HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL MERRY  
DEL VAL, SECRETARY OF STATE TO HIS HOLINESS  
POPE PIUS X.

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THE VATICAN, March 19, 1913.

SECRETARIAT OF STATE  
OF HIS HOLINESS.

*Reverend Father:*

It has been a pleasure for me to put into the Holy Father's hands a copy of your recent work, "The Conquest of Heaven," a book published with full ecclesiastical approval. This proof of your filial veneration for the Sovereign Pontiff he has been graciously pleased to accept.

To make known to the faithful in a simple and luminous treatise, the nature of perfect charity and contrition, by pointing out all their excellence and inestimable benefits, and after having replied clearly to all the objections made against them, to indicate ways and means by which these Acts may be produced and to induce your readers to repeat them frequently during their life, is the object of your book which is destined to enlighten many souls and to do great good.

The Holy Father takes pleasure in congratulating you on this work and begs our Lord to bless it. He grants you with his whole heart the Apostolic Blessing.

For my own part, I am deeply grateful for the copy you have so kindly sent me, and I eagerly seize this opportunity of thanking you for it.

Accept, Reverend Father, with my congratulations, my most devoted sentiments in our Lord.

R. CARD. MERRY DEL VAL.

THE CONQUEST OF HEAVEN

FIRST PART

PERFECT CLARITY AND CONTRITION

## INDEX

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### FIRST PART

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## CHAPTER I

### THE GREATEST OF THE COMMANDMENTS: THE NECESSITY OF LOVING GOD

When upon the summit of Mount Sinai midst thunder and lightning, God gave His law to the Hebrews, He wrote: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength."<sup>1</sup>

Many centuries later, the Son of God made man trod the land of Israel in all directions. This gentle and unwearied Sower scattered everywhere the divinely fruitful seed of eternal truth.

Now one day when the crowds were in admiration at His luminous doctrine, a Pharisee drew near and asked, tempting Him: "Master, which is the great Commandment in the Law?" Jesus said to him: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul and with thy whole strength. This is the greatest and the first Commandment."<sup>2</sup>

Thus the first article in both the new Law and the old is the same commandment of love. And

1. Deut. vi, 5.

2. St. Matt. xxii, 36, 37, 38.



both after Christ's coming as before it, man's first duty is to love God.

If he fails in this essential duty and does not amend, he will surely be lost. Were he to speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity he would be as sounding brass and tinkling cymbal, and would lose his soul. . . . Had he the gift of prophecy, a knowledge of every natural science, of all mysteries, with a faith capable of moving mountains, all without charity would be of no avail to him. Should he distribute all his goods to the poor, waste his body by penance, and have not charity in his soul, all these alms and austerities would profit him nothing.<sup>3</sup> In a word, had divine goodness lavished on him the sublimest gifts and he himself performed the noblest works, if he loved not the Lord his Creator and Master, he would never possess God throughout eternity, since God is love itself: *Deus caritas est*.<sup>4</sup>

But if man keeps the First Commandment, his salvation is assured so long as he keeps it faithfully. For "He that abideth in charity abideth in God and God in him";<sup>5</sup> and consequently he

3. I Cor., XIII, 1. 3.

4. I St. John, iv, 8.

5. I St. John, iv, 16.

cannot be cast out of that Kingdom where God forever reigns.

Thus the love of God is a pledge of salvation for him who possesses it and preserves it in his heart; and to be without this love is the soul's ruin.

Hence man must necessarily love God. He must love Him above all else, and love others only in Him and after Him. For "love is primarily due to God alone; to bestow this love on any other than Him is a sacrilegious theft."<sup>6</sup>

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6. Bossuet, 2nd Sermon for the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, preached before the Queen, 1st point.



## CHAPTER II

## PERFECT AND IMPERFECT CHARITY

Here on earth there are many ways of loving, and man can have many different motives for keeping the First Commandment.

We may love God because we shall one day be punished for not loving Him; or again, because if we love Him, God Whose exceeding mercy inclines Him more to give than our exceeding misery inclines us to ask, will reward us eternally in Heaven for the short time we have been faithful in this land of exile.<sup>1</sup>

We may love Him not through fear of chastisement, or desire of recompense, but also because He is uncreated holiness, infinite goodness, unerring justice,—in a word, because of His divine perfections, because *He is God*.

And as on the one hand these motives differ, not only in their nature, but also in moral value, and perfection, so on the other hand it is the motives of our acts that distinguish and impart to these acts their moral value, and according as we love God for one or the other of the motives

1. Bossuet, 2nd Sermon for the Annunciation, preached at the Court, 2nd point.

I have just mentioned will our love gain more or less in moral dignity, and be more or less perfect.

If we love God in order *to avoid punishment*, or to be rewarded with the eternal glory of the world that knows no end, our love will no doubt be true love, and acceptable to our Lord, but it will nevertheless be *imperfect*.<sup>2</sup>

But if we love God *for Himself alone* (*propter se*), because of His infinite perfections, our love gaining in disinterestedness will by this very fact gain in purity, and carry us at one flight to a higher sphere: it will become *perfect love*.<sup>3</sup>

Be it observed that both perfect and imperfect charity require us to look upon God as the Supreme Good, the Good excelling all other treasures of this world, and to love Him accordingly. We must therefore banish from our hearts any affection contrary to or even merely equal to the

2. When theologians call the love to which we refer imperfect, they do not mean that such love contains a real imperfection, something formally displeasing to God. They simply mean that this love is relatively imperfect, in the sense that by it man does not ascend so high spiritually as he might; in other words, that his love is inferior to perfect love, though otherwise like it real love.

3. Perfect love, pure love, perfect charity or simply charity are so many expressions used by us indifferently to indicate the same virtue.

love due Him. We must also be firmly resolved never to offend Him, grievously at least, for any pretext whatever, whether to avoid trouble and suffering or to gratify our most cherished desires.<sup>4</sup> This means that in practice we shall most certainly love God above all things, if seeking Him with a firm purpose as the object of our affections, we are ready, rather than lose Him, to shun any and every mortal sin.<sup>5</sup>

4. "Amor Dei totum cor possidet, quando excludit omnem affectum contrarium, h. e., quod nihil diligatur supra Deum vel æqualiter ipsi Deo, et sic diligit Deum ex toto corde, qui diligit eum propter se et supra omnia. Hæc totalitas potest haberi per infusionem gratiæ quæ est expulsiva omnis culpæ mortalis" (S. Bonav. III, dist. 27, a. 2, q. 6).

"Ad hoc quod aliquis habeat caritatem necesse est quod diligit Deum super omnia, hoc est autem diligere super omnia quod pro nullo damno vel commodo velit offendere Deum" (S. Bonav. IV, dist. 16. p. 1, a. 2, q. 1).

5. "Summa est appetiatiue (caritas Dei) si per eam Deus omnibus rebus præfertur, si ergo vi caritatis parati sumus omnia alia bona potius amittere et omnia alia mala potius sustinere quam Dei jacturam facere, seu, quod eodem redit, si parati sumus quodvis peccatum mortale vitare." Noldin, S. J., *De Præceptis Dei et Ecclesiæ*, 54, 2. Cœniponte, Reuch, 1911. "Hinc caritas Dei erit appetiatiue summa, si malimus omnia perdere potius quam Deum offendere. Hæc tamen offensa intelligenda est tantum de peccato mortali, nam peccatum veniale stare potest cum amore Dei, ideoque non constituit nos in necessitate eligendi Deum inter et creaturam." Génicot, S. J., *Theol. mor. instit.*, I n° 210, Lovanii, Polleunis et Ceuterick, 1905.

But imperfect charity leads us to avoid mortal sin, especially that we may one day obtain eternal bliss, or escape endless woe, whilst perfect charity induces us to shun mortal sin for God's sake only in order to please Him and without any self-interested thought of a heavenly reward.

## CHAPTER III

## THE THREE DEGREES OF PERFECT CHARITY

Just as charity is divided into perfect and imperfect charity, so there are three degrees in perfect charity.

The first degree is that pure love of God for the sake of His infinite perfections, which leads us to shun *mortal sin* at any cost.

The second degree like the first and for the same motive,—love of God for what He is in Himself—keeps us firmly resolved to avoid at any price not only mortal sin, but *venial sin* as well.

And finally the third degree, with the same object and for the same motive, disposes us to sacrifice everything in this world, or to accept any and every affliction rather than omit what is most pleasing to God, and consequently enabling us to follow more closely His Son Jesus Christ.

The soul aflame with perfect love no longer considers as in the two former degrees whether the omission of what she intends doing would be sin or not, were it only a venial one. It is enough for her to know that it is more pleasing to her divine Master, and that thus she better imitates

Him; straightway she acts, cost what it may.<sup>1</sup>

This third degree reaches the loftiest heights of perfect love. After the example of the saints, we must tend towards it in the measure God wills by giving us the means. For by so doing we give Him the greatest glory possible.

To dwell *forever* on these exalted heights is practically impossible for man. Must it then be inferred that *isolated* acts of the third degree of perfect charity are beyond the capacity of our poor human heart? Most assuredly not. To a truly generous heart these acts become quite easy. For as a writer well versed in spiritual ways remarks: "Because human frailty makes it impossible for us always to dwell in the third degree of perfect charity, it would be wrong to think we cannot *frequently* attain to it. It is not only possible but *easy* to generous souls who hold nothing back. To soar *continually* on the heights of the loftiest degree of love is not possible for us, but it is easy to ascend there *often* if at any time we say whole-heartedly: 'My God, I am all thine; I mean to live only for Thee.'"<sup>2</sup>

1. Cf. Lehmkuhl, S. J., *Theol. mor.*, edit. xi<sup>a</sup>. Friburgi Brisgoviae, Herder, t. I, n<sup>o</sup> 458.—Noldin. *De Præceptis*, 54, 2.—de Maumigny, S. J., *Pratique de l'oraison mentale*, t. I, 2<sup>e</sup> partie, ch. XIII, Beauchesne, Paris, 1905.

2. Maumigny loc. cit. 1st part, ch. XIII. The words in *italics* in this quotation are our own.



The second degree of perfect charity which makes us avoid venial sin for the sole reason of its being displeasing to God, must be even more the object of our endeavor, for it is less difficult of attainment than the degree of which we have just spoken, in what concerns *deliberate venial sin* at least.

But this second degree, like the third, is not absolutely necessary in order that we make an act of pure love. For this the first degree of charity is certainly quite sufficient.

Are we then firmly resolved with the aid of God's grace to suffer anything rather than commit one single mortal sin, and is our resolution made not through fear of punishment or hope of reward, but for God alone?—Then let us have confidence; an act of perfect love is possible for us and will surely produce in us all the effects it produces in souls through God's unutterable mercy.<sup>3</sup>

3. "In confesso tamen apud omnes erat, primum gradum essentiam caritatis perfectæ continere, eamque ad justificationem, etiam ante realem sacramentorum susceptionem consequendam sufficere." Lehmkühl, *Theol. mor.*, t. I, n° 448. "Primus gradus, cum simpliciter sit amor Dei super omnia et excludat affectum ad quodvis peccatum grave, sufficit ad justificationem obtinendum et ad præceptum caritatis implendum." Noldin, *De Præceptis*, n° 54, 2, ad finem.

An act of perfect love does not then necessarily imply that we have no longer any attachment to venial sin, no affection for any such sin.

Such a disposition is no doubt very desirable, but not essential, since without it, the first degree of perfect charity may exist with all its effects. To maintain that this disposition is indispensable would be erroneous and at all events contrary to the teaching of theologians as eminent as they are numerous.<sup>4</sup>

And if you object that there is something inconceivable in this, seeing the marvelous effects in a soul of an act of perfect love, there is but one thing to do and that to emphasize the infinite goodness of God, Whose adopted children we have the ineffable happiness to be.

4. "Aliqui usque eo progressi sunt ut putarent numquam caritatis actum satis perfectum esse, vel ad justificationem sufficere, nisi excluderet affectum omnem venialis peccati.—quæ opinio plane erronea est, quam prioris ætatis theologi ne in disputationem quidem vocaverunt." Lehmkühl, *Theol. mor.*, t. I, 448.



## CHAPTER IV

## THE ESSENTIAL EFFECTS OF PERFECT CHARITY:

## (1) RESTORATION TO GOD'S FRIENDSHIP

Assisted by grace, man is able to attain to perfect charity, but beyond this he cannot go.

Whatever be the sanctity reached, were it the most exalted, perfect love in one of its three degrees is always the best, richest, and highest offering we can make to our Creator.

It is also the homage most acceptable to God and the one most meritorious in his sight.

And that is why He rewards nothing more munificently. Now this very munificence also shows us how He values perfect charity. Do not the dreadful chastisements visited upon sin by the Sovereign Judge give us an insight into God's horror of sin? So too, the incomparable graces lavished on perfect charity reveal God's tender predilection for this love.

What then are the effects of an act of perfect charity on the soul? They differ according as this act proceeds humble and contrite from the depths of a guilty conscience, or full of joy from a heart already at peace with God and which He dilates, comforts and sustains.

Let us first study what an act of charity produces in the soul of a sinner. We shall afterwards see its effects in a just soul, and with what new gifts it makes her superabound.

Radiant from the effects of grace, a soul was living God's very life. Heir of the Father, co-heir with Jesus Christ, she had a right to the everlasting heritage and she was destined to share in it in proportion as she had laboured long and well and suffered more for her divine Master, and thus merited in Him and through Him. Her merits went on increasing daily. In a word—for to him who understands, this word is all sufficient—hers was the only true happiness, that of being God's friend.

But one day beguiled by the fascinations of this world, she yielded to temptation and fell into sin. At the very moment of her fall and swifter than lightning, this soul was utterly and entirely stripped of the greatest of her treasures, grace, and with it also bereft of supernatural life. She became a prey to death.

She forfeited her right to the heavenly inheritance; her perverseness made her run the risk of being lost eternally; besides, she could no longer merit for eternity. Not only was she deprived of all future merit but all she had gained

in the past at whatever cost to herself was henceforth of no avail to her.

Her sin had destroyed all. Even as a thunder-bolt falling upon the sheaves in harvest time destroys by the same stroke past fruits, present reaping and future sowing,—the hope of tomorrow. So too in the soul of the sinner, there was complete and utter destruction. The reason is that she who but lately was a friend of God, has now become His enemy through sin.

Happily for this wretched soul, there in in Heaven a cleansing dew which can impregnate our souls and raise them to life again so long as we are living in this world.

Let us suppose that the soul to which we refer has been thus impregnated. A few drops of this blessed dew falls upon her and under the influence of actual grace,—for without this grace nothing can be done—she once more obtains a glimpse of God in the unalterable beauty of His adorable perfections. From the abyss into which she has fallen she then sends up a cry of love to God, a cry vibrating with perfect love. Immediately, and again with the rapidity of lighting the merciful transformation takes place. God no sooner hears this cry of love than He hastens to answer it. The sinner comes back to

Him and in accordance with His promise, He returns to the sinner.<sup>1</sup>

He re-enters the soul whence sin has banished Him and makes it once more His dwelling place. On entering, He brings back with Him sanctifying grace and bestows it on this soul as we shall elsewhere see more abundantly than ever.

Now this sanctifying grace is the life of the soul. With the return of grace to a soul which but a moment previous was dead in God's sight, supernatural life necessarily returns too. And with the return of life, death is swallowed up, for no creature can be either naturally or supernaturally alive and dead at the same time.

But as mortal sin is the soul's spiritual death, we must conclude that if a soul is no longer dead, it is because it is free from mortal sin. And this is what actually occurs just so soon as a sinner makes an act of perfect charity, no matter what may be the degree of this saving act of love.

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1. Zacharias, I, 3.

## CHAPTER V

## THE ESSENTIAL EFFECTS OF PERFECT CHARITY:

## (2) REMISSION OF SIN.

When God returns to an unfaithful soul, clothing her anew with sanctifying grace, He straightway reconciles her to Himself<sup>1</sup> and blots out mortal sin,<sup>2</sup> however horrible it may have been. In the material world fatal wounds are more or less loathsome; so too in the moral world certain sins though equally mortal are nevertheless more or less grievous.

Is not the treason of Judas a thousand times more criminal and consequently a thousand times more horrible than the theft of a handful of gold pieces?

Now an act of perfect charity does not only blot out ordinary mortal sins in the soul but even such sins as recall the treason of Judas Iscariot or the decide of the Jews. Its efficacy is unlimited. It wipes away the blackest sin, nay, every sin without exception.

1. Conc. Trident. sess. xvi. chap. 4. See Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, edit. XI<sup>a</sup>, n° 898.

2. This doctrine is certain and results from the condemnation, by S. Pius V of several propositions by Baius, prop. 31, 32, 33. See Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, No. 1031, 1032, 1033.

And these sins an act of perfect love effaces in the soul, no matter what dreadful number they may have reached.

One sin begets another. Since the first fall which stripped him of grace, the sinner has perhaps been guilty of many other infidelities. Through impulse, habit, it may be through mere discouragement, his sins have multiplied.

And from these sins countless others have sprung, even as worms issue from one another in the corruption of the grave. No matter, these hundreds, these thousands of faults will infallibly be destroyed by an act of perfect love.

We shall go still further, for divine mercy knows no bounds. Were a man's conscience burdened with more sins than there are sands upon the sea-shore, or stars in the heavens; were his whole life one long tissue of evil and wrongdoing, yet one act, one single act of love would suffice to obliterate them all as the example of the Good Thief evidently shows.

This obliteration requires no great length of time for its accomplishment. It is immediate. It takes place at the very moment the cry of perfect love bursts forth from the soul, just as the light shines forth in all its brilliancy at the precise instant the electricity reaches the wire within the bulb. And as a further instance of



divine compassion, the sins thus effaced by an act of pure love are blotted out forever.

This is indeed the universal law; *what God once forgives, He forgives forever.*

In his ingratitude, the fortunate recipient of divine mercy may again grievously offend his Benefactor; the latter will not on that account recall the sins He has already forgiven. In God's all-pitying eyes, not only do these sins no longer exist, but they cannot even be called again into existence.

But you may say such renewal of divine friendship, such re-infusion of grace, such pardon of every sin must surely require that the act of perfect charity which calls them forth should be accompanied by some heroic deed, such as for instance, martyrdom? Or, again, they positively cannot occur outside the Sacrament of Penance, save in cases of real necessity?

An over-rigorous theology formerly maintained this opinion. But the Church rejected a doctrine so offensive to divine mercy. By her very condemnation of it, she teaches us that to expel mortal sin an act of perfect love need not be sealed by martyrdom, and that this act of charity ever and everywhere, and under all circumstances and

even apart from cases of extreme necessity suffices to blot out mortal sin.<sup>3</sup>

The reason, of course, is that perfect charity always and everywhere includes a hatred of sin together with a virtual contrition sufficient to obtain pardon for our faults.

Nevertheless, though divine mercy may forgive these sins at the moment we make an act of perfect love, those who can have recourse to the Sacrament of Penance, that is Catholics, are none the less strictly obliged to submit all these sins, mortal ones at least, to the power of the Keys in the Confessional. This is a formal precept, and to disobey it would be to fall not into the sins God has already forgiven in consequence of the act of perfect charity, since these sins are remitted forever, but into a new mortal sin.

Mortal sin in a soul is always accompanied with more or less numerous venial sins. Now the fire of perfect charity has consumed the latter as readily as the former, provided one repents all such venial sins. To obtain this two-fold end, the contrition contained in every act of perfect charity will suffice.<sup>4</sup>

3. Proposition 71, Bañus, V. Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, No. 1071.

4. V. Bulot, S. J. *Compend. Theol. mor.*, vol. II, No. 459, 2. Paris, Casterman, 1905.



## CHAPTER VI

## THE ESSENTIAL EFFECTS OF PERFECT CHARITY:

## (3) REMISSION OF ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

Sanctifying grace re-entering the soul through an act of perfect charity purges it of every sin. But the sinner has incurred well-deserved penalties.

