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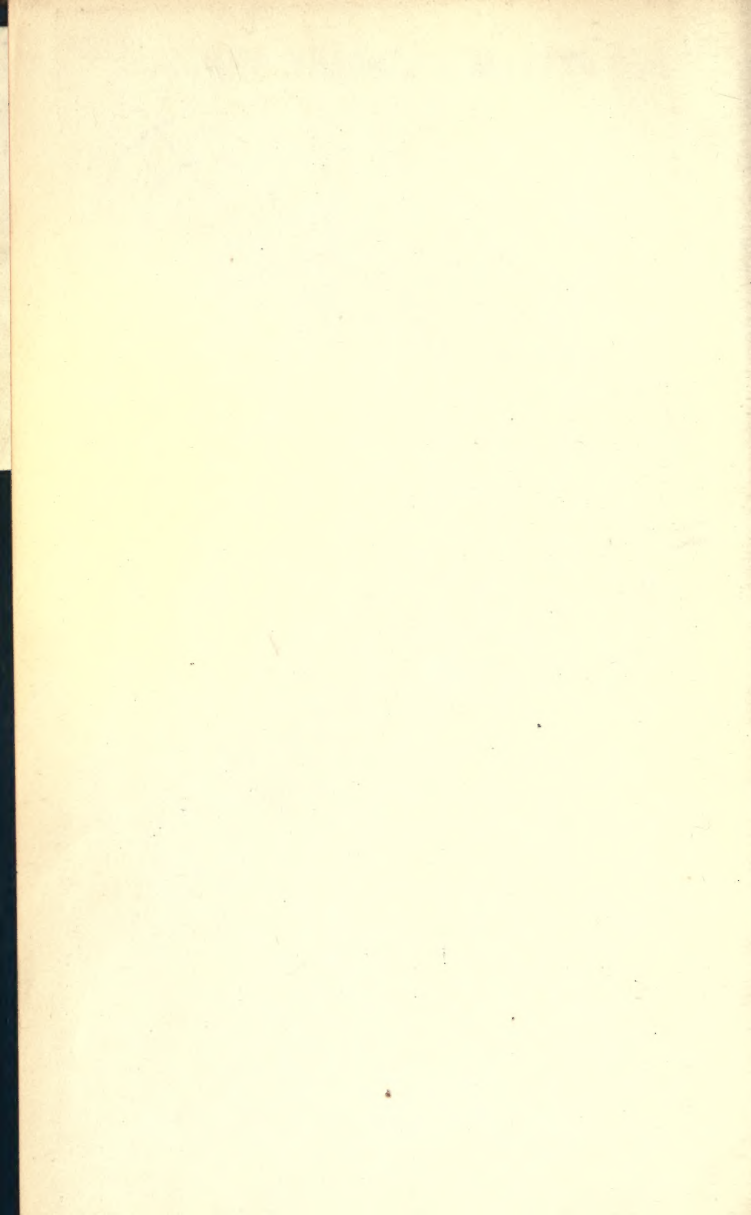
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# SOLID VIRTUE:

A TRIDUUM

AND

SPIRITUAL CONFERENCES.

BY

REV. FATHER BELLECIUS, S. J.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL LATIN BY A FATHER OF THE SOCIETY  
OF JESUS. WITH THE PERMISSION OF SUPERIORS.

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“Be ye renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on  
the new man.”—EPH. iv. : 23.

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## PREFACE.

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WHOEVER seeks to acquire solid virtue must cultivate purity of heart, cleansing himself gradually from every stain, even of the smallest sin. This the Triduum of Fr. Bellecius, if well performed, actually makes us do; for it first removes the obstacles to Solid Virtue, then points out the means, and finally gives the incentives to its acquirement. This retreat is an abridgment of Fr. Bellecius's larger work on Solid Virtue—an abridgment made by himself. His three spiritual conferences practically show in what Solid Virtue consists.

Of your charity pray for the

TRANSLATOR.



# CONTENTS.

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	PAGE
PREFACE .....	3
On the Eve of the Triduum.....	7
<b>Meditation.</b> —On the Necessity and Utility of this Re- treat .....	7
The Following of Christ, i. 20; Rules for making a good Triduum.....	12

## FIRST DAY.

<b>Meditation I.</b> —On Venial Sin .....	17
The Following of Christ, i. 24; <i>Consideration.</i> —On Tepidity .....	25
<i>Self-Examination.</i> —On Human Respect .....	32
<b>Meditation II.</b> —On the Abuse of Grace. Following of Christ, iii. 55.....	36

## SECOND DAY.

<b>Meditation I.</b> —Incentives for the Perfect Performance of our Daily Actions. Following of Christ, i. 15..	49
<i>Consideration.</i> —On Recollection.....	57
<i>Self-Examination.</i> —On the Practice of the Particular Examen.....	65
<b>Meditation II.</b> —On Fervor in Prayer. The Follow- ing of Christ, iv 5 .....	70

## THIRD DAY.

<b>Meditation I.</b> —What Faith teaches concerning the Excellence of Solid Virtue. The Following of Christ, i. 2 and 3 .....	81
<i>Consideration.</i> —What Benefits we may hope to derive from Solid Virtue.....	89
<i>Self-Examination.</i> —The signs of Divine Love.....	98
<b>Meditation II.</b> —God's Love for us deserves that we should give ourselves to Solid Virtue. The Following of Christ, iii. 27.....	102
Prayer of St. Augustine.....	110

## SPIRITUAL CONFERENCES.

I. Holy Indifference.....	115
II. The three degrees of Humility.....	125
III. The Glory and Happiness of one who is despised and afflicted.....	134

## Meditation on the Eve of the Triduum.

### ON THE NECESSITY AND UTILITY OF THIS RETREAT.

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#### POINT I.

##### THE NECESSITY OF THIS HOLY RETREAT.

By a mere glance at the present state of your soul you will readily perceive the urgent need you have of this triduum. The disrelish for heavenly things, the tepidity in spiritual exercises, the continual outpourings of a dissipated mind, the hasty and faulty manner of performing the usual actions of the day; the frequent and very dangerous temptations, the little fear of sin, or, perhaps, the absence of all fear of it, show that you walk on slippery ground, too nigh the danger of a grievous fall. Besides, so many and such violent passions not yet completely subdued; so many vicious and deeply-rooted habits not yet corrected; so much wrong done in the abode of the saints, in the sanctuary of religion, among terrestrial angels; all these prove that you are in much greater danger of losing your vocation, and even your salvation, than you imagine, and that there is a pressing



need to avert the ruin of your soul by a timely correction of these serious faults.

The necessity of this retreat is also manifest from the daily, perhaps hourly, failings in your obligations and duties. By the rules of the institute which you have entered you should lead a life of profound submission, of invincible patience, of heroic obedience, of continual mortification, of constant and fervent prayer; you should be a religious dead to self—living only for God and your neighbor, intent solely upon augmenting His divine glory and seeking the salvation of souls. In short, you should be a living model of virtue; the mere sight of you should inspire all with a horror of sin and a love for holiness.

But alas! you are nothing of all this, but quite the contrary. Ah! the old man domineering over reason lives in you yet. If a sudden death should to-day cut you off from this world and bring you before the Divine Justice to be judged what would be your lot? This frightens you; yet you dare to live in the state in which you would fear to die, and this you have the temerity to do while professing to be a religious! See how necessary it is to examine the state of your soul in time of seclusion.

This same necessity is, moreover, apparent by the frustration of the graces which you have received. You could be a saint from the manifold graces within your reach, you ought to be one

on account of your sublime vocation. And yet, I am ashamed to speak thus. By your remissness you are disedifying the outside world, a bad example to the house in which you live and a shame to the religion which you profess.

Alas! after so many communions, the same tepidity; after so many confessions, the same stains in the soul; after so many meditations, retreats, examens, the same predominant passions, the same abuse of grace, the same apathy in the exercise of the duties of the holy life you have chosen. Is there not just reason to fear lest, since you are like the barren fig-tree described by St. Luke, you shall likewise be hewn down and destroyed by the avenging hand of God? It is absolutely necessary then to apply yourself to this holy retreat with such fervor as at the hour of death you will wish.

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## POINT II.

### THE UTILITY OF THIS HOLY RETREAT.

The graces we obtain for ourselves and others prove this utility.

1st. We obtain graces for ourselves.—There is no doubt that those who devote themselves with earnestness to this recollection of spirit will receive innumerable graces of a high order, a profound knowledge of eternal truths, divine inspirations, efficacious inclinations and impulses

to good and magnanimous determinations, which will be denied to those who neglect this holy retreat or perform it tepidly, with irreparable loss of merits in this life, and of corresponding degrees of glory in the next.

Almighty God, it may be, has annexed to the making of this retreat the critical and decisive grace to which, as to a golden chain, is connected a series of many others; perhaps the call to a very great work for God's greater glory; perhaps a higher degree of virtue not attainable otherwise. Do now what you will wish to have done when on the threshold of eternity.

2d. We obtain graces for others.

Perchance, upon this retreat, well made, depends the conversion of some great sinner, or the holy unction which God will give to your words in the pulpit or tribunal of penance, the happy success of some apostolic mission, or some other work very important for the salvation of souls.

Oh, what a strict account will you not have to give if, owing to your tepidity during this triduum, you prevent the accomplishment of so much good; if souls which otherwise would have been saved be eternally damned; if you render yourself unfit to be God's instrument in bringing sinners to repentance!

3d. How great, on the contrary, will be your consolation if you perform this retreat with the proper dispositions!

“Unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required, and to whom they have committed much, of him they will demand the more.” (St. Luke xii. 48.) To the measure of grace is proportioned the rigor of the account. He to whom five talents were entrusted was obliged to acquire other five. If he had done less he would have been called a slothful servant. This solitude for three days is a new grace. The truths which shall be proposed in the course of the retreat are new talents. Woe to you if you do not use them to advantage, if you do not “*trade*” with them. Oh, if this precious time of recollection were given to the members of your Order who now burn in the purifying flames, perhaps, for the neglect with which they performed this very retreat, with what fervor would they not avail themselves of it! The axe may be now laid “to the root of the tree.” (St. Luke iii. 9.)

This may be your last retreat. How many whose health and strength of body promised a long life has not death snatched away after one such winter or summer retreat. If you are wise, you will do that which, if neglected, will be your greatest sorrow; if well performed, your greatest consolation.

#### AFFECTIONS.

O my God! do not permit that the very means which have been for others a help to greater

perfection should be for me an occasion of greater negligence, and that I should find *death* where others have found *life*. I am determined to devote these three days to this all-important work with all the earnestness in my power, and to retrieve, during this brief period, so many years miserably lost. "For Thee, O my God, shall I live at least a little while, who have till now lived for the world. I will give a few days to my soul, *I* who have lavished so many months and years in the pampering of my body." (St. Peter Chrysol.) For it may happen that for me Time shall be no more, if, like a spendthrift, I waste these days of grace.

For this reason, O God, strengthener of hearts, make known to me Thy will, "that I may know what is wanting in me." (Ps. xxxviii. 5.) And Thou who givest the grace to desire give also the grace to accomplish what Thou willest. (St. Augustine.)

#### PRACTICAL CONCLUSION.

The fruit of this Meditation should be a firm resolution during the time of this retreat to work out your salvation with great fervor and energy; to seek the Divine will in regard to yourself; to strive earnestly to correct every fault, and to observe accurately the following rules:

#### RULES FOR MAKING A GOOD TRIDUUM.

1st. To keep from all occupations as much as possible, to read nothing, write nothing, do noth-



ing but what is conducive to the end of the retreat.

2d. To perform your daily actions with greater exactness and fervor.

3d. To observe carefully external solitude and custody of the senses, and to secure internal solitude by a more strict recollection of the mind, and by frequent aspirations to God.

4th. To write the resolutions, which must not be general and vague, but particular as to the circumstances of time and place.

5th. To increase the usual mortifications of the body. The subject matter of the Particular Examen during the retreat will be the exact observance of the prescribed rules, of the order of the day, and of silence.

6th. To make the semi-annual confession, not through routine but in the spirit in which our holy Father St. Ignatius wished it to be done, and with the threefold fruit which he intended: 1st. To ascertain, by considering the number of your sins, whether there is up to this time a falling off or a progress in virtue. 2d. To conceive a more vehement sorrow and increased horror of sin. 3d. To acquire a knowledge of your predominant passion, and of the vice which is the source of all the rest.

7th. To begin this renovation of the spirit with the firm conviction that you stand very much in need of it, notwithstanding you have made, or will soon make, the annual eight days' retreat;

also to have a generous will to do all that God requires of you, denying nothing to the Almighty, but offering Him your whole heart.

8th. To read over the resolutions that were taken in other retreats and days of recollection, and to see whether they have been carried out; what God frequently inspires you to do or particularly to avoid; what is the principal obstacle to your progress in perfection. Attention to the rules will be of great assistance in reaping the desired fruit from this triduum.

9th. To dwell on one point only if the Meditations be found too long, and to use the remainder of them as spiritual reading.

10th. To prepare yourself for each Meditation by reading accurately the *fruit* which is to be gathered from it, and the means assigned to reap this *fruit*.

FIRST DAY.

## FIRST DAY.

On the First Day of this holy Triduum we must get rid of the principal obstacles to solid virtue; for if these are allowed to remain, this precious time will be spent to no purpose. Among these obstacles the principal are: Venial sin, tepidity of the soul, human respect and the abuse of grace. To remove entirely these obstructions to spiritual progress will be the work of this day;—the exercises of the first day answer to the “Purgative Way.”

## Meditation 1.

### ON VENIAL SIN.

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#### POINT I.

Venial sin is a great evil in itself, because it is worse than all the evils of the world taken together; worse than death, worse even than hell itself. For this reason could I, by one venial sin, prevent the greatest calamities, or procure the greatest good, I should not be justified in committing this sin. Could I by telling one lie avert all wars, famine, conflagrations, sickness and pestilence; could I free myself or others from the greatest pains and disasters; I should not be justified in telling this untruth. Could I by one wilful distraction in prayer convert all heretics, infidels and heathen to the true faith; could I extinguish the flames of Purgatory or the fires of Hell, this would not justify such a distraction. It is better that the whole world should be in confusion until the end of time; that the damned souls should be tormented by eternal flames, than that I should commit one slight sin. And this is a truth, it is even a dogma of faith which it would be impious to doubt. For all these are evils only to the creature; but sin, even venial sin, is an injury to the Creator. As great, there-



fore, as is the difference between the Creator and the creature, so great is the difference between the malice of sin and the malignity of these other evils.

Nevertheless, we find Christians who commonly say: "It is but a slight thing, only a venial sin." O these inconsiderate words! What? Is that only a slight thing which is greater and far worse than the ruin of the universe? According to the doctrine of the Fathers, it would be a less evil were we possessed by the devil; were our bodies to be tormented by the most violent pains; were our souls to be tortured by the fires of Hell.

This we believe, and yet these sins are committed by religious; even by priests, without horror and without reflection, in jest, as it were, without the least thought of the consequences. O how pernicious is this blindness! Here pause, O presumptuous contemner of little things! Venial sin is something great in itself, yea, after mortal sin, the greatest evil in the world.

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## POINT II.

Venial sin is a great evil in its effects; for first it diminishes the fervor of charity, increases the tepidity of the soul, and corrupts acts of virtue by lowering their high standard and taking away from them all merit for Heaven.

Secondly, it keeps back innumerable actual graces, and makes us unworthy of the special providence and particular love of God by which, through His paternal affection, evil is averted and all things made to co-operate for good in the just. "We know that to them that love God all things work together unto good." (Rom. viii. 28.)

Thirdly, the soul, stained with venial sins, becomes displeasing and deformed in the sight of God; for, according to the Holy Fathers, such sins are to the soul what disease is to the body.

Fourthly, venial sin is extremely dangerous inasmuch as it leads to the commission of mortal sin and ultimately to Hell.

Shudder, O pious souls! at this most horrible result; hear and tremble, O ye sinners! who derisively reject this truth. Know that venial sin leads on to mortal, and consequently to Hell. Whosoever is not thunderstruck at this tendency of venial sin, is on the very brink of perdition. No one becomes wicked all of a sudden. Those who are unfortunately lost forever first fell into venial sins, then gradually, step by step, they went to mortal sin and finally to Hell. In short eternal damnation often depends on one venial sin. Remember St. Teresa, who would have been eternally ruined, had she not avoided a slight defect. Perhaps from laziness in rising, tepidity in prayer, curiosity of the eyes, your damnation may ensue. Surely these are not less

faults than the idle conversations of St. Teresa. And do not say, "Perhaps my salvation does not depend on such trifles." For perhaps it does. Will you then risk, on an uncertainty, eternity, your soul and Heaven? Assuredly, had St. Teresa reasoned thus, she would have been deluded and would have perished forever. And why may not that which would have happened to St. Teresa, happen to you? Woe then to you, should you continue to despise venial faults, for perchance, in your case also, your salvation depends on what you despise. Abide then in fear, and "fly from all sin as from the face of a serpent."

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### POINT III.

Venial sin is a great evil on account of its punishments.

