INSTRUCTIONS for MISSIONARIES

FRANCIS MARY PAUL LIBERMANN
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These *Instructions for Missionaries* are a translation of the *Instructions sur la Saintete*, the first part of the *Directoire Spirituel* (pp. 3-179). These instructions were originally published in the *Ecrits Spirituels*, pp. 365-537, under the title *Instructions aux Missionaires*. They were divided into five chapters. In the *Directoire Spirituel*, from which this translation has been made, the division into chapters has been multiplied, and subtitles have been added. The last three chapters (ch. XII-XIV) were left unfinished by the Venerable Libermann. They were completed by the editors of the *Directoire Spirituel*, borrowing some of the matter from the Venerable Father's *Instructions sur L'Oraison* (*Ecrits Spirituels*, pp. 89-280—see note on p. 157 of the *Directoire Spirituel*).

The Venerable Libermann had planned a much larger work. Of the 38 chapters he had planned, only 5 were written. The titles of the remaining chapters are given on pp. 559-560 of the *Ecrits Spirituels*.

The conclusion of this translation is the conclusion of chapter IX of the original French of the *Directoire Spirituel*. In his preface to the *Directoire Spirituel*, Archbishop LeRoy wrote: “We cannot have a better guide than our Venerable Father. In following him we will assimilate his spirit of complete self-abnegation, of strength, of gentleness, and of union with God. Under his guidance, we will learn to be the kind of religious and missionary he wanted us to be. In his words we will seek light when we are in doubt, peace when we are disturbed, and new life and consolation when we find ourselves on the wrong road or in sorrow.

“...In the various circumstances to which our vocation may lead us, and above all when we are called to make great sacrifices, we should consider ourselves fortunate to have at our side an intimate friend, a guide, a father who speaks to us through his writings.

“...In his penetrating words he is with us now as he was during his life. He continues to form us in the same spirit, to direct us along the solid road to holiness, to raise us constantly towards the supernatural, in every place, in every work where obedience may place us. In this way will we be truly faithful to our calling, and will gather the greatest of all goods: we will save our souls, by doing all the good which God has assigned to us.”
INSTRUCTIONS FOR MISSIONARIES

Introduction

My dear Confreres:

For a very long time I have most earnestly desired to give you some detailed instructions which may serve for your consolation and encouragement along the road to that perfection in holiness, which, by the grace and mercy of God, you are striving to attain with zeal and perseverance; and which, moreover, may serve as a means of keeping alive among you the spirit of the Congregation.

I am greatly ashamed to speak to you about perfection; for I do nothing, while you continually sacrifice yourselves for God's glory and the salvation of souls; I who am found unworthy by the Divine Master to share in His glorious sufferings, am ashamed when I compare myself with you who live only by suffering.

However, do not ignore the directions of your poor and miserable father merely because it has not pleased God to endow him as abundantly as you with the gift of suffering. You know that God distributes His various gifts according to the manifold and various designs of His mercy, so as to attain in His divine wisdom the end He proposes, the sanctification of His creatures. He has set you apart from all eternity as victims to be immolated for the salvation of poor degenerate souls, who from the beginning of the world have been under the dominion of Satan. And it is for this purpose that God has accorded you superabundant sufferings, that He might, by their means, raise you to a high degree of love and holiness. Such victims must be holy as the Great Victim of universal propitiation was holy, and must be in union with that Victim. Hence while I am often overwhelmed with anguish at the thought of your incessant sorrows and affliction, I am full of joy because I know that the life of this world is but an empty shadow, a fleeting dream; I know that you value this life but little; and I understand too well, too intimately the boundless joy of one who suffers for the glory of his God, and who is sanctified by such holy suffering. And if I have not been judged worthy of this grace, which is above all other graces, I have at least been granted the joy of seeing you blessed with such favors as God seems to accord only to His privileged servants, to those who are most dear to Him.

But if God has not been pleased to give me the inestimable grace of saving others through suffering with His beloved Son, if He has not willed to make of me a victim of sacrifice for destitute souls, nevertheless He has given me the grace of directing in His way those servants He Himself has adopted for this purpose, and whom He wills to sanctify in this manner for work among abandoned souls.

According to the economy of grace in this world, I am your superior, and you should therefore listen to my voice as the voice of God. For it is He Who speaks through me, it is His divine grace that is within me, permeating my words for the same purpose, the sanctification of your own souls and the salvation of the souls for whose sake God wills to sacrifice you. In the next world however, we shall find the order changed. Then you will be greater than I because now you are blessed with a greater share in the sorrows of Jesus Christ, Who is the source and principle of our vocation and our sanctification. And thus His divine word will be fulfilled: “The last shall be first, and the first last.” (Matt. 21: 16)

My dear confreres, your existence on earth is a brief one, in which you must learn to value all things correctly and with reference to God. Then this miserable and petty world will become rich and glorious for you because of your sufferings which are the true source of wealth and glory,
thanks to the compassion of our Omnipotent God, Who abounds in goodness and love. Remain firm and joyful in the holy laborious way to which God in His goodness has destined you. The way you follow is that of Jesus Christ, your divine Master: proceed as He did; grow in holiness by becoming like to Him, so that through your likeness to Christ others may be sanctified in the truth of God.

Christ, because He was sent by His Father, lived solely for His Father. You too, who have been sent by Christ should live only for Him and in the spirit of His sanctity. Our Blessed Lord, being all-holy, offered Himself and His sufferings for the salvation of souls, and in redeeming sinners through suffering, He sanctified them in truth. But an apostle, sent by Jesus Christ, who does not strive to become holy and to supernaturalize his suffering, cannot carry the redeeming truth to souls. The apostle must possess the very sanctity of Christ. This holiness must visibly flow from his heart into his life of suffering and toil. Thus, with Jesus Christ as his prototype, the missionary begets souls for God, because he is able to nourish them with the true life of the Saviour which he actually shares.

We should all consider ourselves consecrated victims, who in the boundless compassion of God are ordained to give glory to Him by saving souls through toil, fatigue, suffering and even death. And if we are not all granted the same measure of suffering, nevertheless we are all appointed victims for the salvation of souls. We are all called to share in the sanctity of our Master, Jesus Christ.

With humility and the peace of Christ in our hearts, let us rejoice at being summoned by God to be victims with His well-beloved Son. Those of us who are favored with much suffering, must seek their joy in their afflictions and supernaturalize them in love for Jesus. Those among us who endure loss, must put themselves at the disposal of Jesus to suffer for Him, and rather than grieve at their portion they should utilize their longings and labors to become holier, to grow in humility and in love for Jesus.

I am thoroughly convinced that God has destined all of us for purposes of special mercy and sanctity. This makes me most anxious to give you these few instructions and with God's help to inspire you to that holiness which our special calling demands, and to which Jesus Christ in His goodness wills us to advance without delay, as well as to share with you whatever light I may have received.

What calamity, what frightful disaster, if you run in vain, if you become as men beating the air! And this will be the case if sluggishness, if tepidity enter your souls; if vices, bad habits, carelessness and effeminacy, or the imperfections of fallen nature are permitted to prevail over the countless graces that flow incessantly from the divine goodness of God and which will readily be multiplied, if only you are faithful.

It is difficult to see how, as children of the Heart of Mary, you could be unfaithful. But our nature is weak and inclined to evil, and all too often we have shown display of disloyalty, even though Mary, our loving mother, watches over us with particular care. I pray God, through Mary's intercession, to lend to my vain and barren words the power, the refreshment, the courage, the stability needed to persevere with fervor in the path of sanctity and love for Jesus.
CHAPTER I

Our Obligation of Aiming at Holiness

The obligation of striving for holiness is imposed on us by the excellence of our vocation and by the fearful consequences of failure therein. Moreover, the example and words of Our Lord, and the manner in which He formed His apostles indicate our duty.

The Excellence of our Vocation

God's mercy in our regard is great and powerful. Only sound the depths of your nothingness, examine your feebleness, your poverty and unworthiness, look back on your past; and then consider how God has sought you out to raise you to a vocation, which, if you are faithful to His grace, places you among the apostles of Jesus Christ.

Prostrate upon the ground in our feebleness, we hardly had the strength to climb even into the lowest rank of the servants of God. But His mercy has lifted and straightened us. Once we were sitting paralysed on the dunghill of our pride, of our depraved nature, and of our sins. But God delivered us from all that, not that we might become ordinary servants, but that we might be placed among the princes of His people. And what have we done to deserve this immense favor? "Raising up the needy from the earth, and lifting up the poor out of the dunghill: that he may place him with princes with the princes of His people." (Psalm 112)

When at last it pleased God to send His Son for the salvation of the world, He prepared the Sacred Humanity for the salvation of the human race by sanctifying His Victim before immolating it. But we, who are to share the labors and sufferings of Jesus Christ for God's glory and the salvation of the world, we have been taken by God from the midst of wretchedness and sin and united to His Divine Son and to His work of sanctification of the world.