Perfect charity wins forgiveness of sin, however grievously a man has sinned. Will it also win remission of the penalties so justly in store for him?

The first penalty due to mortal sin,—the punishment essential to and inseparable from it,—is *eternal reprobation*. After an act of charity, God remits this penalty as surely as He then blots out every sin.

Had eternal punishment been incurred, not only for one, but for innumerable mortal sins; had the heinousness of these sins called for a particularly severe punishment—for there are degrees in the sufferings of eternity as there are in the glory of the elect—once the sins are pardoned, the eternal punishment is remitted too. This is the certain

doctrine of the Church and cannot be questioned.<sup>1</sup>

Besides how could God cast from Him into eternal torments, a soul He has restored to His friendship?

The eternal penalty is then remitted in an instant like the fault, at the very moment when the sin which incurred it is forgiven.

The eternal penalty once remitted, there may remain other penalties, *temporal penalties* to undergo. Will an act of perfect charity which obtained pardon for the former, obtain it also for the latter?

That an act of perfect love is capable of obtaining the remission of all penalties, both eternal and temporal, due to sin, and even the remission of all the other consequences of sin is absolutely undeniable. Saint Thomas quotes as an irrefutable proof of this the example of Mary Magdalen in the Gospel, an example with which every Christian is familiar.<sup>2</sup>

But what degree of fervour, and what circumstances are required of perfect charity (which can really exist with all its other effects without

1. This is obvious from the condemnation of the 70th proposition of Baius, V. Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, No. 1070.

2. Saint Thom. III. c. 86, a. 5. ad. 1.

obtaining remission of the temporal penalties of sin) that it may obtain this total remission of the temporal punishment? The solution of this question is above our weak intelligence. The wisest course is to abandon ourselves to the infinite mercy of God.<sup>3</sup>

To resume then, *an act of perfect charity induces God to restore the sinner to His grace and friendship.*<sup>4</sup>

*It wins pardon for the mortal sins committed whatever their number and heinousness.*

*It obtains the total remission of eternal punish-*

3. It may at first appear astonishing that when God remits to the penitent sinner the mortal sin with its necessary punishment, He does not at the same time remit the temporal penalties that are much less grievous than endless reprobation.

Saint Thomas thus explains this: "The remission of grievous sin and of the eternal punishment always adhering to it, is," he says, "an act of *operative* grace, whereas remission of the temporal punishment is an act of *co-operative* grace, in so far as man by enduring patiently the trials of this life with the aid of grace, gains remission of the temporal penalties. Hence the remission of the latter, like that of the former, is really an effect of grace, but condonation of the eternal penalty is the result of grace alone, while that of the temporal punishment is the result of grace together with our free will." St. Thomas, III, q. 86, art. IV ad. 2. This is why remission of temporal punishment is granted to the sinner already freed from the eternal penalty, in proportion to the more or less fervent dispositions of his will.

*ment, sometimes even the remission of the whole temporal punishment and always a part of it at least.*

*Now an act of perfect love wins all this in an instant, and forever without any possible reviviscence of past sins, even in the case of another fall, and under whatever circumstances and conditions this act of perfect charity is made.*

*Finally, it secures pardon for all venial sins we have repented of, and within the limits God determines, according to the fervour of our act of charity, it also secures the remission of the penalties due to these sins.*

4. An act of perfect charity does not justify directly the sinful soul. It does not act as the efficient cause of the pardon obtained. It is only the ultimate disposition requisite in order that God may in accordance with His promise infallibly restore to the soul the grace she has forfeited.

## CHAPTER VII

## THE ESSENTIAL EFFECTS OF PERFECT CHARITY:

## (4) REVIVISCENCE OF MERITS

To such an extent does God Who is love take delight in our love of Him, that an act of perfect charity suffices to lift a sinner out of the abyss of sin. Divine mercy has saved the shipwrecked soul from the gulf wherein it would have sunk forever. The sin forgiven, the endless punishment, result of this sin, remitted, this soul so guilty but a few moments since and now restored to God's favor is henceforth capable of meriting for eternity.

For the future, yes, but what of her past merits? What becomes of them?

For when this soul fell from grace through sin into God's enmity, she had certainly acquired a greater or a less degree of merit. These merits were the fruit of many supernatural acts performed while in a state of grace in which she was then so fortunate to be. Her merits were gradually increasing as a consequence of her acts of virtue.

This slowly acquired spiritual patrimony was perhaps immense, or to speak more accurately,

this patrimony was assuredly immense, since whatever its degree it always entitled her to an eternal recompense and an infinite happiness.

One sin destroyed all these merits, and at one stroke laid low everything.

Is this destruction decisive and irreparable? Saved from ruin ought not the forgiven soul to consider herself very fortunate in having escaped eternal reprobation? Must she pay sorrowfully for her disloyalty by the irreparable loss of her former treasure, and again set to work to glean new merits as if like poor disinherited Ruth, she had never merited at all?

Thus it might have been without anyone having a right to protest. For God's infinite goodness would have been fully maintained by the mere pardon of the sin and remission of the penalty and at the same time His sovereign justice would have stamped with a seal of greater severity the charter of His divine pardon. Such a solution might have satisfied man; it has not satisfied God.

Eternal mercy goes infinitely beyond man's widest expectations. The sins once pardoned are not again laid to the charge of the soul that has again sinned. And thus it is that when a soul which by an act of perfect love has regained God's friendship, all her former merits are at once restored to her.



All her merits, I insist, for truly all her merits are restored to her.

Let us take the case of one who, traveling life's dusty highway, has come to extreme old age. Should he rise from the mire of sin by an act of perfect love, what merits will he regain—and that instantaneously? Every merit of his whole life, from the very first won by him under the impulse of grace when the light of reason dawned on his child's mind.

This long life was perhaps marked by many sins. This soul may have risen again so to speak only to sin once more. God may as a result have restored to him a countless number of times the merits of which he continually allows himself to be deprived by the devil.

No matter, these merits will always be restored to the soul. The evil one leaves nothing undone to deprive her of it. Her changeless Friend more unwearied still spares nothing to restore it to her on every occasion, when after a new sin she returns to Him. And in this terrific struggle between diabolic hatred and divine love it is ever love that triumphs and not hate.

If then, in spite of repeated falls this soul ends by dying in God's grace, she will possess for all eternity that degree of glory due to the merits acquired by her in life, and as if in the course of

her tempestuous existence she had never once been deprived of them by sin.<sup>1</sup>

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1. "Redire merita, et per peccatum eis superveniens non exstingui, sed solum mortificari et impediri constans est omnium theologorum consensus" (Ripalda, I, iv, disp. 91, sect 1.—"Merita integre redeunt quoad totum præmium, ut supra gratiam dispositionis propriam ad tantam gratiam et gloriam perducant hominem ad quantam perductura essent, si numquam peccato interrupta fuissent." (Ripalda, I, iv, disp. 91, sec. 7.)



## CHAPTER VIII

THE ESSENTIAL EFFECTS OF PERFECT CHARITY:  
(5) RESTORATION OF PAST SANCTIFYING GRACE

Every faithful observer of the divine law knows that his eternal merits are daily on the increase. But this increase of his ultimate claim to heavenly bliss is not the only recompense awaiting his fidelity. There are many others. And of these the most precious beyond all comparison is the infusion of grace in his soul.

But as we have already remarked, a mortal sin does not confine itself to destroying all the merits this soul possessed; it also destroys the sanctifying grace by which this soul lived in intimacy with God.

An act of perfect love restores her to her Master Who generously gives her back all these merits and all the grace she had forfeited with these merits.

Be it observed, I do not merely maintain that in receiving the wayward soul into His fatherly embrace, God restores to her some measure of the sanctifying grace she may have lost by sin. This truth is too well known to be emphasized. For whenever God's friendship succeeds His en-

mity, and the supernatural life replaces the death of sin, grace returns to the soul. It cannot be otherwise.

The point to consider is this. Just as supernatural merits enrich the soul during her life, so likewise does sanctifying grace. This increase of the treasure *par excellence* is effected in her in various ways; by means of the Sacraments; by her victories over the Tempter; the virtues she practices; the sufferings she accepts; the sacrifices she makes. And so long as she is in a state of grace, this treasure increases.

In any case it will not decrease. For habitual grace cannot diminish in a soul.<sup>1</sup> If mortal sin

1. "Dicendum est, inquit Suarez, xi, 8. gratiam et caritatem imminui non posse. Hanc assertionem censeo ita certam, ut contraria non sit probabilis, nec verisimiliter defensibilis," tum quia graviores theologi id docent cum Thoma (I. 2, q. 24, a. 10). Bonaventura, etc. . . tum quia sequeretur, multiplicatis peccatis venialibus tandem amitti gratiam sanctificantem, et peccatum veniale puniri pœna æterna (amissione æterna gradus gloriæ qui respondeat gradui gratiæ amisso), quod concedi nequit. . . " Hurter, *Comp. theol. dogm.*, t. III, n° 219. Cœniponti, 1900.

Rogacci says the same: "It is the common opinion of theologians that trivial faults, faults of frailty, take nothing from sanctifying grace and cannot lessen that friendship with God of which this grace is the source and bond of union, and that consequently God does not love a soul less after faults of this kind than He previously loved it. I say again, and this is a consequence

gain access there, it will at once completely destroy this grace. But until then it remains entire. Venial sin is powerless to make any real diminution. Grace is culpably weakened and its existence rashly compromised by venial sin which renders us less fervent in doing good and permits the growth of our evil inclinations. And while it makes our struggle all the harder, it helps to deprive us of the assistance we shall need when the battle again rages, since it weakens our powers of resistance to temptation and prevents God from giving us liberally the actual graces we shall then find indispensable. Venial sin also disposes the negligent soul to fall more easily into mortal sin which, like a thief, will strip her of habitual grace.<sup>2</sup> But this is all venial sin can do; and alas, is it not already too much?

When a soul that has just risen by an act of love, formerly had fallen into sin, she possesses

of the principle just laid down by me: if any one guiltier than another of venial faults possesses at the same time a higher degree of sanctifying grace, this soul is dearer and more pleasing to God." Rogacci *L'Art de Traiter Avec Dieu* (The Art of Conversing With God) Pérusse, Lyon, 1843, Ch. 2, p. 52.

2. "Concedunt tamen theologi dici posse gratiam indirecte et quadamtenus imminui, scil., quantum ad radiationem et fervorem—ut loquitur Thomas in 2, d. 17, q. 2, a. 5, et *de malo*, q. 7, a. 2, non quantum ad essen-

with a certain number of merits a fixed proportion of sanctifying grace which she had slowly acquired throughout her life. It is of that fixed amount of sanctifying grace I am now speaking.

Has God given back this same degree of grace to the soul on her return to Him even as He restored all her merits? And if so has this been a total or only a partial restoration?

Here again the divine munificence shines forth as resplendent as ever. All the sanctifying grace she formerly possessed is hers once more when rehabilitated by love.

Like the Prodigal Son on returning to his father's house, she is immediately reinstated in full possession of her lost spiritual treasure and more fortunate than the Prodigal, she does not come back to life merely as rich as she was at the moment of her sin; she rises with greater possessions since, according to the common opinions of theologians, she recovers the whole of the

tiam. Peccatis enim venialibus fervor faciendi opera bona quæ sunt justitiæ fructus minuitur, passiones majorem vim acquirunt, quocirca crescit difficultas operandi bonum, ita etiam minuitur resistentia hominis in tentationibus, minores erunt gratiæ actuales, quas Deus ipsi ad vitanda gravia peccata concedit, ideoque peccatis venialibus disponitur homo, ut incidat in peccata mortalia. C. Mazella, *de Virt.*, d. 1, a. 10." Hurter, *Comp. theol. dogm.*, t. III, n° 219. Cēniponti, 1900.

grace of which sin deprived her and an additional new one as a reward for her act of perfect charity.<sup>3</sup>

For the sake of, and in reward for her act of perfect love, God is not simply satisfied to claim her again as His friend, to restore her to grace, to blot out all her sins and to remit the punishment her sins had incurred.

*He loads this soul with favors by restoring to her the fulness of her former merits and not merely all the sanctifying grace that was hers before her sin, but something more besides.*

3. "Pœnitens semper resurgit a peccato, cum majori gratia quam prius ante peccatum obtinuit: nam semper ei restituitur integre tota pristina gratia et, ultra illam, denuo superadditur gratia de congruo sacramento aut contritioni respondens." (Ripalda, iv, disp. 91, 10, n° 3.)

"Moderni, duce Suarezio, in *Relectione* de reviviscencia meritorum, communiter asserunt pœnitentem numquam resurgere a peccato, nisi cum gratia et sanctitate majore quam fuerat illa per præcedens peccatum ammissa. Dicunt enim restitui pœnitenti totum illud quod habebat prius, et addi ulterius gradum respondentem præsentis dispositioni qua se denuo disposuit ad justificationem sive in sacramento, sive extra sacramentum.

"Ex dictis inferitur, inquit card. de Lugo, *De Pœnit.*, disp. 11, sec. 3, n° 54, hominem per pœnitentiam semper resurgere ad majorem gratiam quam prius habebat; recuperat enim totam illam, et præterea accipit aliam de novo, ex vi contritionis vel sacramenti præsentis."

"Contra vero, St. TH., 1, d. 17, q. 2, art. 5.

"Contingit intensionem motus pœnitentis quandoque

proportionatem esse majori gratiæ, quam fuerit illa a qua ceciderat per peccatum, quandoque autem æquali, quandoque vero minori. Et ideo pœnitens quandoque resurgit in majori gratia quam primo habuerat quandoque etiam in minori. Et eadem ratio est de virtutibus, quæ ex gratia consequuntur." (Card. Billot, *De Pœnitentia*, p. 101, 2<sup>o</sup> éditio. Romæ, 1897.)

Cardinal Billot holds the same opinion as S. Thomas.



## CHAPTER IX

## EFFECTS OF PERFECT CHARITY IN A JUST SOUL

Man, whether baptized or not, can do nothing supernaturally meritorious without God's grace. With far greater reason is he radically powerless to make an act of perfect love without this divine assistance, and this can be easily understood after what we have said concerning the wonderful effects of this love.

And God dispenses this actual grace with boundless generosity. He mercifully bestows it on thousands of unbelievers to lead them away from their sins and errors.

He has given and is still giving this grace to thousands of Christians who through the violence of their passions are led impetuously into sin.

How much more abundantly then must He bestow His grace on those who are striving to live in union with Him, and to serve Him with filial affection.

It is easy to conceive that souls faithful to their divine Master ought to find it easy to make acts of perfect love, since on the one hand, these souls are in the habit of telling God they love Him and imperfect love is undoubtedly the best way of at-

taining to perfect love. And on the other hand, it is natural that God should reserve His most tender affections for His friends and emphasize this by giving them His most precious favors.

Now after the Most Holy Eucharist what can He give more supremely desirable than grace upon whose wings these faithful souls soar to the peaceful regions of perfect love?

The soul unsullied by sin is ever radiant with the light of grace, although God may permit her to feel as if her way were shrouded in the gloom of night. Here perfect love has not to blot out mortal sin, since mortal sin does not even exist in this soul; nor has perfect love to obtain remission of eternal punishment, since none has been incurred; nor to restore past merits, since none have been cancelled. Neither has sanctifying grace slowly and laboriously acquired to be restored, for the vessel containing this grace, frail though it be, has happily escaped all the perils and obstacles of the journey.

But the faithful Christian traveling over so long and perilous a road must have contracted at least some slight defilement. For venial sins more or less numerous and committed with more or less deliberation enter the soul. Perfect charity certainly effaces these, since it has the efficacy requi-



site for the blotting out of mortal sin which is much more serious than venial sin. It will suffice for the soul to repent of these venial sins to obtain their pardon.

And sorry for her venial faults, the temporal penalties these incur are at least to a great extent remitted. No theologian questions this. But theologians are not quite so unanimous that the remission takes place entirely and always. Still there are weighty reasons for maintaining the latter opinion.

Of course, it is sheer lovingkindness alone that would lead God to remit to a soul in a state of grace the entire temporal punishment due to venial sin.

But does it not prove infinitely greater kindness when directly a soul in mortal sin has elicited an act of perfect charity, He remits the eternal penalty and puts the soul once more in full possession of all the sanctifying grace and the merit she had forfeited?

Two souls are on the point of departing this world. One is weighed down by mortal sin which she most keenly deplores; the other has only venial sins on her conscience and for these she grieves most bitterly.

Recourse to the Sacrament of Penance is im-

possible for either, and God in His infinite compassion sends both the actual grace they need for an act of perfect charity. Alike sensible to the gentle inspiration from Heaven, they both respond to the grace given them and each makes that act of perfect love for which God was waiting.

This act of love made, the soul of the sinner can fearlessly break her chains. She escapes perdition, and total remission of the eternal penalty is also accorded her.

Now is it rash to believe that an act of perfect charity which has won for so sinful a soul the entire remission of everlasting punishment, will also procure for another soul repenting of her venial faults, the total remission of the temporal penalties, which are infinitely less than are eternal penalties, no matter whether this act of love procures this remission directly or only indirectly by disposing God to give her in His fatherly tenderness the degree of fervor necessary to obtain this grace? And is not such reasoning quite in harmony with the indisputable principle that God treats His friends not less tenderly than His enemies.

Though there may be other opinions as to this, yet what is quite certain is that an act of perfect charity springing from a heart already at peace

with God, will obtain a fresh influx of sanctifying grace from God. Presumptuous indeed are they who would try to determine its measure. But certainly this influx of grace will be most abundant.

To be convinced on this point, it is only necessary to recall the favors with which charity endows the soul justified by forsaking mortal sin, and conclude accordingly. Once again, why should God behave less lovingly and generously toward a soul with whom He is pleased than towards one who has lived so long in sin and estranged from Him?

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## CHAPTER X

### CONTRITION AND ATTRITION.

#### THE THREE DEGREES OF CONTRITION

Man is much too weak and his temptations far too strong and numerous for him to persevere long without falling into sin. Happily, God, his Creator, is in His mercy quite ready to pardon him.

But that providential order in which we live ordains that no fault, not even the least venial sin shall be forgiven without repentance. So we see that while on the one hand, and whatever be the flagrancy of the sin, God will certainly never refuse to pardon it, yet on the other hand, no matter how trivial the fault may seem, it will most assuredly never be effaced if we have not first sincerely repented of it.

And this single statement proves how necessary it is for us all to be sorry for our sins with a sorrow which, if it is sincere, implies and includes grief at having committed this sin and a firm resolve not to commit it again for the future.

Now, regret for our sins together with sorrow at having been led into them, and a firm purpose

never to yield to them in future, and all this in order to win God's forgiveness, is in the strict sense of the word—Contrition. And this contrition is indispensable to all men baptized or not, since in one degree or another, all men in this world are sinners.

That God may be loved for various motives, we have previously seen, and so too there may be repentance for various reasons.

One man is sorry for his sin in order to escape punishment for it, or to regain his rights to the reward forfeited. And another detests it because he has thereby offended his best Benefactor, a Father, supremely kind, the God of all holiness, infinite justice itself, in short, the sovereign Lord of all things.

If this repentance possess the requisite qualities, if it is genuine, supernatural, sovereign and universal as regards at least mortal sin even in its primary form, it will not be rejected by God. But it will be much more acceptable to Him in the second case, because the motives of this contrition will be nobler, more elevated and holy.