The punishment of venial sin consists in the excruciating torments of Purgatory, which are greater and more intense than all the tortures inflicted upon the martyrs, all the sufferings of criminals, and all the pains of the sick, put together. This is the teaching of St. Augustine and St. Thomas. Who does not shudder at this? But let us proceed. Reflect that these pains and torments of Purgatory, so great in their number, so violent in their severity, so long in their duration, are inflicted for venial sins,—for a lie, for one act of impatience, for an idle word. And

they are imposed on predestined souls; upon the spouses of Christ—upon the heirs of Heaven. They are the sentence pronounced by an infinitely just God, who cannot punish sin more than it deserves; who loves these souls with a most tender and infinite love; and, nevertheless, they must suffer in continual agony. Either, then, God is an unjust and ruthless tyrant, which would be blasphemy to think, or venial sin is a dreadful and detestable evil. O God! this we believe, this we teach others and still we continue to sin. We know that the least offence deserves Purgatory, and yet we hesitate not to commit it. Were we assured that for one or more faults we should be burned at the stake, we would not be so foolish as to sin, even slightly. What! we believe that for these very sins we commit we shall have to burn in the flames of Purgatory, and still we go on heaping sin on sin! What folly! but let us at last be wise, and being convinced of these truths, let us always entertain, in our hearts, a great horror and implacable hatred of every venial sin.

## AFFECTIONS.

O God! I, a handful of dust, have offended Thee, the Lord of Lords, after so many graces bestowed on me. And this so often—and so inconsiderately—out of mere wantonness—when no hope of any good, no fear of any evil incited me. Ah! I ought not to have offended Thee, the

Supreme Good, even if, by doing so, I could have obtained the dominion of the whole world, or have avoided the greatest misfortunes and sufferings. I knew this and yet I have sinned daily, from morning until night, and formed, as it were, a continuous chain of venial sins. This I have done in jest. Alas! I have in jest offended Thee, my God—for a little comfort, through vainglory, for the sake of recreation. Brought to the verge of mortal sin and the precipice of Hell; reckless of my salvation, I have set at naught the pains of Purgatory, due to these sins! O blindness to be lamented with bitter tears. “Who will give a fountain of tears to my eyes” (Jer. ix. 1), that I may lament with uninterrupted sorrow my sins which have accumulated beyond the hairs of my head? “O Lord! To Thee have I sinned and have done evil before Thee!” (Psalm l. 6.) But now I repent, I detest even the least sin. I will imprint indelibly on my mind these words: *I will rather die than be stained with any sin however light.* Terrified by the gravity of the slightest venial sin I purpose never again to allow my soul to be contaminated with it. “As God liveth, so long as breath remaineth in me, and the spirit of God in my nostrils, my lips shall not speak iniquity, neither shall my tongue contrive lying.” (Job xxvii. 3.)

I would rather lose all good and suffer all evil, than ever again sin even slightly “against my own soul.” (Eccl. xix. 4.) “O my God! en-



lighten my darkness" (Psalm xvii. 29), that I may more clearly know, every day, the heinousness of venial sin. "Enlighten my eyes that I may never sleep in death." (Psalm xii. 4.) "Renew a right spirit within my bowels" (Psalm l. 12), that I may fly with great horror and aversion from whatever displeases Thy Divine Majesty.

#### PRACTICAL CONCLUSION.

The fruit which is to be gathered from this Meditation is a deep-rooted, persistent and lasting horror of every deliberate venial sin, particularly of the sin you commit most frequently; which is the source of other defects, and which draws you into more *immediate* danger of greater sins.

The *means* to obtain this horror are the following :

1st, Often to excite in yourself, and chiefly at the *Particular Examen* and before Confession, a lively sorrow for the venial sins you have committed.

2d, Whenever you go to Confession, select one venial sin, and firmly resolve to avoid with special care any relapse.

3d, Often repeat, for instance, when the clock strikes, "I would rather lose my good name, my honor, my health, yes, even life itself, than allow my soul to be sullied with one venial sin, especially the one which I have resolved to guard against."

4th, It helps very much to represent to one's

self, in Meditation or Confession, or holy Communion, the occasions of sinning venially; and to arm one's self by a previously conceived horror and determination to avoid them. Make often the following acts: "O God! if by a little impatience I could avoid dishonor, sickness, death, or procure for myself the highest erudition, the esteem and the love of men, I would not give way to this sin."

*Such ejaculations are a powerful antidote against venial sins.*

*On Tepidity.*

Consideration.

ON TEPIDITY.

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POINT I.

THE INFALLIBLE SIGNS OF TEPIDITY.

They are tepid who have a horror only of mortal sin, and think very little of venial sin; who perform the spiritual exercises negligently, out of mere custom or human respect, with an interior disgust; who pray without attention, confess without amendment, communicate without devotion and fruit; who perform their daily actions without a proper intention, without method or order; who, being intent on exterior things, seldom enter into themselves, and give their thoughts still less to God; who, content with mediocrity, neglect the pursuit of a higher virtue; who avoid those who aim at perfection, and eagerly seek the company of those who lead a life of greater laxity; who form a conscience of their own, by false principles, on the strength of which they endeavor to dull the edge of remorse; who, while frequenting the holy Sacraments, cherish interior aversions, envy, jealousy, pride, familiarities, and a spirit of murmuring and bitterness; whose tongue is virulent and conten-

tious; who foster a hidden self-love, which, secretly pervading all their actions, infects and taints them with its venom; who, weary of self-denial and labor, seek only ease and comfort. These are the indubitable signs of tepid souls, and if they be found in you doubt not of your being tepid.

Lift then the curtain and look a little into your conscience. Perhaps with Ezechiel, who was commanded to look into the temple through that mystical aperture, you also shall see with astonishment "the wicked abominations which they commit all round about." (Ezech. viii. 9.)

For what else are the wicked habits, the unconquered impulses, the loose manners, the innumerable defects, with which, like a foul carcass, swarming with worms, your heart is infected? What more shall I say? Your unbridled affections made of you that field of the slothful man, whose ground is all covered with the thorns of countless stains and blemishes. (Prov. xxiv. 30.)

You are the fig-tree by the wayside, on which our Lord found nothing but the leaves of pretended virtue and hypocrisy. (St. Matt. xxi. 19.)

You are the earth, which drinketh in the rain that cometh upon it, viz., the showers of graces; and bringeth forth thorns and briars of vice, and is thus very near to a curse. (Hebr. vi. 8.) Conceive, therefore, a horror of the miserable state of your soul; be filled with fear and confusion.

## POINT II.

THE DANGERS WHICH INVARIABLY ACCOMPANY  
TEPIDITY.

The *first danger* is that of falling into mortal sin. The tepid live in a state of continual imperfection, commit venial sins without remorse, and but seldom consider the malice of sin, and the motives which should prompt them to refrain from the commission thereof. The horror of mortal sin gradually diminishes, so that conscience becomes, as it were, familiar with it; and so they play securely, as they imagine, even with impure temptations; rashly waver between approval and dissent; doubt very little of the pleasure they have taken therein; allow dangerous freedom to the senses, and form in their minds various principles, or rather subterfuges, with which to make excuses for their sins; until at last, under strong temptations, they are plunged headlong into some crime. Oh! if Hell were opened, how many voices should we not hear of the suffering inmates confirming this truth, and cursing their tepidity with unutterable anguish!

“He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little” (Eccle. xix. 1), is the oracle of the Holy Ghost. Unless therefore, O tepid religious, you expel from your mind this lan-

guor, you are in the greatest danger of falling into mortal sin and perhaps into Hell; and if this consideration do not rouse you from your tepidity you are already on the point of sleeping quietly and perchance of dying in mortal sin.

The *second danger* is, that a tepid soul is on the point of being cast away, with disgust, by Almighty God. This is proved by Holy Writ: "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth." (Apoc. iii. 16.) Behold, O miserable slave of tepidity! God begins to vomit you out of His mouth. God, the same God who earnestly seeks after sinners, and receives them with tenderness, is quite estranged from you, disgusted with your sickening lukewarmness, and is on the point of vomiting you forth with horror. O unhappy mortal, you have become abominable to the Divine Heart, and you fear not, you tremble not! You read these things without feeling, without emotion. You believe what you read, yet you shake not off your coldness! Alas! you go through these very considerations tepidly. O slothful religious! What shall ever awaken you from your torpor, if these thundering words rouse you not? God wishes men to be even cold rather than tepid, and seems to prefer the state of coldness to that of tepidity. He says, "I would that thou wert cold or hot." (Apoc. iii. 15.)

We know this and yet we are tepid. O indif-

ference! O lukewarmness, deserving of avenging flames!

*The third danger* is the risk of not dying a pious death.

Death is the echo of life. It would, therefore, be wonderful if they were to die in a state of fervor who have lived in a state of tepidity. It is deplorable to see how carelessly, and with what want of devotion, these persons receive the last sacraments; if, indeed, they be not deprived of them altogether, and die suddenly in punishment of their tepidity. The last Confession is made inconsiderately, holy Viaticum is received without fervor. They are unconcerned and negligently unconscious while Extreme Unction is administered to them; the pains of sickness are borne impatiently, as if the sufferings of Christ had never been heard of by these unfortunate religious. For want of previous exercise in devotion they heed not the priest who suggests pious affections; they drop into their agony in a state of stupidity as to heavenly things. At last, by a chilling death they leave those who stand around in the greatest anxiety. They appear before the terrible tribunal and are plunged if not directly into Hell, at least for an untold number of years into the flames of Purgatory. "O Lord, pierce Thou my flesh with Thy fear" (Psalm cxviii. 120), that, terrified by these dangers, I may shake off my tepidity and serve Thee henceforward more fervently.



## POINT III.

It is very hard to cure tepidity.

In order that one may apply a remedy it is necessary that he should first know the evil and its malignity. Now the tepid do not believe that they are tepid, at least they do not perceive the dangers of the malady, for blindness of mind is the inseparable companion of tepidity. The knowledge of the unhealthy state of their souls would already suppose some fervor. Moreover, they who, in the performance of their daily exercises of piety, occasionally, though very imperfectly, do some good, are deluded by a false appearance of virtue, and do not see their miseries, nor provide a remedy for them; and this it is which renders the cure so very difficult.

The tepid religious may be compared to that class of sick persons to whom, on account of the disordered state of the stomach, medicines themselves become a poison. For meditations, examens of conscience, confessions, communions, masses and spiritual exercises are gone through by them without any fruit, because they are performed slothfully and without attention, and thus the only means most efficacious to expel tepidity and acquire fervor are, by them, turned to the detriment of their souls. For this reason St. Bernard in the 96th letter to the Abbot Fontanus says, very truly: "More readily will you

find many worldlings abandoning their evil ways, and returning to God, than one tepid religious correcting his faults and becoming fervent." The greatest sinners are often awakened from their death-slumber by merely looking upon the Crucifix, by reflecting upon the Last Judgment or the eternity of Hell; while, on the contrary, a slothful religious, who is accustomed to meditate carelessly and without proper attention upon these eternal truths, is as little touched by them as those who daily assist the dying are by the sight of death.

Finally, the only remedy for this evil would be some extraordinary grace, by the overwhelming influence of which this inveterate torpor would be shaken off. But languid religious whose minds are engrossed with exterior things, owing to the tumult of their passions, far from taking advantage of the ordinary graces, turn a deaf ear to them, and render themselves unworthy of such extraordinary graces.

No wonder, then, that God gives up at last rousing them, and allows them to sleep on, in avenging darkness.

It too often happens that they perform even good works with a bad intention, and sin continually. Although, now and then, some heavenly ray illumines the blindness of their minds and melts their frozen hearts, still these momentary fits of fervor soon vanish, and the state of torpor is resumed, and hardly ever shaken off but with

life. Who shall now deny that it is very difficult to cure this malady? O the dismal and destructive effect of this languor! which is the more to be feared as it is common. And this makes the state of tepidity so deplorable.

Shake off, therefore, O my soul, thy tepidity! redeem lost time. Renew thyself, and "be mindful whence thou art fallen. Do penance now" and begin to reform, or else fear that God in His anger will "come to thee and will remove thy candlestick out of its place." (Apoc. ii. 5.)

The remedies to banish this languor, are:

1st. A fervent meditation to be performed every morning.

2d. Pious and attentive spiritual reading every day.

3d. A daily examination of conscience joined with the particular examen.

4th. A short recollection, for at least half an hour every month.

#### SELF-EXAMINATION.

##### *On Human Respect.*

One of the greatest obstacles to solid virtue is human respect. This malady of the soul consists in a depraved desire to please men, and in a servile fear of displeasing them.

It is clear that it originates in pride, from which this fear of contempt and love of esteem arise. Therefore, searching the inmost recesses of your heart, seriously examine:

1st. Whether you have not committed many evil deeds from this vain fear of displeasing others, and omitted many good works out of a base desire to please them. If you have done so "Know that for all these God will bring you unto judgment." (Eccle. xi. 9.) This plague is a mad folly, the most galling tyranny and the greatest contempt of God.

2d. Inquire diligently whether you believe with a lively faith the following oracles of Eternal Truth. "No man can serve two masters" (Matt. vi. 24.); that is to say, Christ and the world. "Whoever will be a friend of this world, becometh an enemy of God." (St. James iv. 4.) "If I did yet please men I should not be the servant of Christ." (Gal. i. 10.) "God hath scattered the bones of them that please men." (Ps. lii. 6.)

Examine, therefore, whether you seek not the favor of men by ceremonious behavior, by abject flattery, by fulsome praise, by imitating the manners of worldlings? Senseless mortal that you are! what you so eagerly seek is as dust, which is blown away, as smoke that is scattered abroad by the wind, as a thin fog which is dispersed by the storm. You are like the dog in the fable which lost the reality by snatching at the shadow; you neglect eternal, that you may enjoy transitory goods.

3d. Consider whether you are practically persuaded of this truth, which is inculcated by Christ. "Fear ye not them that kill the body

and are not able to kill the soul, but rather fear Him that can cast both body and soul into Hell." (Matt. x. 28.) See, therefore, whether you are firmly resolved to incur the displeasure and hatred of men; to be harassed by jests and mockeries of your companions, to be excluded from their gatherings, to be ridiculed, despised and shunned by them, rather than offend God by a single venial sin. Why do you hesitate?

Hear what the Holy Spirit says: "Be not ashamed of any of these things, and accept no person to sin thereby." (Eccl. xlii. 1.) "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm." (Jer. xvii. 5.)

4th. Lastly, examine whether you are troubled and take it ill when others speak coldly to you, avoid your company, turn away from you, and shun you? This is the very thing, you say, which is so hard to nature and which stings me.

But tell me why do you grieve at the removal of deceptions? Why do you lament the drying up of a source of much weariness of spirit? Why do you regret the loss of that companionship, the abstaining from which will one day be your joy?

Is not God better to you than a dozen such companions, yea, than a thousand of such erring, inconsistent and wicked friends? Rather rejoice that the world hates you, for it is a sign that Christ has chosen you from out of the world. "If you had been of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are

not of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (St. John xv. 19.) Be glad, therefore, and rejoice. "Know ye that it hated Me before you." (St. John xv. 18.) "The disciple is not above his Master." (Matt. x. 24.)

Rejoice exceedingly that you are treated by the world in the same manner in which Christ was treated.

Finally, this transitory contempt, which tepid persons evince for you, is abundantly compensated for by the genuine and enduring esteem of the just on earth, and the Blessed in Heaven. Yea, these very scoffers, at the end of their lives, and on the last day, will praise you. Although such revilers may have "a forehead of brass" (Is. xlvi. 4), God will give you, if you carry out your heroic resolution, "a face stronger than their faces, and a forehead harder than their foreheads." (Ezech. iii. 8.)

You have only to receive their taunts and railleries for the first few days with undaunted courage, and you shall have conquered. These very same people will afterwards praise you, and, as they thought little of you, when you were like themselves, so will they revere you now for being unlike themselves.

Follow, then, the advice of St. Paul: Turn your back upon the world and let it be crucified; laugh at it, when it laughs; despise it, when it despises; and setting at naught its judgments, fear only the judgments of God.

**Meditation 2.****ON THE ABUSE OF GRACE.**

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**POINT I.****THE ENORMITY OF THE ABUSE OF GRACE.**

This is first proved by the absolute need of grace. There is the greatest necessity for grace, because faith teaches, on the one hand, that without it no supernatural act can be performed meriting an eternal reward (Council of Trent, Sess. 6, Can. 3), and, on the other, no one who has arrived at the age of discretion can, without such an act, attain salvation. Therefore, since such a supernatural act is absolutely necessary to work out our salvation, and since no one can perform such an act without supernatural grace, whoever neglects grace throws away a means which is absolutely necessary to work meritoriously and gain Heaven. Consequently, whenever, O senseless mortal! you reject an impulse of grace, you waste a talent, whereby alone an immortal crown can be merited; you cast away a precious stone with which God can be purchased, and you think but little of it! But the hour shall come in which you shall bitterly weep over such an unpardonable abuse of grace; lamenting shall you cry out, "When I could, I would not."



The second proof is drawn from the worth and excellence of grace itself.

Grace which is offered is an immense good, surpassing all the treasures of the earth, and, after sanctifying grace, and the Beatific Vision, transcending everything that is not God; it is the price of the blood and death of Christ; it is the beginning, the increase, and the reward of our merits; it is the seed of eternal glory; for, after every actual grace, if you co-operate with it, follows a higher degree of indwelling grace, and consequently a greater degree of glory which will last forever. What then can be more foolish than to reject this heavenly gift, this divine fruit, this seed of glory! and yet this is done in a jesting way, as it were without remorse, for a mere nothing; for the loss of the least thing grieves us more than the loss of grace. But woe to us! if we only then begin to estimate its worth, when we shall be deprived of it.

The third proof of the enormity of the abuse of grace is its munificence.

The graces bestowed are exceedingly great; namely: vocation to the religious life, elevation to the dignity of the priesthood and the cure of souls, besides the novitiate, the yearly eight days' retreat, the renewal of the spirit twice every year, the frequent sharing in the holy mysteries, and so on. Moreover, these graces follow each other in uninterrupted succession:

the daily masses, meditations, examens, spiritual readings, examples, exhortations and internal inspirations.