Do we wish to confound the plans of God, to make Jesus Christ ashamed of our company? My dear confreres, it would be intensely shameful and degrading for us and our Divine Master should we persist in the depravity of our fallen nature and fail to enter the path of divine holiness.

Jesus has chosen and adopted us that we may put the demon to flight and destroy his reign over souls. He has invested us with His power over hell. But if Jesus Christ does not reign in us, how can we expect to destroy the dominion of hell, if the demon still holds sway over our souls? We cannot be both his slave and master.

Reflect that our vocation is the greatest good that God grants to any creature, that it calls for holiness consistent with the purpose of the mercy of God Who calls and with the vocation to which He calls. If we fail, we are not worthy of God's loving preference, we frustrate the designs of His compassion, we dishonor a glorious call by which He would raise us above all creatures.

A man called the apostolate, and invested for this purpose with the character of Jesus Christ, who repudiates the holiness of His Master in order to live as a man of the world, who keeps the faults and vices of his nature is like a king who, with a crown upon his head, covers himself with filthy rags and spends his time in dens of vice.
Disastrous Consequences of our Want of Holiness

We must not stop at considering only the general idea of our calling. We must consider its inmost nature as well and be convinced how disastrous it would be for us and for souls, and how outrageous to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, if we were to stay in the ordinary ways of other men, if we were to remain subject to the propensities of fallen nature, its vices and defects.

You know better than I the immense dejection of the souls among whom you live, the darkness which envelops them and the moral degradation in which they are steeped. You who work in the missions grasp a thousand times better than I the mystery of the mercy of God, Who became incarnate for the salvation of these people. How glorious, how divine is His infinite compassion! But this mercy, whose rigor is commensurate with its immensity, exacts of us great holiness. For if we are not men of God, His mercy becomes void and is changed for us into a justice which condemns us.

The Son of God, beholding the abyss of misery and corruption into which souls were cast, became incarnate to rescue them. He passed thirty-three years on earth as our model and exemplar. He taught the sacred doctrine of His Father. He suffered and died that He might draw those souls from the abyss of evil wherein they dwelt and wherein they would have remained for all eternity. Having lavishly accomplished all that was necessary to merit an immense treasure of grace for the redemption and salvation of those souls, He sent us, furnished with all His wealth, enriched with His gifts, reinforced by His power, and clothed with His character, to liberate those souls from the dominion of hell in His name and by His power. Woe to us if we are false and disloyal to the task, if we remain carnal men when we ought to be angels of sanctity to accomplish the divine task of redeeming souls. By the baseness of our character we make void the Incarnation of the Word and render useless the toil, the sorrows, the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ. Souls suffer eternally in hell, because those sent to deliver them were recreant to their eminent vocation and to the rich graces they received. Do not these souls cry out from the depth of the abyss that they are lost through us, that if we had been holy as our Master was holy we would have saved them from the eternal depths in which they groan?

Poor souls, too frail and too sick to save themselves, they are now ruined for all eternity because we, entrusted with their salvation, failed them.

The Example and Words of our Lord

Jesus Christ taught us by His words and example that we can have an active part in His work of redemption only by becoming holy ourselves, by living as men of God. This holiness of life should be inspired by the very motives that animated the life of our Divine Model.

Jesus Christ, Our Lord by the mere fact of coming into the world had already done enough to redeem the human race. One sigh of His Heart towards His Father could have secured our regeneration, and would have procured a superabundance of merit. But the Son entered into the designs of His Father that mankind should be redeemed at an exorbitant price. This can be understood, if we consider the ravages which sin had wrought in the hearts of men. The least action of the Incarnate Word would indeed have sufficed for the redemption. And every man coming back to God would have been well received though he offered as ransom for his sins but a single tear shed by the Infant Jesus in the crib.

But the difficulty is to persuade the free and perverted wills of men to return to God, and to make men accept and offer the merits of their Savior in atonement for their sins. Yet this conversion to God and acceptance of the merits of Christ is precisely the work of those who espouse
and continue the mission of Jesus Christ on earth. To make us other Christs the Master imparts to us His Divine Spirit, invests us with His sacerdotal character, places in our hearts His divine strength; and thus transformed, armed with His authority, renewed by His doctrine and sanctity, He sends us forth in virtue of His omnipotence to spread throughout the world the sacred doctrine with which we are filled. "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me; go therefore and make disciples of all nations." (Matt. 28: 18-19)

Why does Jesus appeal to His omnipotence when He sends us to preach His sacred doctrine? Because by giving this prodigious mission to weak and imperfect creatures He changes them into entirely different men. He converts natural men to men of grace; He transforms feeble and infirm men into men with divine power. Men of darkness become men of eternal light.

And why this wonderful transformation? Because it is necessary in order to sanctify and save sinners through the merits of Christ if we would lead them back to God. Sinners cannot come of themselves. "How are they to hear, if no one preaches? And how are men to preach unless they be sent?" (Romans 10: 15). Apostles of Jesus Christ must take the sinner by the hand and lead him back to the Master. But first it is necessary that the missionaries themselves have undergone a transformation and been changed into men of God.

The return of sinners depends on our personal holiness, and this for three reasons.

1) Sinners are kept in their sin and held captive by the demon through all the channels of conscious life. All their senses are seized and controlled by the flesh and the devil. Only the word of God, appealing to every faculty, can detach them from sin and deliver them from the snare of hell. The ambassador of Jesus Christ is powerless if he has only the word of his own mouth. His word enters the ear, but shrivels up in the heat and disorder of the passions, which choke the germ a mere word may have produced. The apostle must appeal to the entire man, to all his faculties, by the eminent holiness of his life, which, when joined to his word, will profoundly affect his whole being. Little by little it will soften the hearts hardened by sin, refresh the arid souls, subdue and temper their unfettered passions and enlighten their darkened intellects.

2) The demon is all-powerful in souls enslaved by sin. Armed with all his infernal and tyrannical powers he holds them in the clutches of passion and in the shadows of superstition. Powers stronger than hell are needed to vanquish this mighty force. It can be achieved only through the spirit of Christ's own sanctity.

To confound the enemy of God, it is not sufficient merely to have been sent by Christ; we must also be possessed of His missionary spirit. How can a man, even though sent by Christ, prevail against the enemy he attacks, if he is in any measure subject to him? If Satan dominates a man in his desire for profane diversions, in consequence of his constant self-seeking and pride, through his sluggishness, effeminacy and indiffercience, how can such a man pretend to control the enemy when actually the enemy controls him? A man of God proposing to drive out Satan from the hearts of sinners must be equipped with the shield and armor of sanctity. He must live, he must be actuated and confirmed by the spirit of his Master, Who alone is able to sanctify souls. Thus prepared he must strike with his piercing sword, the all-powerful word of God. And though all hell stands against him, he will conquer. But if he has remained a natural man, weak and imperfect, his every attempt will be frustrated by the least of the demons. He will live a wretched and useless life, and the all-powerful divine energy at his disposal will be of no avail.

3) The sinner, separated from Jesus Christ, does not share in the merits of the redemption, because he does not seek the Redeemer. He does not come forward for lack of faith in Christ and His divine merits. And he is without faith because his passions and the powers of hell block his assent and his submission, or because in the turmoil of these disorders he cannot and will not hear.
Submerged in sin and ignorance, he has no merit to offer that would obtain the first grace of conversion. Another must merit this grace and draw it down upon the sinner. And it is none other than the missionary who is sent for this purpose. Evidently, if such is our mission, we must above all be men of God.

Thus holiness is part of our calling; and Jesus Christ has called us in vain unless we labor earnestly for our sanctification. Surely the Master will not withhold what we need for the attainment of our mission.

Reflect upon these words of the Savior: “as the Father has sent me, I also send you.” (John 20: 21). And how did the Father send His Son? Was it not in the spirit of divine sanctity? Was He not sent to sanctify Himself, that He might sanctify others in holiness and truth?

Now Jesus Christ sends us forth for the same purpose for which He was sent. Our mission is His. It is He Who lives and suffers in His true representatives; and it is He Who draws souls to God His Father and imparts grace to them through His ministers. But that Jesus may live in His apostles and work all things in and through them, it is essential that they live in Him, united to Him in all they do, in their sufferings and apostolic work.