In the first instance it is *imperfect contrition* or *attrition*; in the other *perfect contrition*, for *imperfect* contrition proceeds from fear of God,

whereby we think principally of ourselves—but *perfect* contrition has for its motive pure love, (whether love of benevolence or of gratitude matters little)—a love in which we consider God first of all. Attrition alone suffices to obtain forgiveness for the sinner, but with respect to mortal sin, this attrition must be united to accusation of the fault in the Sacrament of Penance, by means of sacramental confession and absolution. It really then contributes to free us from our grievous sins, but only when united to the Sacrament of Penance.

Perfect contrition by itself wins this pardon for the sinner at the very moment it takes place and even before recourse to the Sacrament of Penance.

For this justification it is enough that perfect contrition be united to a desire for the Sacrament,—with the intention of having recourse to Confession, not at the earliest opportunity, however excellent this would be, but eventually. For under the new law perfect contrition itself cannot justify the sinner apart from the Sacrament of Penance.

It is unnecessary that this desire, this intention, should be explicit, an implicit desire is enough. And such desire is never absent from true contrition for it is there included in the at least vir-

tual act of perfect charity it implies and which gives it such power with God.<sup>1</sup>

Like an act of perfect charity, an act of perfect contrition also possesses three degrees of perfection.

Sins may be repented of through *pure love* that is wholly and solely *on account of God's infinite goodness*, and because sin is repugnant and offensive to our Lord. But at the same time the firm resolution never again to offend our divine Master may be confined to *mortal sin*. We may be determined to do and endure everything because God is good, in order to avoid *grievous sin* and *grievous sin only*.

Again our sins may be repented of through *pure love* by not only declaring a relentless war against mortal sin, but by also resolving never again to commit even venial sin, since venial sin is also displeasing to God's infinite holiness.

Finally, we can have so intense a contrition as to yearn to embrace for God's sake every kind of sacrifice and suffering, even though there may *not be the slightest imperfection in avoiding them*, our sole object being to give God greater pleasure and a greater degree of glory.

1. "Sufficit autem ut hoc votum seu propositum confitendi sit implicitum in actu contritionis; non requiritur explicitum." Noldin, *De Sacram.*, 249, n° 2.

The last two degrees of contrition are evidently more exalted and of greater supernatural value than the first. We must then never cease to implore them from Him Who alone can give them to us.

But even when perfect contrition does not exceed the first degree, it really perceives in mortal sin not merely harm to ourselves, but the offence to God, and consequently the greatest possible evil. As a result, a truly contrite soul detests sin for its intrinsic malice and as much as sin deserves to be hated.

Therefore, be it observed,—for this is a point that escapes many Christians—perfect contrition even in its lowest degree, possesses all the characteristics of perfect contrition and like an act of pure love of the lowest degree, produces in the soul all its essential effects.



## CHAPTER XI

## EFFECTS OF PERFECT CONTRITION

Scarcely has the unfaithful soul been moved by perfect contrition to break away from sin, than the friendship of God and the sanctifying grace inseparable from this friendship are immediately restored to her before any Sacramental Confession.<sup>1</sup>

The soul is by this very means called back from spiritual death to life. Perfect contrition cleanses her from every mortal sin on her conscience, however numerous, offensive and perhaps even inveterate these stains may be. Yet perfect contrition blots them all out and so completely that never again will they be laid to the charge of the converted sinner.

This sinner, if a member of the true Church, is still obliged to accuse himself in the tribunal of penance. Unfortunately, he may later on re-

1. No more than an act of charity is an act of perfect contrition the formal cause of the sinner's justification. Each is only the final and adequate disposition for this justification to which each really contributes in a positive manner, but its sole formal cause is sanctifying grace, and this grace is always a gift of God. Cf. Lessius *De Perf. divin.*, xii, C. 28, No. 94.

fuse to do so when the inspiration that moved him to true repentance has passed away. But even then his past sins will not rise again from their ashes to accuse him. He will undoubtedly forfeit grace, but only because of the new and most grievous sin he commits by this refusal. As to his past sins, they are entirely and eternally blotted out, never again to revive, so true it is (as we have previously said) that what God once forgives, He forgives forever.

At the same time, perfect contrition gains for the sinner a complete remission of the eternal and terrible punishment reserved for him. Perfect contrition puts him again in full possession of all his former merits, leads divine mercy to restore to his soul all the sanctifying grace he has gained throughout his life, and in addition confers on him a further degree of grace in recompense for his act of perfect contrition which makes him once more the friend of God.

As to venial faults, if by his act of perfect contrition the sinner disowns and detests them, he is freed entirely from them. This is quite certain.<sup>2</sup> Finally, as all theologians admit, according as his contrition is more or less fervent, will God

2. "Contritionem perfectam, quæ etiam ad venialia se extendat, ad eorum remissionem sufficere non est dubium." Noldin, *De Sacram.*, n° 244, 2.

exempt him wholly or in part from the temporal punishment he may still owe to the supreme justice of God.

In a word, *all the effects produced in a soul by an act of perfect charity are there produced in exactly the same way by an act of perfect contrition.* What gains the former gains the latter. And this is easily understood, since there cannot be an act of perfect contrition that does not imply and include either formally or at least virtually, an act of perfect charity.

And this is why whenever an act of perfect charity (which, let us note in passing can have the same effect on venial sin, and on even mere imperfections as it has on mortal sin) bursts forth from a faithful soul already possessed of grace it fortifies her, becomes more or less firmly rooted in her, and there develops for her eternal benefit the most excellent and most precious treasure to which a human being can lay claim—the love of God.

Whether it relate to an act of pure love or to one of perfect contrition, can there be greater mercy or more absolute forbearance? And is there not something about this unfathomable kindness of the best of Fathers that is truly touch-

ing, because while He is our Father, He is also our God.

Yet this God is sometimes accused of severity. He is reproached for excessive harshness when after a mortal sin, He in His justice, deprives the guilty soul of the sanctifying grace and merit she formerly possessed.

And when after one single absolution, even after one act of perfect charity or contrition lasting but a few seconds, infinite mercy straightway restores all former graces and merits, can we not realize how wonderfully God's mercy exceeds His justice and not kneel in loving adoration?

END OF PART ONE

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SECOND PART

DIFFICULTIES AND OBJECTIONS

## CHAPTER XII

### ARE ACTS OF PERFECT LOVE AND CONTRITION DIFFICULT?

God is infinitely powerful; God is infinitely good: here are two truths we learned while yet children in our Catechism and which under one form or another the Church has been repeating to us ever since.

Now by an infinite power we mean one that is supreme and capable of producing indefinitely the most exalted works without danger of ever becoming itself exhausted.

And by infinite goodness is understood that from which everything may be hoped for, even the most magnificent and most unexpected gifts.

And yet, notwithstanding this infinite power and immeasurable goodness, when there is question of perfect love and contrition, too many Christians are prone to think God is niggardly with these two choice graces, that He hardly ever gives the former except to persons of eminent sanctity, and that forgiveness of sin is but rarely and with difficulty attained through the latter.

Do these Christians then think that by increasing pure love and perfect contrition in our souls, God will end by impoverishing Himself?



Let them look at the sky: there they will see shining myriads of glittering stars. A great astronomer, Sir John Lubbock, estimates the number of solar systems like our own to be found in space, at seventy millions amongst a still greater multitude of other systems that are extinct forever. Over and above the thirty thousand stars revealed to us by astronomical charts, there are millions more in the unexplored depths of the firmament.

Nearly all these stars are invisible to man, yet has not their Creator scattered them throughout space? Why should He not do even more in the order of grace than He has done in the natural order, since according to Bossuet: "It costs God nothing to produce what is most excellent, and what possesses greatest beauty, He multiplies most."<sup>1</sup>

If not afraid of impoverishing Himself, is God loath to depreciate His gifts by liberally imparting the grace of pure love and perfect contrition?

No! For there is no room for such despicable fear where love reigns supreme. Now as the corporeal world floats in the light of the sun, so does the world of souls—float as it were in the light of divine love. Divine love was the first cause of the creation of these immortal souls. Divine love

1. Bossuet, IV. Sem. 1st elevation.

is still their support at every moment of their existence. And this is why God is not afraid of lowering His most precious gifts by giving them to us with a liberality that has never counted these gifts and never will count them.

Besides, when has He ever been influenced by such fear? Has it prevented Him, for instance, from sending His only Son to redeem mankind? Has it prevented this Son of God made man from delivering Himself entirely to us and from giving each of us His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in the adorable Eucharist?

How then should it prevent Him from pouring out upon our souls, wretched though they be, what is best and most exalted in love? He who is love *par excellence* and asks nothing more from us than to love Him.

Motives of expediency will perhaps be urged. Be it so, but to these motives there must be added others which to us seem more forcibly convincing and even irrefutable when they are given serious consideration.

For how long a period has this little planet on which we live been making its annual revolution round the sun?

For how many ages, after attaining a sufficiently cold temperature has our earth been inhabited by man?

The Church does not tell us, and leaves us free in this regard to adopt the hypothesis that seems to us most probable.

But even if we hold to a moderate opinion, to a *via media*, this period must be reckoned by many thousands of years.

Throughout these ages, the human race had multiplied over the entire surface of the earth. Whether living amid the ancient civilization of India, Egypt and later on of Greece, Carthage and Rome; in vast forests or on "steppes" inaccessible to the rest of the world, these men were innumerable. Who indeed could give the number of their appalling multitudes? As well might we try to count all the drops of water of every river on earth that since the creation of the world have been swallowed up in the deep.

An impossibility, but what is certain is that since the appearance of the first man here on earth, until the coming of the Divine Child into the world, some hundreds of billions of human beings have passed through this life, and after a longer or shorter existence here, have entered eternity.

And what is also certain is that almost all these men have been sinners, and sinners more or less guilty of grievous sin. For the Angelic Doctor has no hesitation in declaring that before the

Passion of Jesus Christ there were few persons free from mortal sin.

Should proof be needed to confirm this grave assertion, the Bible will supply it. And this same book will enlighten us as to the perversity of the "Nations."

History furnishes similar evidence. Monuments, inscriptions, paintings, statues, medals, in short, a thousand objects unearthed daily by workmen excavating ruins proclaim the depravity of man with uncontrovertible proof.

Thus almost the whole human race, Jews included, were guilty of grievous sin before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But mortal sin committed, man had to obtain pardon or be irrevocably lost.

Now from the fall of Adam until the coming of Jesus Christ, it is an indisputable fact—and one no Catholic has ever questioned—that for all sinners, whether Jew or Gentile matters nothing, there must have been but one way, one only way of regaining the grace of God, that of an act of pure love or of perfect contrition.

Hence, if what certain Christians think is correct, if it is true that an act of perfect charity is rare, and an act of contrition very difficult: if God grants them only as exceptional graces, it must then be concluded that as hundreds of bil-

lions of sinners living before the death of our Lord on Calvary, made neither one nor the other of these acts, appalling avalanches of these wretched beings were under condemnation, and as a result the whole of the human race before the birth of Jesus Christ is lost forever.

It must then finally be concluded that if these unfortunate souls have been eternally lost, it was for want, not of *will*, but of *power* to make the act of perfect love or contrition necessary to save them—since God having placed this act at morally inaccessible heights it was impossible to attain thereto without an extraordinary grace not actually given to them.

To this frightful conclusion must be added another, assuredly not less terrifying.

Over nineteen hundred years ago under the darkening sky of Calvary, the Sacred Victim died upon the Cross, and since that time hundreds of billions of human beings have passed through this world to the grave.

For the great majority of these men, recourse to the Sacraments has been materially impossible.

Never having heard of the Gospel, some of them have lived in the most abject idolatry, others professed religions less gross but every whit as false. And even in our own day the heathen on this globe of ours may be reckoned by hundreds

of millions, since in one empire alone there are four hundred million adherents of Confucianism. What havoc was wrought in these countless souls, whether still living or not, by corruption of the flesh or pride of intellect! All, or very nearly all these souls must have been irrevocably condemned to eternal woe if, when recourse to the Sacraments was impossible, an act of perfect charity or contrition is as rare as it is claimed to be.

And is this really so? It must then be admitted and openly declared that after creating man through love and later on becoming incarnate for him in the Person of the Word; after redeeming him at the cost of His blood shed to the very last drop; after suffering Himself to be buffeted, spat upon, scourged, crowned with thorns and finally crucified for love of man, God has given over to eternal perdition almost all of these human beings that He of His own volition and pure kindness in their regard had drawn out of nothingness; almost all of those who have passed through this life before the coming of Jesus Christ upon earth, who since His nativity and death have lived, are living or will live outside the Church and in error until the end of time. This is equivalent to saying that God has permitted the great majority, if not more, of the human race to be eternally lost.<sup>1</sup>

1. It would be useless to answer that many of these



Who then, having meditated were it only for an hour on the Good Shepherd, the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son, ever blessed parables and inexhaustible sources of confidence for our poor feeble hearts, can assent to this merciless opinion? Who will admit it after looking attentively at his crucifix or at the tabernacle? Who can ever reconcile it with the unutterable tenderness of our dear Lord and the infinite kindness of His Sacred Heart?

In reality, terrified by this pitiless severity, need it be said we reject such an opinion and that among these countless human beings we believe many are most surely saved through God's infinite mercy.

This means admitting by the very fact that they escaped perdition only through an act of perfect contrition or pure love, since apart from recourse to the Sacrament of Penance there is absolutely no other means of salvation.

And as it is necessary to admit that these souls must have been saved in large enough numbers,—

men may belong to the soul of the Church. For whether they belong to it or not, if they have sinned grievously they cannot be saved except by an act of perfect contrition or of perfect charity implying a desire of baptism. And it is precisely this that certain persons try to represent as something very difficult, even for members of the Church leading Christian lives.

their precise number remaining God's eternal secret—to disprove the above opinion and deny the assertion that nearly all the human race is condemned to endless misery, we are forced to acknowledge that even among heathen and idolaters, an act of perfect contrition or pure love, thanks to God's infinite mercy, ought not to be so rare or difficult as we sometimes suppose.

With far greater reason must this hold true of Christians. They too need an act of perfect contrition or pure love. And if for them this act is not, as it is for all those outside the pale of Christendom, the only means of obtaining forgiveness, it is none the less true that it is often absolutely necessary and always very useful for them.

This is obvious as regards all Christians living in heresy or schism outside the Catholic Church. For even when in good faith, they are none the less full of infirmities. Their will being weak, their heart enervated by sensuality, they commit faults as Catholics commit them in the Church in spite of the innumerable helps the latter have the happiness and privilege of possessing within her fold. Now sin once committed, have these outsiders, save for a small minority, any other means than an act of perfect contrition or of charity to obtain forgiveness of sin?



Is it not very often thus with respect to Catholics themselves? How many of them daily quit this world before a priest can come to their assistance? Frequently alas, there is carelessness, indifference, even hostility on the part of the dying person or of his family. But often too, there is absolute impossibility. Is not this so for all those dying at this time of ruthless secularization in the public institutions, asylums for the aged, homes and hospitals of France?<sup>1</sup>

Hence it can be justly said: "Even after the institution of the Christian Sacraments, perfect contrition is practically the only means of salvation for a great many souls."<sup>2</sup>

That God gives the indispensable succour to all these souls, there can be no doubt; upon all consequently, He confers the grace necessary for their justification.

We may therefore believe that even as throughout the ages of darkness and error Everlasting Mercy saved souls through perfect contrition and

apart from the Sacraments which did not then exist, so does God lovingly save them today. God continues to save apart from the Sacraments and by means of perfect contrition, for instance, those unfortunate invalids whom the sectarian hatred of certain modern States immures in hospitals amid an atmosphere of official paganism when they are nearing the grave. And thus are marvelously foiled the odious plans laid by the enemies of the Church. Poor ignorant creatures, who imagine that to keep away the priest from the dying is to keep away Jesus Christ Himself. As if by making the Sacraments the ordinary channels of grace our Lord had irrevocably enthralled it therein. Such is not the case: the divine Master instituted the Sacraments to facilitate the obtaining of grace, not to render it subservient to the whims of the mighty ones on earth, not to enable them by paralyzing the administration of the Sacraments to shut down at will the floodgates of Heaven. By instituting the Sacraments, He did not forego His right to impart grace directly to our souls. This right is absolute and beyond question. This explains why Jesus Christ continues and will continue to make use of this right as He pleases according to the views of His ineffable goodness and the mysterious designs of His tender compassion.

1. At the time of writing these words, the sinking of the gigantic liner *Titanic*, with the loss of more than sixteen hundred persons during the night of April 15th, 1912, is a singular confirmation of our argument. (Note to the first edition.)

2. Nicholas Gihl, Vice-rector of Fribourg University. *Les Sacraments de l'Eglise Catholique*, trad. Mazoyer, t. III, p. 122, Paris, Lethielleux.

## CHAPTER XIII

## ARE NOT ACTS OF PERFECT CHARITY AND CONTRITION MADE EASIER BY GOD'S INFINITE MERCY?

But it is not only to the dying God facilitates within His Church the graces of perfect charity and contrition. He acts no less liberally to her living members.

He came on earth, as He Himself tells us, "that they may have life and may have it more abundantly."<sup>1</sup>

This is merely saying that after His death on Mount Calvary, He intended with the increase of the means of grace that the means of salvation should also be greatly multiplied.

And by this very fact He has made it easier for us to reach Heaven.

The first means to this end was assuredly the *institution of the Sacrament of Penance*. Through this Sacrament, sinners have obtained forgiveness by attrition alone. Until then attrition would have been fundamentally powerless to justify them. Such a gift is far too precious for us ever to thank Him sufficiently for it.

1. St. John, x, 10.

To this first means, Jesus Christ adds a second, since He is well aware that Sacramental Confession is not always within the sinner's reach. This second means is *to make perfect contrition easier*. Our divine Saviour does for this signal grace what He does for all other graces. In His fatherly and merciful compassion He renders this grace more accessible and widespread under the New Law than it was under the Old. And here again our hearts will never be capable of praising Him worthily.

Thus even after the institution of the Sacrament of Penance, God in His infinite mercy does not abolish or render perfect contrition less frequent, under the pretext that this grace is no longer as necessary as formerly. On the contrary, our Lord is pleased to put it within the reach of many and in His lovingkindness makes the means of access to it easier "that they may have life and may have it more abundantly."<sup>2</sup>

2. "In V. T. actus perfectæ caritatis sola erat via salutis. atque etiam nunc pro omnibus, quibus possibilitas sacramenta baptismi vel pœnitentiæ suscipiendi deest, actus perfectæ caritatis vel contritionis unicum medium est, quo remissionem peccatorum habere possint. . . . Hæc igitur via justificationis in V. T. erat sola pœnia, in N. T. certe non est occlusa, quamquam vim justificativam ex voto sacramenti repetat. . . . Verum in

What God does for contrition, He does also for perfect love. Love was increased after our Lord's death on Calvary, at the very moment when by the institution of the Sacrament of Penance, it became less exclusively indispensable for the restoration of the sinner to God's grace.

Should we not be greatly surprised were it otherwise?

The adorable Blood falling from the Cross upon the world not only cleansed it and washed away its stains, but rendered it also very fruitful. Especially has it brought forth every kind of grace. In this universal blossoming, why should not perfect charity be also included? Why, when love is the first and last word of everything on earth as it is in Heaven, should perfect charity only, with perfect contrition which is inseparable from it, be the sad exception to this great outpouring of grace?

An exception all the more inconceivable that

N. T. institutione Sacramentorum Christus Dominus eatenus faciliorem salutem reddidit, quod cum sacramentis attritio, seu imperfectus dolor, sufficiat. Quo fit ut eo magis abundantia gratiarum et salutis in N. T. institutione Sacramentorum Christus Dominus eatenus faciliorem salutem reddidit, quod cum sacramentis attritio, seu imperfectus dolor, sufficiat. Quo fit ut eo magis abundantia, gratiarum et salutis in N. T. appareat, cum caritatis necessitas minor facta sit. *facilitas vero longe major.*" Lehmkuhl, *Theol. mor.*, t. I, n° 543.

everything in the New Testament urges us impetuously to love: the kindness of the Incarnate Word, our Master, His words and deeds, His benefits and sufferings, His passion and death on Mount Calvary.