Lastly, they are efficacious in themselves, as the theologians speak, considered in their entity or congruity, since these same graces, if they had been given in the same number to other persons, would have made them the greatest saints, and they would have been sufficient to convert the most wicked men; but they are deprived in us of their effect, solely because they are voluntarily rejected by us. Therefore, since we resist such great, continued and efficacious graces, and despise these heavenly gems as so much tinsel, no wonder that the abuse of grace is something very enormous and heinous.

“Woe to thee, Corozain! Woe to thee, Bethsaida!” Woe to thee, O religious! “for, if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the mighty works that have been wrought in you, they would have done penance, long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.” (St. Luke x. 13.) On the Day of Judgment there shall arise “from the East and from the West” (St. Matt. viii. 11), the heathen and the heretic; there shall also arise many Catholics who lived in the world, your pupils, your penitents, your hearers, whom you have animated to the faithful correspondence with grace; they shall arise, I say, and accuse you of so horrible abuse of grace.

The blood of Jesus Christ shed in vain for

you, and which procured for you so many graces shall call for vengeance. Alas! with what terror shall this thought torment and overwhelm you on your death-bed: I could have become a saint, and so easily, and I ought to have become one by virtue of my rules and my vocation, and, nevertheless, I have made little or no progress.

O Lord, I detest my malice and great ingratitude! Alas! what have I done, when I rebelliously resisted so many graces? I have foolishly despised the price of the Blood of Jesus Christ, the ray of Thy Divinity, the pledge of eternal salvation. Grant that I may at least correspond with constant fidelity to the present grace, which is perhaps the last.

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## POINT II.

### THE PUNISHMENT OF THE ABUSE OF GRACE.

Those who abuse sufficient graces are usually punished by the withdrawal of such as are efficacious.\*

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\* *Gratia excitans* dicitur vel *sufficiens* vel *efficax*. *Sufficiens* pure talis, et ut efficaci opposita, est *gratia excitans* quatenus *non* obtentura liberum hominis consensum, ad quem tamen obtinendum sufficit. *Efficax* est *gratia excitans* liberum hominis consensum certo et *infallibiter* obtentura.

[Exciting or impelling grace is either sufficient or efficacious. Sufficient grace, purely such, and as opposed to effi-

And this is of all punishments the greatest, the most just and the one ordinarily inflicted.

1st. It is of all the punishments in this world *the greatest.*

There is nothing to be dreaded so much as that which alienates us from God, the Sovereign Good, and subjects us to the sovereign evil—sin and Hell. Now this is the deplorable effect of the withdrawal of efficacious graces. For efficacious graces prevent the commission of sin, the cause of damnation, since they are by the decree of God the absolute necessary means by which we are to work out our salvation; and, indeed, so essential<sup>1</sup> are they that without them we can never possess God, nor avoid damnation. True, with merely sufficient grace we could be saved; but in reality we never shall be saved by them alone. We shall surely sin, and consequently be damned.

The withdrawal of grace is, therefore, what most turns us away from the Supreme Good, God and Heaven, and brings us nearest to the worst of evils, sin and Hell. Consequently of all punishments in this world it is the greatest and the most terrible. Moreover, according to common consent, there can be no more awful chastisement in this life than that which hardens the

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acious, is exciting grace, inasmuch as not about to obtain the free consent of man, though it is sufficient to obtain it. Efficacious grace is exciting grace which will surely and infallibly obtain the free consent of man.]

wicked and confirms them in their evil ways; which blinds their understanding so that they see not the perilous state of their soul; which binds, as it were, their will so that they are not anxious to extricate themselves from this danger, which deprives them of the best means of repentance, and paves the way to all vices, making them more prone to evil and more ready to fall.

Now all this is the result of the loss of efficacious grace. For when the Almighty allows us to be slandered, visits us with sickness, afflicts us with persecutions, it is a punishment, it is true, but not the greatest, since in these particulars He intends and seeks to turn us from sin, and convert us to Himself, and thus acts rather as a Father who desires the conversion and correction of the sinner than as a Judge or Avenger of sin.

But when He denies sinners the light by which they could discover the deformity of vice, depriving them of inspirations by which they could be moved to its detestation, then, indeed, He rages "as a bear that is robbed of her whelps" (Osee xiii. 8.) Then the omnipotent anger of God strikes with great affliction, with an exceedingly great evil, with an incurable bruise, with a very severe wound, the wound of an enemy (Jer. xxx. 12 and 14), with a chastisement so terrible that He could not inflict a greater.

2d. It is the *most just* punishment.

Divine grace is a visitation of the Heavenly

Bridegroom, who, standing at the door of your heart, knocks, begs and even urges to be admitted. You open not; you hear not His voice; you deny Him entrance. At last God, as it were, tired, ceases to knock, and being despised by frequent refusals goes away. What can be more just? Grace is a torch by whose light God desires to enlighten the mind, and by its ardor to inflame the will; but you close the avenues of your heart, you seek only darkness, and like the owl fly light and warmth.

At length the Sun of Justice, so often frustrated, ceases to shine, and hides its rays. What can be more just?

Grace is an inestimable gift, a most precious gem, and a pledge of eternal glory. God offers it of His own accord, without being asked. He even forces it upon you, and begs you would accept it, and this He repeats after so many reiterated repulses. But you contemn this gift; you refuse to accept this gem; you think nothing of this pledge. At last God very justly ceases to offer it, or to press you to accept it. Who will think that this is wrong? Is not then the withdrawal of grace which has been so neglected and despised a most just punishment? O Great God! it is indeed a most just chastisement. But pardon me! I promise to do better for the future. Afflict me with any other punishment. Oh! do not chastise me with this.

3d. It is the *ordinary punishment*.



There is no chastisement more frequently threatened by God, through Moses, the prophets and the Royal Psalmist, than this very withdrawal of grace.

“I let them go according to the desires of their heart: they shall walk in their own inventions.” (Ps. lxxx. 13.) “Blind the heart of this people, and make their ears heavy and shut their eyes.” (Is. vi. 10.) “He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts, that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts.” (St. John xii. 40.) “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” (Matt. xxi. 43.) These and other such passages threatening the wrath of God meet our eyes in almost every page of Holy Writ. The examples which writers of Sacred History relate prove abundantly that this taking away of grace has been in the Old and New Law usual and very frequent, aye, even in our own times.

We often wonder why God bears so patiently with so many tepid religious, who, notwithstanding abundant means, fulfil the duties of their state so negligently; particularly the obligations they are under to aspire to perfection. “Ah!” says St. Augustine, “God punishes them with a secret chastisement which is all the heavier because it is hidden, while he deprives them of His graces and allows them to sleep in their torpor.”



Hence it is that they regard as trifles thoughts, looks and actions that are dangerous; that they make light of aversions, particular friendships, hatred, murmuring, anger and detraction. They deem neglect of the duties of their office and violations of their vows trifling. Hence, they make for themselves various excuses by which they try to palliate their faults instead of employing the means by which they could overcome them. Would to God that sad experience did not teach us that this usually happens in religious communities. Search, therefore, the innermost recesses of your heart, and see whether you have not often experienced this loss of grace. Think of the annual retreats, of the days of recollection, and of other such periods of special grace; are you not obliged to confess that since that time you have been deprived of many graces, because you neglected to co-operate with them? For God forsakes, at last, those who forsake Him. Take heed that this very same misfortune which has befallen so many may not happen to you also. Perhaps the series of graces destined for you is already on the point of being taken from you to be given to the more deserving. Be in dread, "the judgments of God are a great abyss." (Psalm xxxv. 7.) Although this is the most terrible, yet it is the usual punishment, and it is also a very just one.

## AFFECTIONS.

“O Lord, terrible and exceeding great!” (Eccl. xliii. 31.) “Fear and trembling are come upon me.” (Psalm liv. 6.) I fear, alas! lest Thou sayest to me, striking me as Thou didst Saul, with a thunderbolt “As thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, the Lord hath also rejected thee.” (1 Kings xv. 23.)

“The Lord hath sought him a man according to His own heart.” (1 Kings xiii. 14.)

“The Lord hath given the chain of gifts which were prepared for thee to thy neighbor who is better than thee.” (1 Kings xv. 28.) I fear lest in punishment of such frightful abuse, “the Kingdom of God shall be taken from me, and shall be given to a soul bringing forth the fruits thereof.” (Matt. xxi. 43.) Who will not tremble at the thought that in the Kingdom of God’s grace Samuel was put in the place of Heli, David in that of Saul, and Matthias in that of Judas?

If this was done to a pōntiff, to a king, to an Apostle, what shall be done to me? O unhappy moment when I resisted the impulse of grace! Oh, what an irreparable loss I sustained of an inestimable treasure!

“Who shall give water to my head and a fountain of tears to my eyes?” (Jer. ix. 1) wherewith I may bewail such an enormous contempt of the Divine Goodness! Would to God those neglected inspirations might return! O how faithful would

I not be to them! How I would listen to them: Unworthy though I am that Thou shouldst again help me, yet I hope to obtain from Thy infinite goodness the victorious grace which will put an end to my former life and enable me to begin a holier one; because even "when Thou art angry Thou wilt remember mercy." (Habacuc iii. 2.)

#### PRACTICAL CONCLUSION.

The fruit of this Meditation is an heroic resolution to listen henceforward to the voice of God and to co-operate with actual grace :

- 1st. *Promptly*, by avoiding all delays.
- 2d. *Generously*, by overcoming all obstacles.
- 3d. *Constantly*, by guarding against all remissness in what has once been undertaken.

The means to arrive at this are the following:

- 1st. Examine seriously and often, particularly at the end of Meditation, or after Holy Communion, or in visits to the Blessed Sacrament, what God by reiterated impulses of grace wishes you to do or to omit; for instance what self-denial and victory over your inclinations; what sacrifices, what rooting out of vice, what practice of virtue, He particularly demands.

- 2d. Above all endeavor to acquire recollection of mind and tranquillity of heart, because the whisperings of divine grace are hardly perceived amidst the tumult of a troubled heart.

SECOND DAY.

## SECOND DAY.

After having removed the principal obstacles to solid virtue, we are to look for the most effectual means of acquiring it. These are as follows: A perfect performance of our daily actions; a constant recollection; a diligent use of the particular examen, and a fervent daily prayer or Meditation. ’

These are the four voluble wheels (Ezech. x. 13) by which the soul will be carried to the highest pitch of perfection; “for the spirit of life is in them.” (Ezech. x. 17.)

By the exercises of this Second Day we shall be convinced of the utility of putting these four means into daily practice until they become our constant rule of life. The considerations of this day will then answer to what is called the “Illuminative Way.”

## Meditation 1.

### INCENTIVES TO THE PERFECT PERFORMANCE OF OUR DAILY ACTIONS.

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#### POINT I.

#### THE GAIN WHICH CEASES.

*(Lucrum Cessans.)*

Man's life is a chain consisting of different links which are his daily recurring actions. These, if performed with the required perfection, are acts of virtue; consequently if these actions be performed in a holy manner, our whole life shall be as a golden chain, the links of which will be formed by the happy succession of virtue after virtue. The Council of Trent (Sess. 6, Canon 31) teaches that for every salutary act which is done by the just a degree of sanctifying grace is given; and that every degree of such a grace entitles them to a degree of eternal glory. Hence it follows that their daily works when performed in the proper spirit merit innumerable degrees of grace in this life and glory in the next. We each day perform at least twenty different actions. How many more in a week, and what a still greater number in a month. Now should these actions be perfectly performed, we

gain in one month more than six hundred degrees of grace in this life, and as many of glory in the next.

But one degree of grace and glory is of such value that were the saints capable of sorrow they would lament the loss of one such degree of glory. And we now blindly despise this possible profit; we reckon as naught this irreparable neglect of so many degrees of grace and of glory. Oh, what a different opinion shall we form at the hour of death, and at the judgment seat! Therefore, O soul, destined for Heaven, recollect thyself, and consider the greatness of the gain irretrievably lost. Behold, O religious! if you perform well this Meditation which you are now making you shall see God for all eternity one degree more clearly, you shall love Him perpetually one degree more; but if you meditate carelessly you shall love the immense amiability of God one degree less; you shall behold His infinite beauty one degree less clearly, and this eternally; and this happens on account of your shameful sloth which could be so easily shaken off. Those are not worthy of Heaven who are not sorry for depriving themselves of such a gain.

I am filled with sorrow, O my Creator and my God! What have I done when I performed such and such a work imperfectly? I have in my folly forfeited a greater happiness forever; the opportunity of beholding Thee perpetually, O most Beauteous Love, in a clearer manner,



and of loving Thee more ardently. Oh, let me weep! all this I have done for some miserable gratification.

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POINT II.

THE HARM THAT ARISES.

(*Damnum emergens.*)

First. The careless performance of our actions leads to a more woful death. Oh! how this thought will torment me as I stand on the threshold of eternity. Being a religious, I was obliged to aim at perfection befitting my state; to fulfil this obligation I had at hand the easiest and most efficacious means, to wit, the exact performance of my daily works; for this is, according to all spiritual writers, the shortest, the least difficult, and the most certain road to perfection. I knew it, and yet I neglected to use this means. O my God! I could have lived a life of holiness, and so easily, had I only in my every-day actions shaken off my sluggishness; had I diligently observed the rules prescribed for performing them well; had I fostered good intentions and performed not other works but these same works diligently. But now, O detestible sloth! I have increased the pains of Purgatory by these very actions, whilst had I overcome myself a little I could have ascended to that high throne of glory which my fellow-religious now occupy.

Others acted differently; encouraged by their example I also purposed to do the same; I even began—oh, had I but continued! Ah! I remember well the troubles, miseries, and hardships which during the course of my life occurred in the discharge of my daily actions. How many difficulties had to be surmounted! Oh! how great a glory in Heaven could I have merited by all these. How exceedingly great was my folly! Instead of reward I have accumulated the chastisements of Divine Justice.

These shall be the thoughts of a dying person, who during life hurried through and negligently performed the wonted functions. Woe is me! I have done but little good, and this little carelessly. My whole life has been nothing but a chain of defects, by which the enemy shall drag me before the Divine Judge.

Secondly. The sluggish performance of our daily actions brings on a more rigorous judgment. As soon as we die our works good or bad follow us to the tribunal of God, for “we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the proper things of the body, according as he hath done, whether it be good or evil.” (2 Cor. v. 10.)

There it will not be asked what illustrious part we have played on this world’s stage, but how well we have acted it out; nor what honorable positions we have filled, but how well we have filled them; nor how satisfactorily we have borne

the burden imposed upon us, but how holily we have sustained it—in short, our daily works will form the principal subject of that examination. “For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father, with His angels, and then will He render to every man according to his works.” (St. Matt. xvi. 27.)

O soul! what shall then be thy feelings when the Divine Judge, after having examined the imperfect state of thy account, shall say, “Behold, I have called thee to great sanctity, I have given thee a very easy means to acquire it, viz., to perform well the ordinary duties of thy station in life, therefore thou art inexcusable.” (Rom. ii. 1.) Thou art inexcusable because thou didst pay more attention to amusements than to thy prayers, thou wast more mindful of thy studies than of the holy sacrifice of the Mass; and because thou hast served the great God of Heaven for an eternal reward with less eagerness than seculars, for a paltry gain, serve the world. Alas, O God! “searcher of hearts and reins” (Psalm vii. 10), what shall I, miserable sinner, say then? I cannot give one answer for a thousand accusations (Job ix. 3), and “if I would justify myself my own mouth shall condemn me; if I would show myself innocent He shall prove me wicked” (Job ix. 20); my own works shall condemn me—I feel shame and sorrow. I resolve henceforth to lead a more perfect life—grant me pardon and remission before the day of reckoning.

Thirdly. The hasty performance of our daily actions entails a greater and longer punishment. Oh ! what will your terror be at Judgment to find that by so many labors you have merited torments instead of rewards, and that all your actions in which you so often gloried, and preferred yourself to others, are, on account of the imperfect manner in which they were performed, mere chaff in the eyes of God, and destined to the flames of Purgatory. Labor and sorrow, whether we be willing to endure them or not, are the invariable concomitants of the life of every mortal. How lamentable then if, after having endured the miseries and afflictions of life (which certainly are neither few nor light), we deserve only Purgatory for neglecting to fulfil perfectly our ordinary duties. O unfortunate religious ! what shall you think when, upon entering Purgatory, you shall behold yourself in the midst of fire, darkness and torments ; and this for the very actions by the perfect performance of which you could so easily have avoided its flames, and augmented your glory in Heaven ? If you be wise, now is the acceptable time ; while the days of salvation last provide diligently for yourself. Oh ! could a soul in Purgatory return to the world, how zealously would it not perform its daily actions ! You are therefore guilty of an unpardonable cruelty towards yourself if you do not act as this soul would do, and you shall one day bitterly deplore your neglect.

AFFECTIONS.

O God of virtues! justly with the Prophet Job "I fear all my works." (Job ix. 28.) "My days have been swifter than a post, they have fled away and have not seen good." (Job ix. 25.) "My days were consumed in vanity." (Psalm lxxvi. 33.) After so many years of life, I have not been able to show any marks of virtue, but "am consumed in my wickedness." (Wisdom v. 13.) "My works are unprofitable works, and my thoughts are unprofitable thoughts." (Is. lix. 6, 7.) I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength without cause and in vain (Is. xlix. 4), I feel the darkness of that night coming upon me "when no man can work" (St. John ix. 4), and when time shall be no more to amass those immense gains, and to avoid those dreadful evils. I repent, full of shame and sorrow. O Lord! whose works are all exceeding good (Eccl. xxxix. 21), grant that henceforth I may perform only good actions and these well, to wit, with a pure intention and with becoming fervor. Ah! by a thousand titles I am Thine, for Thou hast formed me from the womb to be Thy servant. (Is. xlix. 5.) Accursed, therefore, be the actions which shall be performed for another end than the love of Thee. And as it is not becoming that the works which are done for Thee, Supreme Lord, should be performed negligently; put Thyself as a seal upon my heart, that I may serve Thee for pure

love; put Thyself "as a seal upon my arm" (Cant. viii. 6), that I may henceforth serve Thee fervently, by performing my daily actions perfectly.