If the missionary is not thus united to Jesus Christ, he is Christ's apostle only in appearance, and not in reality. Our Lord was sent by His Father not as a figure, but as possessing the substantial life of the Father. Christ sends us for the same purpose and in a like manner. His Sacred Humanity has been marked with the substantial character of the Word, and possesses in itself the life and merits of the Word. Likewise Jesus Christ in sending us forth as His apostles has stamped upon us His sacramental character. He lives in us and in our apostolic works and confers His merits on all we do. And thus our life and our works have in reality become His. But all this will be realized only if our entire life has taken on marked resemblance to the life of Jesus. For He does not live in those who do not follow Him, nor does He impart to them His merits.

Our vocation bears a perfect resemblance to Christ's own mission, except as regards the source of the merits which constitutes the price for souls. For in Him alone are the treasures of merit and of the graces which flow from them. In Him alone dwells the personality of the Word, and hence He alone was capable of performing actions of infinite worth.

Being unable to bestow on us what is incommunicable, He has put at our disposal whatever He is able to give, by living in us and giving us a share in the very mission which He received from His Father, and placing us in conditions similar to His own. What are these conditions? “He who sees me, sees also the Father.” (John 14:9). The Father willed to reconcile the world to Himself. He sent His Son to represent Him among men, to attract men to Himself. And the Son of God said: “He who sees me, sees also the Father.” He spoke thus, not only because the nature of the Word dwelled substantially in Jesus Christ, for no creature could see the Divine Substance living in the Sacred Humanity, but because His Divinity was manifested in its effects. The Word of God became visible to the eyes of all men by His sanctity and by His works.

Jesus Christ, in His turn, sends us as He Himself was sent, and He wills that those who see us will be able to discern Him in us, as once His Father was manifest in Him. And this will be brought about by our personal holiness, by the resemblance of our life to His, and by our union with Him.

So much for our life in general. But the same also holds for all its particular phases. Our Lord told us that He did the works of His Father: “If I do not perform the works of my Father, do not believe me.” (John 10: 37). And elsewhere He said: “My Father works even until now, and I work.” (John 5: 17). In like manner our works ought to be the works of Him Who has sent us, and we ought to act only in so far as He Himself acts in us by His grace.
The doctrine of Jesus was not His own, but that of His Father; there was not a simple word He spoke that did not come from His Father. “The things that I heard from the Father, these I speak in the world.” So also, all we teach and every word we utter should be imbued with the mind of Christ.

Finally, Jesus, who was sent by His Father to save men, came not to seek His own glory. “I do not seek my own glory.” (John 8: 50). He came not for His own gratification. “For Christ did not please Himself.” (Romans 15: 3). He came not to judge or condemn. “For God did not send His Son into the world in order to judge the world.” (John 3: 17). He came not to do His own will. “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me.” (John 6: 38). God the Father had sent Him, and He lived only for the Father and to accomplish the mission of mercy and sanctity assigned Him by the Father. His whole sojourn on earth was a life of mercy and sanctity. For He came that He might manifest His Father’s sanctity and mercy in His divinely human life and thereby lead men to holiness. “And for them I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.” (John 17: 19).

It was in the spirit of sanctity and mercy that God the Father sent His Son to earth, and therefore the Son of God lived only for His Father and for the souls He came to save. With this intent He lived a life of abnegation and sacrifice, or obedience, humility and love, of consummate power and profound compassion. And now He sends us forth for the same purpose and under like conditions. He commissions us as His Father commissioned Him. “As the Father has sent me, I also send you.” (John 20: 29). We are to Jesus what He was to His Father. In our whole life, in all our works, we ought to seek only His glory. We must reproduce in ourselves His sanctity and mercy, His abnegation and love of suffering, His charity, firmness and gentle forbearance.

Woe to us if we seek ourselves, if we are proud and stiffnecked and refuse to bow with docility and love to the sweet yoke of the Divine Will! Woe to us if we are exacting, unsympathetic and critical! We would then be apostles only in name. Our apostolate would be not only barren, but lifeless, without any participation in the life of Jesus.

But blessed, a thousand times blessed are we, if emptying ourselves of the proud ill-will of our fallen nature we allow the spirit of Jesus, Who has sent us, to quicken our souls. Then will all our efforts be supported by copious grace and blessed by God, and we shall shine like angels among the saints.

How Our Lord formed His Apostles

To convince ourselves that Our Divine Master, in calling us to the apostolate, wills us to resemble Him, we need only reflect upon the three years of His public Life. Why did He and His apostles, during these three years, travel through the towns and countryside of Judea, Galilee and Samaria? Was it to convert these countries by His preaching and miracles? If this were His purpose, why were the results so meager after so much labor even after His divine and bitter passion? Had our Lord intended to convert the people of Judea and Samaria by preaching, the Divine Power which dwelt substantially in Him would have easily attained the result He desired.

But during His public life Jesus wished to show not only to the apostles but to all those He would later send to souls throughout the world, how they were to live in every circumstance, how they were to act towards others, how they were to speak, to suffer, to work for the salvation of souls. Towards the close of His life on earth, on the occasion of the last act He performed among the apostles, after washing their feet. He told them: “I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you also should do.” (John 13: 15). This He said after giving us such a great
example of the charity and the docile and obedient humility that should motivate all our relations with our fellowmen. “No servant is greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than he who sends him.” (John 13: 16). These words, “I have given you an example,” crowned His whole life in the midst of the apostles, and taught them that in all things they were to follow their Master’s example.

Jesus willed to be the model for all who were to be His own, the pattern for all to copy, Thus He is the model for the ordinary faithful by the virtues He practised in his daily activities and in His normal intercourse with His Father and with creatures. Souls specially consecrated to God find Him their exemplar in His hidden, interior and religious life. Buy only the life of Our Lord in its entirety and in its most exalted manifestations of sanctity must serve as a pattern for those who are consecrated to His Father in the apostolate. To the first two categories, the ordinary faithful and His special servants, Our Lord is an example simply to be followed. But to us, His apostles, who are to serve in turn as examples to others, He is our prototype in a special and more perfect manner. A copy that is not intended to serve as a model need not have perfect resemblance to its prototype; but a copy which is itself to serve as a model to others must be perfect.

Conclusion

Let us regard our calling to the apostolate seriously and not lower our ideals. We have made a contract with Our Lord Jesus Christ. We have received His mandate; we have enrolled in that sacred legion of conquerors of souls. There must be no shirking; we must live up to the requirements of this admirable legion. Marked with the seal of Jesus Christ, we can no longer turn back, for His seal is indelible. We shall be regarded as deserters if we abandon His banner. But to stand beneath that banner, to persevere under the apostolic standard of Our Lord, we must be clothed in the livery of the sanctity of Jesus.

Moreover, we are consecrated to God by baptism, by religious vows, and by our apostolic task; we are bound to live up to this threefold engagement. Shall we rest content then to pass as common Christians, when in fact we are religious and apostles? If not, let us examine ourselves to see if we possess at least the holiness of a Christian or whether we fall short even in ordinary Christian virtue. If such is the case, we have a threefold guilt. But if we, who are called to the religious and apostolic life, possess all the qualities demanded of a Christian, we shall not be wanting in those imposed by our special vocation. Because without the operation of grace within us, we cannot even maintain an ordinary Christian life; and if the grace of God has dominion in our souls, it will necessarily make of us religious and apostles according to our calling. If however, we are unfaithful to the divine grace given for the exigencies of the religious and apostolic life, this same grace will no longer give us even the holiness that constitutes the ordinary Christian life.

There is no middle way for us; either we imitate the Master in His religious and apostolic life, or we will be wanting even as Christians. And what bitter misery for an apostle of Jesus Christ to be but a poor and feeble Christian! “Of everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required.”(Luke 12: 48).
CHAPTER II

Holiness is the Life of God in us, imparted through sanctifying Grace

Holiness is the life of God in Our Lord Jesus Christ, and through Him in us. “In Him was life, and the life was the light of man.” Men also possess a kind of life, but when it is divorced from the life of God in Jesus Christ, that life is darkness. “And the light shines in the darkness.” When the divine life dwells in the soul, it illumines it with the light of Christ’s holiness and it quickens and sanctifies the soul in God His Father.

Christ explains this in the parable of the vine. “I am the true vine.” He is the true vine and He imparts the sap of the true vine, enabling us to produce good fruit in conformity with God’s designs in our regard. Fallen men did not lose the purely natural life. Our first father Adam is the natural trunk from which spring all the branches of the human race and from which flows the natural life of man. But all that this life can yield is natural fruit, which is tasteless, unsavoury and spoiled. When God first planted this vine it was strong. But the human race is no more the vine planted by the Creator. It no longer has its roots in God, not the sap to bring forth the fruits which it was originally intended to yield.