So that the reasons, real as they were, for man to love God before the advent of the Redeemer into this world appear to us almost nothing in comparison with those we ourselves possess for loving Him. Ah, if ever a world were capable of producing this love superabundantly, it is this world of the Gospel. Shall the weakness of our faith make us apprehensive of being unable to gather an ample harvest of perfect charity in this field made fruitful by the Master's toil and crimsoned with His Precious Blood?

This would be all the more incomprehensible that, as we have on one hand already seen, perfect contrition is absolutely necessary *as a means of salvation* for innumerable sinners who are unable to avail themselves of the Sacraments and on the other hand, an act of perfect charity is binding *at least as a precept* on all Catholics. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, in Holy Scripture tells us so: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul and with all thy strength," and by these words



He has made the First Commandment of the Old Law the first one of the New.

If this be so, how can this act of perfect charity be hedged about with all sorts of difficulties for those obliged to observe it?

God is too kind to require such an act from all men, and at the same time render it so arduous to the greater number of them that to make it would be morally impossible.

Now it is to all men—and not only to the young, the poor, the ignorant, but also to sinners, and these constitute the largest portion of the human race,—that He has given the command of loving Him with their whole heart and soul. The fulfilment of this precept ought not then to be made morally impossible for them by any difficulties whatever surrounding it.<sup>3</sup>

And in fact, an act of perfect charity, far from being so difficult that it is morally impossible to the greater number of the faithful, is on the con-

3. "Illud est cavendum ne actum caritatis plerisque hominibus difficillimum existimemus. Nequit enim etiam rudioribus et imperfectis, qui maximam humani generis partem efficiunt, moraliter impossibilis esse actus quem Deus ab omnibus poscit, siquidem omnibus, etiam peccatoribus, dedit præceptum Eum super omnia diligendi." Génicot, *Theol. mor. institut.*, t. I, n° 211.

trary easy for all and within reach of everyone.<sup>4</sup>  
And for this may God be ever praised!

4. "Cum actus caritatis perfectæ omnibus fidelibus necessarius sit necessitate medii, omnibus debet esse facilis et pervius." Noldin, *De Præceptis*, n° 55, 2, b.

"If it is true that God does not will the death of the sinner, He cannot mean to impose upon him a perfect contrition impossible for him to obtain." J. de Driesch, *La Contrit. parfaite*, trad. Simon. Paris, Casterman, 17.  
"There is no one who cannot with the aid of God's grace obtain perfect contrition, provided he sincerely desires it." id.—p. 16.

## CHAPTER XIV

## WHAT IT IS TO LOVE GOD FOR HIMSELF

Among the various attractions that may stir the human heart, theologians rightly distinguish two very different kinds of love.

The first is the love of concupiscence, or of *desire*, termed also by Saint Francis de Sales *interested* love. This love in which interest holds indeed so large a place is the one that leads us to attach ourselves to some person or thing for our own ends, that is, for the personal advantage we hope to derive from them.

The second love is the love of *benevolence*, or of friendship where this benevolence is reciprocal. And this perfectly disinterested love is one by which we love a person, no longer for our own advantage, but for himself, consequently not for anything we may gain, but solely to give him pleasure or honor and because of the beauty, virtue, perfection to be admired in him.

This distinction clearly established, theologians conclude by defining perfect charity as the love whereby God is loved above all else, and for Himself alone, that is because of His infinite perfec-

tions. This charity cannot therefore proceed from an interested love, too unworthy an origin for such a grace, but of absolute necessity must be rooted in the love of benevolence or friendship.

On this point there is and always will be unanimity. And unanimity still when it is question of knowing whether the love of God considered in its essence, or in some one of its sublime attributes suffices for the formal determination of perfect charity, for here again there can be but one opinion.

But further research raises for discussion many subtle questions to which schools and theologians offer various solutions, and wherein they no longer agree. And it is the very subtlety of the arguments set loose by these problems that might at first lead us to think an act of perfect charity and contrition very difficult.

How can the simple laity ever become acquainted with such delicate problems? And especially how can they ever take part with sufficient security in such conflicting opinions?

If such knowledge be necessary, it must be at once admitted that the faithful are obliged to renounce the happiness of making either an act of perfect love or contrition. This happiness is for chosen souls only, and within the Church as elsewhere, chosen souls form a relatively small

minority and are an exception to the general rule.

Fortunately, God has mercifully arranged things otherwise. Christianity is not a religion of pride, founded exclusively or even especially for a select few. It is a religion based on humility, a compassionate religion and intended for the reception of all men into its pale.

Is not God the Father of all His creatures, drawn by Him out of nothing; the Father of the poor and lowly just as much as of the rich and powerful? And is not Jesus Christ the Redeemer of the entire human race, of the ignorant quite as much as of the learned?

Our divine Saviour then calls everyone to Him. He does not send away a single individual. And calling all alike, He has not set up social distinctions within His Church, nor established there any privileged classes, thus reserving His most precious gifts for some of His faithful children and refusing these gifts to the rest.

Far from that, for what is highest and holiest, for example, the Most Holy Eucharist, He puts within reach of everyone, and actually confers this, His greatest gift, on all who present themselves at the Holy Table, whether they come there in sumptuous attire or in rags.

Why should He act otherwise with respect to

perfect charity or contrition, which, though treasures of another kind, are nevertheless real treasures?

So He would have acted, at least in practice, if He had required for the making of these acts a knowledge any way profound of their nature, of their formal object, of the questions, briefly, which schools of theology raise in their regard.

For the acquisition of such knowledge, a subtle intelligence is needed, a keen mind, a taste for study, and finally, time; all things out of reach of the great majority of the human race.

Such was not the intention of Him Who one day watching the Jewish multitudes from the summit of a hill in Galilee uttered over them these words: "*Misereor super turbam*," "I have compassion on the multitudes."

And as a matter of fact, He never requires such knowledge.

The study of the unfathomable Eucharist raises far more abstruse problems than those raised by perfect charity.

Does the divine Prisoner of the Tabernacle require these questions to be known and understood that He may descend into a Christian's heart? And does He make this a condition that man may have the unutterable felicity of Holy



Communion and the privilege of receiving this heavenly Bread, the fruit of eternal life?

Our Lord deems it enough that every Catholic should know what one of possibly simple intelligence, of humble station, or it may be of tender years is capable of knowing with regard to this divine mystery. And this knowledge is sometimes really a very small matter, since it suffices, strictly speaking, that young children coming for the first time to the Eucharistic Feast should believe the Bread there given to them is not ordinary bread and that under the appearance of this bread, they receive Jesus Christ Himself.

Likewise for an act of perfect charity or of contrition, it is absolutely certain that the laity are not required to possess an explicit knowledge of the nice distinctions and subtle explanations customary amongst theologians as to these virtues.

In ordinary everyday life, there is not a man of the people, however little accustomed to mental exertion, who is incapable of loving a friend sincerely and disinterestedly, and in so loving does not perceive confusedly at least, the difference between this sentiment and the interested affection such or such a person for instance may bear him.

And yet theoretically, this unlettered man may

not clearly discern any difference between these two affections. He loves his friend no less truly with a disinterested love, for want of this perception.

In the same way, the Christian can make, and really does make, acts of perfect charity while possessing relatively very confused ideas about this queen of virtues. Like the workman we have just mentioned, he can in practice love God with a disinterested love, with a love of true benevolence, without being able clearly to discriminate or to characterize the nature itself of this affection.<sup>1</sup>

1. "Neque requiritur ut notiones satis subtiles quas communis sententia in scientifica hujus actus explanatione adhibet explicite a fidelibus apprehendantur.

"Sicut homines etiam retusi ingenii capaces sunt vera amicitia erga homines illamque satis discernunt a mero amore concupiscentiæ quo alios prosequuntur, quamvis distincte utriusque amoris discrimen minime percipiant, ita Deum vera caritate prosequi poterunt quamvis hujus virtutis notionem confusam tantum habeant. . . ." Génicot, *Theol. mor. instit.*, t. I, n° 211.



## CHAPTER XV

## WHAT IS IT TO LOVE GOD ABOVE ALL ELSE?

To love God perfectly, it is not enough to love Him for Himself (*propter seipsum*), it is also necessary that we love Him above all things (*super omnia*).

Will not this second condition tend at least in practice to make an act of pure love or of perfect contrition almost inaccessible to the incurable weakness of our poor human nature?

Is it not really hard to love God above all things? Have we not already too often experienced the difficulty of doing so?

In one of those moments when the soul is profoundly moved by grace, and gratitude wells up from the very depths of our being, we resolve to love God above everything here on earth, to love Him more than we love anyone, to avoid sin first of all and chiefly because it displeases Him, and to renounce all our earthly possessions rather than let ourselves be again miserably enticed into sin.

And this promise we make in all sincerity. But when we come to examine ourselves more closely,

we soon recognize that there are those around us—whether bound to us by ties of blood or friendship, persons particularly dear to us and for whom we feel a livelier affection than for God, their very thought usually dilating or moving our hearts, when the recollection of God rarely succeeds in making any impression.

Before so sad and yet so undeniable a fact, how admit that we love and even are capable of loving God *above all things*?

Would it not be gross delusion and childish deceit to think so? Why then aspire to perfect charity or contrition?

This objection so firmly supported by experience and thus at the first glance appearing so strong, proceeds nevertheless from an inadequate knowledge of the question.

To dispose altogether of this objection, it is quite enough to know exactly what is meant by the theological expression: "To love God with all our heart, with all our soul and above all things."

To love God "with our whole heart, our whole soul and above all things," is it necessary we should love Him as much as He is absolutely capable of being loved? Consequently, that we

should love Him with a love that responds wholly to His infinite perfections?

Obviously not, for God alone can love Himself with such a love, since such a love is without limitation, and is as immeasurable and unfathomable as the ocean of His divine perfections.

Must God then be loved as much as He is capable of being loved, on the one hand, with all the intensity and fervor of which we are susceptible, and on the other, continually and without intermission?

Again, most certainly not, for only the Blessed are capable of such love, which love is of Heaven, not of earth. Here below, we cannot aspire to it and still less attain it.<sup>1</sup>

Are we obliged at least to love God with all the fervor and intensity of which we are capable by means of the sanctifying grace and actual graces bestowed upon us? No, again, and that for many reasons.<sup>2</sup>

In the first place, who in the world can ever be sure of having fulfilled faithfully a duty of this kind? Positively no one. And in any case the moral impossibility of our obtaining any certainty on this point would soon involve us in a veritable sea of agonizing perplexities.

1. St. Thom. II, 11<sup>ae</sup>, q. 44, a. 4, ad. 2.

2. Card. Mazella, *De Virtut. infusis*, prop. 2.

Now Blessed Bellarmine says:<sup>3</sup> "It is absurd and quite opposed to divine Goodness to think God has prepared a remedy for us in which we should encounter neither peace nor tranquility of soul.

It follows that such intensity of fervor is not possible to man in this world, even with the aid of ordinary grace. Visible objects affect us more keenly in the sensitive part of our nature than those that are invisible. And present evils make a stronger impression upon us than those yet to come, because the former we perceive at once, whereas we are able to judge of the latter but very imperfectly and by reasoning. And the result of this is that save for a *very special grace from God*, the loss of a palpable possession to which we cling, of a person we tenderly love, always affects us more sensibly than sin. Just as the horror we instinctively experience, for instance at the sight of suffering and death, causes us greater grief than of our having sinned against God.<sup>4</sup>

And lastly, to gauge to a nicety the sincerity, the depth of our love and sorrow by what we

3. Bellarmine, I, II, c. 11.—Salmant, *De carit.* disp. 3, n<sup>o</sup> 18.

4. Cardinal Billot, *De Pœnit.*, p. 130, 131.—Cf. Hurter, *Theol. dogm.*, V, III, 465.

feel, is to make use of a very fallacious sign, of a highly deceptive criterion. It would be wholly imprudent to rely absolutely on such impressions. For actual experience shows us daily a number of persons who, without any very strong impressions, love and hate with ten times more intensity than others who on every occasion shed abundant tears.

Then, to love God with our whole heart, our whole soul, and above all things, it is not necessary we should love Him with more or less intensity of fervor, or after a more or less sensitive manner, for example, by trying to ascertain whether we love Him more than we love our relatives and friends, *for the fervor, the vivacity of the impression belongs to the substance of neither an act of love nor of an act of contrition.* They are merely an accidental perfection of these acts and, desirable though they may be since they give to these acts more sweetness and consolation, they are not at all indispensable to them.

But what is it then to love God above all things? It is so to love Him that in our *intelligent appreciation* of Him, we *esteem* Him for what He really is, the Sovereign, the supreme Good and consequently of our will we place Him above all we possess on earth, and as a result, rather than

lose Him by committing a mortal sin, we steadfastly resolve with the aid of His grace to sacrifice all we possess.

*To love God above all things is then essentially an act of the will.*

It matters little whether this act is accompanied by any interior feeling. *Even when the heart remains cold and the soul completely without consolation, if the will acts despite this insensibility, this desolation, an act of love is undoubtedly accomplished.*

And so it is too with contrition. According to the Council of Trent<sup>5</sup> contrition is grief at having sinned and hatred of sin committed, together with a firm purpose of never again committing this sin.

These three parts of contrition, all three, consist essentially in acts of the will—of the will, I repeat, and nothing else.

In fact, it is by an act of the will that the soul aided by grace is sorry and afflicted at having sinned. It is also an act of the will that makes a person detest the sin and undo it so far as possible, and desire it had never been committed.<sup>6</sup>

5. Conc. Trid. Sess. XIV, c. 4.

6. In the three acts of the will essential to contrition: sorrow for sin, hatred of it, and a firm resolution never again to commit it, the principal one is that of hatred



It is an act of the will finally whereby she determines never again to commit it.

In making these acts, a person may not feel the least sorrow, he may remain as cold as ice, as hard as stone, but for all that, it will nevertheless be true that his act of perfect contrition or of attrition, according to circumstances, will have been made and accepted by God, because vivacity of feeling and sensible sorrow are no more a part of the substance of an act of contrition or attrition than they are of an act of perfect or imperfect charity, all of which can really and truly exist without them.<sup>7</sup>

Leaves, flowers and fruit, all so pleasant to the eye, are not indispensable to the life of a tree. This life can exist without them. Beneath the leaden sky of winter, the oak, with its leafless branches appears forever dead. Yet, under the rough, thick bark the sap is still circulating. The tree is alive in spite of all appearance to the contrary, though nothing may reveal this life to the observer. So does the soul frequently live,

of sin, for it is from this that sorrow and firm purpose proceed. Now this act by which the will detests the sin can be expressed thus: "Would to God I had not offended Him." (Nic. Gühr, *Les Sacrem. de l'Eglise*, v. III, p. 105.

7. St. Bonav., iv, dist. xvi, p. 1, a. 1, ad. 1.

apparently insensible and devoid of feeling to the very last fibre of her being. And yet even in this condition she can make acts of the will which with the aid of grace suffice to render her very meritorious in the sight of God.

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## CHAPTER XVI

### SOME OTHER EXPLANATIONS

There are persons who the better to ascertain whether or not they actually possess perfect charity or real contrition propose to themselves some very strange questions.

"Rather than offend God, should I be ready," they say, "to undergo such and such a trial, accept any sort of heartbreaking sorrow, submit to some form of special suffering?" Such persons even go so far as to ask themselves if they would be willing to suffer death, to face martyrdom and that of so dreadful a kind that its mere recital makes them shudder.

Deliberately to consider such eventualities, in order to assure ourselves whether or not we really love God is not the least bit of use in the world.

Further, not only is it unnecessary, but all theologians led by Saint Thomas Aquinas declare that to do so is extremely rash and utterly imprudent.

Nothing is easier to understand if it be remembered that material sufferings as we have said make a much livelier impression upon us than those which appeal only to our intellect.

Let us add to this consideration another of too great importance to be lost sight of. Should God mean us to endure such a trial, or any exceptional suffering, He will certainly give us the grace, an exceptional grace too, that we may bear these trials courageously. But are we to expect this grace before the time? Obviously not! We do not then possess this grace. Why then for the future rashly expose ourselves to the thought of a conflict for which we are not prepared as we should have to be, and one besides that may never be ours?

To be sure of loving God above all things, whether as to perfect or imperfect charity, or to be equally sure of possessing either contrition or attrition, we need not, according to Saint Thomas, go over in detail the evils we should be ready to accept rather than offend God. *It is enough that we are prepared to suffer all things in general, rather than to sin grievously.* And all theologians on this point are at one with the Angelic Doctor.

Were a person to possess but a single degree of sanctifying grace, when he reaches the gates of Heaven—and this is probably true of newborn infants dying immediately after baptism—this single degree of grace would suffice to give him the right to eternal glory, and for his entry into possession of everlasting bliss. So too a single

degree of perfect charity or of contrition, provided this charity or contrition is genuine, suffices for the immediate justification of the sinner and for his regaining without delay, on the one condition of his having recourse ultimately to the Sacrament of Penance, the habitual grace and all the merit he had previously acquired on earth.<sup>1</sup>

But if one single degree of sanctifying grace is sufficient to assure eternal happiness to baptized infants dying before the age of reason, this beatitude is not accorded them in the same measure as enjoyed by others, for instance by the Saints who have bequeathed to the Church such glorious examples, or even by those who have for a long time labored, toiled and suffered in obscurity on earth for love of God.

In the same way, only one degree of perfect charity or of contrition amply suffices for the essential justification of a sinner, outside of the Sacrament of Penance, but one degree is evidently not enough for him to gain all the accessory graces God may be disposed to give him.

1. "Quantumcumque parvus sit dolor, dummodo ad contritionis rationem sufficiat, omnem culpam delet." S. Th., iv, d. 17, q. 2, a. 5.

"Dolor omnis peccati, qui proficitur ex amore prædominante super omnia, etiam remisso, est justificans hominem extra Sacramentum, ut communiter docent doctores." S. Alph. Lig., *Theol. mor.*, I, xvi, 4. n° 441.

This increase of grace will be proportioned to the more or less perfect dispositions of his soul restored to God's grace. The more ardent his charity, the deeper his contrition, the greater share will the penitent have in the supernatural blessings that accompany his restoration to God's favor. Again, for example, the soul like that of another Magdalen may obtain with the pardon of her sins, and in a greater degree, remission of the temporal penalty. She may become strongly rooted in grace so as to obtain from this grace an inexhaustible fecundity, or to be more effectually proof against temptation which is ever awaiting her in this world and might again be the cause of her downfall.

In all this, are there not advantages precious enough for us to desire them with our whole heart? Let us then most earnestly beg our divine Lord to give us as ardent a charity and as intense a contrition as possible, to the end that we become more and more worthy of His holy friendship.

These simple words, if well understood, will certainly set at rest a dangerous subterfuge that troubles and paralyzes many Christians.

"I can understand," these timid persons say, "an act of pure love or of perfect contrition proceeding from the fervent heart of a Saint, from a Francis of Assisi, a Dominic, an Ignatius of Loyola, a

Theresa. But how can such love and contrition exist in a heart such as mine? I possess none of the virtues these true lovers of our Lord possessed. I have labored neither interiorly nor exteriorly for God's glory as unremittingly they labored; knowing naught of their long penance, their unwearied self-sacrifice, their inexhaustible charity, their unalterable patience, is it not really inexplicable rashness or rather unbearable pride worthy of all condemnation for me to desire to make like them acts of perfect love or contrition?

I reply: But must this love, this contrition be necessarily like that of the Saints, I mean of the same degree as theirs, in order really to make an act of perfect contrition or of pure love sufficient to justify the sinner?