PRACTICAL CONCLUSION.

The fruit will be a great exactitude in performing the daily actions required in our state of life. That our actions may be done well, this exactitude comprises three qualities. They must be performed: 1st, with a pure intention; 2dly, with becoming and continued fervor; 3dly, at the time prescribed—thus we shall do what God wills, how and when He wills it; which is the shortest way to the highest perfection. The following rules will aid in the accomplishment of this: 1st, to select from approved authors the method of performing our daily actions according to the rules of sanctity. 2d, strictly to observe the prescribed order of the day, for what is done in order is also done properly. 3d, after every action, particularly when it is of long duration, to examine ourselves with sorrow and purpose of amendment as to the faults committed during its performance. 4th, to perform every action as if it were the last of our lives.

*Consideration.*

## ON RECOLLECTION.

## POINT I.

## THE EVILS OF A DISTRACTED MIND.

“If any one abide not in Me, he shall be cast forth as a branch, and shall wither, and they shall gather him up and cast him into the fire, and he burneth.” (St. John xv. 6.)

These words declare the three evils of a distracted mind. The first is a weakness and inability to enter into one’s self. “He shall be cast forth.” For as the branch cut from the vine is thrown over the wall by the vine-dresser without any probability of its being ever looked after, so also the soul engrossed with external things is cast by the Heavenly Father from the bosom of His special Providence, and it will only with the greatest difficulty again revert.

Nor should this surprise us. Such a soul is seldom present to itself, and more seldom present to God. Blind to heavenly manifestations, deaf to divine impulses, always rebellious to grace, it gradually becomes altogether earthly and carnal. It thinks on nothing but vanities, relishes only the things of earth, desires only



what is agreeable to the senses. Its memory is like a public market or highway, a thoroughfare for all sorts of thoughts and imaginations. Its understanding is like a house with open doors and windows, to which there is free access and egress to all temptations, to the most foolish ideas and errors. Its will is like a ball which the tumultuous motions of the wind keep twirling to and fro. Lastly, the Meditations, the offering up of the Holy Sacrifice, the recitation of the Divine Office, communions, exanens and confessions are but a tissue of distractions, a sink of imperfections, a downright lethargy; consequently it follows that, defiled with these stains, exposed on every side to the illusions of the enemy, it is brought at last to immediate danger of a greater fall. It is true that at intervals unhappy religious will see and acknowledge their calamity. Wearied in the paths of sensuality, loathed by creatures, full of disgust they desire to enter into themselves; but as this cannot be done without a special grace (and God with avenging severity usually denies or at least delays it), banished by the world, repulsed by Heaven, and frightened at themselves, they suffer a hard but just exile from their own hearts. "He shall be cast forth."

The second evil is dryness of heart and blindness of mind, coupled with a very great disgust for holy things. "He shall wither." As the branch cut from the vine withers away, so also such a soul separated by dissipation from

the mystical vine of Christ dries up altogether. At the most endearing mysteries of faith, in the midst of the delights of the Blessed Sacrament, under the very morning dew of meditation, it remains harder than flint; neither does Heaven attract it, nor Hell terrify it much, nor does the tribunal of God cause it great anxiety. It meditates or reads without feeling or without pious emotion the eternal truths which are apt to move even stony hearts; it is altogether stupefied in respect of heavenly things, and alive to earthly things alone. In the understanding there is nothing but darkness, in the will a bitter dryness, in the conscience nothing but remorse, in the whole soul the tumult of the passions threatening an entire dereliction of the service of God. "He shall wither."

The third evil lies in the manifold chastisements with which a distracted soul is punished. St Augustine says, "The branch belongs either to the vine or to the fire." If it is not on the vine, it shall be in the fire; that is to say, a soul either must adhere to God by recollection, or it shall burn in the flames of temptations and of afflictions here, and hereafter of Purgatory. Vain thoughts and wicked imaginations shall run to and fro in such minds "like sparks among the reeds." At one time they will burn with envy, at another with lust, and then again with anger. Very soon they shall heap upon their heads hot coals of murmurings and detractions.

They shall be thrown in the furnace of various afflictions. The dissipated mind is like to a wasp, which, after leaving its little cell, flies about terror-stricken in the closed chamber, and strikes with all its might against the wall. Hence it happens that, hurt by jests and witticisms, stung by personal injuries and affronts, they fall into a gloomy state of mind, become very melancholy, full of bitterness and vexation, and drink only gall where they should suck honey. Lastly they shall be consigned to the purging flames, there to endure most excruciating torments and for a long time. For as their daily actions are nothing but fuel to increase the flames, there shall they burn until they have paid the last farthing. These are the three evils of a distracted mind threatened by our Lord Himself.

O great God, "in whom we live, and we move, and we are" (Acts xvii. 28), whose "eyes are upon the ways of men; and He considereth all their steps." (Job xxxiv. 21.) There is not one moment in which Thou dost not remember me with fatherly care and affection; and I live whole days forgetful of Thee and Thy presence. "Henceforth, if I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand be forgotten; let my tongue cleave to my mouth if I do not remember thee." (Ps. cxxxvi. 5, 6.)

## POINT II.

## THE ADVANTAGES OF RECOLLECTION.

1st. Recollection of mind preserves us from many offences against God, and from great weariness. For this thought "God sees me" is the most efficacious means to withhold us from every fault. Since recollection consists principally in such a thought, or in a watchful attention to the fact that God is everywhere present, it is evident that it keeps one free from innumerable sins.

Besides, the three sources of recollection, viz.: the keeping to one's cell, the observance of silence, the avoiding of news, reunions and too many distracting occupations, preserve the soul from a world of weariness, melancholy, vexation and afflictions, which are always created by the neglect of recollection, and by too free a manner of acting with others. "For where men are, there also are vices;" where there is the free use of the tongue, there also words fly like arrows, inflicting wounds upon the soul which, when we enter our chamber, chafe, sadden and afflict us. It is certain, therefore, that recollection of mind delivers us from a great many sins and vexations, and prevents much sadness and weariness.

2d. It is the quickest and most efficacious means to acquire a high degree of perfection, Perfection consists in the exact fulfilment of our

daily actions; for by performing them well we do what God wills, and in the manner He wills it. What makes us more prompt and ready to perform them thus than recollection of mind, which consists in affectionate attention to the Supreme Judge? "For we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the proper things of the body, according as he hath done, whether it be good or evil." (2 Cor. v. 10.)

No one has ever arrived at perfection without recollection, and the fonder and more desirous one is of it, the holier and more perfect will he be—for as, according to the teaching of the Fathers, the solitude of the heart is the mother and nurse of virtue, without it no degree of perfect virtue will ever be attained or preserved. It is evident, therefore, that recollection is the most efficacious means to acquire perfection.

3d. Recollection is an earthly heaven, for the recollected soul does in some measure what is done by the blessed in Heaven. It continually beholds and loves God everywhere present; and like those blessed ones it tastes a happy joy, being exempt from all care and fear, and immersed, as it were, in an ocean of delights. Tranquillity, heavenly consolations, fervor, joy and confident security are the fruits of such happiness; and as the angels sent on earth by the Most High bring their beatitude with them, so, also, such a soul, though occupied with business, carries always

about it, as it were, a portable heaven, in which it never ceases to contemplate and to love the Divine Majesty. It follows, therefore, that a recollected soul experiences on earth a foretaste of the joys of Heaven.

4th. Recollection is the source of the most excellent graces, for it infuses into the soul that incomprehensible union, familiarity and communing with God, the delight and inestimable value of which no one knows except one who has experienced it. From it also proceeds the tacit testimony of the Holy Ghost whispering to this soul words of consolation, inspiring it with a firm hope of having obtained the pardon of its sins. This sweet assurance of being in the state of grace, and in the enjoyment of the divine friendship, invariably produces a happy peace, a consolation and joy altogether heavenly. Hence also arise wonderful facility, generous alacrity in the practice of virtue, propensity to the things of Heaven, disgust for everything earthly, very great tenderness and purity of conscience, which cause such a soul to fly from even the shadow of sin, and, lastly, perfect indifference to everything, so that it seeks nothing and fears nothing. In short, a recollected mind is constantly favored with innumerable heavenly inspirations, and the clearest and most sublime knowledge of eternal truths. The Holy Ghost becomes, as it were, the teacher, that never ceases to instruct and to dissipate all doubts and



reveal what is hidden, intimating what should be done, showing what should be avoided, cherishing and protecting the soul, as a provident mother does her offspring. To conclude, recollection is the means by which sins are banished and tedium is overcome; it is the mirror in which heavenly rays are concentrated; it is the channel through which divine graces flow; it is the principle of sanctity, the paradise of joys, and the nurse of interior peace. (Phil. iv. 7.)

O blessed recollection! thou art truly an infinite treasure to men. (Wisdom vii. 14.) Oh, how prudent are they who give everything and spare no trouble to possess thee, but how senseless are they who live regardless of such a good! How great, therefore, has been my folly! I am become as a dove that is decoyed, not having a heart. (Osee vii. 11.) I have allowed my heart to go freely among creatures; but now "when I return to Him again, I shall seek Him ten times as much." (Baruch iv. 28.) In the innermost recesses of my heart I will build a cell, and enclosed therein, dead to the world, I will live only for God.

The practical conclusion of this consideration should be henceforth a frequent and constant exercise of the presence of God—that is, a continual and affectionate attention to His immense Majesty ever present within us. The means to carry out this resolution are: 1st. To remain in your room. 2d. To withdraw yourself from



superfluous talking, and to love silence. 3d. To shun as much as is consistent with your duty such occupations as have a tendency to distract the mind. 4th. Frequently throughout the day to excite in yourself acts of faith and love of God, who is present in the depths of your soul.

## SELF-EXAMINATION.

*On the Practice of the Particular Examen.*

On a par with the perfection of our daily works and recollection of mind, the practice of the particular examen is one of the principal means of acquiring solid virtue, and justly so, for it produces the most excellent results, and is the speediest and most efficacious means of extirpating vices and implanting virtues. This is the reason why its practice is recommended with so much earnestness by the holy Fathers and by spiritual writers, not only to those who begin to walk in the ways of sanctity, but also to those who have a long time trodden therein.

1st. Inquire what subjects you are in the habit of choosing, whether or not fit ones for the particular examen. Then see what is your predominant passion, also what is the defect which gives you most trouble, which is the root of other defects, which is a hindrance to greater perfection, and which brings you nearer to mortal sin.

2d. After these faults have been corrected, the subjects of the particular examen are the per-

fection of our daily actions, fervor in prayer, recollection of mind and purity of intention, in order that you may conform yourself in all things to the rules of true sanctity.

3d. After this you will labor particularly to acquire the virtue of which you stand most in need, and which certain circumstances indicate is of all others the most necessary for you.

4th. The imperfection by which offence and trouble are given to others is especially to be corrected by this method. You should not, however, be wholly occupied in correcting these external faults. For as all the glory of the king's daughter (or the soul) is within (Psalm xliv. 14), all your labor should first be directed to govern its internal motions, according to the rules of rectitude, so that all your rebellious appetites be entirely conquered. Therefore, examine whether you have thus far observed all this, and decide what you will do in future.

But, that you may with greater certainty reap the desired fruit, you must above all observe the following rules:

1st. The root of the disease is to be carefully sought after, and when it has been discovered, every effort should at once be made to eradicate it.

2d. This examination is made on only one thing, so that the particular vice you purpose to conquer by this means ought not to be attacked as a whole, but divided as it were into parts,

which you must gradually assail and defeat and thus overcome the whole.

3d. The subject of this exercise should not be changed. They who allow themselves to pass lightly from one subject to another make a great mistake. Yet the primary subject may, according to circumstances and the disposition of the mind, be interrupted for a short time and be exchanged for another in order to avoid tedium; provided, however, that after some weeks one returns with renewed vigor to the purpose, and wages war more bitterly and energetically against the mortal enemy. See how far you have acquired a thorough knowledge of these rules.

Besides this, examine yourself as to the method of performing this exercise, which comprises these rules:

1st. This spiritual warfare is to be commenced with a serious, fervent and very firm resolution of amendment, which is to be made every morning and renewed at noon. This resolution of the mind is not to extend over the whole course of life, lest, frightened by the number of years, you despair of correction; but only from one half day to another, that, by this very shortness of the interval, you may be more powerfully animated to pursue with constancy the work you have undertaken.

2d. During the day reasonable care should be taken to remember and foster this resolution by

foreseeing the occasion wherein you are to put it into execution, by avoiding the danger of falling, by asking of God the grace to fulfil your resolution, and by making an act of contrition as often as you fail.

3d. Twice every day, at noon and in the evening, you should examine your conscience, and during these examinations you should inquire what faults you have committed, and after having excited sorrow for them, and again promised amendment, you should mark the number of these faults in a little book kept for that purpose, so that you may compare the number committed in the afternoon with that of the morning; to-day with yesterday; the present with the past week; that by such comparison you may learn whether you have made any progress, or whether you remain miserably fixed in your old habits. Reflect now upon the care and exactness with which you have up to the present performed this exercise, or, at least, with which you are determined to perform it in future.

Oh, what a severe account you will have to render before the great tribunal for having neglected this practice! Will you allow yourself by your indolence to be surpassed in an affair which concerns the salvation of your soul, and your progress in solid virtue by the very merchants who with such great care mark down in their account-books and daily ledgers their gains and losses? They will condemn the carelessness

with which you have kept your accounts in this spiritual business. There shall arise so many happy inhabitants of Heaven, who, raised on high by means of these little books of the particular examen, have reached such a height of sanctity and bliss. They shall arise, I say, and put you to shame for your supine neglect. Alas! how great then will be your confusion, when you see that these merchants have done more for mammon than you for God; when you shall see that you have lost so much time in useless note-taking, and have not employed one single moment to note down the faults of your soul, that you have made light of this excellent and most useful exercise, on the plea that it was a pious little practice suited to novices: that, after spending so many years in religion, you have not by it corrected a single fault or acquired a single virtue! Ah! if you be wise do now what if neglected will fill you with sorrow; if done, with joy.

“O Lord! let the day perish, and let it not be counted in the days of the year” (Job iii. 6) in which I shall neglect to mark down my faults, and to make this profitable comparison. I am determined with the help of Thy grace that no day shall henceforth pass without this exercise. I will prepare a little book, so that by this means, constantly practised, I may completely root out the vices of my soul, and implant therein all virtues.

**Meditation 2.****ON FERVOR IN PRAYER.**

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**POINT I.****EVIL RESULTS OF NEGLECTED PRAYER.**

The first is that there is no progress in virtue. One's advancement in perfection is in proportion to one's ardor in prayer. Where there is very little fervor in prayer there is little or no progress in sanctity. St. Climacus measured the success of the whole day by the morning's meditation, for as the meditation is so the day is, and the whole tenor of one's life. As the effect of fervent prayer is a certain sweet propensity to what is good, accompanied by a quiet recollection, quickening and perfecting the actions of the day, and softly wafting the soul onward to sanctity, so the consequences of tepid prayer are a disrelish of divine things, an extreme languor in what is good, an outpouring of the soul on external things, and finally blindness, disquiet and dryness. Thus it happens that all good resolutions vanish, wicked affections spring up anew, temptations become stronger, and not only the edifice of perfection which one has begun to erect ceases to rise, but also the portion already built crumbles away; so that by the course of



tepidity we fall from rectitude more in one day than we had progressed therein in many months. St. Chrysostom aptly remarks, "When I see religious remiss in prayer then I think this of their souls: they have very little virtue and are adorned with very few divine gifts." So one's diligence in prayer corresponds with his amendment of life and fervor.

Alas! my progress in virtue is very small, because I pray either tepidly or not at all. Grant, therefore, O Lord! that every day with becoming fervor my eyes to Thee may prevent the morning that I may meditate on Thy words. (Psalm cxviii. 148.)

The second is that souls are not gained to God. Though one were gifted with the greatest talents and adornments of nature, if fervor of prayer be wanting, "He is become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal" (1 Cor. xiii. 1); that is to say, a mere sound with the echo of which everything disappears. It is a beautiful musical instrument, but there is in it no melody. The tool without the artist's hand is useless; though the pen be very good it will form no letters unless it be guided by the writer. We are God's coadjutors and the instruments chosen by Him to procure the salvation of our neighbor; the link by which we are united to the hand of God is prayer.

Whosoever, therefore, neglects it will make no progress in so difficult an undertaking as the saving of souls. Although one of his hearers be



converted or advanced in virtue this is not to be attributed either to his eloquence or to his learning, but to the prayers of others, and to the merits of the Order of which he is a member. We shall find no one to have been renowned for bringing sinners to repentance or for teaching with great success who was not prayerful.

Although there are many laborers in the vineyard of the Lord there is but little harvest of souls, because the fervent use of this exercise is so rarely practised. Formerly one person alone sufficed to convert whole provinces, nowadays several are unable to convert one town. The reason is evident: they preach much but pray little, and this tepidly; therefore the influence and the fruit of their labors are small. Let those who desire to be instruments for the conversion of sinners be fervent in prayer; for prayer is the condition without which the graces necessary for this end will not be granted. Spiritual writers justly conclude that they who have to save souls must pray more than study. "Many make it their aim rather to know much than live well, therefore they are often deceived and bring forth little or no fruit." (Foll. of Christ, i. 3, 4.)