God created us for a supernatural order. He wants our life to be supernatural. Hence he infused a supernatural life-force into our first parents, capable of producing supernatural fruit for all eternity.

But sin came and destroyed the work of God. We still receive the natural life at the first moment of our existence, and together with it we also inherit from Adam the corruption resulting from his original sin.

It was never in God’s designs to create us for a purely natural life even of the intellectual and moral order. If, therefore, we lead a purely natural life we miss the end for which we were made. Though good as far as it goes, this sort of life can but produce mediocre fruit, which will satisfy neither the soul nor especially the Creator, Who expects fruit possessing definite qualities.

If we live such a natural life, we dwell outside the light of God, and we yield bitter fruit.

God, however, took compassion on His perverted vine. He formed a new trunk, a new vine capable of yielding superabundant fruit. “I am the true vine.” The roots of the new trunk are in the ineffable depths of His divine nature, and we have been grafted upon this divine trunk. This vine is Our Lord Jesus Christ, the new Adam come to give life to the world. Let us lovingly meditate on the admirable designs of Divine Mercy. Let us profit by His infinite goodness, and be vivified by Our Lord Jesus Christ! Let us not waste one drop of the sap of that Vine! This sap of the life of God is sanctifying grace, which we receive from Our Lord. It has the property of uniting us to Him and sanctifying us. It causes our life to resemble the life of the Incarnate Word. God becomes our beginning and our end.

The Operations of Sanctifying Grace in Our Souls

Sanctifying grace, by uniting us to Jesus Christ, connects us with the source of life, and enables us in proportion to our fidelity to receive a great abundance of this divine life and an ever increasing number of graces. Sanctifying grace disposes the soul to receive incessantly holy inspirations from good and supernatural objects.
Becoming the principle of our life, it gives us the life of Jesus Christ Himself, Who thus imparts to us His sentiments and His inclinations. Hence this grace tends most powerfully to destroy sinful tendencies and to inspire horror for all that is contrary to God. It preserves us from receiving bad impressions, or at least makes us immune from their influence. It makes us indifferent to the impression of the natural life, and draws us more strongly towards supernatural objects. It carries us Godwards and God becomes both the principle and the end of our life.

This grace, essentially sanctifying, together with infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost, resembles a smoldering fire. It tends to grow and to inflame all our affections, activities and inclinations. "I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled." We grow in holiness in proportion to the development of grace in our affections and inclinations. Our actions become holy according to the measure in which they are dominated and controlled by grace.

We receive sanctifying grace without any merit on our part, and like a mustard seed it becomes a mighty tree. As the mustard seed does not grow without the help of the soil, so does divine grace, cast into our souls as a germ of life, depend for its growth on our fidelity and cooperation.

Enemies of Sanctifying Grace

There are two possible enemies of sanctifying grace in our souls. A life of sin which would tend to destroy grace, and a purely natural life which will impede its development, deaden its power to lead us Godwards, bury this sacred fire as it were with ashes.

One is placed between three sources of activity. One leads to death, another induces but a dangerous sleep. But from the third springs a life and a light wholly divine. If we are content with merely preserving this spark of divine life, we have only to reject the temptations to sin and the promptings of the flesh. But if we want grace to exercise its powers to the full and influence all our works, we must besides resist the inclinations of a purely natural life. And it is here that we encounter the gospel teaching on perfection and on the perfect renouncement of creatures and of self. Once our souls refuse to yield to all attractions of creatures we become entirely dominated by that fire cast into us by the Divine Master, and all our faculties are then quickened by the divine life.

We have other reasons for keeping in check the tendencies of a purely natural life. Because of what sin has worked in us, we are unable to maintain our life undefiled for any length of time. It is difficult to keep ourselves free from sin.

Sanctifying Grace operates through Faith, Hope and Charity

Since it is of the very nature of sanctifying grace to incline our souls Godwards, its action always tends to union with Him and it is exercised through the virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. Moreover, it enlivens our will giving it the powers necessary for its activity.

Although these three virtues have God as their direct object, it remains true that sanctifying grace vivifies our actions and imparts to us its three-fold activity, even in our relations with creatures. Such relations (they have numerous variations) may be the occasion for vices and defects corresponding to the impressions received from these creatures. Or, on the contrary, when our actions are done under the inspiration of sanctifying grace, and in a spirit of Faith, Hope and Charity, they may offer us an opportunity for exercising supernatural virtues.

Take for an example a missionary who receives an order from a superior. He considers the task unpleasant and following the inclinations of his evil nature, he grumbles or fails to do the work
prescribed. He acts independently he disobeys. If the missionary willingly executes the command, either because he is naturally fond of the superior, or has a natural liking for order and discipline, he performs an act of natural virtue. But if, animated by faith and love of God, he sees God's will in that command, and with a good heart makes the sacrifice which is involved in the task, he has exercised to perfection the virtue of obedience.

Acts are supernaturally perfect according to the measure of the supernatural sentiments which inspire them. Whatever holiness virtues may contain is due to the principles of grace and to the inspiration of Faith, Hope and Charity. Through these the soul is exercising a virtue, is united to God, and herein lies the good which virtues may contain.

Ordinarily a Single Act contains several good or several bad Elements

Our acts are usually influenced by several virtues or by several vices, depending on what principle, namely, grace or nature, animates them. Thus, in one act of obedience the missionary, moved by grace, will practice also interior self-denial in submitting to the pain involved in the task. Further, if the order affects his spirit of independence, he practices humility in overcoming his desire of grumbling. And when he accepts the command with meekness he performs an act of charity. If, on the contrary, he allows himself to be ruled by an evil principle, his act will contain elements of several vices. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance to live and act animated by supernatural sentiments. Once our souls are acting under the influence of such a principle, a variety of virtues will quite naturally come in its train, the soul will receive divine impressions and varieties of holiness will be multiplied.

An Act in order to be perfectly Holy,
must be done entirely under the Influence of Grace

It is important to remember that, even when an act is in itself good and supernatural, it is not sufficient for us to recall some spiritual thoughts to prevent its being inspired by natural or evil tendencies. To make this clear, let us analyze what happens in our souls from the first moment of our contact with an object to the time when an act is accomplished.

Let us see what is done by God to endow this act with a requisite holiness, and we shall understand what we must do to perform it in a saintly manner.

There is first a movement of our soul corresponding to the impression made on us by the object. The soul is already prepared by sanctifying grace which imparts to it a supernatural tendency and hence a facility for receiving a supernatural impression. But God also helps us by a special grace to produce that holy impression. Thus assisted, the soul, as it were, sees God in the object. The will then actualizes this thought of faith. Since we have conceived the thought of God in the sight of the object, grace which makes us tend Godwards now also inclines us toward the object. A second grace is given to strengthen this inclination against the contrary promptings of nature. This inclination having thus been fortified, sanctifying grace no doubt exercises its influence on the will, but this faculty being weakened by the inclinations of our nature, needs another grace to decide and execute the act. This shows that the mere coloring of an act by the injection of some supernatural thoughts is far from sufficient for its sanctification. Grace must be the animating principle at every stage of the exercise of an activity, and only then will it lead the act to God, its supernatural end.

An act is holy if grace alone dominates every phase of its evolution. If, on the contrary, nature has its share in it either because it mingles with its natural impressions, obscures the supernatural perception, or weakens the supernatural inclination, the act, because it is done under the influence of grace, remains supernaturally good, but reaches a lower degree of perfection.

We now understand how much fidelity to grace is required to be able to perform an act that is truly perfect and holy.
CHAPTER III

Degrees of Holiness in our Works

The perfection and holiness of our acts depend on purity of love and intensity of performance.

Purity of Love

It is a grace that enables us to make acts of pure love of God, but we ordinarily inject in them a certain amount of love of self. The one and only source of holiness is sanctifying grace, which by Faith and Charity carries us Godwards, and makes us tend toward Him even in our dealings with creatures. If then, we act purely under the influence of sanctifying grace, allowing no admixture of love of self, God alone becomes the beginning and the end of our acts, we act in God and for God alone. If, on the contrary, through the natural self love which God has implanted in our nature, we blend our attachment to God with some hope for personal benefits, our action is not holy with the holiness of perfect love. Even when we do not transgress the bounds of love which God allows us to have for ourselves, our action, though in no way contrary to God’s will, is but an expression of what is called the love of Hope.