There is no question whatever of such similarity. No, there is no question of loving God as Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Dominic, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Saint Francis Xavier and Saint Theresa loved Him.

Neither is there question of a repentance comparable to that of Saint Mary Magdalen or Saint Mary of Egypt. All these Saints made acts of pure love, of perfect contrition of the second or third degree, that is of the highest perfection.

And they made a great many of these acts during their life.

Should God grant us the grace of loving Him perfectly with a love as exalted as theirs, at least from time to time, we have only to thank Him for it with our whole heart.

But it is not at all necessary we should fly so high, particularly at the beginning of our spiritual life, and provided our love for God is perfect enough to make us ready to endure all things rather than to offend Him mortally, that is, provided we attain the first degree of pure love, we are capable of making true acts of perfect charity and contrition, and thanks to God's mercy, of reaping from them all their fruits.

An act of charity or of contrition may be made in an instant. "Their preliminaries," says Saint Bonaventure, "require some little time, but the act by which the soul renounces her errors is made in a moment."<sup>2</sup>

"Contrition," to quote Saint Alphonsus Liguori, "does not require more or less time to attain perfection, for time is but a purely accidental element of this act."<sup>3</sup> And Saint Thomas adds:

2. IV, dist. 16, p. 1, a. 3, q. 1.

3. IV, dist. 16, p. 1, 3, q. 1.



"Man obtains remission of his past sins the very instant he repents."<sup>4</sup>

The fatal consent of one moment caused man's fall and separated him from God.

One moment's contrition or love again justifies him and brings him back to his Creator.

This salutary moment may be followed by many fresh infidelities. The soul forgiven will perhaps fall again, letting herself be deceived by new and captivating illusions, and once more led astray, wander grievously out of the path of righteousness.

Must it thence be hastily concluded that her love was nothing but smoke, and her repentance without foundation? That above all, her act was evidently not one of perfect charity or of true contrition, for had they been so, how could she have returned to her former errors and fallen once more into sin?

No, for such an inference would not necessarily always be true.

We may be truly converted and yet not persevere in living in God's grace. Conversion, whether effected by recourse to the Sacrament of Penance, or by perfect contrition is assuredly a

4. III, q. 84. a. 8, ad. 1.

great grace, but great though it be, it does not imply perseverance. And this perseverance, life-long or simply momentary, is another grace which God in His wisdom and mercy bestows when and how it pleases Him.

To fall again into sin does not always prove the insincerity of the conversion, nor that the heart never for an instant possessed perfect charity or contrition. It only affirms the truth of what we alas know only too well by experience that the human will is changeable and has actually changed.<sup>5</sup>

Such natural inconstancy of will remains after this will has been led by the inspiration of grace to the attainment of pure love or of perfect contrition. And because this inconstancy of will has led the soul to commit some further breach of God's law, it must not be too hastily inferred thereby that love or contrition never existed.<sup>6</sup>

5. "Quod postea aliquis peccat, vel actu, vel proposito, non excludit quod prima pœnitentia vera fuerit" (S. Th., III, q. 84, a. 10, ad. 4).

"Vera pœnitentia non excludit casum sequentem, sed malam voluntatem præsentem" (S. Bonav., IV, dist. 14, p. 1, dub. 4).

6. A transient fall into any grave sin does not of itself always prove that progress has not been made in perfection. Saint Francis de Sales, cautious though he is, writes unhesitatingly on this subject:

Some falls into mortal sin, provided there is no inten-



That God, in spite of His having foreseen this fall, should nevertheless have paternally granted the grace of perfect charity or contrition to the guilty soul, is for all who understand only a fresh proof of His incomparable love and unutterable kindness.

Besides, He has here manifested His infinite mercy in every way.

Yes, He shows forth His mercy by offering an act of pure love or of perfect contrition as a last resource to billions of unbelievers before and after the coming of Jesus Christ, and by making this act still easier for every member of His Church.

His infinite mercy is seen in this act, short and instantaneous though it be, an act whereby He immediately justifies the guiltiest and most inveterate sinner at any moment of his life, and up to the very brink of the grave.

And His infinite mercy is again manifested

tion of remaining in such a state, and no blindness as to its malice, do not prevent progress in virtue.—And though, indeed, grace is forfeited by grievous sin, it is nevertheless recovered, the first time the sinner sincerely repents of his sin, even, I repeat, when the sinner has, as it were, long been steeped in sin." (*Letters of Direction of St. Francis de Sales*.—Moses Cagnac, Paris, de Gigord, p. 320.)

when He revives the merits destroyed by sin and restores them entirely to the pardoned sinner, thus encouraging us all to live meritoriously, since even future falls cannot deprive us of our efforts made in the past, provided we return to God before our death.

And so it is that God, blending justice and delicacy, makes a difference as to the degree of the eternal recompense between a soul that has all her life been faithful or that having sinned more or less frequently, has as invariably repented, and another soul who having lived her whole life, or nearly her whole life, estranged from God, returns to Him only at the very last and when almost in sight of the grave.

And finally, God's infinite mercy and exceeding love having created and sanctified His poor prodigal child, multiplies the means of salvation in his regard, and until he draws his last breath, makes it possible for him to return to his Father's house by the sweet, the consoling, the alluring way of love.

END OF PART II

PART III

WAYS AND MEANS

## CHAPTER XVII

### CONFIDENCE

We can do nothing without our divine Master, without our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> He Himself declared this to His disciples and His words to them are intended for us all.

In the natural order, man may indeed act without grace, I do not say without God's assistance. Naturally and of himself, he may be capable of doing many great deeds, of accomplishing mighty works. He has in himself, in his intellect so noble and profound what is necessary to obtain victories, to produce masterpieces, to make important scientific discoveries and to astonish the whole world. Yes, but in the supernatural order, he is absolutely helpless: without grace never can he do anything to merit eternity.

On the contrary, with the aid of Him who becomes his strength, he can do all things.<sup>2</sup> Not absolutely all, that is quite clear, but relatively all; that is all God in His eternal designs intends and calls him to do, no matter how inadequate his

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1. Saint John xv, 5.

2. Phil. iv, 13.

powers may appear for such work, or how arduous, sublime and perfect such work may be.

In the spiritual life there are two illusions to fear, two extremes to avoid, and they are signified by these words of our Lord I have just quoted.

These two illusions are presumption and faintheartedness; presumption which artfully inspires us, sometimes without our even perceiving it, with too much confidence in our own knowledge, talents and experience and prevents our having recourse as often as we should to God; and faintheartedness which by unduly magnifying our own weakness to ourselves, and on the other hand veiling the infinite tenderness of God's mercy, turns us away from Him and makes us less supernaturally strong in His sight.

Faintheartedness is therefore to be dreaded no less than presumption, since both suffice to keep us at a distance from God Who is the sole dispenser of the grace without which we can do nothing.

Midway between presumption and faintheartedness is confidence, and this for our greatest consolation shows us God as the sovereign Goodness overflowing with kindly compassion and ever ready at our first appeal to condescend to our

misery, so that like a mother, He may give us the aid which we cannot do without.

All through the Gospel, our Lord Jesus Christ extols confidence: "*Nolite timere*"... "*Confidite*"... "*Confide*"... "*Noli timere*"... "Be not afraid"... "Fear nothing"... "Have confidence"... He says continually. These sweetly consoling words for such poor weak mortals as we were spoken upon Mount Thabor amidst the glories of His Transfiguration, and again during that dark, stormy night on Lake Tiberias when He came walking over the foam-crested waves His feet seemed scarcely to touch, to comfort His disciples.

He repeated these words along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, on that bright April morning of His resurrection day when all nature appeared clad in its spring beauty as though wishing to offer its risen Lord a picture of life, fragrance and verdure, a landscape worthy of Himself, and in the solitude of the Cenacle when the terrified apostles haunted by the recollection of those tragic events of Gethsemane and Calvary at which they had been present, thought a spirit had appeared in their midst.

He addressed these supremely consoling words to His disciples, to the holy women, to Peter on



the occasion of the miraculous draught of fishes, to Jairus when about to raise his daughter from the dead, to the trembling woman with the bloody issue, to the paralytic He was soon to cure.

And inspired by Him, the angels, His ministers, have said like their Master: "Be not afraid"... "Fear nothing"... Celestial messengers of peace, they spoke thus to the Blessed Virgin at Nazareth, to Zacharias in the Temple, to Joseph, the Shepherds of Bethlehem and also to the three Marys when Jesus had just risen triumphant from the grave.

For our divine Master is well aware how necessary confidence is for us and that of ourselves we cannot do without His support.

Nor can we do without His help at any moment of our spiritual life, or with regard to any supernatural actions. This confidence is thus just as indispensable to us for the attainment of perfect charity and contrition as it is for the acquirement of any other virtue.

And if we have not enough faith, enough confidence in divine goodness to be sure that God will not deny us these two great graces, in case of need, as He has made these graces one of the means of salvation at our disposal and one of the

remedies reserved for our destitution, we shall never obtain them.

So our confidence must first be firm, steadfast and so deeply rooted within us that for no consideration whatever shall we doubt the success of the work which in response to our humble petition, the Father of Mercies vouchsafes to do in our heart.

Most assuredly we are very barren soil from which to produce such fruit. But is He not all powerful? Is He not able of the very stones of the desert to raise up children to Abraham? Has He not at His disposal a never failing dew? So, no matter how parched our souls may be, or how hard our wretched hearts, He is able when He so desires to make them fruitful.

Just as He made it possible for Mary to become mother without loss of her virginity and removed the barrenness of Elizabeth which had existed many long years, and was, humanly speaking, incurable. Why should He not act likewise in our souls? Has He not already done so very often? Yes, He will make us fruitful too, if we have confidence and seek him lovingly.

Yes, He will make our souls fruitful, for let it not be forgotten: *"To do and to give what He*

*pleases, nothingness serves God's purpose as well as being, what is not as well as what is."*<sup>3</sup>

We sometimes question this because it seems to us that God repulses us. What we do not realize is that "these refusals of God are often graces and very great graces:"<sup>4</sup> And then are we quite sure God does really refuse us? Unaware of what He is doing within us, we instinctively conclude from this refusal that He is doing nothing and consequently thrusting us away from Him.

A huge mistake, for "*the invisible Workman knows how to act without seeming to do so.*"<sup>5</sup> *He bestows His favors without our being conscious of or feeling them and often without our even suspecting them.* But He knows, and it is to Him that all must be referred."<sup>6</sup>

At other times, seeing how impossible it is for us to gainsay God's gifts to us, we wonder whether the source of these favors may not necessarily become one day exhausted, since it seems to us that we are always receiving without giv-

3. Bossuet to Madame d'Albert de Luynes: letter 138. Our quotations are all taken from the three volumes "*Lettres de piété et de direction*," published by the firm La Bonne Presse, Paris, 1897.

4. Bossuet, to Sister Cornuau, letter 19.

5. Bossuet, to Madame d'Albert de Luynes, letter 206.

6. Bossuet, to Madame d'Albert de Luynes, letter 141.

ing anything in return and that such ingratitude is bound to be punished. And thus our confidence shaken by this fear, becomes weak and wavering.

But Bossuet tells us most emphatically: "Take what is offered you without troubling whether or not you give anything in return. *To receive from God is to give to Him, and as He has no need of our possessions, all that He asks is for us to receive what He gives us.* To be ready to receive what God gives is highly meritorious in His sight."<sup>7</sup>

"But," resumes the anxious one, "there is nothing imaginary about my reasons for being afraid; they are unfortunately only too well founded, since I discover them in my own faults. Why should I not fear when I am so weak and especially when it is question of such great graces as those of charity or of contrition? In such a state would not confidence be deplorable blindness and criminal foolhardiness?

"*It is quite certain,*" as Fénelon observes, "*that God opens a strange book for our instruction when He persuades us to read our own hearts.*"

But it is no less true however, that such reasoning as tends to make persons afraid, is quite

7. Bossuet to Madame d'Albert de Luynes, letter 169.

wrong, though the devil uses it daily to delude us. And where is it said in Holy Scripture that only persons with no faults to deplore have a right to confidence in God and to rely on His lovingkindness?

Was not Saint Mary Magdalen a great sinner? Did not Saint Peter deny His Master, after having sworn to follow Him to death? Sorry deserters of the holiest of causes, and of the meekest and most affectionate of Masters did not the cowardly Apostles forsake Him in the Garden of Olives? Yet, our Lord exhorted them all to confidence and said to each one of them, in spite of their faults: "*Nolite timere*"... "*Confidite*"...

If to seek God with confidence, it is necessary we have nothing with which to reproach ourselves, not a sinner would ever emerge from his miserable bondage. There he would ever remain, irrevocably held fast, since to obtain pardon, he must first ask, and why ask if he does not firmly believe he will obtain?

No, our sins are no hindrance to confidence, on the contrary, they even render this confidence more than ever necessary, and so the more earnestly to be urged.

We must humble ourselves for our faults and persevere, for "our imperfections are bound to

accompany us to the grave. We cannot proceed without touching earth, but we must not rest there or wallow therein, nor can we think of flying. We are like little chickens still without their wings: We are dying by degrees. So, too, must our imperfections die daily, dear imperfections that lead us to recognize our destitution, exercise us in humility, contempt of ourselves, in patience and diligence, and notwithstanding which God looks at the preparation of our hearts, that it is perfect."<sup>3</sup>

"God leaves us these defects for His glory and our greater good: He wishes our destitution to be the seat of His mercy and our helplessness the seat of His omnipotence."<sup>9</sup>

"Know well then, that we seldom root out all our imperfections: *they remain for our humiliation and trial*. Let us ever fight against them, but never dream of gaining so complete a victory as to exterminate our faults wholly and entirely.

And so must it be, in order that ever depending on God, our very need and helplessness may prove our strength."<sup>10</sup>

8. *Letters of Direction* of Saint Francis de Sales, published by Moses Cagnac, Paris, Poussielgue, 1902.—To a Lady, pp. 97-298.

9. Id.—To Madame de Chantal, p. 90.

10. Bossuet, to Sister Cornuau, letter 145.



And Bossuet had written still more plainly: "I have told you, if I remember well, that with respect to your troubles, you should consider in sin, not the sin God detests, but the result He intends to draw from it for your humiliation, by offering Him your humiliations and afflictions for the fulfilment of His secret designs."<sup>11</sup>

This was precisely Fénelon's idea when he replied to a Secular who was bewailing her faults: "I am not surprised God permits you to be guilty of these, even in times of fervor and recollection just when you desire their number to be less.

"The very fact of their being permitted is one of the graces God gives you at that particular time. For God allows them only to make you realize your own inability to correct them yourself. What more opportune grace can He bestow than that of ridding you of self-illusions and compelling you in all humility to have continual recourse to God?

*"Profit by your faults, and they will prove more useful to you, by lowering you in your own eyes, than your good works do by consoling you. Faults are always faults. But they do us great service by making us ashamed and by leading us back to God."*<sup>12</sup>

11. Letter to Sister Cornuau, letter 116.

12. Fénelon to a Secular. Letter 82, *Lettres de direc-*

And this explains why, *notwithstanding our unfaithfulness, God is ever willing to give us new graces*: He gives them beyond our merit.<sup>13</sup> He will never cease giving them to us, "for God is well used to our imperfection" to quote those delightful words of Saint Francis de Sales, and in His mercy He will never send the destitute away."<sup>14</sup>

So He will no more refuse us the grace of perfect charity or of contrition than He will refuse us the others, provided we ask confidently for them and wait for them with patience and humility.

Let us have this humble confidence: "God is really not so formidable to those He loves; He is satisfied with little, for He knows well how very little we have to give."<sup>15</sup> Let us have full and entire confidence, the confidence of Peter, but more steadfast than his, and one that will not hesitate even a second as did the Apostle's on

*tion*, published by Moses Cagnac.—Paris, Poussielgue, 1902. Reference is made to this volume for all the following quotations.

13. Bossuet, to Madame d'Albert de Luynes, letter 141.

14. Moses Cagnac.—*Letters of Direction* from Saint Francis de Sales, p. 231.

15. Id.—*Letters of Direction*, p. 70, to the Abbess of Fuits d'Orbe.

the stormy waves of Lake Tiberias. Let us not deserve the reproof our Lord gave on that occasion to the future head of His Church: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

Let us doubt no longer. Let us fear nothing. Nothing from events, since God directs them. Nothing from man; they can only do what God permits them to do. Nothing from ourselves, provided we are truly convinced of our own nothingness, the Master will protect us against our pride, our indulgence, our impatience, our sensuality, just as He defends us from external attacks. For the *Ego sum* is of infinite power, and the *Nolite timere* without limit or restriction. Applicable to all things, it then applies to charity and perfect contrition. One day, we shall have the happiness of realizing this, if we abandon ourselves to God's everlasting mercy and adhere filially to it, as a little child who clings to its mother and hugs her with all its strength and as tightly as it can.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

### PRAYER

The God we serve is a God of Supreme Goodness, or rather He is Goodness itself, goodness *par excellence* and that from which all other goodness here on earth proceeds. Now of its nature, goodness tends to effusion. So God, being infinite Goodness, never ceases to heap His blessings upon us, and one of His most glorious attributes is that of His boundless generosity to man whom He sustains and enriches during his life after having created him out of nothing.

When Jesus Christ came into this world, He went about doing good, "*Pertransiit benefaciendo.*"<sup>1</sup> He scattered His blessings everywhere with prodigal hand. He did not limit Himself to alleviating the material sufferings of mankind. We bear within us more pitiless and lacerating wounds than those that afflict the body: He there applies a heavenly balm. He comes into our soul and, not content with merely healing, He restores her to life, for sin had really caused her death and consequently it was necessary she should be restored to life and this restoration He has effected.

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1. Act x, 38.

And yet bountiful though He is with His gifts, Jesus Christ has made prayer the ordinary condition for the bestowal of His blessings. This is why the Holy Ghost refers just as frequently in the New Testament to prayer as He did in the Old. He tells us: "Pray, ask... We ought always to pray and not to faint."<sup>2</sup>

So true it is that the necessity of prayer is one of the points on which the Gospel most frequently insists in one way or another.

Faithful inheritor of His divine plan, the Church does not disregard the urgent obligation of prayer and its great value. I do not speak merely of its absolute but still more of its comparative value. And when the Church opposes action to prayer, she the silent, the indefatigable laborer of twenty centuries seems to esteem prayer more than activity. She in her wisdom has actually approved those religious orders wherein prayer is the principal occupation of a day in which not a single hour is given to the direct relief of one's neighbor. And on the contrary, she has never approved any order wherein external action without prayer takes up the whole day.

Does not this simple comparison show us how

2. Saint Luke xviii, 1.

the Church esteems prayer and how necessary she thinks it is?

Thus a large portion of our day must be devoted to prayer, and nothing allowed to encroach on this time which is set apart.

It must be so, for it is a general law that for every prayer there is a corresponding grace, and that for every grace, prayer is necessary, usually at least.

To this might even be added that the greater the grace, the greater God's right of making us ask it urgently, not for Himself, but for us, the better to convince us who are so inconsistent, of its value: we must not then be astonished should he often act thus.

Though as a result, however necessary confidence is, if we desire to obtain the graces we need, yet this confidence alone is not sufficient. Prayer is also indispensable and especially for the obtaining of those two graces, perfect charity and contrition.

Happily, prayer costs man scarcely anything. Has he not really been accustomed to pray from childhood? Seeing how impossible it was for him to procure what he needed for himself, has he not spent many years making his wants known to those about him? Now is not petition one of



the forms of prayer? From our youth up, we have so asked and consequently prayed. And so this habit of prayer is comparatively easy for all of us, at least vocal prayer, which is the customary prayer of the young and ignorant.