O Guardian Angel! obtain for me the grace not to place any barrier in the way of others' salvation, and thus not to increase immensely the account which I shall have to render to the Divine Judge.

The third is the imminent danger of falling away from sanctifying grace, and of even quitting religious life.

That religious who neglect prayer are not far from falling into great sins and losing their sacred calling is a truth which the damned in Hell and the dying from their sick-beds with one voice proclaim. The reason is obvious: in order to persevere in the state of grace and the religious vocation, a special aid is required, as the Council of Trent teaches. (Sess. vi. Can. 22.) But prayer, as St. Augustine says, is the channel by which the heavenly supplies flow to us, and the condition without which they shall not be granted. It is, therefore, a necessary consequence that where prayer fails perseverance also fails; and no wonder, for meditation preserves the light which illumines the soul, and exhibits to the understanding the malice and enormity of sin and the rigor of Divine Justice. It fosters motions by which the will shuns evil and embraces good, otherwise darkness prevails in the intellect and coldness in the will; consequently Lancicius with truth writes thus: "All religious who fall into mortal sin, or who forsake their holy state have either omitted or shortened their meditations or performed them negligently and only for appearance's sake." Let the fall of others make us cautious; we also may sin mortally, and lose our vocation.

O God! into what a precipice has my sloth in

meditation thrown me! But I adore the hand that brings me back. Henceforth "I will meditate on Thee in the morning." (Psalm lxii. 7.) It is my firm resolution. Let my prayer be directed as incense in Thy sight. (Psalm cxl. 2.)

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## POINT II.

### THE ADVANTAGES OF FERVENT PRAYER.

1st. It banishes evils. Ignorance of heavenly things, erroneous maxims and foul thoughts are the great bane of the intellect; half-resolutions, sinful affections and depraved desires are the bane of the will. But meditation dispels those and represses these, since it imbues the mind with eternal truths, and fortifies the will by acts of virtue. Moreover, it expels tepidity, the pernicious pest of the will, removes the danger of losing grace and religious vocation. In short, it banishes a whole host of evils. Oh! what a severe account will you not have to give one day, for having out of mere indolence neglected so easy a means of freeing yourself from innumerable evils! O meditation! O powerful remedy against every malady of the soul! O how late have I learned to esteem thee! But in the future thou shalt be my chief care, the delight of my soul.

2d. Fervent meditation accumulates graces. It is by this heavenly chain that we draw to ourselves the gifts of God; by it we are admitted to

the intimate familiarity of the Blessed Trinity, which is in some degree a heaven on earth, and a foretaste of the Heaven above—giving to the soul a peace that surpasses all understanding. Who can explain the light of the mind and the joy of heart with which a soul given to prayer is flooded! Ah! one little drop of this consolation infinitely exceeds all the satisfactions of the senses, for which, O hapless soul! you neglect prayer. You acknowledge this, why not then reform?

3d. Prayer in various and wonderful ways perfects the soul, for 1st: it makes saints of those who are devoted to it. "By no other means," says St. Chrysostom, "do we make more progress in sanctity than by the practice of prayer." 2d. It unites the soul with the Divine Word; for by it, as William of Auvergne teaches, the human intellect becomes the true spouse of the Uncreated Truth. 3d. Those who are given to much prayer, as St. Bernard tells us, are the chamberlains of Heaven, to whom is given the golden key to the Heart of God, and its treasures.

4th. Such persons are, as St. Climacus says, like to angels; for that which is the employment of the angels in Heaven is their occupation on earth. Justly exclaims St. Augustine, "What is more excellent than prayer? What is more profitable to our life? What is sweeter to the soul? What is more sublime in our whole religion?"

And nevertheless—"Be astonished, O ye heavens" (Jer. ii. 12)—many have nothing at heart less than mental prayer; for nothing else have they less time than for meditation; there is no business so unimportant, no allurements so low, as not to make them omit, shorten or languidly perform this exercise. The illustrious Suarez preferred to lose all his knowledge rather than omit one of the seven hours which he every day spent in contemplation. And we, alas! trifle away the hour of meditation through mere laziness, that we may indulge in sleep; and this we do, although we see clearly the evil results of neglected prayer, and the advantages of fervent prayer; although we know that prayer is the mother of virtues, the support of discipline, the soul's protection and bulwark, the ruin of which is followed by danger to grace, vocation and salvation.

O senseless being that I am, to have been disgusted with the heavenly manna, to have hungered after the flesh-pots of Egypt! who with injury to my health have devoted so many days and months to profane science, and who have not profitably spent one hour in order to acquire by meditation the science of the saints; and even of this short period I have sometimes robbed God that I might give it to study. To talk, to walk, to play, to sleep I had abundant time, but to think on eternity, on the soul, on God, I had none. To feed my body two or three

times every day I had plenty of time, but to refresh and strengthen my immortal soul for a short period by holy meditation, alas! I had not a particle of time. Ah! with what great reason may I not now justly fear, lest one day all grace may completely fail me. Henceforth, my way of acting shall be better. Accursed then be the action, buried in darkness be the science, changed into bitterness be the pleasure, for which after this I deprive myself of the light and consolation that are to be obtained by meditation.

O Divine and ever-merciful Saviour! who once didst drive out of the temple those who bought and sold therein, banish from my heart whatever may interfere with so necessary an exercise. Expel the sleepy languor, the vain and importunate distractions of the mind; grant that in future my meditation may be worthy to be offered to Thy Divine Majesty, by the "four and twenty ancients" "in golden vials, full of odors which are the prayers of the saints." (Apoc. v. 8.)

#### PRACTICAL CONCLUSION.

Resolve firmly to make every day a reverent, fervent and entire meditation. Reverent in regard to the posture of the body, fervent in regard to the efforts of the mind, and entire in regard to the duration of the prescribed time.

#### THE FOLLOWING ARE THE HELPS TO PRAYER.

1st. A frequent and attentive reading of the method of meditating well.

2d. A diligent, proximate and remote preparation of the mind for meditation.

3d. A short review after the meditation, in which we seek out the faults committed, and consider the fruit to be reaped.

4th. Always a prompt and cheerful rising in the morning, according to the admonition of Ecclesiasticus, "At the time of rising be not slack." (Eccles. xxxii. 15.) "And they that seek Him early shall find a blessing." (Eccles. xxxii. 18.)



THIRD DAY.

## THIRD DAY.

On the First Day we endeavored to remove the principal impediments to the attainment of solid virtue; on the Second we indicated the most effectual means to acquire it. On this, the Third Day, we bring forward the motives which will induce us to strive to attain it, among which the following seem to be the most important:

1st. The teachings of faith concerning the excellence of solid virtue.

2d. The hope of the benefits to be derived from its practice.

3d. God's love requiring and claiming as a right this solidity. This last point is preceded by an examen on the sure signs of our love for God. This last day corresponds with what spiritual writers call the "Unitive Way."

## Meditation 1.

### WHAT FAITH TEACHES CONCERNING THE EXCELLENCE OF SOLID VIRTUE.

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#### POINT I.

The excellence of solid virtue is exceedingly great; this faith teaches.

1st. A thing has necessarily just the value which God attributes to it, and whatever He prefers to all things else must doubtless be the most excellent. Therefore, "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord" (Jer. xxii. 29); hear the judgment with which the Almighty, the infinitely wise God, who cannot be deceived, passes on the excellence of solid virtue. Behold! thus saith the Lord through Solomon: "The purchasing thereof is better than the merchandise of silver; and her fruit than the chiefest and purest gold: she is more precious than all riches, and all the things that are desired are not to be compared with her." (Prov. iii. 14.) "All gold in comparison with her is as a little sand, and silver in respect to her shall be counted as clay." (Wisdom vii. 9.) "I esteemed riches nothing in comparison with her, neither did I compare unto her any precious stone." (Wisdom vii. 8.) This is what faith teaches.

2d. It is to be preferred not only to the riches of the earth, but to the higher gifts of nature. For thus saith the Lord through Jeremias the Prophet: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, and let not the strong man glory in his strength, but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me." (Jer. ix. 23.) Consequently, the practical knowledge of God and of one's self, in which virtue consists, is to be preferred before all human prudence and statesmanship, the eloquence of the greatest orators of Greece and Rome, the bravery of heroes, the glory of kings, the vigorous health of the body, before kingdoms and thrones, before the highest honors of the world, before sceptres and crowns. (Wisdom vii. 8.) This is what faith teaches.

3d. Even the gift of prophecy, of tongues, of miracles, of the infused knowledge of all things, of the intuition of mysteries; all these gifts, which, in the opinion of men, are the most precious things in this life, are, in the judgment of God, nothing when compared with the lowest degree of sanctifying grace; and yet this is only the commencement of solid virtue. Of this St. Paul assures us, writing thus to the Corinthians: "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal; and if I should know all the mysteries and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, so that I could re-

move mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing; and if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." (1 Cor. xiii. 1.) This is what faith teaches.

A proof of this is that Lucifer himself, with all his knowledge, strength, skill, and other natural endowments, is only a vile and wretched being, because he is without virtue and grace. God seems to have left these gifts to this haughty and reprobate spirit, on purpose to declare openly to the world how worthless they are in His sight when unaccompanied by sanctity. Moreover, these gifts are often bestowed profusely, even on the most corrupt sinners, in order to teach us, that without virtue all things are of no value in the sight of God. And, therefore, according to the judgment of Heaven, "An humble husbandman that serveth God is better than a proud philosopher, who, neglecting himself, considers the course of the Heavens." (Foll. of Christ, i. 2, 1.)

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## POINT II.

Between this faith and our actions there is an immense discrepancy. Our mode of life proves this, as a few words will suffice to demonstrate. We believe that the obligation of acquiring solid virtue is the principal, the greatest, and only

necessary one; and yet this is the very thing which is often entirely neglected.

The science of the saints is the only treasure esteemed by Heaven; and yet we seek it with no greater eagerness than we do the knowledge of mathematics. Even one ray of Divine light which illumines the mind of an humble illiterate man is incomparably greater than the perfect comprehension of all books, greater even than all the natural science of the demons. We believe this, and nevertheless we condemn the inspirations of grace, and mourn the loss with as little regret as we would that of the meanest trifle.

What folly! For the attainment of profane knowledge, which, perchance, we shall never require, we toil day and night, even with detriment to our health; in the pursuit of heavenly wisdom alone do we weary. Forgetful of eternity, we philosophize about time; we analyze material light, and leave the soul in darkness; we learnedly explain quantity and quality, but care little to inquire what we are before God. Oh, how great is our blindness! Oh, if men would use as much diligence in rooting out vices and planting virtues as they do in proposing questions there would not be so great evils committed, nor scandals among the people, nor so much relaxation in monasteries. (Foll. of Christ, i. 3, 5.) But because they choose to be great rather than to be humble, therefore they

are lost in their own imaginations. (Foll. of Christ, i. 3, 6.)

And what, pray, when we are breathing our last, will all these sciences profit, which during the whole course of our life we have acquired to the prejudice of sanctity, with so much labor, so many watchings, and such anxiety?

What benefit will it be to us to have read so many books, taken so many notes, and made so many extracts, unless it be to deplore all the more bitterly our folly for having wasted our strength and rest to obtain that which is not of the least advantage for procuring a happy eternity; and to have, on the other hand, foolishly neglected that alone which would have been our only consolation at the last hour? "Verily, when the day of judgment comes, we shall not be examined as to what we have read, but what we have done; nor how learnedly we have spoken, but how religiously we have lived." (Foll. of Christ, i. 3, 5.)

Is it not madness to prepare so carefully what one shall say in answer to his opponent in a public disputation, and never to reflect what one shall answer to the Divine Judge "in the day of the wrath of the Lord"? (Lam. ii. 22.) O wretched soul! if by the loss of one degree of virtue you could acquire the wisdom of Solomon, with his riches and kingly power, you would be exchanging the most precious gem for a glass bead. This you believe, and yet every



day you neglect to acquire many such degrees, and expend all your energies on the perishable things of this life.

O Lord! to what are we come? Behold, a temporal loss is greatly bewailed; for a small gain men labor and toil; but the loss of the soul is little thought of, and rarely ever strikes the mind. That which is of little or no profit takes up our thoughts, and that which is above all things necessary is negligently passed over, for the whole man sinks down into outward things, and unless he quickly recover himself he willingly continues immersed therein. (Foll. of Christ, iii. 44, 2.)

For a scanty substance men run a great way, but to acquire perfection they will scarcely lift a foot from the ground. A petty gain is sought after; for a single coin men sometimes shamefully quarrel; but alas! for *Solid Virtue*, for an unchangeable good, for an inestimable reward, for the highest honor and never-fading glory, they loathe to undergo even a slight fatigue. Blush then, thou slothful, querulous servant, that they are actually more ready to labor for death than thou for life. (Foll. of Christ, iii. 3, 3 and 4.) Truly there is an immense difference between our faith and our life. What Hindoo would think this state of things possible among the faithful, much less among the religious?

AFFECTIONS.

O God of truth! I believe that the excellence of solid virtue is immense, and that it infinitely surpasses all the gifts of mind and fortune. I believe that the least Divine illumination infinitely exceeds all profane science; that one single act of piety infinitely excels all natural gifts; that the smallest ray of grace is far more precious than all the treasures of earth; that the lowest degree of glory is much greater than all the honors of the world. This, I say, I believe firmly, without the least doubt, because Thou, O Eternal Truth, hast vouchsafed to reveal it to us. "I believe, Lord; help Thou my unbelief." (St. Mark ix. 23.)

Thou knowest, O Lord! and the sad experience of our daily faults tells us, how weak our faith is when occasions are offered for putting it in practice; for I must confess that I also am in the number of those whose tenor of life is continually at variance with faith; who, it is true, believe that the excellence of solid virtue is infinitely greater than all natural endowments, and yet practically value it very little. Oh, how great one day will be my astonishment when the Divine Judge with thundering voice shall proclaim to me, "Out of thy own mouth I judge thee, thou wicked servant!" (St. Luke xix. 22.) See, thus have you believed, and thus have you lived!

Grant, O God! that we may at last profess by our lives the faith which our tongue speaketh. Allow not that the belief I have in the excellence of perfection be contradicted entirely by my life; for then my credence in and my knowledge of solid virtue would be my greater condemnation, and would make me deserve a greater punishment in Hell, or, at least, in Purgatory.

PRACTICAL CONCLUSION.

The fruit is a most efficacious resolve to put in practice this most important constitution of St. Ignatius, which says: "Let all who have given themselves to the Society apply to the study of solid and perfect virtues and of spiritual things, and account these of greater moment than either learning or other natural or human gifts; for they are the interior things from which force must flow to the exterior, for the end proposed to us." (Summary of the Constitutions, 16.)

The means to effect this are as follows:

1st. Frequent acts of faith in these practical truths of our religion: I believe that solid virtue is of greater moment than learning or other natural gifts; I believe that the study of perfection is of all affairs the greatest and the only necessary one; I believe that all is vanity but loving God and serving Him alone.

2d. A firm resolution to fulfil every day the customary spiritual exercises fervently, entirely and perseveringly; to hold as sacred the time

set apart for them, and to complete carefully, and as soon as possible, whatever may have been wanting to their completeness.

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**Consideration.**

WHAT BENEFITS WE MAY HOPE TO  
DERIVE FROM SOLID VIRTUE.

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POINT I

Those only who zealously pursue the path of perfection lead a happy life.

1st. They are happy on account of the heavenly consolations with which they are filled. Oh! who can explain the tender and sweet affections, the most pure joys of that soul which, intimately united to its Beloved by the bond of love, can exclaim with the spouse in the Canticles, "I have found Him whom my soul loveth." (Cant. iii. 4.) Ah! we should be a St. Philip Neri, a St. Teresa, a St. Stanislas, to understand these delights. How very great they are is proved by St. Anthony, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Ignatius, St. Francis Xavier, and innumerable others who at times were inundated by such a torrent of heavenly sweetness that they were unable to bear these delights any longer and asked God to moderate them. They confessed that they im-

mensely surpassed all the pleasures of the world and of sense, and that all the sufferings, labors and difficulties, undergone for years in the practice of virtue, are compensated a hundred-fold by even one such drop of heavenly consolation.

2d. They enjoy an ineffable, and, as it were, a heavenly peace, for in them the two sources of all trouble and perturbation, self-will and self-love, are dried up.

Experience proves that this two-fold monster is the origin of all the interior rebellions of the soul; for what is it that raises in us such frequent and violent storms when anything occurs contrary to our wishes and inclinations, when something which we wish done is neglected, or when our honor is impugned or our bodily comfort disturbed? But souls given to virtue having put off their own will breathe only the Divine will, as we breath the air.

Since they have freely renounced all self-will, self-esteem and the pleasures of sense; since to desire nothing created is their only wish and endeavor; since they have full control of themselves and full mastery over all their desires, they are very far from this double source of all perturbation, and dwell securely, as it were, in the palace itself of peace and rest. Besides, as nothing in the world occurs without the will or permission of God; and as such souls will nothing else but what God wills; therefore, nothing ever happens to them but what they wish. And

since they seek to be despised, and love crosses and afflictions, they are never troubled by contempt nor afflicted in adversity; therefore, can never lose their tranquillity of mind. Thus it happens, as St. Chrysostom said (Hom. 20 on Matt.), that, dwelling yet on earth, they live already, as it were, in Heaven.