Hope is a holy virtue which unites us with God. It is the soul’s yearning for God envisioned in the hereafter. This longing is not free from the natural love of man for himself, and yet it is in order insofar as it aims at enjoying God, and is confident of eventually possessing Him. This, however, demands a fuller explanation.

We are able to distinguish four degrees of love of ourselves.

1. Necessary love of self. God has endowed human nature with a certain love for self which man is incapable of suppressing or opposing. God has willed it to such an extent, that He has set it up as the standard for charity towards our neighbor: “Love they neighbor as thyself.” Sanctifying grace quickens this natural propensity by adding to it an ardent desire for God, so that we tend entirely towards Him. We hear the most Holy Virgin, in the transport of her love exclaiming: “For behold henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.” And her Divine Son cried out from the cross: “My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” Here we find two manifestations of this ingrained love of self unable to overcome, the craving for personal well-being, and repugnance for what is opposed to that good. These two tendencies, if pure and wholly quickened by grace, are holy. We are then in the presence of the virtue of hope in its perfect degree.

However, grace often animates us with such fervor that we act with perfect self-forgetfulness. Our soul is then preoccupied with God alone and loves Him in all simplicity and with a most pure love. In souls tending to perfection such acts are more frequent than we may imagine.

But we must remember that any effort of ours towards this end is futile and even very harmful. Pure love is without any doubt a perfect gift, and every perfect gift cometh from the Father of lights. But it behooves us to seek to obtain this heavenly gift by rendering ourselves pleasing to Him Who alone can accord it.

Comprised in this love of self that is inherent in our nature are the desires to possess God, joy in our own existence, fear of being separated from God and fear of annihilation. I need not here examine whether we may desire separation from God or our own annihilation, assuming it to be the will of God. Such suppositions are useless. For if a soul, in the feverish intensity of sensible love, should, without reflection, utter such a wish, God would certainly gather from it whatever might be good. Anyhow we should not entertain any such thought, for we should become victims of our imagination.
Within this degree of love we find also the love of gratitude which causes the soul to be occupied entirely with God and His love and to retain scarcely any attention to self.

2. Love for ourselves, good and in conformity with God’s will, yet not forced upon us by our nature.

This consists in loving the joy of possessing what is good, and in fearing the pain which accompanies evil. Here again we find in this love of self what God has placed in our nature, namely, the tendency towards happiness. Grace supernaturalized this tendency and makes us desire and hope eternal happiness in God as well as fear the eternal wretchedness of separation from Him.

This degree of love of self differs from the first because in the first we desire and love the Sovereign Good as such, while in the second degree we long for the eternal joy which we shall derive from that possession of the Sovereign Good. In both we love God, in the first, however, God is the direct object of our love, as the Sovereign Good, though always contemplated as our good and in the light of the love of ourselves. In the second the direct object of our love is our happiness which we see lies in God, but in such a way that God is the ultimate and not the immediate end to which our souls aspire.

A soul that earnestly aspires to belong entirely to God will easily rise above this interested love by means of sanctifying grace. But once more, as for the first degree of love, we must not count upon our own efforts to attain it. God alone can unite us to Himself in a higher degree of love, through the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ. All we are to do is to be faithful to this grace.

It is good to aim at self-abnegation and self-forgetfulness so that we may more frequently perform acts purely inspired by grace and may love God in God and for God alone. But we must take good care not to curb acts just because they are not perfect; for we would run the risk of being unfaithful to the grace received, and of staining our acts even more by selfishness. We must also avoid a certain spirit of introspection, seeking to discern what in our actions proceeds from the love of Hope, with a view of purifying them and raising them to the degree of pure love. Let us realize one thing: Of ourselves we can do nothing in this matter, and instead of gaining by our efforts, we shall lose very much. We would fall a prey of our imagination, which would build up the purest of motives and intentions, while in reality nature and selfishness have the largest share in what we assume to be acts of pure love. All that we can do is to fill ourselves with a lively and fervent desire of belonging entirely to God, and of sacrificing ourselves wholly for Him, of being ever faithful to His grace. With these dispositions of solid fervor, let us act under the inspiration of grace in the measure in which we sense the impulse of grace without indulging in meticulous self-analysis. If we act otherwise, we risk giving in to pride and to illusions.

3. Love for ourselves, that is good in itself, in accord with the will of God and inspired by grace, yet where nature has to great a share.

Faith shows us that our sovereign good and happiness lies in God. Divine grace tends to carry us to Him, but the weight of nature now counterbalances the attraction of grace. The reason for such a state is that we either fail in proper submission to the will of God, or that we are wanting in confidence in Him Who alone, in His great mercy towards us, is able to give us a share in His absolute blessedness. Souls in this state are quite deficient, and they should above all seek means to overcome their failings and to become detached from their own ideas, so that they may grow more perfectly in the love of God.

4. Love for ourselves, that is greater than our love of God.
Here we ourselves are the ultimate end of all that we do in the service of God. Such a condition is evil. It is manifested through pride, or at times by an utter selfishness in the devotional life. However, it is usually difficult to determine how much good is mingled with such an evil.

**Intensity of Performance**

The holiness of our acts also depends on the intensity with which we tend towards God, that is, on the interior strength and energy with which we seize the object with which we are concerned and execute our actions. This intensity is not the offspring of natural energy, of our character or of sensible fervor, but it springs from grace.

It cannot be acquired by a direct method. It does not flow from natural efforts, but depends on a growing dominion of grace over our lives, and the latter is itself consequent upon self-abnegation and persevering fidelity to divine inspirations. We should, therefore, be on our guard against such natural exertion, for this would merely introduce natural elements and often lead to pride and selfishness. Let us build on the firm foundation of a life of abnegation and perfect fidelity to grace and we may count upon God living in us to intensify our love for Him in due proportion.

We should likewise be mistaken were we to think that intensity of love of God depends on character. It obviously springs from grace alone. Grace can produce an equal measure of holiness in a man of cold and in another of passionate character. Character can yield natural virtue, but supernatural virtue springs from grace. Character may shape the external appearances of virtue, but intensity lies in the soul and is felt in the action of the will.

People differing in character may act with equal intensity of love and attain to equal holiness, and yet cold and ardent characters may give quite different exhibitions of a love which is fundamentally equal.

Another error quite often misleads those who strive for holiness. They imagine that the vigor of their love depends on their emotional fervor and sensible devotion, such as is often found in beginners in the spiritual life. In the latter the soul is greatly moved by divine grace, but they are mainly affected in their interior senses. They consequently experience a keen delight, their passions are aroused, the heart is drawn toward God, and to a great extent it is because of the pleasure experienced in the contemplation of things divine, and the soul strives more or less to obtain and enjoy that satisfaction. This does not mean that it is an evil. It is even a good to which we must yield, if we desire to be faithful to grace (provided that there be no excess). Nevertheless we shall love God more purely and with greater freedom when, as a reward for our fidelity to grace, we rise above the appeal of the senses.

The same applies to the intensity of our acts. When divine impressions and impulses affect our senses, there is a stirring up of the passion and the intensity of this love is proportionate to those impressions made on the senses. This also is genuine love of God and in some measure it is true fervor, and yet, such fervor is to a great extent an accident of our enjoyment rather than a quality attaching to our adherence to God.

It follows that we need not be troubled or discouraged if after a while our sensible devotion ceases, and if the stirring of Divine love is no longer felt. If we remain faithful to God when our emotions are cold, our love possesses greater purity and intensity thought our devotions and the practice of virtue finds no resonance in our sensibility.

In the natural order the desires of the young are passionate while more mature persons, even while their desires may be equally strong, remain calm and the latter usually possess the stronger...
will. The willpower of the young man may appear greater but this may be nothing more than passion.

It is only in the beginning that grace works through the senses. Later there is a calming of the emotions, and at the same time, because of fidelity to grace, there is simultaneously a growth in energy and intensity of love.

The lives of the saints furnish many examples. When Our Lord told His Apostles that they would be scattered during the night of His sorrow and Passion, St. Peter, filled with passionate love, replied: “Even though all shall be scandalized because of thee, I will never be scandalized.” And soon again he added: “Even if I should have to die with thee, I will not deny thee.” Thus he could speak because the presence of Jesus moved him to a worm and tender love, such as is incomprehensible to us who have not seen Our Blessed Lord in the flesh. These very words of St. Peter proved his ardent feelings, springing from the deep impression made upon him by the personality of Our Lord. That his love was imperfect is obvious from the audacity and indiscretion of his words, as we find it so often is sensible and vehement love. But fundamentally his love was true and sincere. When many years later St. Peter went to prison to be crucified he was calm and serene, while his martyrdom proved his love to be far more intense than it was during the night of the passions, when he fled and denied his Master.