And its sublime form, so simple nevertheless in its sublimity, for which we are first indebted to our Lord Jesus Christ and then to His Church, also makes prayer singularly easy for us.

The trouble is, we become too quickly discouraged. When we are in trouble and pray, we desire to be heard at once. Should God delay somewhat to interfere, to dispel our fears, to remove our anxieties, to take away our sufferings, in a word, to clear the atmosphere, we grow impatient at these divine delays. There are reasons, however, for their existence, and these reasons are supremely wise, though we do not see it. So, instead of becoming impatient, we should on the contrary resign ourselves humbly and gladly to these delays in a spirit of child-like adoration.

Is not the Gospel full of examples for our encouragement in such circumstances?

The Canaanitish woman's first appeal was not heard. She had to repeat her timid petition many

times—a mother's appeal, always so touching—and at last she was heard.

When Martha and Mary implored Jesus to come to their sick brother, our Lord seemed not to heed the urgency of their petition and did not hasten His steps to Bethany.

But these delays were providential. They afforded time for Lazarus to die and so permitted our divine Lord to do more for His friend than He would have done had He hurried to him, for then He would merely have cured Lazarus, as He had cured innumerable other sick persons, whereas to raise Lazarus from the dead was to place him among those privileged to show forth fully God's omnipotence and love.

But He Himself, He the Incarnate Word, the Son of God, the Lord of all, was His own petition heard at first: when twenty-four hours before His death on Mount Calvary, He suffered His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane? No, indeed, and three times the sorrowful "*Transeat*" was to fall from His lips before His Father sent an Angel from Heaven to strengthen Him.

Are not these wonderfully eloquent examples? And do they not help us realize that we should never become discouraged in prayer even when God seems to be deaf to our most earnest appeals?

Another source of discouragement for us is that our Lord does not always give us what we ask. "What is God thinking of that He does not give me what I desire? is the first cry of each one of us. If the Sovereign Lord of all is not my humble servant, or if in order to do me good, He does not consult my preferences, or make known to me His plans, He is deficient in all His duties and to speak the truth, there is great reason for doubting His very existence. I cannot tell how absurd such language appears to me,"<sup>3</sup> wrote on one occasion Monseigneur d'Hulst.

Saint Augustine was also astonished at such a state of mind and with his usual earnestness waged war against it. "He that created you," he exclaims, "knows well how to deal with you, unless you imagine Him to be so unskilled a workman that He could have created you from nothing, and does not now know how to treat you."

"But He only despises me," you reply. "I have prayed and He does not listen."

"Did you not ask for something likely to do you harm?"

"I entreated with tears," I say, "and have not been heard."

3. *Letters of Direction*, letter 146. Poussiégué, Paris.

"O foolish one, what did your tears demand? Some material happiness, some transient pleasure, some earthly good fortune... and all these might have taken you to Hell, the possession of this wealth been your misfortune, the deprivation of which will open your eyes to your peril.... Abandon yourself then entirely to God. For He alone knows what to give you, and of what to deprive you."<sup>4</sup>

To abandon yourself to God is really the very best thing you can do. To abandon yourself to Him with confidence and to pray to Him frequently during the day.

This frequent prayer is easy, for it is not the same with respect to piety as it is with temporal affairs. Business matters require free and regular hours for long and continuous application, but piety does not. In a word, we can recall God's presence, love Him, adore Him and offer Him what we do and suffer.<sup>5</sup>

And this is why in the spiritual life "the less time we have at our disposal, the more important it is that we know how to use it well. If we wait a fixed and convenient hour to fulfil

4. Saint Augustine, Sermon 21.

5. Fénelon, Letter 7.

our religious duties, we run the risk of waiting too long.

"So every spare moment must be turned to account: when we are waiting for anyone, or going from one place to another; when we are with those who like to talk, and we have only to let them speak, we may lift up our hearts to God and become strengthened anew for our future work."<sup>6</sup>

These rapid aspirations, these ejaculatory prayers are particularly fruitful, and promote most wonderfully our desire for Heaven. We must make a great many of these in the course of the day and often ask God for the "*grace of loving Him above all things, and because He is God,*" and that we may also "*repent of our sins because He is infinitely good and sin is displeasing to Him.*"

Charity and contrition are most assuredly great graces, and no one would think of denying it. Therefore we must ask our divine Lord most earnestly for them. But then, however great they are, we must have perfect confidence of obtaining them.

Is not perseverance a still greater grace, since it is the grace of graces? Now, Saint Augustine

6. Fénelon, Letter 7.

without hesitation says we can obtain it for ourselves by means of humble prayer.<sup>7</sup> So also in the same way can we merit the grace of perfect charity and contrition. When God sees our earnest desire to love Him as perfectly as we can, He will not refuse us the help we need to realize this desire which we moreover possess only because it is His will to give it to us.

"How indeed could He refuse our petitions," exclaims Saint Bernard, "since He Himself inspires us to ask when we forget to do so?"<sup>8</sup>

7. "Hoc donum suppliciter emereri potest" (*De dono persever.*, c. 6).

8. "Quomodo Deus negabit petentibus, qui non petentes provocat ut petant?" S. Bern., *Serm.* 3.

## CHAPTER XIX

### MENTAL PRAYER

Vocal prayer helps us forget for a time this world and out of the stifling depths of our exile opens up endless vistas of Heaven. It sets us before God. Mental prayer leads us still nearer to this beloved and peerless Master. And it most clearly and forcibly reminds us that as mere wayfarers and fleeting pilgrims in this world, we must needs while we are here, and cost what it may, make every effort to reach our eternal home!

Hence we see the inestimable value of mental prayer in the spiritual life. Every Saint has proclaimed its worth; all ascetic writers fearlessly recognized it. And no director worthy of the name but has urged the souls confided to him by God to the practice of mental prayer.

These persons, past and present, belonged to very different classes of society. The obligations of their state in life, as well as their leisure time, have varied greatly! What matter? God does not expect we should all pray after the same manner or even for the same length of time. He asks from us only what we are able to give. Is

it possible for us to devote a good part of our time to prayer? Let us give it to Him faithfully. Have we merely a few moments at our disposal every morning for this purpose? Let them be devoted to Him without hesitation.

Brief though these moments are, we may be sure they are not valueless and the greatest profit will ensue from them at last.

In any case, and whatever efforts mental prayer may cost us, the end we have in view is well worth the effort.

Fénelon, writing to the Duc de Chaulnes said: "You should ask the Duchesse de Chaulnes to try to *commune* alone with God for at least a quarter of an hour every morning and for as long a time every evening.<sup>1</sup> This is not too much for eternity."

"This is not too much for eternity." We should repeat these words to ourselves at certain hours, however long our prayer may last. And how right Fénelon was!

It is a great pity that there are persons in whose minds the mere mention of mental prayer raises a host of objections. With the result that a large

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1. To the Duc de Chaulnes, December 19, 1709.



number are either turned away from the practice of meditation or if they do take it up, are soon disgusted and leave it off.

And yet the majority of these objections are groundless while others spring wholly from ignorance.

Mental prayer is really very simple and could hardly be anything else.

Why should God complicate one of the means He has in His wisdom ordained whereby man may have recourse to Him? I have previously remarked this with respect to another truth: that the human race has not been divided by the Lord of all into two classes, one so to speak disqualified and condemned never to address God, save by forms committed to memory, the other on the contrary, privileged and able at leisure to converse with its Creator either by means of these forms of prayer or by reflecting on the Christian virtues and then allowing the heart to speak for itself.

The most ignorant, most unlettered of Christians should be able to go to God by this second way as readily as the most instructed. Undoubtedly, the reflections of the former would be elementary, his language incorrect, the whole character of his meditation rude and unpolished, but for all that he will according to his ability

have prayed mentally, that is, have made a meditation.

I have no intention here of writing a treatise, condensing whatever has been said on a subject already dealt with by so many excellent authors.

But before pointing out how greatly meditation may serve for the attainment of an act of perfect charity and contrition, it will not perhaps be amiss to recall briefly some practical advice given certain persons by masters eminent in the spiritual life. For these wise counsels are of general import, and no Christian, whether a beginner or not in the way of perfection, but will find these counsels highly serviceable and fail to derive the greatest profit from them.

And first consider this broad and true principle of Saint Ignatius: "*That method of prayer is the best for every person wherein God communicates more freely with him.*" For God knows and sees what is most expedient for each, and knowing everything, He Himself points out to us the path we must follow."<sup>2</sup>

It was to Francis Borgia, then Duke of Gandia and Grandee of Spain, that the illustrious founder

2. To Don Francis Borgia, September 20, 1548.

of the Society of Jesus gave this enlightened advice.

Afterwards a Jesuit and in his turn General of the Order, Saint Francis Borgia was always faithful to the direction given him. On July 28, 1567, he wrote to Father Nadal, the Visitor to Spain: "After half an hour's meditation, the rest of the time may be spent in vocal prayer.... without necessarily imposing the same method on everyone. *Each individual should follow his attraction and the advice of his Confessor.*" And he also wrote to the Provincial of Aragon: "For their direction in prayer, our Lord has given us a good guide, the *Spiritual Exercises* of the Society. Then let some of them continue to use this method, and the rest other methods, *Alius quidem sic, alius vero sic*, and since all methods are good, these persons must be left free. The movements of the Holy Ghost are diverse and diverse too the talents and intellects of men."<sup>3</sup>

And like Saint Ignatius and Saint Francis Borgia, Saint Francis de Sales also writes: "*The secret of secrets in prayer is to follow our attraction in simplicity of heart.*"<sup>4</sup>

3. Peter Suau, S. J., S. Francis Borgia, pp. 391-392.
4. To a secular Lady, June 20, 1618.

And Bossuet, of the same opinion as these eminent masters, unhesitatingly says: "*There is ever but one good attraction for everyone, and that is to follow the attraction given him by God, willing to forego or to receive what is not essential to perfection.*"<sup>5</sup>

Whatever may then be the way God asks us to take, whatever the attraction He deigns to give us, so soon as we have submitted them to the approval of those in authority over us, and they have approved them, we may follow our attraction fearlessly, sure that it will lead us to God.

Let us add to the principle we have just recalled this further statement of Bossuet which, well understood, will allay a very great many of our anxieties in prayer. "*The important rule in meditation is to take what God gives.*"<sup>6</sup> So we should not desire to have in prayer more than God wills to bestow upon us. We should confide to His fatherly love the care of regulating the kind and degree of nourishment most suitable for us.

Finally, why not cite also these priceless words which we should recall at the beginning of each of our meditations, for they will make them

5. To Sister Cornuau, letter 98.
6. To Sister Cornuau, letter 98.

much more fruitful and it may be much easier." *God must be dealt with in all simplicity, for He is kindness itself.*<sup>7</sup>

If our meditations are a trial to us, is it not very often because we do not know how to deal with God in all simplicity? We converse with Him in too formal a manner and with too many preliminaries. We see in Him the Almighty, the Creator, the Master, the Judge. And no doubt we must do so, but we should not stop there. And it is with respect to this point that our meditations prove such a drag. We should also look to God as our Father, our Savior, our Friend, that loving Friend Who came to us on earth and has such compassion for our weakness. Then dealing with Him in all simplicity, we shall tell Him everything that interests us and no longer dread remaining fearful and silent in His presence.

Fénelon referred to this principle when he wrote to a young man: "*Speak to God in prayer of all your miseries, all your necessities, all your troubles, even of the repugnances you may experience in His service.* You cannot speak to Him too freely, or with too great confidence. He loves the simple and humble, and it is with them

7. Bossuet, to Madame du Mans, I, 74.

He communes. If you are of this number put aside your intellect and lofty ideas, open your heart to Him and tell Him everything."<sup>8</sup>

And entering more into detail with his friend, the Duc de Chaulnes, Fénelon wrote: "Tell God all you have at heart, for we unburden our hearts to a good friend of what afflicts or gives us pleasure!

"Tell Him your troubles that He may console you; your joys that He may moderate them; lay bare your desires to the end He may purify them; set forth your repugnances that He may help you overcome them; speak to Him of your temptations that He may assist you in guarding against them, show Him all the wounds of your heart that He may heal them; tell Him of your tepidity in what is good; your depraved inclinations for evil; your dissipation; your weakness; your fondness for a corrupt world. Say to Him how your self-love leads you to be unjust to your neighbor; how vanity tempts you to be false in your business dealings with men, and this in order to stand well with them; how your pride is hidden from others and even from yourself. When you thus make known to Him all your weakness, all your necessities and anxieties, how much you will have

8. Letter 4.

to say! Ah, material for conversation can never be exhausted; it is constantly renewed."<sup>9</sup>

No matter how great your desolation, there is no occasion for you to change your mode of speech. "What shall you say to God," Fénelon again writes to a Secular, "in the time of desolation, repugnances and depression?"

"You may always say what is in your heart, *that you no longer find His love within you; that you feel only a frightful void, that He wearies you*; that His presence no longer affects you, that you are eager to forsake Him for the most despicable pleasures, and that you will only be at ease when you are far away from Him and occupied with yourself.

"You have only to tell Him all the evil you know of yourself. You ask me what there is to talk about? Is there not only too ample material for conversation?

"And in relating to Him all your miseries, you will beg Him to cure them.

"You will say: 'O my God, behold my ingratitude, my inconstancy, my unfaithfulness. Take possession of my heart which I know not how to give Thee. Having taken possession of it, keep

9. Fénelon to the Duc de Chaulnes, May 31, 1709. Letter 65.

it, for I know not how to keep it for Thee. Give me exteriorly those repugnances and crosses necessary to recall me to Thy service. Have pity on me in spite of myself.' Thus you will always have plenty to speak of to God, either of His mercies or your miseries. Never can these subjects be exhausted."<sup>10</sup>

If Fénelon spoke thus, it is because he knew our divine Master never sends us away from Him. And were not these beautiful words also said by Fénelon: "*God is our one true Friend and only Comforter*. No one else understands everything at a mere suggestion as He, nor can enter into all our troubles and make Himself acquainted with our every need."<sup>11</sup>

Besides, it must not be thought that prayer made in desolation and dryness of soul is useless. "You are doing nothing, you tell me, in prayer," wrote Saint Francis de Sales to President Brulard,<sup>12</sup> "but what else do you want to do, but what you are: repeatedly putting before God your nothingness and misery? The most effective plea beggars can make, is to show us their sores and necessities.

10. To a Secular, Letter 77.

11. Letter 4.

12. Cagnac, pp. 61-62.



"But sometimes, so you say, you do not even do this, but merely remain there like a ghost or a statue. Well, even that is no small matter.

"Trees bear fruit only in the sun, some sooner, others later; some every year, others every three years, and not always alike. We are very fortunate in being able to remain in God's presence. Should we not be satisfied to bear fruit sooner or later, every day or only occasionally, according to His good pleasure to which we should be fully resigned?"

Let us not be disturbed should we remain in this state of desolation. We have merely to persevere quietly in our prayer "even though our prayer were in darkness greater than that of Egypt, and dryer than the sun-scorched earth."<sup>13</sup>

No doubt we are always prone to seek for and desire consolation.

But desolation in prayer is particularly meritorious. "Since to love God in the time of sweetness and consolation is easy even for little children," says Saint Francis de Sales, "but to love Him in desolation is the touchstone of our fidelity. Saint Peter, despite his imperfection, had courage to acclaim Jesus on Mount Thabor, but

13. Bossuet to Sister Cornuau, Letter 119.

on Mount Calvary only His Mother and the faithful Saint John whom He bequeathed to her as a son, stood at the foot of the Cross."<sup>14</sup>

"The bitterness of desolation is then much more fruitful...and it is far better to eat bread without sugar than sugar without bread."<sup>15</sup>

And then "prayer made in desolation of soul, provided it is persevered in, inures us to trials. It fortifies us against ourselves, humbles us and exercises us in the hidden way of the cross..."

"So do not relinquish prayer, however dry, empty and interrupted by distractions it may seem to you.

*"Be patient in prayer for the love of God and keep at it; you will not fail to go a long way."*<sup>16</sup>

The great Archbishop of Cambray has indicated no less firmly how to act with regard to distractions.

In the first place, distractions are inevitable. "Do not expect to avoid all distractions in meditation. So do not think for a meditation to be successful there must not be distractions, for that is impossible; endeavor only to benefit from

14. Saint Francis de Sales, Cagnac, *To a Lady*, p. 174.

15. Saint Francis de Sales, Cagnac, *To a Lady*, p. 316.

16. Fénelon, to the Duc de Chaulnes, May 31, 1707.

your distractions by bearing them with humble patience and without ever allowing yourself to be discouraged. Every time you perceive them turn quietly to God. *Worry about distractions is a distraction more dangerous than all the rest.*"<sup>17</sup>

Besides, these distractions can scarcely be prejudicial to us: "These involuntary distractions cannot hurt you, and the patience with which you bear them without discouragement will advance you further than a more enlightened prayer, wherein you take greater pleasure."<sup>18</sup>

So Saint Ignatius teaches, as well as Saint Francis de Sales, Saint Theresa, and many other Saints; Bossuet also, even in reference to the gravest matters. For he writes: "Your difficulties as to faith must be solved by a humble repetition of the *Credo*, without reasoning, but with a simple and entire submission."<sup>19</sup>

When we seek our Lord, we should certainly go to Him with entire good-will. Let us converse with Him if we can; should this be out of our power, then let us remain simply in His presence; let us show ourselves to Him, this will

17. Letter 5.

18. Fénelon to the Marquis de Blainville, June 1, 1683.

19. To Sister Cornuau, Letter 100.

suffice without being anxious about anything else.<sup>20</sup> Disquietude in prayer and our eagerness to obtain ideas satisfying to our mind are often of themselves quite sufficient to prevent our finding what we seek. For as Saint Francis de Sales so appropriately remarks: "When we are searching for anything too eagerly, we overlook the thing we want a hundred times without perceiving it."<sup>21</sup>

20. Saint Francis de Sales, *To a Young Lady*, 1619. —Cagnac, p. 230.

21. Id., p. 248.

## CHAPTER XX

MEDITATION ON THE LIFE AND ESPECIALLY THE  
PASSION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

Fénelon, addressing the Elector of Cologne, wrote one day: "Prayer is love. Love says everything to God, for in speaking to the Beloved of our souls, we have only to say we love Him and desire to love Him. *"Non nisi amando colitur,"* says Saint Augustine.

If this is true, as it is indeed, we can readily understand how the practice of meditation must prove a most certain means towards the making an act of perfect love which itself is rooted in contrition.

By frequently saying to God "that we love Him and wish to love Him," our hearts cannot, with the help of grace, but become more and more enkindled with divine love.

And this love will be so much the more likely to become purer and stronger, that is of attaching itself to God for Himself alone and above all else, if by meditation we think of God with more loving attention and thus learn to know Him better.

Perfect charity may then spring up in our souls as the result of contemplating some of the

absolute attributes of God, such as His infinite duration, His omnipotence, holiness, justice and majesty.

But so far as we are concerned, we strike a much deeper wellspring of love by meditating on those divine attributes that show us most clearly God's infinite goodness to us.

Nothing indeed urges us so forcibly to love as love itself.<sup>1</sup> When we perceive ourselves enveloped in an atmosphere of tenderness, constrained by an affection as sweet as it is deep, we feel instinctively impelled as it were to give love for love.

So it is not astonishing then that by contemplating God's goodness, His inexhaustible mercy, His infinite compassion and boundless generosity and remembering the innumerable benefits springing therefrom, should generally urge and incite us with more than ordinary force to perfect charity and contrition, rather than do the learned but abstract and cold speculations as to God's being and unfathomable *self-existence*.