3d. Lastly, they are, in a special manner, cherished, defended and governed by a singular Providence of God. The Almighty, with peculiar affection, watches over the interests of those who are constantly laboring with earnest endeavor to acquire perfection; for if the Heavenly Father provides with such care even for the sparrows that, without His Divine will, not one of them shall fall on the ground (St. Matt. x. 29), how much more will He protect, direct and foster you, O faithful souls, you, I say, whom He has loved with an everlasting love (Jer. xxxi. 3.), whom He hath drawn and holds attached to Himself, "with the cords of Adam, with the bands of love" (Osee xl. 4), whom "He has graven in His hands." (Is. xlix. 16.)

He carries you in His bosom "as the nurse is wont to carry the little infant." (Numbers xi. 12.) "He keeps you as the apple of His eye." (Deut. xxxii. 10.)

He removes from before you every stumbling-block, destroys the snares of temptation, and directs the various events of your lives with such infinite wisdom that all things co-operate in you



for good, even your very falls. "Know that to them that love God all things work together unto good." (Rom. viii. 28.)

Hence it comes that, free from all cares, you breathe a heavenly atmosphere, you rest sweetly on the bosom of Providence, and live in the embraces of Divine Love, a life which gives you a foretaste of that which you hope to live in Heaven. O happy indeed is the state, on this earth, of those who are solidly virtuous!

4th. We shall see better how happy the life of such persons must be, if we consider the heavenly gifts which are conferred on them. Their clear insight into the most hidden truths of our religion far surpasses that of the most subtle divines.

The eight beatitudes, which are believed by others to be great calamities, are to them a real blessedness, which they seek with all their heart. They fly, as it were, along the path of perfection with angelic swiftness. In adversity, they stand invincible with a sort of heavenly impassibility. Trusting in God, they expect and hope for everything; confiding in His grace they fear naught, and are frightened by nothing but sin.

They excel in the divine gift of prayer, in a wonderful recollection of mind, in an astonishing facility to comprehend all things appertaining to faith, and to the practice of virtue. The reason is this: they give themselves entirely to God, who likewise communicates Himself and



His gifts to them. Hence it is that such souls, even in this world, lead a very blessed life.

Indeed, O Lord! we are deprived of these graces because we are not entirely Thine. Thou withdrawest the things of Heaven, because we deny Thee those of earth. Thou art less liberal towards us, because we are too miserly towards Thee. "It is wonderful that thou wilt not, from the very bottom of thy heart, commit thyself to Me, with all things that thou canst desire or have." (Foll. of Christ, iii. 27, 1.)

"Give all for all; seek nothing; call for nothing back; stand purely and with a clean conscience before Me, and thou shalt possess Me. Then all vain imaginations shall vanish, all evil disturbances and superfluous cares. Then also immoderate fear shall forsake thee, and inordinate love shall die." (Foll. of Christ, iii. 37, 5.)

I am sorry to have acted with such base ingratitude towards Thee, O my God! I am full of confusion for having valued so little the ways of perfection. They seemed to me mean and contemptible; scarcely have I ever thought of them; but the hope of obtaining innumerable good by solid virtue, even in this life, will be henceforth a powerful motive for seeking to possess it.

## POINT II.

Those only who are anxious for perfection die peacefully.

1st. They die peacefully, because they rest, and shall ever rest, from their past labors. Such souls are filled with the greatest consolation by the very remembrance of the adversities they have gone through, of the temptations they have overcome, of the dangers they have escaped. Their whole life seems but a moment. They joyously exclaim: "All is past! past are the injuries, contempt and calumnies that we have suffered; past are the mortifications of the flesh, the restraining of the senses, the pains of sickness, and all other troubles. Past would be likewise the honors, allurements and comforts of life, if we had desired and eagerly sought after them. Of all our lives, nothing would remain but a bitter sting of conscience; whilst, on the contrary, we are now filled with joy that we have devoted them wholly to the acquirement of solid virtue; that we have not done the evil which we could have done, but the good which we were obliged to do. Oh, how great a consolation is it for us now, to have paid little attention to injuries, to have been silent under contempt, patiently to have borne persecution, to have labored much for the salvation of our neighbor, to have undergone many hardships for God!

“O blessed troubles, contempt, miseries and sufferings! O generous silence in adversities! ye opened Heaven to us, and were to us the means of greater glory! Oh, how wisely did we act in preventing by a holy life the fears which a life of tepidity would have caused us now in our last hour! Oh, how happy are we that we have avoided the anguish and grief we should suffer, had we not followed the grace that was offered to us! Ah! we could also have given our consent to that temptation; yes, we were not very far from a fall, but we resisted.

“Alas! had we indulged longer in tepidity, what should we have come to? But with the grace of God we shook it off, we have worked out our salvation, we have suffered extreme heat and cold in the vineyard of the Lord; we expect, therefore, with full confidence, the promised penny from the Heavenly Father.”

These are the death-bed sentiments of the just, who have always been devoted to virtue. Who, then, shall deny, that the passage of a pious soul from this life is very placid?

2d. They die peacefully on account of the sweet consolation which flows then into their hearts from the three following sources:

First. From the testimony of a good conscience, which assures them that they are in the state of grace; that they are the children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of Heaven; that they have fulfilled the conditions to which the just

Judge has annexed a never-fading crown of glory.

Second. From the soul's detachment from all inordinate love for created things. "Oh! what great confidence shall they have at the moment of death, who are not detained by an affection for anything in the world!" (Foll. of Christ, iii. 53, 2.)

For what could trouble such virtuous souls? Riches and honors which are to be left to others? These they have always despised. Perhaps the allurements of the senses which are now to be given up? Against these they have long ago steeled their hearts. Perhaps the body which is to be reduced into dust? This they have always treated as an enemy.

Lastly. The mere sight of the crucifix is to such religious a well-spring of joy, an anchor of trustful hope, and a pledge of eternal bliss. Holy Viaticum is for them an anticipated heaven, as they receive Him whom they desire to enjoy forever; and since they have provided themselves in time with the oil of charity, they fear not to be excluded by the Heavenly Bridegroom, but hope with confidence to be admitted to the celestial nuptials; and this confidence no temptation can disturb, no grief weaken, no horror of approaching death diminish.

Father Francis Suarez exclaimed on his deathbed, "I never thought it was so sweet to die."

Third. They die peacefully on account of their

security from future evils, whilst the fear of death, judgment and Purgatory is the cause of great anxiety to the tepid. Death puts an end to sin and suffering, and to all the miseries and imperfections of this life; it is the gate by which we enter Heaven, where, by a happy necessity, we must perpetually love God. Therefore, such religious fear not, but rather desire death. And as their conscience tells them that they have laid bare their sins by a sincere, clear and entire confession, they present themselves without the least fear before God's tribunal, of whom Holy Writ says, "His tender mercies are over all His works." (Ps. cxliv. 9.) Neither do they fear too much the penalty, which, perhaps, they may have to undergo in the flames of Purgatory, since they have wisely paid most, if not all of it, beforehand.

Consequently, it is very true that only souls that give themselves up to solid virtue live a happy life, and die a tranquil death. You are, therefore, guilty of very great folly if through sloth you suffer the loss of these excellent blessings; if you allow yourself to be deprived of a happy life and a tranquil death, for fading pleasures, for empty honors, which vanish like smoke in the air; for a little honey, which, when tasted, bringeth death; for a trifle which you refuse to sacrifice to God! Up then and act, if you are wise, and do that now which one day you shall wish to have done; and as you are

afraid to die with the tepid, live with the fervent, for death is the echo of life; if you desire to die in the Lord, live only in the Lord, and while in health give up to God everything which may fill your heart with fear and anxiety at the last hour.

#### PRACTICAL CONCLUSION.

The fruit shall be the carrying out of this resolution, "I wish to become a saint, a great saint," and in order to do so, I must begin by some heroic act to live a holier life. The means to effect this are:

- 1st. To find out the obstacle which principally retards my progress in the path of perfection.
- 2d. To extirpate the vice which reigns most powerfully in my soul.
- 3d. To sacrifice to God that which most effectually withdraws and separates me from Him.

#### SELF-EXAMINATION.

##### *The Signs of Divine Love.*

Charity, the queen of virtues, is the bond of perfection (Col. iii. 14), the fulfilling of the law (Rom. xiii. 10), and the most perfect justice. St. Augustine said, "Charity transcends by its eminent dignity faith and hope." "There remain faith, hope, charity, these three, but the greater of these is charity." (1 Cor. xiii. 13.) According to St. Bernard, "Charity is the measure of all the excellence of a soul;" hence it is that the



infernal enemy labors with all his might and craft to counterfeit this heavenly gem, by offering us self-love in place of divine love. Lest, then, you also should be deluded, I will set forth the signs of divine love; in order that, being imbued with the knowledge of what is genuine, you may the more easily distinguish and separate the precious from the vile. (Jer. xv. 19.)

The first sign of a generous love is the breaking asunder of the chains by which we are fastened with inordinate affection to some created object. Such an excellent victory gained over one's self, such an heroic act performed for God, is without doubt a sign of divine love. Arise, therefore, to generous deeds, and after having courageously assumed the mind of Abraham, while on the point of immolating his son Isaac, and already brandishing as it were the sword of the Spirit for the blow, ask yourself, and carefully examine, for instance, what person, place, office, trifle, comfort, honor, pleasure, sensible gratification, your mind clings to with greatest affection, and God more pressingly asks you to give up. Search your heart, and see which of these things God requires of you. As soon as you detect it, at once, armed with holy zeal, and animated with a hatred for yourself, drag it forth from its hiding-place, and lay it on the altar of the Cross, and there let love be the priest that will immolate this victim. Such a sacrifice is an evident sign of a genuine love for God.



Another sign of a generous love is the doing and suffering of great things for the beloved, as to work for God means both to act and to suffer. St. Bernard says: "You then love God truly, if for His love you do all the good you can; for love, if it is truly love, works great things, and if it does not work them, it is not love."

Inquire, therefore, how faithfully you listen to the divine inspirations which urge you to do or to omit this or that; with what ardor you seize the opportunities of doing some good, either to increase the glory of God, or to promote the salvation of souls.

Lastly, see what heroic act God asks of you by repeated whisperings to perform.

To be deaf under such circumstances would show a great coldness of heart and a very great want of love.

The third sign of pure love is the conformity of our will to the divine will, for, as St. Gregory says, "They love their Maker perfectly who leave self completely aside," but they who retain the principal faculty of the soul, the will, keep themselves wholly to themselves. They consequently do not love God perfectly, for it is impossible for persons to love each other, and be united, and, at the same time, differ in their wills. From this it is clear that, without the conformity of our will to the divine will, there cannot exist a genuine charity, and therefore such conformity is a sure sign of true love.

Summon this principal part of yourself before the tribunal of your conscience, and examine in what it particularly differs from the divine will ; what God desires you to do, and what you dislike to do ; what trifle, or what affection to created things, He wishes that you should sacrifice, and which you niggardly refuse ; whether you accept adversity with the same tranquillity of mind as Job and Heli ; whether, when any trouble or calamity afflicts you, you make use of these words of theirs, as of a ready and secure buckler : “ The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away ; as it has pleased the Lord, it is done ; blessed be the name of the Lord.” (Job i. 21.) “ It is the Lord, let Him do what is good in His sight.” (1 Kings iii. 18.)

Moreover, examine whether you are really like a corpse or an old man’s staff, so that you allow yourself with the same facility to be taken up or laid aside, to be stripped or clad. Have you the same indifference towards honors or contempt, towards comfort or hardships as a statue ? Does this indifference extend to every place and employment ? Inasmuch as you are deficient in this, so far are you distant from the perfection of love.

O Lord Jesus ! who didst come to send fire on the earth, and who willest naught else but that it be kindled (Luke xii. 49), kindle in me, I beseech Thee, the fire of divine charity, which never says “ It is enough,” but, always rising on

high, strives to ascend higher still. Grant that my soul, inflamed by it, may rise to generous deeds, and by these signs prove that it possesses true love.

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### Meditation 2.

GOD'S LOVE FOR US DESERVES THAT  
WE SHOULD GIVE OURSELVES TO  
SOLID VIRTUE.

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#### POINT I.

We must consecrate ourselves wholly to solid virtue, because God gives to us Himself and all His in the most perfect manner. He gives material things for our use and benefit, the guardian angels for our protectors, grace for our merit, and Heaven for our reward.

Since the earth, the angels, grace and Heaven, among created things, constitute the four principal ones, by the creation of which the Almighty made known to the world His omnipotent munificence, it follows that by giving these to us, He generously gives us all He has. Moreover, He that spared not even His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how hath He not also with Him given us all things? (Rom. viii. 32.) Besides, the most merciful Lord has with the greatest liberality given to us not only His goods, but

Himself wholly ; for He in a wonderful manner employs for us His infinite perfections, which are identically the same as His being.

And, first, He gives us His being, by dwelling always intimately present in our body and soul, as in a temple consecrated to Him.

He gives us His power, not only by creating and preserving us, but also by continually concurring in all our actions. He gives us, moreover, His Providence, not only with singular affection warding off evils with which we are threatened and providing us with blessings, but making also "with temptation issue." (1 Cor. x. 13.) He gives us also His Mercy, by overlooking so often and so long the sins of men for the sake of repentance. (Wisdom xi. 24.) Lastly, He gives us His infinite Charity, by heaping every moment upon us, who are so unworthy, in preference to many others, innumerable and quite singular graces. Who, then, can deny that the Great God gives Himself wholly to us, since He communicates His attributes to us so generously and employs them continually in our behalf? Certainly this shows abundantly that God gives all His goods and Himself wholly to us, and He is therefore most worthy to receive the entire consecration of ourselves to Him by solid virtue.

This will appear also when we reflect on the manner in which He gives His goods and Himself entirely ; a manner which has three ennobling characteristics. The first is, that this benefi-

cent affection towards us is eternal, according to Holy Writ. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." (Jer. xxxi. 3.) The second is that this beneficence is entirely gratuitous; for the Prophet says, "I will love them freely." (Osee xiv. 5.) He loved us spontaneously, "even when we were enemies." (Rom. v. 10.) The third quality of this munificent love consists in its being infinite, so that there is not one perfection in the Godhead, not one Person in the Blessed Trinity, which does not embrace us with the same infinite love. Since God gives us, with stupendous liberality, not only His goods but Himself also, and in a manner so perfect, is it not just that we should live for Him wholly who wished to be wholly given up to us?

Truly, O Lord! I acknowledge this to be very just. Therefore because all Thou hast is mine, all I have should likewise be Thine. Henceforth let the love of God, who gives all He has to me and Himself in so generous a manner, be to me a powerful motive to acquire solid virtue.

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## POINT II.

We should especially consecrate ourselves to God because Christ also gave Himself wholly to us on the cross and in the Blessed Eucharist.

For, on the cross, He gave us, first, His vestments, since this heavenly Jonathan stripped Himself of the coat with which He was clothed.

(1 Kings xviii. 4.) Secondly, His honor, since he chose death—a death which slaves only had to undergo. Thirdly, His body, since He gave it to be tortured with the greatest pains and sufferings for our sins. Fourthly, His soul, since He, by such a cruel death, delivered it up for enemies and rebels. “Greater love than this no man hath, that he lay down his life for his friends.” (John xv. 13.)

And in the Blessed Eucharist, where He poured out, as it were, the riches of His divine love for man (Coun. of Trent, 13 Sess., 2d Chap.), He gives not only His coat, woven by human hands, but His very humanity, united to the Divine Word; He not only sacrifices the honor of the Son of Man, but also exposes the dignity of the God-Man, while He hides His Majesty under the lowly species of bread and wine, and publicly lays Himself open to so many injuries. He gives up to us therein not a body liable to suffer and to die, but one that is impassible, immortal, glorified. Finally, by making Himself a victim in this blessed Sacrament, He so completely sacrifices for us Himself by multitudinous immolations, that while there is nothing in Him which He has not wholly and fully made over to us, there could not have been found, even by angelic intellect, a more perfect manner of communicating Himself to us. The omnipotent and omniscient God, therefore, could not give us anything greater or better. “What better,” exclaims St.



Bernard, "could He Himself give than Himself?" In short, nothing is in Christ which is not ours. His body is ours, for it was wounded for us; His blood is ours, for it was poured out for us; His life is ours, for it was sacrificed for us on the cross; His merits are ours, for they were, by His death, given to us as a legacy.

Since our Saviour so ardently desired in us solidity of virtue, and since He deserves it from us for so many reasons, we shall yield, at last, and resolve what we are to do in future.

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### POINT III.

By giving even all to Him we give Him little.  
It is little:

1st. If we consider the vileness of him who gives.

2d. If we contemplate the majesty of Him to whom it is given, for He stands in need of nothing.

3d. If we contrast what we give with the greatness of the benefits already bestowed on us by Heaven, and if we compare it with the number and grievousness of the sins which we have committed.

4th. If we place it side by side with what seculars do for the world, with what the saints did for God, and with what an eternal reward deserves.



Justly, then, we must with deep sighs confess that by giving ourselves wholly to God we give Him little, yea, nothing. But if by giving the whole we give nothing, and if by doing all we do nothing, according to the words of our Lord, "When you shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say that we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which we ought to do." (St. Luke xvii. 10.) What will it be to refuse this little, or rather this nothing, to the great God?

Since we cannot do much, let us at least do the little we can; as we have nothing precious, let us give the trifle we possess; but let us give this little entirely, by devoting ourselves wholly to solid virtue.