Not only the love of God which perfects our union with Him, but also the singleness of this love, its intensity, and the other qualities perfecting it have their source in sanctifying grace. The more our acts are determined by the light of grace, to the exclusion of all that is foreign to the divine life in us, the greater is the singleness of purpose with which we cling to God.

The divine gift of grace may at times pervade all the powers of our soul to such an extent as to set in order all our inclinations and desires so that, when we act, whatever be foreign to God will be far from our souls. Then sanctifying grace alone will determine our souls. Then sanctifying grace alone will determine our acts and we will love God with vigorous intensity.

Thus our acts are holy when they are determined by sanctifying grace and tend towards God with singleness of purpose and great intensity. Singleness of purpose depends on the energy with which all the power of our soul cling to God, to the exclusion of creatures.
CHAPTER IV

Holiness requires that We act habitually through Grace

If we wish to accomplish what God expects when He gives us sanctifying grace, we must do more than perform holy acts occasionally; we must do so as often as we can. Nor is it enough to direct our intentions towards God only while we act, by exerting ourselves to add just then what is required for the sanctification of what we are doing. True, such efforts are worthy of praise and even of merit before God, but such occasional efforts are usually powerless to mark our actions with real and perfect holiness. This is especially true if we are habitually swayed by nature; for if nature prevails, grace is too weak to make us gravitate towards God alone, to stamp our acts with a spotless supernatural purity. These momentary efforts are signs of our good will, and they are certainly inspired by God but should the prerequisites be even more favorable to grace, nature's share will, as a rule, be quite considerable. I repeat, that nature will predominate even under more favorable conditions. Moreover, we will to often be prompted by contention of spirit, by impetuousity and other imperfections, thus revealing the considerable power of nature, at times of depraved nature, over our motives.

Consequently to attain perfect holiness in our actions we must have recourse to sanctifying grace which alone as the active principle must vivify all our ordinary propensities. Just as people of the world continually seek natural pleasures and satisfactions, we missionaries of Jesus Christ, should live under the constant guidance of that divine and sanctifying life, which is the vital fluid which Christ the vine imparts to us, His branches. Only then shall our works be holy, just nourished by a vigorous sap. Living habitually by grace, we will acquire a certain facility of seeing things in a supernatural light, and this view alone will attract us. Besides, when we have thus turned towards the supernatural, created things often will present to us the reflection of their Creator, and in this way we will be raised to a supernatural state.

In short, such a life will continually lead us to God and away from creatures, because created things as such will cease to distract us; they will have little attraction for us, and if we take cognizance of them at all, we will not be easily drawn towards them. Consequently we will with ease oppose purely natural inclinations, the better to follow the inspirations of grace. Rarely will we be moved towards the same end both by grace and nature, because grace, if habitually inhering in the soul, will inevitably weaken the power of nature in proportion to the growth of our supernatural habits. And so we will act with ever greater purity and holiness.

The soul, reaching this state where grace predominates, is readily disposed to act in a holy manner, and can be said to have the mark of holiness. The immanent energy of the soul is now habitually transformed by the life blood of the supernatural life received from the author and finisher of all holiness, Jesus Christ. Thus are realized in us the words of our divine Master, that “he who abides in me,” being grafted to the source of all holiness; “and I in him,” by the workings of grace, “he bears much fruit.” All our acts will be holy, “for without me you can do nothing,” he tells us. “If anyone does not abide in me,” is not grafted to me by sanctifying grace, “he shall be cast outside as the branch and wither; and they shall gather him up into the fire, and he shall burn.”

How We can attain a State where We act habitually through grace

We can reach a state of solid and permanent holiness in two ways: by a sudden infusion of grace—or at least by an operation of grace resembling an infusion; or by the ordinary current of grace gradually raising us to this state.
By an extraordinary favor God sometimes raises a soul to a state of habitual holiness through an instantaneous infusion, without any effort on the part of the soul. But this is exceedingly rare, even among the saints.

It is true, as we can observe quite often, especially following a striking conversion, that a soul passes into a state of ardent and intense love, forcibly drawn to the supernatural, while looking with disgust at the gratifications of the world, thus gravitating lovingly towards God. This stirring and passionate love for God is excellent, but it is only in a limited measure an indication of holiness coming from Jesus Christ. Could a newly converted soul analyze the various sources of this state, defective and even depraved natural energy would probably be found at the root of this activity. Such an analysis however is not advisable.

In His immense mercy, God adopts such a soul with all its natural weakness, taking hold of those powers more susceptible to His representations. At this stage all the soul’s energies are rooted in sense, it lives by sense impressions, its judgements, tastes and actions are external and superficial; such a person leads a preeminently natural and exterior life. If God wills that this soul advance to perfection, divine grace will somehow reach below the surface to make the soul discern God with the aid of the imagination, causing a sensible attraction towards the supernatural. This rather external attraction awakens strong desires corresponding in intensity and force to the workings of the imagination. If the sensible delight is great, the cravings for such joy will be violent. Thus we see to what a considerable extent the intensity of this love depends on the sensible delight drawn from the perception of God.

Moreover, when our desires are strongly influenced by forceful imaginations, reason has little or no effect upon our inclinations. This is because our fervour is to a great extent rooted in self-seeking which leads us, often times unconsciously, into faults inherent since the fall in our natural self-love. This impression on the senses and the commotion occasioned by it, however, is the effect of grace, and real love enters into it; it is a process of great value and much to be desired; it is the ordinary means of Divine Providence to draw souls to perfection. It must be borne in mind though, if we are in this state that we are not already saints, not if these sensible affections cease, should we think that we have failed to progress in holiness. On the contrary, it is then that pure and deep-seated holiness begins to be realized. For this reason it is important that the soul continue to cling to God, that the supernatural remain the source of all life, that God be preferred to creatures with unswerving perseverance, for thus is true holiness acquired.

Since sensible delight in the supernatural turns the soul to God and by its very nature obliterates all natural affections, these may seem extinct, but they have actually remained alive, though dormant, and since innate self-love has not seriously been overcome their source is still intact. That is why, when sensible fervour ceases, corrupt inclinations and defects soon reappear. At this we must not be alarmed, but struggle valiantly.

If we do so, the victory will be ours. Bad habits and defects will have been weakened by inactivity during the period of sensible fervour, and above all the newly established supernatural tendencies, in replacing nature by grace will weaken the roots of the natural life, the source of all vice. The soul too has obtained a greater abundance of light, together with fresh capacities of resistance; it is fortified by new graces and virtues developed during this time.

I will add an observation here to clarify what I have said in a rather general way about this state of sensible fervour.

After turning to God, for some time the soul through the imagination is being touched by the supernatural which thus actuates the affections. But often after this period the sensibility becomes more delicate; the relations to the supernatural become more interior and spiritual; the agitations of
the soul lose their violence, and the soul begins to rest with a certain fixed attachment in God. As the soul advances, the intellect becomes more susceptible to the supernatural, the soul responds to God more readily, love grows more pure and more intense, virtues increase, while vices and defects reappear only faintly or not at all. The action of grace penetrates little by little every operation of the soul, and will in the course of time, succeed in realizing in it a life of purity and holiness under ordinary circumstances.

Holiness thus attained is due in part to the infusion of grace; which however has been accompanied by a constant correspondence of the soul.

Acquired Holiness

Ordinarily God makes use of another means to lead us to perfection. It is by a flow of particular graces that God guides and attracts us, that He enlightens and affects the mind, that He feeds and sustains the energies of the will. This He does in order to bring about an active tendency towards Him in the soul, which is quickened by a new life of holiness. I will explain how it is that God maintains the soul in constant fidelity by repeatedly quickening our acts by His grace; how He reduces the influence of the natural life in our acts and practices; how, little by little, He destroys the pressure of corrupt nature.

1) In the beginning God sustains our soul in constant fidelity. In consequence, while He acts upon us to render us faithful in the accomplishment of every act, the repeated practice of fidelity to His graces gives us an ever growing facility to remain faithful, because little by little every obstacle to our faithfulness disappears, and the virtue of fidelity is acquired.

2) God reduces the influence of the natural life in our acts and practices. Every triumph of particular grace results in giving to sanctifying grace added power over our future acts corresponding to the perfection of this victory. The more our acts are quickened by sanctifying grace, the more does the influence of the natural life fade.