Now, in so far as benefits already received, and those promised us, reveal God's infinite goodness, His mercy and love towards us, they constrain us

1. "Nulla est major ad amorem invitatio quam prævenire amando." (S. Aug., *De Catech. rud.*, c. 4, n° 7.)

to love God, not so much for His gifts as for His boundless generosity. And herein is perfect charity inspired by gratitude. "*Dilexi, quoniam exaudiet Dominus vocem orationis meae*" (Ps. 114, 1.)<sup>2</sup>

And the result of this is that the love of God stimulated by gratitude, may be, and in fact is, usually perfect charity itself, because as all the perfections of God are in reality one with the divine essence itself, they all constitute a sufficient motive of charity.

The relative attributes of God, that is to say, those that manifest Him in His relations with us, affect us much more than do His absolute attributes, or those that reveal Him to us as He is in Himself, in His eternal and omnipotent majesty. And this is readily understood, since the former make more clearly known to us every kind of gift and blessing we have ever received from Him.<sup>3</sup>

But of all these blessings is there any greater than that of the Redemption? Indeed is there one at all comparable to it? For when God so

2. Gühr, *Les Sacrements de l'Eglise Cathol.*, v. III, n° 127.

3. Cf. S. Th. *Quaest. disp., de Spe*, a. 3.

loved the world as to give His only Son, did He not in giving Him give all else besides?....

Since it is impossible for us always to remember God's innumerable benefits, we must at least ever bear in mind the Redemption which in some sort includes every other blessing.

Saint Bernard recommended this practice to his monks at Clairvaux. He drew their attention chiefly to two points in this mystery of the Redemption, the method of its operation, that is the humiliation of the Incarnate Word, and the fruit of this Redemption, the grace destined to regenerate the human race. And he added: "To meditate on the fruits of the Redemption is to foster in ourselves holy hope, and to contemplate the humiliation of the Incarnate Word is to kindle in our souls the most exalted and perfect love."<sup>4</sup>

Considered in its entirety and in so far as it includes the Redeemer's whole life which began at Bethlehem, was continued at Nazareth and during His public life to its consummation on the Cross, the Redemption is a stupendous flame of love, lighted by God upon earth and a flame never to be extinguished.

4. "Hoc meditari, sanctæ spei seminarium; illud, summi amoris incentivum." *In Cant.*, Sermon 88, n° 3.



Everything in the Redemption is food for love, everything in it inflames our hearts with love. The Redeemer Himself, whether we consider His divinity or His humanity, matters nothing. His works, His miracles, His triumphs, His sufferings, His Cross, His glory, all, all proclaim to us He must be loved.<sup>5</sup>

It is then impossible to meditate humbly and perseveringly on the Master's life here among men without our love gradually increasing. This increase may be imperceptible, but none the less real in our souls, and becoming purer, it will one day, at a providential hour and with the aid of divine grace, enable us to reach the heights of perfect charity and contrition.

The Church, our Mother, is well aware of this, and throughout the Liturgical Year, she celebrates at intervals all the Feasts that remind us of our Lord's unutterable mercy and loving-kindness.

What is her intention by so doing but to recall to us periodically our divine Lord's goodness and love that we may be the more easily persuaded to love Him and so really give all our love, our best and purest love to God.

5. Cf. Lehmkuhl, *Theol. mor.*, v. I, n° 453.

Do we then desire to obtain this supreme grace of loving God perfectly and of possessing true contrition for our sins?

Let us meditate often on His infinite majesty and goodness, on His tender mercy and innumerable benefits; let us finally contemplate our divine Master, dwell upon His love manifested to us in Gethsemane and at Golgotha, on that love He still reveals to us in the Holy Eucharist. Having visited Bethlehem, Nazareth, the Cenacle, the Garden of Olives and Mount Calvary, let us seek the Tabernacle and our Crucifix.

And we must not only meditate, we must pray humbly and trustfully, and with untiring perseverance, with that quiet obstinacy that never wearies of asking. Let us remind our Lord in childlike fashion that by so doing we are but putting His precepts into practice, "that it is He Himself that bids us ask that we may receive, seek that we may find, knock that it may be opened unto us,"<sup>6</sup> and that we shall continue doing so until we have been heard, sure as we are in advance that no more than the father mentioned in Holy Scripture will He give a serpent or a stone to us His miserable children who are asking Him for bread!

6. S. Matt., vii, 7.

For may we not add with Saint Augustine: "Lord, what petitions wilt Thou hear if Thou dost not hear these!"<sup>7</sup>

And we may ask this so much the more, in that we are but petitioning for what He Himself desires for each one of us: the deepest and most efficacious repentance for our sins, and in our hearts the most perfect and purest love, that is the love most worthy of Himself.

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7. "Domine, quas preces exaudies, si has non exaudis?" *De Civit. Dei*, I. xxii, c. 8.

## CHAPTER XXI

### HOLY COMMUNION

The people delighted with the unspeakably winsome ways of the young Prophet of Nazareth, for as yet they deemed Him only a prophet; won by His luminous and enthralling word, the multitudes had come far from their homes to follow our Lord. Never were they tired listening to His consoling doctrine. In their insatiable yearning for the truth, the people forgot how exhausted they were becoming and that they should have a long way to go to return to the homes they had for the time forsaken.

They had overlooked this fact, but Jesus had not. He remembered, and touched with pity, He ordered the multitude to sit down there on the grass. There under that clear blue Galilean sky overlooking the Sea of Tiberias which surrounded by the waving rushes along the shore was softly murmuring its unceasing melody; there upon those grassy slopes descending like so many steps of an amphitheatre to the lake, He worked one of His sweetest and most sublime miracles.

Taking the five small barley loaves offered Him,

He blessed and multiplied them and had them distributed to the multitudes by the Apostles, thus making it possible for them to recruit their own strength by breaking their long fast.

This miracle so natural and captivating in its simplicity was not worked once and for all in the Gospel. It has been repeated many times, or it might be better to say that it is still repeated everywhere and in every place.

And countless generations have followed Jesus throughout the ages, just as the Jewish people followed Him of old, all holily inebriated with the pure wine of the Gospel and mystically enraptured with His heavenly beauty. And for all the same miracle has taken place. Every morning the miracle of the loaves is renewed here on earth. But this miracle is no longer as it was over nineteen hundred years ago, confined to a few solitary peaks of Upper Galilee; it takes place in every church, over the whole surface of the globe wherever there is a priest and an altar. And it is no longer worked only on behalf of some thousands of Jews, but for millions of the faithful to whatever race these may belong, nations proud of their civilization and learning or degenerated and still semi-barbaric, nay, even for the cannibals of yesterday, with difficulty con-

verted to the true faith by the heroic efforts of missionaries.

To all these persons in every age, Jesus has given His Bread by multiplying it indefinitely for them, since all have need and no one can do without this Bread.

But this Bread is not the bread, no doubt miraculous but still material bread, of Tiberias, of which the latter was merely the type and hidden symbol. This is the new Bread, the Bread of the Cenacle, the adorable Eucharistic Bread.

This is the Bread of which we are now speaking, since this Bread is *par excellence* the Bread of Love.

Of all the Sacraments of the Church, the Most Holy Eucharist is incomparably the first. It is far beyond the rest since it not only contains the graces they possess, but also the Author of grace itself, our Lord Jesus Christ. Herein in a fundamental truth with which every Catholic is familiar.

More excellent than all other Sacraments, why should not the Most Holy Eucharist excel them also in divine efficacy?

And so it actually does, as all Catholic theologians declare: it confers grace with such extraordinary plenitude as to be unrivaled by the

other Sacraments in the inexpressible magnificence of its effects.

Let us remark in passing, it is not the least proof of infinite mercy that God should be so magnificently lavish of His graces in the Holy Eucharist rather than for instance in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. Because as Baptism and Confirmation can be conferred only once, we should have received but once in our lifetime the outpouring of these heavenly gifts, whereas in the Holy Eucharist to which all the faithful may have frequent access, we may often, very often and even daily receive these gifts if we are not deaf to the calls of our divine Friend.

But why this extraordinary accumulation of grace in the most adorable Eucharist? For the furtherance of its most admirable objective, and what is this objective? "It is," the Angelic Doctor immediately responds, "the conversion, the transformation of man into Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup>

And he adds that this progressive transformation must be wrought by that incomparable workman, . . . Love.<sup>2</sup>

1. St. Thom. iv, dist. 12, q. 2, a. 1, sol. 1. "Conversio hominis in Christum."

2. S. Thom. iv, dist. 12, q. 2, a. 2, sol. 1. "Transformatio hominis in Christum per amorem."

So then the proper end of the adorable Eucharist is to arouse and increase in us the most excellent, the chief of all virtues. And its object, like its principal effect, is to perfect this virtue in our hearts, not in any sort of fashion, but in such a degree as to convert us, transform us into Jesus Christ.

And this is why, from the standpoint of love, the Eucharist is not simply a Sacrament typifying the love of Jesus Christ, a Sacrament recalling and setting forth this love times without end. It is also a Sacrament that produces and engenders charity in us more and more.<sup>3</sup>

The most Holy Eucharist procures so consoling and precious an effect, not only by increasing in us sanctifying grace, but as a result the charity inseparable from this grace. For were this Sacrament to limit itself to the first effect, it would accomplish merely what the other Sacraments do.

But the Most Holy Eucharist also produces charity in us by conferring the sacramental grace peculiar to itself, and one that directly tending to this charity, is particularly designed by the

3. Hoc est sacramentum caritatis quasi figurativum et effectivum." (S. Th. iii, q. 78, a. 3, ad. 6.) "Eucharistia dicitur sacramentum caritatis Christi expressivum et nostræ factivum." (S. Th. iv, dist. 8, q. 2, a. 2, sol. 3, ad. 5.)



fervor it kindles in our souls to promote the making of acts of love.<sup>4</sup>

And hence it is easily seen how powerful a help we find in the Holy Eucharist on our way to the attainment of perfect charity and true contrition.

If indeed the sacramental grace peculiar to the Most Holy Sacrament secures for us the actual grace destined to facilitate love in our hearts, the more frequently this grace is bestowed upon us, the more these acts of love are multiplied, the more fervent and purer they become, the more closely also shall we approach that perfect charity which is the object of our desires.

Now this sacramental grace will be given us so much the more as we more frequently approach the Eucharistic Banquet.

And so by means of frequent communion and still more, by daily communion, we shall by following obediently the way marked out for us by our Savior and wherein the Church calls us, facilitate in ourselves the means of obtaining from divine mercy the grace of charity and contrition.

The devil knows this well and endeavors to turn us away from the Holy Table by every means he can use.

4. Cf. Card. Billot, *De Euchar.*, q. 79, p. 497.

But none of the pretexts by which he tries to trouble our souls is plausible, and we must reject them with contempt.

"Daily Communion must be your sustenance," wrote Bossuet to Sister Cornuau.<sup>5</sup> "Consume, absorb, swallow, satiate yourself with this heavenly Bread."

And when the Sister opposed to this her state of desolation, he replied: "My daughter, you should go to Holy Communion as if Jesus Christ were urging you there, sometimes as a criminal, again as a spouse, at other times as a "beast" so David expresses it (Ps. 23), in short, whether willing or unwilling, according to these words: 'Constrain them to come in,' provided Jesus Christ sees you there wearing the wedding garment. . . . All is well if we believe and never omit our sacramental and spiritual Communion on account of difficulties whatever these may be."<sup>6</sup>

A little later, he again wrote: "Far from dreading Communion in these states of desolation and dryness, this is the very time to desire and to make more frequent use of it, for it belongs only to Him that is, to quicken and take us out of this nothingness. Say then to this dear Spouse: 'Thou

5. Letter 105.

6. Letter 106.

art infinite and I am nothing, then make me to be what Thou wantest me to be, and if Thou still desirest to hide from me what Thou art doing, Thy will be done.' As a result of so doing, ideas and consolation will come, but these are unnecessary; faith is sufficient; in desolation and darkness of soul say the *Credo* and the *Pater noster* and believe all will go well, however dry your meditation may appear."<sup>7</sup>

Even our backslidings should not keep us away from Holy Communion, for it is above all when we are weak that we have need of being fortified... "And then," as Fénelon wrote so wisely to a person of the world, "were you to wait to receive Holy Communion until you were perfect, you would have neither Communion nor perfection, since we become perfect only by communicating."<sup>8</sup>

Let us seek then the Most Adorable Eucharist in spite of our imperfections. We can have recourse to it without fear. For the One Whom we find there under the Eucharistic veil is He that says in the Gospel: "For I am not come to call the just, but sinners,"<sup>9</sup> and again: "I was not

7. Letter 122.

8. *Letters of Direction*, Letter 90.

9. St. Matt. ix, 13.

sent but to the sheep that are lost of the house of Israel."<sup>10</sup>

Thus the weaker and more vacillating we feel along our road in life, the more confidently should we go to Him, and the more too will our seeking Him be justified since it is from Him alone we must expect together with the contrition necessary for us, the charity for which we long so ardently for His sake.

10. St. Matt. xv, 24.

## CHAPTER XXII

## THE LIFE OF LOVE

Unshaken in confidence, enlightened by prayer and by consideration of the divine goodness, as well as that of the life and death of Jesus Christ, stimulated by the frequent reception of the august and lifegiving Eucharist, if we would increase acts of perfect charity and contrition during our life, we must necessarily do all we can to live habitually a life of love.

Happily, love is natural to man. "Love," says Saint Francis de Sales, "is the life of the soul. And just as the pendulum sets all the parts of a clock in motion, so does love give the soul all the progress she makes."<sup>1</sup>

"Love in some fashion dominates the heart," continues Bossuet.<sup>2</sup>

"So not to love," adds Fénelon, "is really not to live, and to love but feebly is mere existence and not life....so we must love."<sup>3</sup>

Many centuries before, Saint Augustine had

said: "I do not say to you 'Love nothing'; Heaven preserve me from so doing. For were you to love nothing here on earth you would be unfortunate indeed, and really dead. On the contrary, I tell you 'love,' but take great care upon what you bestow your affections."<sup>4</sup>

This love so natural to man is the only offering God demands and is in itself the most notable characteristic of His sovereignty and infinite greatness. *Since that which has no need of anything asks also for nothing save to be loved.* And it is an essential proof of the poverty of the creature that it should be compelled by its poverty to ask from those that love it aught else than their love. Thus it belongs only to God to ask from us nothing but perfect love.<sup>5</sup>

So on one hand, we needs must love, and on the other, God asks us for our love. Unfortunately, He is not alone is asking us for this love. Others solicit it in the same way, and the question is on what shall we bestow our affections?

Should we set them upon the world, it will be upon something "that has no sincere affection for

4. Enarr. 2nd in Ps. 31, No. 5.

5. Bossuet, 2nd Sermon for the Annunciation, 2nd point.

1. *On the Love of God*, Book xi, Ch. 20.

2. Second Sermon for the Annunciation, 2nd point.

3. *Letters of Direction*, Letter 2.

us, upon that which is far from kind, and which will flee from us like a shadow when we try to grasp it."

This homage is then due to God alone, and it is precisely when it is question of His love that "*we fear to give too much to Him to Whom all would be as nothing and to Whom we have never yet given anything.*"<sup>6</sup>

Whence proceeds this deplorable error? From the fact that "*man does not know God's love, and not knowing Him is afraid of God and keeps aloof from Him.*"<sup>7</sup>

How true this remark is, how true this cry from the heart!

The world imagines that the love of God requires extraordinary virtue and almost heroic deeds from all alike. With his strong good sense Fénelon wrote on this point to the Duke of Burgundy: "This love requires that we do for God only what is reasonably practical.

"There is then no question of adding to what we are doing already, but merely of doing for love of God what upright and honest men do for honor's sake and for self-love.

"Nothing need be omitted but evil, which would

6. Fénelon, Letter 2.

7. Fénelon, Letter 17.

have to be omitted even though we were actuated merely by reason.

"As to all the rest, let us leave it in the order God has established in the world; *let us perform the same good deeds, but let us perform them for Him Who has created us and to Whom we owe everything.*

"This love does not require of every Christian austerities resembling those of the ancient hermits in the desert, nor does it require of us their profound solitude and contemplation.

"It usually calls for neither conspicuous nor heroic actions, neither renunciation of possessions lawfully acquired nor the sacrifice of those advantages belonging to every condition in life.

"It merely requires us to be just, moderate, sober in the use of all things, that we make not creatures our be all and end all, and make use of all things in accordance with His demands and as a means of tending towards Him."<sup>8</sup>

To speak the truth, this love will not always be sensible. It will not always prevent our being in the "darkness of Egypt," or our going astray in the wilderness like the Children of Israel in their journey to the Promised Land.

8. Fénelon, Letter 17.



What does it matter? To love, "it suffices that the will clings to God, and that in spite of the corrupt inclinations of the heart it prefers God to the whole world and to itself."<sup>9</sup>

"Sensible fervor, then, is not necessary and truth, however unattractive and obscure, suffices for the soul guided by faith. The love of the soul thus bound, becomes more interior. The suppressed cry is worth more and is sometimes even better than that which makes itself heard."<sup>10</sup>

To sum up: "feeling does not depend on us and feeling is not love. Our will which depends on us is what God asks for."<sup>11</sup>

To be sure that we love God truly it is not necessary for us to have a tender and sensible love, for such cannot even be given to ourselves. Such love is not at our command.

"And such love is not necessary. God bestows this sensible love more frequently upon the weak as an aid to their weakness than He does upon stronger souls whom He means to lead by a purer faith. We are often deceived as to this love. We are attached to the pleasure of loving, instead of being attached to God alone, and when the pleasure decreases, these pious inclinations

9. Fénelon, Letter 84.

10. Bossuet, to Sister Cornuau, Letter 122.

11. Fénelon, Letter 85.

and imaginations vanish. We become discouraged, think all is lost and draw back.

"Should God give you this spiritual joy to make it easier for you to return to Him, you must accept it, for He knows better than we do what is necessary for us. But should He not bestow it, do not be troubled, for *the true and genuine love of God often consists in a will which, cold though it may be, is yet firmly resolved to sacrifice everything for God.* In this case, we serve Him much more purely, since we serve Him without pleasure, or without other support than the renunciation of self.

"Jesus Christ in the Garden was sorrowful even unto death, and His reluctance to accept the Chalice held out to Him by His Father was so great as to make Him sweat blood. What consolation there is in such an example! How far was our Lord from having a sensible relish for suffering, yet He said: "Thy will be done, not Mine." Let us say the same to Him in spite of any desolation we may feel, and then rest at peace in God's hands."<sup>12</sup>

Besides, despite all disgust and the most painful desolation, there is ever a sign to show us the reality of our love for God, and this infallible

12. Fénelon, to the Marquis de Seignelay, Letter 31.

sign is our conformity in greater or less degree to God's holy will.

So with the exception of these half deliberate impulses of our poor weak nature, to which all of us are subject, if we are wholly resigned to God's will and unreservedly accept our life as God plans it for us; if we murmur neither at the trials with which He paves our way, nor at the sorrows permitted by Him to cloud our path, we may be reassured as to the reality of our love. For love is there at the bottom of our heart, and we may love God really and truly without perhaps being actually aware of our loving Him.

Is not this in fact a great principle, that next to love the fulfilment of the divine will must here on earth be supreme?

It is by a positive act of this divine will that I have been called into existence. It is by another positive act of this omnipotent will that I shall one day die. The divine will is then accomplished by an act of God at the beginning of my life, and this same divine will is also fulfilled at its end. Being at its two farthest poles, it is also necessary, and this alone matters, that this will be fulfilled by me in this life and during the whole of this life. "*Fiat voluntas tua*" was said joyfully when I came into this world; "*Fiat voluntas tua*," I must repeat at every moment of my existence

if I want my life to go on harmoniously. This is the law, the supreme order, established by God.

And whoever does not perceive this, understands nothing of the sublimity of the Christian life. He may momentarily do good, but he proceeds with no fixed rule, and is as it were feeling his way like a blind man who can occasionally obtain his object but merely by chance and unwittingly.