#### AFFECTIONS.

O great God! jealous of our heart (Exod. xx. 5), who dost never accept the half if it is not given entirely, ah, what shall I give in return for Thee, if it be not myself? And as Thou hast given Thyself wholly, what can I give Thee less than myself? I am resolved, therefore, O ye citizens of Heaven be my witnesses, to be entirely Thine. Thou alone shalt be the Master of my heart. The world and self-love have no right over it. Let this besetting affection which holds me enslaved be banished from it. Let this inordinate desire that has hitherto miserably captivated me be destroyed. Let the flesh

rebel, and Hell gnash its teeth and rise against me. Let my traitorous senses murmur. The die is cast. God alone shall reign in my soul. Christ alone shall live in me. Divine Love shall triumph! For "as iron cast in the fire loses its rust and becomes all bright with burning, so the man that turneth himself wholly to God is divested of all sloth and changed into a new man." (Foll. of Christ, ii. 4, 2.) May the love of God, who deserves to find in me solid virtue, remove all obstacles, break through all difficulties, and render even and smooth that which seems rough and hard. Henceforth the acquirement of perfection shall be my greatest and only occupation. O Lord, all that I possess is a mere nothing, and shall I hesitate to consecrate to Thee this nothing? Had I a thousand hearts they would not be sufficient to love Thee worthily. I have only one, and it is so small should I dare to divide it? Far from me be such ingratitude. Thou hast conquered, O most loving Jesus! Thou hast conquered; I surrender. To Thee alone my heart belongs. No room in it henceforth for sin, no place for sloth, or for my predominant passion. Self-love shall be banished from it forever. No affection or desire shall be there which shall not be directed towards Thee alone. Henceforth my watchword shall be, God deserves that I become a saint; this will be a powerful spur to make me proceed daily with gigantic strides in the way of virtue. I most

humbly beseech Thee, therefore, by Thy infinite goodness and mercy, that thou wilt vouchsafe to accept, in an odor of sweetness, this holocaust of my heart, and this my firm resolve of acquiring virtue; and as Thou hast already given me grace to desire and offer it, so Thou wilt also bestow on me plentiful grace to fulfil it.

#### PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS.

The fruit to be drawn from these exercises is an efficacious resolve of the heart to advance with the greatest fervor in the way of the perfection which our state requires. The means to accomplish this are:

1st. To observe the resolutions that have been made during this Triduum.

2d. To commence the amendment of our life by some heroic act.

3d. To make monthly a short recollection.

4th. To accustom ourselves to make throughout the day acts of the love of God.

5th. To worship our Lord constantly and fervently in the Blessed Eucharist, by visiting Him frequently and always receiving Him with great faith and devotion.

I conclude the present holy retreat with the words of St. Cyprian: "I exhort you by our common faith that you guard your glory by strong and persevering virtue. For the property of virtue is not only to have begun but also to have continued to the end." This St. Augustine con-

firms, by saying "it is not great to have commenced what is good, but to have completed it, this alone is perfect." For what profit would it be to have removed the obstacles to solid virtue, to have considered the means by which solid virtue is acquired, to have earnestly reflected on the motives which should incite us to give ourselves entirely to God, and to have even laid the first foundations of a holier life, unless the edifice of perfection be raised and finished by assiduous labor and continued endeavor? St. Jerome said: "In Christians what we inquire into is not their beginnings, but their end and their perseverance." "Perseverance alone," remarks Peter of Blois, "will be crowned."

## PRAYER OF ST. AUGUSTINE.

*(Second Book of Soliloquies.)*

I seek Thee alone, I am ready to serve Thee alone, because Thou alone rulest justly. I desire to be subject to Thee. Heal and open my ears, that with them I may hear Thy words. Heal and open my eyes, that with them I may see the intimation of Thy will. Remove folly from me that I may recognize Thee. Tell me where I may expect and see Thee, and I hope I will do all Thou wilt order me. Receive, I beg of Thee, O Lord, most clement Father, Thy fugitive servant. I have already suffered punishment enough. I have served long enough Thine

enemies, whom Thou hast under Thy feet. I have been long enough the sport and plaything of illusion. Receive me as Thy servant fleeing from these, because they, when I was fleeing from Thee, received me though a stranger. I feel that I must return to Thee. Let Thy door be opened to me when I knock. Teach me how I may reach Thee! I have nothing else save my will. I know nothing else save that which is transitory and perishable should be despised, and that stable and eternal things should be sought after. This alone I do, O Father! because this alone I know; but by what means I may reach Thee I know not. Do Thou suggest them to me. Do Thou show them to me. Do Thou help me to find them. If those who have recourse to Thee find Thee by faith, grant me faith; if by virtue, grant me virtue; if by science, grant me science. Increase faith within me, increase hope, increase charity.



CONFERENCES.





## CONFERENCES.

*To be used as Spiritual Reading during  
the Retreat.*

### I.

#### HOLY INDIFFERENCE.

THE foundation of the spiritual life is holy indifference. Could even the greatest trials deprive us of it, then the groundwork being shaken the superstructure must necessarily fall. But this holy indifference being contrary to the inclinations of our corrupt nature, all our self-love rises in revolt against it. We will therefore advance some reasons why we should be induced to labor seriously to acquire this all-important virtue.

### I.

The great difficulty we experience in the practice of this virtue is to be found in the fear we have of the labors, contempts, vexations and troubles of ill health, which seem to await us in such and such a place, office, or degree of virtue. Remove this fear and indifference is easily acquired.

And first of all, cannot God punish you with

sickness in the very place and office in which you would prefer to be, or preserve you in good health in the place or office you are trying to avoid? Now, then, as there is reason for fearing the punishment of God on account of your opposition to His will, so there is every motive for hoping that He will reward your indifference, by preserving your health in the station to which He calls you. Besides, if God your Creator, the Arbiter of life and death, should be pleased to afflict you with sickness, who are you, vile worm of the earth, that you should fretfully resist, instead of readily conforming to His will? Is it not better to suffer in obedience to the will of God, than against it to enjoy vigor and strength? Thus we put to flight the pretext of sickness, which is but the prompting of self-love. You are not forbidden, however, to inform your superior of any fear of sickness which a proper reason justifies, provided you are ready to comply with what he may command, after having heard your case.

2d. Moreover cannot the labors, hardships, vexations and troubles which cause you to have such an aversion to this office or place, be abundantly compensated by a higher gift of prayer, by heavenly delights, by success in the management of all your affairs, by peace of mind, by purity of heart, by exemption from greater annoyances and anxieties, and by freedom from various difficulties, with which in another place you might

have to contend? Again, cannot God send you in that very place, in the very office which you eagerly seek, adversities far more numerous and greater than those you fear in another place and office? Should you not have this fear? Are we not then our own enemies, since we rush blindly into greater evils, the more we endeavor to avoid smaller ones? If we be wise, let us be indifferent to everything, abandoning ourselves entirely to the guidance of Divine Providence.

3d. The same may be said of the contempt which we might have to encounter in this or that place or employment, or in such a degree of virtue. For if we patiently endure this contempt, we may be amply rewarded with a special assistance of divine grace, strong health, and immunity from harassing cares. How many there are who, on the contrary, find nothing but contempt and trouble where they expected honor and ease! How many who are placed above others are regarded with ill-will and are disliked by almost everybody, while these same persons, had they been left on a level with others, would have been acceptable to all.

Such men, by a just judgment of God, fall from one misfortune into another. Thus Aman, elevated to the very highest dignity, suffered death on the gallows. Oh! how much happier would he not have been had he, satisfied with a lower rank, remained away from the court. Lot, in order to avoid the quarrels of the herdsmen,

departed from Abraham, and chose the fertile regions of Sodom. Who could not but congratulate him on the apparent wisdom of his choice; but how badly it turned out we read in the book of Genesis (xix. 24). After much opposition, and after having gone through many crooked ways and various difficulties, very often one has to yield at last, and must of necessity do that which before he refused to do.

The decree of God's Providence is like an unavoidable sea, over which, in spite of your delays, you must inevitably pass before reaching your destination. Let us give an instance from Holy Writ. "Jonas was commanded to go to Ninive, the great city, and to preach in it." (Jonas i. 2.) But fearing to be called a false prophet, in case God spared the repenting Ninivites, he disliked the mission. "And he rose up to flee into Tharsis from the Lord." What did his resisting the will of God avail him? "Jonas, who was afraid to enter the safe harbor, was cast into the sea;" he who was afraid of men "was swallowed up by a fish;" he who would not preach in the city was hidden away in the belly of a whale; and that which would have given him very little trouble if done willingly in the beginning, he was compelled finally to go through, notwithstanding the opposition he made, and the sufferings he endured. At last, when the word of the Lord came to him a second time, he arose and went to Ninive.

With less merit and with less joy he at last did what he should have done in the beginning. Hence it is evident, the principal obstacle to holy indifference is a vain fear of something which, when seen from afar, terrifies us, but upon a nearer inspection vanishes like a vapor into the air.

## II.

After having overcome the principal impediment, let us consider a very powerful incentive to holy indifference, namely, the sovereign happiness in this life of the religious who possesses this virtue. Those who endeavor to acquire this holy indifference seek no preferment, and refuse nothing out of cowardice; for these two things, the desire of acquiring what we have not, and the fear of losing what we have, are the causes of all the troubles of this earth. These persons rule over the greatest empire of the world, since to feel no want is to reign; they are truly strong and mighty because they are conquerors of themselves; they are superior to the superiors themselves, because they are indifferent to everything, and seek the favor of no one. They overflow with internal consolation, since they are certain that they are in the place and office in which God wishes them to be. For this reason, whenever any difficulty or calamity occurs, sure of the assistance of God, they have recourse to Him in all confidence; they rest tranquilly on the bosom of Divine Providence, remembering

the word of the royal prophet, "The Lord ruleth me and I shall want nothing." (Psalm xxii. 1.) They lead on earth a life altogether heavenly, for as the angels who stand before the throne of God are always ready to execute His word, hearkening to the voice of His orders (Psalm cii. 20), and equally ready to guard the poor or the rich, the peasant or the king, equally indifferent to offer up the prayers of the saints, or to pour out upon the earth the seven vials of the wrath of God, so also the religious who possess holy indifference regard the decrees of God's Providence and His good pleasure with love and submission, for the will of God is the only rule of all their actions. Now you can judge of the grandeur and happiness of such generous souls.

On the contrary, they who possess not this virtue are like the angry billows of the sea, tossed about by the continual agitation of cares and anxieties. They are obliged to flatter others with servile obsequiousness that they may advance, or, at least, not hinder their ambitious designs. And when some sharp trial occurs, they dare not have recourse to God, for their conscience tells them that they have merited this affliction, since by importunities they obtained from their superiors this office and this place, the cause of all these troubles. Having strayed from the ways of God's Providence, they wander about anxious and uncertain, always in pain, like one whose limbs are out of joint. They are not



at all content in the place for which they had such a preference, and in the employment which they desired particularly; for God, to punish those slaves to their own will, sends them bitterness and troubles. And you who read this, have you not experienced it yourself? And yet, it did not avail you. O senseless religious! do you not fear lest God may allow you to be tempted more violently, and even to fall into mortal sin, in the place which you desire so much, while, in another place, He would have preserved you from such a calamity? Are you not afraid that God may withdraw the graces which He would have given you elsewhere in another employment? And are you sure of corresponding faithfully to the graces necessary for the position you are so anxious to fill? Tell me, what consolation will it be to you at the hour of death to have always obtained what you desired, to have always acted according to the dictates of your own fancy? O miserable being! what will it profit you, then, to have followed your own rather than the Divine Will? What reward can you expect from your labors, which not Heaven but self-love imposed? We must, therefore, generously resolve to serve God in whatever station of life, degree of perfection, office, place, or state of health He wills us to be, and to act or to suffer in perfect resignation to His Divine Majesty.

## III.

That this resolve may take firm root, be convinced that all that happens, sin excepted, is ordained by God; that whatsoever occurs on this earth occurs not by mere chance, but by the will of an infinitely provident and loving Father, who, with unbounded wisdom, justice, prudence and forbearance, "ordereth all things sweetly." (Wis. viii. 1.) Be persuaded, therefore, that this place or this occupation is assigned to you by God through your superiors; that this sickness, this adversity, is sent to you by His paternal hand. It is He who wills that you live in this part of the world; that you be employed in these functions; that you strive towards this particular degree of perfection; that you suffer these pains in your body, these afflictions in your mind. You will say, "Not at all; it is not the will of God that has placed me here, but the scheming of jealous individuals, the ill-will of superiors. In envy, bitterness and hatred lies the source of the evil." Judging rashly you may imagine this with greater temerity than truth. Without any foundation the mind sometimes concludes that what has been suspected is a reality. But let us suppose you are right, and that what you suffer proceeds from the wicked inclinations of men. What then? I freely grant that they err, and that their action is condemned by God, who threatens to punish them severely on account of

it; but at the same time I maintain that the Sovereign Ruler of the world, although He wills not sin, wills its effects. Consequently this place, this office, this sickness and this trial, not being matter of sin, are the objects of the Divine will, though the depraved will of others may be the cause of them. Thus, though "the Lord God of Hosts" disapproved of Joseph being sold and led into Egypt, yet He sanctioned his stay and his service in that country. "God sent me," he himself confesses, "before you into Egypt for your preservation." (Gen. xlv. 5.) It was not the envy of his brothers, but the Providence of God that had sent him into Egypt. So also, though all the calamities which afflicted Job were caused by the malice of Satan, yet they were the objects of the eternal decree of God. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away," Job himself says. "As it hath pleased the Lord, so it is done." (Job i. 21.) Remark, he said not Satan hath taken away, but "the Lord." Though the Heavenly Father condemned the malice and hatred of the Jews, He decreed, nevertheless, the death of His only begotten Son; for Christ said to St. Peter, "The chalice which My Father hath given Me shall I not drink it?" (St. John xviii. 11.) Mark, "The chalice given Me," not by the Jews, but "by My Father." For the same reason, although the sanctity of God condemns the ill-will of your companions, the imprudence of your superiors, the envy of the jealous, yet He wills this your

station, this your misfortune, this your oppression. O religious! it is not the envy of fellow-religious, but the Providence of God that has led you into Egypt; it is not Satan who has sent those evils, but the Lord; it is not the malice of the Jews, but the Heavenly Father that mixed this chalice.

It is God, I repeat again, who wills that you stay in this place; that you perform this work; that you suffer these pains; that you remain in so obscure a position; that you be afflicted with this misfortune. This contempt, this vexation—God wills them. In spite of the contradictions of the world and self-love, be assured that such is the will of God. And indeed He does so for your own greater good and greater advantage, so that if you could, by lifting the veil, see the sacred decrees of God's Providence concerning you, you would approve highly of the very thing which you now condemn; you would not choose anything else even if you could. Here is the proof of my assertion. God knows what suits you best; for "the works of all flesh are before Him, and there is nothing hidden from His eyes." (Eccl. xxxix. 24.) He also can give what He knows to be most advantageous to you, "for Thy power is at hand when Thou wilt," and He will give it, because He loves you as the apple of His eye. Whatever then happens to you by His will happens for your greater good. "Thou hast ordered all things in measure and number and weight, and, moreover, Thou being Master of

power, with great favor disposest of us by turning evil into good."

Throw yourself, therefore, with complete and generous indifference into the arms of so loving a Father, and say with St. Ignatius of Loyola, "Do with me as Thou knowest and as Thou wilt, for I know that Thou lovest me." Let these words, "God wills it," be to you like a buckler, by which you repel all the assaults of self-love, and never rest until you have reached the sublime heights of "*Holy Indifference.*"

## II.

### THE THREE DEGREES OF HUMILITY.

#### I.

The first degree of humility, says St. Ignatius, in the "Book of Exercises," consists in our giving ourselves entirely to the observance of the divine law, so that even if the dominion of the whole world were offered to us, and our lives were threatened with the greatest dangers, we would not deliberately transgress any divine or human precept which obliges us under pain of mortal sin; so that with Christ, despised, poor and afflicted, we would rather be despised, poor and afflicted than with the guilt of mortal sin enjoy the highest honors, the greatest riches and the most exquisite delights.

The motives to urge us on to acquire this degree are:

1st. The grievousness of sin, which is very great, on account of the foulness of the offence, the insignificance of the offender and the majesty of the offended.

2d. The enormity of the punishment inflicted on Lucifer, on our First Parents, and the severity of that which Christ Himself endured.

3d. The rigor and eternity of the torments which the sinner has to suffer in Hell.

4th. Moreover, to be in this degree is just. "It is just to be subject to God." (2 Mach. ix. 12.) It is of the strictest obligation, for the Book of Ecclesiastes says in the twelfth chapter, thirteenth verse, "Fear God and keep His Commandments, for this is all man," *i.e.*, to this is every man naturally and essentially bound. It is very profitable. "Evil pursueth sinners, and to the just good shall be repaid." (Prov. xiii. 21.)

5th. Lastly, it is absolutely necessary for salvation to be in this degree, for "if we sin wilfully, after having the knowledge of the truth, there is left a certain dreadful expectation of judgment, and the rage of a fire which shall consume the adversaries." (Heb. x. 27.) This the martyrs proved; for rather than sin "they were stoned, they were put to death by the sword." (Heb. xi. 37.) Now have you reached this degree? Are you ready to suffer the loss of your good name, of honors, of wealth and of life itself rather than sin grievously? If by a mortal sin you



could obtain the greatest dignity and riches, if by it you could free yourself from a long sickness or the imminent danger of death, would you rather be without honors and wealth, and lay down your life than offend the Divine Majesty mortally? And if this is your mind are you determined never to abandon this degree? Can no temptation overcome you any more?