This has immense significance for our sanctification. If now we are normally no longer determined by natural reactions, our disposition becomes more and more indifferent. Though we remain susceptible to nature, and even grow more keen and delicate, the soul will respond to created objects in a supernatural manner, because the operations of our powers are characterized by the kind of life that vivifies our soul. Since we live a life of holiness, grace will sublimate whatever affects us. This takes place not only when we encounter that which by its very nature can elicit a reaction of holiness, such as the sufferings of those near to us; but even more than music. A soul living by grace will taste joy as much as even more than others; a joy moreover that will not remain purely natural, but raise the soul to God and be a cause of supernatural acts. This will always be the case whenever a man of grace is affected by a worthy object.

If the reaction to a created object remains purely natural, the soul will continue to be indifferent, and will as a rule easily curb every encroachment of nature.

When I say that as a rule a soul at this point of holiness is not swayed by external impressions, I have in mind only what affects the moral life, what reaches our spiritual powers, not what touches our organic senses. Unless by an exceptional gift of God, uncommon even among the greatest of saints, our body always remains subject to feelings of pleasure and pain, of craving and repugnance, and thus we are well or ill disposed, and habits of the physical life are developed. As to the effects of physical impressions on our spiritual powers, these have become weak, because the soul is quickened no longer by the life of nature, is no longer open to natural agitation, and finds sufficient vigour to curb such effects or to erase any of their traces.
Lastly, God little by little destroys the pressure of corrupt nature. This corruption is rooted in our nature, and as our nature is essentially immutable, the root of perversion remains with us. However, the more the soul withdraws from the influence of nature, to live a life of grace, the weaker will be the bad odor emanating from our “fomes peccati.” The root of perversion does not die, but, latent in our heart, the infected sap will rise up whenever we permit nature to have its way, to vitiate the fruits of our actions. If we possess solid holiness, sin will contaminate us little.

In this manner God subdues in us little by little not our fallen nature, but its pressure, by withdrawing us gradually from natural life, that He may vivify us with the divine. But as we remain always subject to the influences of our physical life, even souls that are constantly living by grace frequently feel the string of corrupt nature.

If we are thus animated by grace, our whole life will tend to resemble the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ; we will acquire great facility in the practice of all virtues; we will put away bad habits and imperfections; we will eradicate that which gives force to temptations. We will, to a certain extent, even put an end to these very temptations, although we shall never be entirely free from them. They shall rise, as a rule, only when we cease to live habitually by grace, or when we are exposed to them through the senses; in the latter case temptations generally do not affect us very deeply, and are easily checked.

One class of temptations however shows its traces more or less often and with varying force even in those who have attained considerable holiness; these are temptations to pride.

But grace, the source of the interior life and the guide of all operations of the soul, also imparts a strong bent to humility, counteracting our temptations to pride, weakening them more and more as the dominion of grace expands. The imagination moreover, which is the medium pride makes use of, and the susceptibility of the senses, which in turn feeds the imagination are now mortified and weakened. When the imagination and the sensible life cease to support our pride, the impressions thus made become few, are feeble and are quickly resisted and easily overcome.

Summary of the last Three Chapters

When sanctifying grace gives life and vigor to the dispositions and actions of our soul, we possess holiness.

Sanctifying grace develops, expands, and finally dominates all our dispositions and every detail of our actions. It becomes visible in those constant and supernatural dispositions which often and without difficulty on proper occasions engender supernatural acts. To remain under the dominion of sanctifying grace we must take care to remain free from sin, to hold vices and defects subdued, to keep detached from creatures and from self. We must never become accustomed again to a natural and secular outlook on life; we are to live but for God and through His inspiration. Through grace we are given the powers to practice all virtues, to stay safe from sin, vice and defect. Grace gives fervor and strength to do what pleases God, to remain indifferent to things that are not of God, to oppose what offends God.

Our holiness is directed by PARTICULAR graces God accords to us, that we may realize through SANCTIFYING grace whatever we do. But God requires our fidelity to His graces; and occasional advertence does not suffice. Only for a constant fidelity, by a corresponding extension of sanctifying grace, does God impart to us His life of holiness.

This is the view we are obliged to form of that holiness we are to realize to a greater or lesser degree, if we would be faithful to God. If we remain men of the world, if we think, feel, live and behave as men of the world, as natural men, governed by our nature, slaves to infirmities and
and imperfections and even to passions, we are unworthy of God and His immense mercy by which He has called us to be followers of His Son. If we remain thus, we defy His express and positive will.

Holiness is not at all made up of extraordinary things, of visions, ecstasies, miracles or revelations. All these often are marks or proofs of holiness, favors which God at times grants to saintly men. Holiness lies elsewhere, as I have shown. Therefore fix all your aspirations, your activities and leanings on the things I have pointed out to you in these chapters.

Do not busy yourself with extraordinary favors; be on your guard against desiring such, whatever motive you may have. There is no possible motive that could warrant such boldness as to demand these favors from God. If God wills to accord extraordinary gifts, He knows full well how to inspire us to the necessary concurrence. We must have no such desires which only too often are rooted in pride. We would be in danger of losing real holiness, of drifting towards an imaginary perfection of a false luster which only serves our self-love, our defects and our passions.
CHAPTER V
Holiness of the Missionary

In the preceding chapters we have seen how souls are commonly led by God, how sanctifying grace is the principle and source of holiness, and that special graces are granted to aid us in the performance of our ordinary tasks. We will now consider the divine operations upon us, who are following a call to perfection; a vocation indeed, by which we have bound ourselves to special duties, and by which we are placed in an exceptional state distinct from others.

It is imperative for Missionaries to be Men of God

As nature changes sap into fruit proper to the tree, so divine grace gives rise to the type and degree of holiness befitting our state of life, that life in which we are grafted to the stem from which all supernatural life must spring, Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God.

As apostles we are grafted to the very marrow of the tree of life, and receive with superabundance its vivifying power, not only that our own supernatural life may be quickened, but also that we ourselves may become vigorous branches and channels of grace, communicating its quickening and refreshing life-blood to the offspring which will issue through the activity of the divine sap in us. Should we, main branches planted in the heart of the tree, become dry and lifeless, how can the shoots have life? If we share the life of Jesus but little, allowing nature with its disorders and shortcomings to predominate, how can we expect new branches to sprout upon the tree of grace? Even should we bring forth some few, we would be able to impart a weak and impotent life to them, a tenuous thread of supernatural life, quite insufficient to stem the flood of the sinful life in which they are submerged. Unknown to us we would with the little of the divine life of Christ communicate to them an abundance of the natural.

This reflection is so fundamental, I wish I could repeat it on every page of those instructions. A missionary who does not work seriously and constantly at his own sanctification, is not worthy of the eminent grace of apostleship, and he is guilty before the souls he should lead to God. If however he strives earnestly, he cannot fail to sanctify himself and many other souls.

Grace gives to Each the Holiness proper to his respective State of Life

We have said before that sanctifying grace quickens our acts and strengthens our good dispositions through faith, hope and charity; and from these flow the virtues requisite in our individual relations with God and creatures. But we are so weak that the help we thus receive from sanctifying grace is not adequate to the task. God, with infinite mercy, adds special graces for every act to dispose us, to draw us, and to strengthen us the more. Thus in every state of life, wherever God may have placed us, sanctifying grace inclines us vigorously towards the duties and virtues proper to that state.

When, through a special Sacrament, God gives to certain vocations the proper and necessary graces, these in turn will promote the growth of the virtues required for the new tasks. The support given by these virtues must dominate our whole life, we who are called to be Christians, priests and missionaries. The grace of state should blossom forth and manifest itself in what we may call the Christian, the priestly, the apostolic spirit.

By the fact that we, as priests, receive the grace of state through a Sacrament, God has bound Himself as it were to add to sanctifying grace at certain times and situations special graces, that we
may be equal to those duties for which we have received the aid of a specific Sacrament. If we fall short in doing what we know to be our duty, we can be sure that we simply have not corresponded to our graces. For if we had done so, we would have succeeded.

**Apostolic Men will receive sufficient Grace to attain the Holiness necessary for the Missionary Priest**

Now let us apply these principles to ourselves, and consider two different aspects of our vocation, which nevertheless are not distinct from one another, the priesthood in general, and the particular conditions under which we exercise its functions.

A man chosen by God to be a priest of Jesus Christ, is by election united to Christ the Son of Man, while by consecration he is clothed with the divine power and quality of Christ, the Son of God. Thus linked to Jesus, God and Man, he becomes with Him a mediator between God and men.

As mediator, the priest represents men before God to obtain pardon for sinners, to pray for the perseverance and sanctification of the just, to render to God, in the fullness of his personal holiness and perfection, what is due to Him from those who refuse to pay homage, or do so poorly.