On the other hand, whosoever says this *Fiat* in the sincerity of his heart, and quietly submitting his conduct to this will serves God with generosity, is in the light and most assuredly loves God, for as Hugh of Saint Victor wrote many centuries ago: "To love God is to serve Him and who loves Him not does not serve Him. Who loves Him little serves Him little, and who loves Him much serves Him much."

So it is obvious, whatever the world may urge, that the precept of love, far from being an additional burden, is on the contrary one that renders all the other commandments easy and light."<sup>13</sup>

And it is so much the easier to observe in that as we again repeat, feeling not being at our own disposal, "love does not consist in feeling or in sentiment."

13. Fénelon, Letter 17.

It is exclusively and entirely in the will alone because the will only depends on us. "You want to love," says Saint Augustine, "by this very desire, you do love." "*Via amare? amas.*"

To live habitually in the love of God is not then to live in the midst of ceaseless outpourings of the heart and to fly swiftly in a whirlwind of sensible joy to the Lord.

But it is to live habitually with a resolute will, felt or not matters little, to obey God filially and to endure anything rather than to be wanting, at least in important matters, in the service which is His due.

And this disposition of soul, a lofty one, no doubt, is one that, God be praised, is not beyond our reach with the aid of His grace, and in which, with the aid of prayer, it is assuredly possible for us to live habitually.

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## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE HABITUAL AND PROGRESSIVE PRACTICE OF THE ACTS OF PERFECT CHARITY AND CONTRITION

In a heart prepared by confidence, prayer and Holy Communion, and desirous besides of living as far as possible a life of love, the act of perfect charity or of contrition will not fail to spring up at least from time to time.

But in order that it flourish fully and frequently, it will certainly be highly salutary for us to exercise ourselves in making these acts as often as possible.

What impresses the ordinary Christian most, is the recollection more or less vivid of his faults, the memory, more or less acute, of his errors. Thus taken as a whole, the faithful in general make an act of contrition more readily than they make an act of love.

This contrition is most frequently but imperfect contrition, or what is called an act of attrition. But this act of attrition is still a praiseworthy act, since God in His mercy vouchsafes to accept it. And it is by this act of attrition that a beginning is usually made.

Attrition brings us into relation with God and

furthermore opens a way to nobler sentiments—true contrition. Not that contrition must proceed from attrition as a delicious fruit springs from a flower.

For between contrition and attrition just as between perfect charity and imperfect charity, there is not merely an accidental difference of degree; there is an essential difference of kind, a difference that has for its principle the particular motives of these virtues.

Nevertheless, just as in the natural order the imperfect precedes the perfect, so in the order of grace, a similar succession is remarked, and there is often progression from the lowest to the highest.

And in this sense it may be said that in attrition there is already the germ of true contrition.

So great care must be taken not to represent the passage from attrition to contrition as a very difficult one and as something that is seldom realized.<sup>1</sup>

For beginning with fear, man may advance to hope, and from hope rise to love.<sup>2</sup>

1. N. Gühr, *The Sacraments of the Catholic Church*, Vol. III, No. 170.

2. "Quandoque timor inducit amorem, in quantum scilicet homo, qui timet puniri a Deo, servat mandata ejus et sic incipit sperare, et spes introducit ad amorem." (St. Th. 1<sup>a</sup>, 2<sup>a</sup>e, q. 43, a. 1, ad. 1.)

And this love by adhering to the consideration of God's infinite goodness, His mercy, His liberality becomes purified and sufficiently disinterested for the soul to advance to perfect contrition and true charity.

Is not this progressive method from attrition to contrition by dwelling on a virtual act of perfect charity always implied in the act of contrition or, when possible, by pushing on to the explicit act of charity itself, the way every soul anxious to be restored to God should follow? For my part, I know of no better way. And it is so much more practical, in that it can be made in a few moments if necessary, or take a little more time if this be considered wiser or more prudent.

So all persons who through duty or simple charity happen to assist the dying should suggest these acts to them while offering them the crucifix to kiss.

In fact, it is not enough to present a crucifix to these dying lips, even though this symbol be loaded with indulgences, for were these indulgences a hundredfold richer and more numerous, the dying person would not gain them if he should be guilty until he has first made an act of contrition and of charity required by his sins. This



is why these acts must be quietly suggested to him. Who knows, if in the absence of the priest, they do not constitute the means chosen from all eternity by the Sovereign Goodness for drawing this soul out of the abyss of hell and re-opening for Him the road to Heaven.

With much greater reason must this be so in case the dying person one assists, at the hospital, for instance, is a heretic or a schismatic. Here to speak of Confession would be futile. It would be useless to attempt it. The best thing to do is to urge the dying to make an act of love of God, by slowly reciting oneself the act of contrition and persuading the patient to unite in saying it from the bottom of his heart. By so doing salvation with the help of grace may again be obtained.<sup>3</sup>

Amongst those who are struck down by sudden death without any one being able to offer them a crucifix to kiss, how many may have owed their

3. "Every Christian ought to be soundly instructed in the supreme importance of the acts of perfect contrition and of charity because of the inestimable service such knowledge may render us at the hour of our death and permit us to render to those to whose death beds we may be led by Providence. No one, even in good health should forget this truth." Lehmkuhl, Preface, *La Cont. parfaite*, by J. de Driesch, Casterman, publishers.

salvation to the grace of perfect contrition, a favor of divine clemency which all unknown to us, awaited them on the brink of the grave, to save them at the very moment when they were to be hurled into eternity.

And let no one urge that perfect charity and contrition are the most priceless of graces. Would God by any chance be prodigal but with the most ordinary of His blessings?

Will He be steadfastly sparing of the most fruitful blessings He has in Himself? And after the startling and innumerable proofs He has given us of His goodness, is it then presumptuous to believe that it is not after this mean fashion He is likely to act? Is it not more in harmony with His liberality to think that in bestowing His favors upon us, He is much less concerned about their comparative value than of the need, more or less urgent, we have of them?

Besides in one way or another, no sinner can obtain pardon, save as a result of a grace granted him by God.

A Christian has access to the Sacrament of Penance; he confesses his sins. To obtain their remission he must have "attrition."

This attrition is a grace; can he have this grace of himself? No! God alone can grant it to him,

and as it is really necessary for him, God in His goodness gives it to him.

At that very moment, another Christian is in his agony, unable to go to a priest, and for some reason or another, it is impossible for a priest to come to him; it is not attrition alone this Christian needs, but contrition.

Then why think that He Who wills not the death of a sinner but his conversion and life: that He Who is *bountiful to forgive*,<sup>4</sup> Who has not refused the grace of attrition to the sinner able to have recourse to Confession, will refuse to give that of contrition to this dying Christian who cannot see a priest to receive absolution from him.

Is there not rather scope for hoping that, in His sweet and unwearied mercy, our divine Savior Who has redeemed this soul with the last drop of His blood on Calvary will inspire it with perfect love and contrition, that in responding to it, this soul, if it will, may be saved?

But these souls have wandered far from God in their life time, and in their guilty existence have accumulated sins of every kind, even the worst. Why then should the Master, Whom they

4. "Multus ad ignoscendum." (Isaias LV, 7.)

have so outraged, remember them at the moment they are about to cross the threshold of eternity?

—*Because He is God.*

Besides, was not the Good Thief a wanderer from God during his whole life? Had not his life been one of crime and wrongdoing? And if any one of the disciples lost in the surging crowd on Calvary had been asked: "Do you think that one of these robbers will be this very day in Heaven with your Master?" they would most assuredly have answered "No." Yet, Jesus saved the Good Thief and did He not save him even on the cross at the moment when he was about to die?

At least the Good Thief had an intensely contrite heart!

—Undoubtedly, but why had he this intense contrition? Only because Jesus gave it to him. How many good thieves have been and will be saved throughout the ages, under the same conditions, and for the same cause, in spite of our poor human reasoning?

And this is but in accord with the consoling words of Saint Augustine: "Jesus Christ does not want those souls to be lost whom He has purchased at so great a price."<sup>5</sup>

In order to make their eternal salvation secure,

5. "Qui nos tanto pretio redemit, non vult perdere quos emit." (Serm. 49 de Temp.)

He is ready to do up to the last minute, all He can to save them, short of forcing their wills.

We should not only foster thoughts of confidence to strengthen us when we seek to bring back souls to God. We should also foster them, and as steadfastly as ever, when there is question of ourselves and our eternal salvation.

Ah! unhappy, surely most unhappy would be the Christian who, relying on the infinite mercies of God, should give himself up wantonly to sin. And he is truly to be pitied who, because God has often justified souls through perfect contrition, would make this an excuse to offend Him by the daily committal of mortal sin.

God's goodness is unlimited, but He is not to be mocked. We cannot spit in His face as did the villainous Jews in the palace of Caiphas during the Passion. And yet those who, in order to sin more easily, count beforehand on His merciful forgiveness act very like the Jews acted then.

But if some rash or foolish souls take advantage of this to turn to evil the very means God has given them in the act of contrition and charity is that a reason to veil with fear the treasure to be found therein or to refuse to benefit by it?

Alas! it is not only the easy terms assured us by the act of charity or contrition a Christian may

misuse, but also those lavished on us in the Sacrament of Penance. And this is seen but too often every day. But because of this must the door of this tribunal of mercy be closed to us, or no more than partly opened? Should we not point it out the more to the people as an incontrovertible proof of the divine goodness, and more earnestly urge the faithful to have recourse to it?

It is then an evil too deplorable for words, that certain persons give way to their weaknesses in the false hope that at the wished for time, perfect contrition will in some way be at their command and prove the means of their salvation.

We ought to do all we can in order that neither we, nor anyone about us, so far at least as we are able to prevent it, should have the misfortune of yielding to such criminal presumption.

But forewarned of this danger, let us then multiply as often as possible our acts of charity and contrition, because the more we do so, the more we shall glorify Him to Whom all glory belongs—the essential thing—and furthermore be ourselves glorified one day in Heaven.

"No one in fact," Saint Bernard tells us, "can love God without being recompensed for this love, though this should not be our motive for loving Him."



And the Great Doctor also says: "True love, perfect love, though looking for no reward, merits it none the less and so obtains it."<sup>6</sup>

The frequent practice of perfect charity and contrition is supremely useful to the soul.

Of use to those, who in their weakness fall into sin comparatively often, for this practice proves the means by which these souls may rise immediately after their fall, until recourse may be had to the Sacrament of Penance: of use, too, to more vigorous souls who at one time or another may be taken unawares along the road, during a voyage, in the night, at a time when immediate recourse to a priest is impossible, for these acts of charity and contrition promise a means by which these souls at once regain the grace of God.

Useful again to really faithful souls who, as the result of certain violent temptations are wondering in anguish if they have struggled as they should against them. An act of perfect contrition or of charity restores their peace of mind.

And finally of use to those souls who have

6. "Non sine præmio diligitur Deus, etsi absque præmii intuitu diligendus sit."—"Verus amor præmium non requirit, sed meretur."—Ap. Card. Mazzella, *De Virtut. inf.*, 3rd edit., n° 1253, 1262.

the moral certainty of possessing the friendship of God.<sup>7</sup>

By God's grace have we not the happiness of being in this thousand times blessed state?

Every act of perfect love or of contrition will put us into possession of graces, in comparison with which all the possessions of this world are as nothing. For each of these acts will increase grace in our souls, the treasure of treasures here below. Each one of them will blot out our venial sins, for which we are sorry, and remit either wholly or in part, according to circumstances, the penalties attached to these sins. Finally, each of these acts, while increasing a true love of God in our hearts, will firmly establish us in good, and by this very fact permit us to hope with a more legitimate confidence for that final perseverance which will open to us the gates of Heaven.

Nevertheless, these acts of perfect charity or

7. The act of perfect charity is not only useful to the soul that makes it, it is also of great utility to the whole Church in whose bosom it is produced. Saint John of the Cross whose doctrine is so safe, distinctly declares this when he says: "The smallest act of love is in God's eyes of greater value to the Church and the soul itself than all other works taken together."—"So true it is that the smallest spark of perfect charity is of the highest importance for the Church," Saint John of the Cross, *Cant. Spir.* Strophe xxix.—(Life and Works, Vol. iv, p. 317. Oudin, Paris, 4th edition.)



contrition,—I am speaking particularly of those of the first degree—are easier for true Christians than is supposed, although they always require actual grace, as a matter of course, just as all other supernatural acts require it.

We always make them implicitly, when for instance living in the habitual disposition of never committing a mortal sin for fear of displeasing God, we tell Him how much we deplore the outrages heaped upon Him by sinners, that we would desire that no one should offend Him, and how happy we should be were all mankind to serve Him with unflinching fidelity.<sup>8</sup>

But these implicit acts ought not to be sufficient for our love.

We must earnestly desire throughout our life to multiply the explicit acts themselves, the formal acts of contrition and charity.

These may be acts of *affective* love—words or thoughts—or acts of *effective* love—manifested exteriorly by the efforts we make to do good or to avoid evil. In what concerns the acts of *affective* love, it will be good for us to fix upon definite ejaculations. In Heaven the Angels and Blessed

8. Cf. Génicot, *Theol. mor.*, instit. 1, n° 212, 1.

sing: "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty Who was and is."<sup>9</sup>

And this act of love which is one of *com- placency*, is the act of perfect love *par excellence*, since it is the act by which the three adorable Persons of the Most Holy Trinity love one another from all eternity, taking delight in their infinite goodness.

The Angels and Blessed thus have reason for repeating this song of praise without ceasing. And, in fact, it is continually on their lips, and they will joyfully repeat it for all eternity.

On earth, the Church continually repeats: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be for ever and ever: "Hallowed by Thy name... Thy Kingdom come... Thy will be done."

And this act of perfect love of desire is also an excellent one, since by it, forgetting all self-interest, we desire one thing only, that God may receive apart from His essential glory—the accidental glory every creature should give Him by honoring His name and by serving Him faithfully.

The Prophet David cried in turn: "Lord grant

9. Apoc. iv, 8.

I may love Thee, . . . I wish to love Thee because Thou art my God. *Diligam te, Domine, quoniam Deus meus es tu.*"

Saint Ignatius echoing on earth Heaven's complacent act of love, ever repeated: "To the greater glory of God. *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam.*"

Of all these acts of love, let us choose those best responding to the needs and dispositions of our souls, or if we prefer, such other ejaculations our devotion may suggest.

Our choice made, we must adhere to it, certainly not exclusively, for at certain times our heart must be at liberty to express itself as inspired by God, but usually, at least, after the manner of the Saints. We should do so, because in this way, we shall draw more easily near to God. Let us then punctuate our day with acts of charity and contrition.

As a beginning, let us form the habit of making these acts faithfully, for instance in the morning when awaking, God puts another day at our disposal. So serious a matter is the beginning of a day in which we might be saved or lost.—At night, when the day is ended, this day wherein we have perhaps incurred many responsibilities, and in any case have received from God so many graces and blessings;—between morning and eve-

ning, at the time of Holy Communion, in our thanksgiving, or when the Angelus rings.

When this has become habitual, and we have assured to each day a solid armor of love, let us go further still.

We should multiply acts of charity and contrition all day long, at the beginning of our principal actions, our works, our devotions, the duties of our state; our sufferings too will afford us many easy opportunities. Let us profit by them.

By often and perseveringly repeating acts of contrition, for instance, surely these acts will at least occasionally prove genuine. How could it be otherwise with the help of grace and the promise of God?

Suarez affirms this and rightly so. We may say the same with regard to acts of perfect charity.

This second step being taken, one last may be added, if our heart is truly bent on glorifying God as far as possible by means of charity.

Impossible of course for us to spend our whole days continually with heart and lips making formal acts of love. This is indeed the exclusive and glorious privilege of the elect.

But tantamount to this, it is possible for us to tell God from morning till night that we love

Him with our whole hearts and above all else. And perfect *effective* charity will furnish us with the means of doing so.

This charity consists in procuring the greatest glory we possibly can for God, by striving to know and love Him, and to make Him known and loved so far as lies within our power, because of His infinite perfections and ineffable goodness.

And we can never better prove our love for the divine Master, according to what He Himself has told us than in keeping His Commandments and submitting to His holy will;<sup>10</sup> perfect effective charity consists practically in observing the Commandments, in avoiding at least mortal sin, and, better still, in performing all our duties with the pure intention of glorifying God and proving to Him what love His infinite solicitude inspires us with.

If we succeed in renewing this intention before each of our actions, we are doing all we can to make progress in the way of perfect effective charity.

But God knows well that this is so difficult that we cannot possibly achieve it, so in His fatherly kindness He does not exact it to insure the merit of perfect charity.

10. St. John, xiv, 15, 21, 23.

For want of an actual intention, He is willing to be satisfied with a virtual intention, and when with our whole heart, we offer Him all our actions in the morning, for instance, and all the more so, several times a day, by begging Him to give them the value of so many acts of charity, or of perfect contrition, that is to regard them as all done through perfect love, He is willing to accept them as such, and it is by so appreciating them that He will one day reward us for them.

It is in this way of perfect effective charity that we must enter and persevere as far as possible, at the same time living in that affective charity, for these two are wonderfully compatible, and mutually helpful, in leading us to the God of love.

Bossuet wrote one day to Sister Cornuau<sup>11</sup> who complained of not knowing how to offer her nights to our Lord:

"A keen intellect is not necessary, nor beautiful thoughts, for the consecration of our rest to God. No need of this. By acknowledging that you do not know what to say to our Lord, you have said everything: "Yes, I would my God that every inspiration, every beating of my heart were an act of love. I would be myself wholly love, crushed and annihilated in such a way that nothing

11. Letter 37.



but love and eternal praise for Thy holy name remain in me."—After that we may yield to necessity because God has so ordained and instituted sleep, and we should love what He ordains because it proceeds from His justice, wisdom and goodness. No more is necessary, and then our very sleep gives glory to God, and is an acknowledgment of our infirmity, the penalty of our sins.

Let us transpose these words: instead of applying them to the night and to the sleep we then take, let us apply them to our days, and to the actions with which these are filled.

We might also say every morning: "Yes, I would my God, that each breath, each beating of my heart during this day, were an act of love. I would be myself wholly love, crushed and annihilated in such a manner that nothing remain of me than love and eternal praise of Thy Holy Name.

We may also say: "O Lord, during this day just begun and for which I am indebted, O my Master, to Thy singular goodness, may my mind be so wrapped in Thy service, so disengaged from the cares of this world, and steadfastly directed to Heaven, that I may offer Thee every one of my thoughts, words and deeds. I want to be able to say that every one of them is offered solely to please Thee, and as an act of pure love.

"But fully aware of my weakness, I foresee that this is beyond my power. That is why I am wholly resolved insofar as Thy grace enables me to do so, to offer with my whole heart this very morning all my thoughts, words and deeds.

"Mayest Thou see in each one of them, O adorable Master of my soul, what I wish they should be, a pledge of the deep desire Thou hast given me, in spite of my unworthiness, to love Thee with my whole heart, my whole soul and all my strength and of dying gladly in Thy love and service."

This daily offering, humbly renewed each morning, will cast a genial glow over our whole day. It will supernaturalize all we encounter during these twenty-four hours. And if it does not always succeed in stamping each of our acts with the peerless seal of perfect charity, still it will prove invaluable for us, impressing as it does, all we are and do, with the sublime hall-mark of divine love, thus making it possible for us to procure by this means, and in the highest degree, the greater glory of God.

May divine grace thus inspire us, may it lead us to repeat this act daily without ceasing. And, in the evening of life, when the light of this world is waning, may it also be sweetly suggested to us in our dying hour, so that our last sigh may be



intermingled with this loving and supreme offering of our whole life to God on Whose infinite goodness and mercy alone we rely.

THE END

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