Be assured, unless you are influenced with an implacable, firmly-rooted, never-abating hatred of mortal sin; yea, unless, when occasion offers and the danger threatens of committing a sin, you become terrified and tremble as at the sight of a demon, all hope is gone of a holier life and a closer imitation of Christ; there perishes all that holy indifference so necessary to acquire greater perfection, and not the least fruit will be reaped from this retreat. Let this be the touchstone of your aversion to mortal sin; examine it well, and then employ the surest means to avoid the greatest of evils.

II.

The second degree of humility is more perfect than the first, and consists in our feeling, when the service of God and our salvation could be equally well procured, the same inclinations to riches or poverty, to honor or ignominy, to a long or a short life, so much so that no human felicity, not even life itself, can ever induce us to commit, I do not say a mortal sin, but even the



slightest venial sin. Consequently, the second degree consists in this—I would rather choose to lead with Christ a life of poverty, abjection and distress than by committing a venial sin to abound in honor, wealth and pleasure. The motives which draw us to this degree are these:

1st. “We must be indifferent,” says St. Ignatius, “towards all created things, so that as far as lies in us we desire not health more than sickness, and prefer not riches to poverty, honor to contempt, a long life to a short one.” They act then against this indifference, who in view of a slight fault prefer honor to contempt, riches to poverty, health to sickness, life to death. Now, if we do not wish to destroy the foundation of this retreat, and to lose the fruit which we have reaped, we must lay hold of the second degree of humility, viz., we must choose to be despised, to be sick, even to die, rather than stain our soul with a venial sin, and thereby deviate from the indifference so earnestly inculcated.

2d. Riches and poverty, honor and ignominy, a long life or a short one, are only means to arrive at the end for which we are created; they are means useful only inasmuch as they bring us to this end. Reason itself tells us that we should be indifferent as to the means, and be directed in their choice and use only by the end of our creation. We must, therefore, be equally inclined to riches or to poverty, to honor or to ignominy, to a long or to a short life. But those who

commit a venial sin in order either to avoid poverty, contempt, sickness, or to acquire honor, riches, to preserve health and life, relinquish the path of indifference, so requisite to make a good choice, deviate from their last end.

3d. Furthermore, we should, to make us avoid venial sin, think as much as possible of its malice, which is exceedingly great, for, after mortal sin, it is the greatest evil in the world. God detests it with infinite hatred; it spoils the acts of virtue, diminishes the fervor of charity, finally leads to mortal sin, and is severely punished by God either in this life or in the next.

We must, therefore, firmly resolve to detest and avoid, by all means, this horrible monster, so that no human felicity, even life itself, can ever induce us to commit even the slightest venial sin.

“Search now Jerusalem with lamps,” and see how great is your horror of venial sin; ask yourself, if by a little lie I could avert either troublesome poverty, great disgrace, dangerous sickness, death itself, or obtain a large sum of money, a distinguished employment, or a long life, would I not commit this sin? Am I equally satisfied to be despised or to be honored, to live in poverty or in abundance, to be in the vigor of health or to be on the point of death? What does your conscience answer?

## III.

The third degree of humility, which surpasses all the rest in loveliness and in value, consists in our choosing—even though in riches and honors we could as easily as in poverty and contempt, work out our salvation—poverty, contempt, disgrace, in preference to wealth, honors and reputation, in order that we may thus more closely follow our Lord, who was poor, dishonored, and despised.

The motives to reach this degree are :

1st. The example of Christ, who, for our sake, chose the road of poverty, contempt and pain; “who, having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising shame.” (Heb. xii. 2.) Consequently, we also out of love for Him should endeavor to follow Him herein more closely, not only when riches and honors do not hinder the end of our creation, but even when they bring us thereto, and help to our advancement in perfection, as well as poverty, trouble and contempt.

They whom the example of Christ cannot persuade to love this degree have hearts of stone; for the King of kings has become for love of us “a man of sorrows” (Isaias liii. 3); “the reproach of men” (Psalm xxi. 7); “not having whereon to lay His head” (Luke xi. 58); and sinful man, mere dust, swells with pride and “spends his days in wealth.” (Job xxi. 13.)

We know that honors, wealth and pleasures

are the baits by which we are caught by the devil and precipitated into eternal flames, and that contempt, pains and poverty are the means which conduct us to the heavenly kingdom. We believe that Christ has chosen a poor and humble life for no other reason than to inspire us with a desire of contempt, poverty and hardships, and to make us despise pleasures, riches and dignities; and yet knowing and believing all this we neglect the example of Christ, and live only in the enjoyment of riches and of the gratifications of the flesh; we hate what He loved, and still we call ourselves Christians, who, according to St. Gregory of Nyssa, should be other Christs. Perhaps even we are religious, who, by our vows, should be the living images of the Crucified Redeemer. What excuse have we for this discrepancy and opposition between our faith and our lives? Cannot the example of Christ, our Saviour, have over us as much influence as that of a commander over his soldiers? He first of all gains the wall of the beleagured city, and is at once eagerly followed by his men. Christians only are unwilling to follow their Divine Master. Far be from us such cowardice and faintheartedness! "Take, therefore, courage, brethren; let us go forward together." With a generous mind we will struggle towards this third degree of humility; we have promised it in every retreat. "We have begun; we may not go back, nor may we leave

off. Take courage, then; Jesus will be with us. He will be our helper who is our captain and forerunner. Behold our King marcheth before us, who will fight for us. Let us follow Him manfully; let no one fear terrors; let us be ready to die valiantly in battle, nor let us bring disgrace upon our glory by flying from the Cross." (Foll. of Christ, iii. 56, 56.)

2d. The fear lest if we do not attain this third degree of humility we have not attained the second and even the first. For although we may have made a firm resolution not to contaminate ourselves with a mortal sin or even with venial sin, though surrounded by riches, honors and comforts of life, it is very difficult amidst them to avoid sin, at least, for a long time. Whoever, therefore, wishes to be firmly fixed in the first and second degrees, must needs strive towards the third.

Justly may it be feared, lest in punishment of the neglect of the call to a holier life, divine assistance be withdrawn, the supply of grace be taken away, the thread of God's special Providence be cut short, dangerous temptations be incurred, so that at last a great fall ensues. These words of Holy Writ would then be verified:

"I called and you refused; I stretched out my hand and there was none that regarded. I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock when that will come to you which you feared;

when sudden calamity shall fall on you, and destruction as a tempest shall be at hand." (Prov. i. 24.) Lest this fate should befall us let us promptly follow Christ calling us to the third degree.

3d. This last degree of humility is the distinctive mould of our Society. From this sprung most of the Constitutions, particularly the 11th Rule of the Summary, "They must diligently observe (esteeming it of great importance, and of the highest moment in the sight of our Creator and Lord) how much it helps and contributes to progress in spiritual life to abhor wholly and not in part, what the world loves and embraces, and to accept and desire with their whole strength whatsoever Christ our Lord loved and embraced. They would wish to suffer reproaches, slanders and injuries, and to be treated and accounted as fools (without at the same time giving any occasion for it), because they desire to imitate and resemble in some sort their Creator and Lord Jesus Christ, and to be clothed with His garments and livery."

It would be very disgraceful if we never thought of this rule and considered it as a mere theory, whilst in it is embodied the spirit of the Society, and on it depend the entire strength, safety and felicity of the whole Order.

From all this it is evident how justly this third degree of humility is called a treasure hidden in the field; a pearl to be bought at any



price; the marrow of the Spiritual Life; the abridgment of the evangelical doctrine; the chief point of perfection, the abundant source of graces of the highest order, and finally, the mystery in which lies hidden the Wisdom of God, of which Christ said, "I confess to Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones." (Matt. xi. 25.)

### III.

#### THE GLORY AND HAPPINESS OF ONE WHO IS DESPISED AND AFFLICTED.

The object of this instruction is to confirm a soul that has arrived at the degree of humility in which it would rather, even supposing God's glory were equal in both cases, lead a life of contempt, troubles and hardships, than abound in this world's joys and honors. But to be despised and to suffer is a thing very difficult to our weak nature. It is therefore important to place before our eyes the glory and happiness which lie concealed under afflictions and contempt, that, allured by the sweetness of the fruit, we may thereby be encouraged to undergo the severity of the labor.

In order that contempt and suffering may become more agreeable, let us consider that to be



despised does not bring shame but glory; to suffer does not make us miserable but happy.

I.

The glory which adversity brings to a despised and afflicted soul is very great. For sufferings prove that such a soul is heroic, that it equals the martyrs and angels, and that it is very dear to Christ, on account of the resemblance it has to Him.

1st. If the soul patiently bears sufferings, it is heroic.

St. John Chrysostom spoke thus of the Egyptian Joseph: "He became celebrated and illustrious by the calumny, imprisonment, chains and hardships which he suffered. Although he was great by his chastity, he was made greater still by the sufferings which he endured; for, at that time, he was more glorious and appeared in greater splendor than when he sat on Egypt's throne, and distributed bread to the hungry." Adversities prove how great our virtue is. Even the heathen knew this. "Adversities," says Epictetus, "prove us to be men." "It is not," remarks Seneca, "a sign of a great soul to be brave in prosperity, when life flows on with an even course. A tranquil sea and favorable wind do not show the difficulty and the art of steering the vessel. Adversity must occur to show forth the man as a hero."

"God acts," observes St. John Chrysostom,

“with virtuous men, in the same manner as a general who chooses the best soldiers for the most difficult work. Thus God sends greater sufferings to those whom He knows to be great heroes in the spiritual battle-field.”

2d. Adversity makes us equal to the martyrs and angels. First to the martyrs. “For patience,” says St. Lawrence Justinian, “makes a man a martyr.” “Blessed is he,” observes St. John Climacus, “who being everywhere calumniated for God’s sake, and provoked by opprobrious words, overcomes himself; truly there is no difference between such a soul and a martyr.” This is also confirmed by the authority of the Church. In the office of St. Martin, Bishop of Tours, we say, “O thrice holy soul, that didst not lose the crown of martyrdom, although the sword of the persecutor did not take away thy life.”

3d. It renders us equal to the angels. “Those,” says St. John Chrysostom, “who are meek and patient, and bear with calm resignation the insults and affronts heaped upon them, and bless those who persecute them, are equal to the heavenly powers, who are endowed with the gift of impassibility; for, like the angels, they are above the troubles and vexations of this life.” What is more glorious than to be equal to the martyrs and angels?

4th. Adversities prove that we are very dear to Jesus Christ, and render us like unto Him. The

experience of the saints shows us this; "for we always find," as St. Teresa remarks, "that those who are nearer and dearer to our Lord have a larger share of labor and adversities." One day the blessed Angela of Foligno asked our Lord who were His dearest children. He replied: "Those whom I love most sit the nearest to Me at My table, eating with Me the bread of tribulation, and drinking with Me of the chalice of My Passion. To My dearest children I send many tribulations, and it is a special grace for them that I do so." Consequently, those who suffer most are the truest sons of God and brothers of Jesus Christ, His nearest guests at table, and His dearest and most cherished friends.

They are conformable to Christ and like unto Him. "For whom He foreknew He also predestined to be made conformable to the image of His son" (Rom. viii. 27); that is to say, as Vasquez and Cornelius a Lapide explain: "Those whom God foreknew to be by grace His beloved friends, He predestined to suffer; that they might by patience become conformable to His Son, who underwent for the love of them such hardships and labors. In short, God desires that they should also be crucified with His Son and be a perfect image of Him."

As many strokes of the chisel, and of other sharp instruments, are required to form out of ivory an image of the dying Saviour, accurately

representing the muscles and veins of His body, so many tribulations and afflictions transform the soul into a perfect likeness of the bruised and suffering Jesus. The more, therefore, one is afflicted with great and numberless pains, the more Christ shows that He desires to make Him conformable to Himself.

Oh! what an honor it is to be an image of the Crucified, to be nailed with Christ on the same cross! "As it is very honorable to a soldier to carry the arms of his king, so it is very glorious for a Christian to bear the prints of the wounds of Jesus Christ," remarks St. Lawrence Justinian.

And yet, O blindness of men! we flee from sufferings as much as possible; we fear to be brought to the same state to which Christ was reduced on the cross. The third degree of humility is a stumbling-block and foolishness, not only to the Pagan and to the Jew, but also to a great number of Christians. Woe to those who, seeing the eminent glory that is hidden under contempt and affliction, conceive, nevertheless, neither esteem, love, nor desire for such a state; they deserve to be covered "with the double cloak of confusion." (Psalm cviii. 29.)

## II.

One who is despised and afflicted enjoys very great happiness, both on account of the prerogatives granted to this state, and of the excellence of the grace which is hidden under adversity.

1st. The prerogatives of this state are great indeed, for adversities are the means of perfection, a sign of the divine love towards us, and a mark of predestination.

That they are the means of perfection is evident from the teaching of St. Gregory the Great, who says, "I make bold to assert that the fewer persecutions you suffer the less holy is your life." By the abundance of affliction this saint measured the greatness of perfection. St. Lawrence Justinian is of the same mind, for he declares, "When the world rages against you, when the envious repine, when the devil roars, when the wicked calumniate you, and the proud lay their snares, then be assured you walk in the footsteps of the perfect." The reason thereof is obvious; for contempt, poverty and pain deprive our sensuality, self-love and pride of all charm, nourishment and strength, and consequently stop the fertile source of evil, and afford the soul frequent occasions of performing heroic acts. Thus it is that one is led in a wonderful way to the very height of perfection.

Adversities are, moreover, a sign of God's love towards us. "For whom the Lord loveth He chastiseth." (Heb. xii. 6; Prov. iii. 12.) "Because thou wast acceptable to God it was necessary that temptation should prove thee." (Tobias xii. 13.)

These are the oracles of Holy Writ. Similar are the sentiments of the holy Fathers concern-

ing it. "In the just," writes St. Lawrence Justinian, "tribulation is a sign of the divine love towards them, and even the more one is loved the harder he is treated in this present life." "We see," remarks St. Gregory the Great, "the chosen ones of God live piously and suffer bitterly." "It is most certain," observes St. Teresa, "that those whom God loves much are led by Him through the path of difficulties and labors, and the more He loves one the greater hardships He sends him."

Adversities are likewise the best proof of our love for God. As Christ has shown His love for us by His death on the cross, so we prove our love for Him by suffering with Him. "And thus the more we bear with," says St. Catharine of Sienna, "the greater proof we give of our love." "For tribulation," remarks St. John Chrysostom, "is an evident proof of undying love for God." On the contrary, to have no cross is the sign of the divine wrath towards us; for, as the same saint elsewhere says, "God chastises every son whom He receives, consequently one who is not chastised is certainly not among the number of His sons." For this reason St. Francis Xavier used to say, "It seems to me that we do not serve God faithfully if we are long without persecution." Even Seneca wrote to one of his friends, "Unfortunate I deem you to be, because you have never been unfortunate." If a heathen then, to whom the mystery of the



cross was a scandal, thought this, what shall be the sentiments of a Christian, of a religious, who is instructed in the mysteries of faith?

Lastly, adversities are a mark of predestination and divine election. This St. Augustine affirms. "When God," he says, "chastises you with severe persecutions, it is presumptive evidence that He has destined you to be among the elect." "Tribulation," observes St. Lawrence Justinian, "is in the elect a proof of divine love, a token of future bliss, and a mark of predestination." And in another place he says, "Crosses patiently borne are undoubtedly a sign of predestination." Who shall then say that one who is despised and afflicted is not truly happy, since he enjoys prerogatives that give the greatest happiness, namely, the most efficacious means of acquiring perfection, an unmistakable sign of God's love for him, and a most certain mark of predestination?

2d. Very great also is the excellence of grace which is hidden in adversity. "For it is," says St. Chrysostom, "the greatest honor to be deemed worthy to suffer something for Christ. It is a precious crown, a reward almost equal to the life to come. Even if there were no reward hereafter, to suffer hardships for the sake of Him who is loved is in itself a great reward and an ample remuneration. Those who love understand this. To be a prisoner for Christ is more glorious than to be an apostle, a doctor, or an



Evangelist. This is truly a great dignity, far beyond that of royalty. One that loves Christ would rather be in prison for His sake than enjoy the blessedness of the heavenly court. No glittering diadem so adorns the head of a prince, as chains adorn one that is a prisoner for Christ's sake."

To suffer is something greater than even to work miracles. "For," remarks St. John Chrysostom, "when God gives the power to raise the dead to life, He gives less than when He confers the grace to suffer; for the gift of miracles I am indebted to God, but for suffering patiently Christ is indebted to me." Miracles by no means make a saint, since they may be common to the good and bad, but patience in adversity is the surest way to sublime sanctity.

Lastly, to suffer is something greater than to have revelations of the most profound mysteries. "O my God!" exclaimed the blessed Baptista Verana, "by revealing all the secrets of Thy most Sacred Heart, Thou wouldst not confer on me so great a good as by sending me afflictions."

From all this you may infer that our enemies are our greatest benefactors and our best friends. "Acknowledge yourself," says the same blessed Verana, "more indebted to him that does you harm than to him that does you good; for the former purifies your soul, and makes it beautiful, lovely and acceptable to God." "Will you call him an enemy," asks St. John Chrysostom, "who

opens to you the gates of confidence, and the treasures of divine graces, and cleanses your soul from all stain of sin?" The holy doctor concludes: "Were the choice offered me, either of Heaven or the prison, I would choose the latter. Had I the choice either to stand with the angels above near the throne of God, or to be bound with St. Paul, I would prefer the dungeon. Nothing can be better than to suffer for Christ. St. Paul is not so blessed for having been caught up to Heaven as for having borne chains. It is more desirable for me to suffer evils for Christ than to be honored with Christ. This is a grace above all graces."

Thus the saints thought, spoke and acted concerning the glory and happiness which are concealed in adversity. These are the thoughts of the children of God, and from them let us not degenerate.







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