To perform this duty the priest must be holy, without guilt, unsullied and without any attachment to sin, following, as far as his feebleness admits, Jesus Christ, the Great Priest, to Whom he belongs through his own priesthood, and Whose place he takes in his priestly functions. Only then will the priest be able to rise above this world, and even above heaven. Perfect fidelity to the graces of his ordination will lead the priest to perfection and raise high above things human the soul of one possessing such great power in things divine.

Lastly the grace of his ordination inspires a spirit of prayer and a pure, virile love for God and for all that is to His glory; it develops a keen discernment of all that concerns the divine perfections, the mysteries of the Redemption and the truths of salvation.

These are the fruits of the priesthood for those servants of God who are faithful to its gifts, who grow in sanctifying grace, the life-blood of their sacerdotal life.

Moreover, as mediator the priest represents God himself before men, in Whose Sacred Name he functions for the end and by the means and in the spirit determined by God himself. Christ always lives in His priests and unites them to His own sovereign Priesthood. This participation in Christ's priestly life marks the priest and all his acts with a real likeness to the Divine Master.

This participation in the priestly life of Jesus, in virtue of which we actually live His life, is given to us by the Sacrament of Holy Orders. It confers a burning and efficacious love for souls, especially for the poor, the infirm and the dejected. Did not Isaias say of Our Lord, that He was sent “to bring good news to the poor,” and did He Himself not say: “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened?”

To this love is joined a boundless desire for the salvation and sanctification of souls, even preferring those who are farthest from salvation and whose needs are greatest. This love for souls, this desire for their friendship with God is already contained in the grace received in Baptism; but only in the priesthood does the love for souls assume that firm and efficacious determination which leads to self-sacrifice. This longing, this love for sacrifice is manifested by the privations and labors freely chosen, by sufferings and even death in that great consuming ideal of the priesthood, the salvation and sanctification of souls.
The life and the words of Christ the Priest confirm this ideal of priestly love. That souls might be saved, He endured self-effacement, privation, toil and suffering, crowning His supremely sacerdotal life by a shameful and appaling death. His own words bear out the nature of His love: "I am the good shepherd," He said, "the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep."(John 10: 14). "How distressed I am until it is accomplished!" (Luke 12: 50). The whole character of a priest, filled with the grace of his state, is lifted above self and creatures. One thought alone possesses him, the salvation of souls for the glory of God. All that concerns and interests himself he forgets. He acquires unshakable courage, and patience and a perseverance which nothing can confound or weaken. His soul experiences a calm and peace, a gentleness and sympathy with others which contradictions or humiliations, sickness or want, difficulties or sorrows are powerless to weaken.

This, in effect, is the rule of the graces of the priestly state if we are faithful to them. Fidelity is of supreme importance, and woe to us if we fail. We who should be radiant suns would diffuse but a dim light and little heat, hardly enough to prevent our own spiritual death. That the priest may be able to act constantly according to the exacting requirements of his exalted office, he receives special graces, and fidelity to these graces gives the priest a true and solid sacerdotal character.

The habitual grace given in Holy Orders, like the grace given at Baptism, tends not only to activate, but also to govern intimately and entirely, the whole foundation of life. Even more than the ordinary Christian, the priest must strive to make grace the sole principle of his life. The grace of his state is ordained to procure perfection, and commits him without reserve to God and to care of souls. It is of the very essence of his consecration to God in the service of souls that the priest surrender fully to a life of sacrifice, so that he no longer belongs to himself. To aid the priest in his holocaust the grace of the priestly state is given, and as his priesthood is eternal, he must all the days of his life be without reserve at the disposal of God and of souls.

Missionary Priests will receive sufficient Grace to attain the Holiness that is needed for the proper Exercise of the priestly Office under the most difficult Circumstances

The nature and the growth of the dispositions which sacerdotal grace engenders depends upon two things: on the designs of God with regard to the priest, and on the circumstances under which God wishes him to labor.

We know that the priest, whose vocation calls only for an ordinary and conventional ministry, seldom demanding extraordinary sacrifice, will, as a rule, not attain to the full realization of that sublime holiness attainable in the priesthood. God in calling him to ordinary labors only, would not, by the grace of state, deepen his holiness beyond his needs; unless the priest himself makes up for the lack of occasions to practice heroic love, he will not reach an eminent degree of sanctity.

But Missionaries, called to wage a desperate war against the powers of darkness, to rescue great numbers of souls from everlasting death, who must endure constant want, contradictions and sufferings, even death itself, may be certain that God will greatly augment the graces due to them in virtue of their priesthood.

I need not emphasize the fact that God has placed you in this category, raising you high among the elect, assigning you to be among the most privileged in His apostolate, Sound your heart while considering God's superabundant mercy, and see how you have responded to His designs of grace and to His blessing; have you not perhaps crept along on earth, feeble and sinful, leading a purely natural and human life rather than follow the upward surge of divine mercy?
Do not lose heart if you have been faithless; only time is lost, not grace. Grace is always available to you in the same manner, and the nature of your work is as favorable to growth in holiness, as it was in the past. You cannot think highly enough of the gift of God in you. Yield to its attraction unswervingly, and you will reach your goal, where Jesus is awaiting you to proclaim you as His brother in the apostolate, and where Mary, Mother of apostles, will greet you.

To bring your priestly grace to a perfect unfolding, it is essential that you vanquish self-love and natural faults, and that you make use of every occasion for self-denial and suffering.

Let us add that the grace of our priestly state gives us the dispositions requisite for our work. To celebrate Mass and administer the Sacraments in the spirit of holiness we have need of a living and activating faith, of recollection, modesty and reverence. To discharge our duties as worthy representatives of God before men, we will receive graces enabling us to become like to Christ in charity, courtesy, patience, loyalty and humility. If we are faithful to the grace of our state, tact and wisdom will be given us and the gift to touch and draw the hearts of others, and even if necessary, those extraordinary gifts which we dare not desire, not which we should even think of.

Let us remember always that we can never acquire the fullness of priestly virtues unless we practice them with constant fidelity; remember too that we are aided always by a superabundance of graces.
CHAPTER VI
Obstacles to Holiness

The designs of God in the Creation of Man

God has created us as beings that are both spiritual and corporeal. He has given us a spiritual soul to place us in an immediate relation with Himself by sharing His life of grace and holiness with us now, that we may participate in His beatitude hereafter. And He has given us a body in order that our immaterial soul might contact the surrounding world of matter which has been made for us, only that we might rule over it.

Since God the Creator is reflected in the visible material world, we ought to raise our thoughts to him, whenever we take delight in it; we must find His image in the creatures that are made for our use: "Gloria Domini plena est terra." But in order to do this, to rise from the visible world to God, the soul must participate in the life of God and begin to see all things as He see them. In this way when we view the visible world, we will perceive in it the reflection of its Creator and raise our soul to God.

Lacking the necessary means to feed the vital powers given us by God, and feeling a strong need to apply these powers so as to derive true joy and happiness, we can nevertheless find in our created faculties an instrument of maintaining a constant support of the life we have received from God. To help us perfect our relations with creatures and to help us find true blessedness, God has given us our imagination, a faculty part spirit and part matter, one of vigorous vitality, one that brings us in contact with things distant, past, present and future. It affects us with an intensity and intimacy much greater than any we can derive from immediate contact with the visible world through the senses. Both intellect and will are exposed to the keen impressions produced by the imagination.

Through the imagination we come into relation with every kind of being. Through it ideas are accompanied and even magnified by sense image which in turn call forth a host of associations. In this way the range of mutual associations of ideas and images is greatly extended. Our Creator has formed our imagination in this way so that it might render considerable assistance to us as we strive to adhere to God and reach a full life and complete happiness. Since on the one hand divine truths will call up concrete images—and thus abstract ideas are related to the senses—sensations that are both vivid and pleasing will help us in raising our minds to God; on the other hand, since the perception of sensible, concrete images, even the most common of them will call up a host of associations, the imagination thus arouses the spiritual in man and will continually turn our mind back to God so that with much greater facility we will remain united to Him and begin to see Him in every creature.

Before the fall man easily referred all his actions to God. All his natural powers were perfectly balanced, and fulled with divine grace, the soul was constantly tending towards God even in its relations with creatures. Finding that his supernaturalized activities could not be nourished from his own natural resources, man turned instinctively to God. He found in his own well-balanced natural powers, transformed by grace, a source of happiness and love, and he remained united to God and lived in perfect submission to the divine Will. This dependance however did not destroy human liberty in any way.

Passions and will were completely controlled by reason, and both functioned in full submission to God. Thus among man's powers, perfect harmony existed between the human person and God, Who directed man and imparted to him His divine life.
Since Adam’s Fall
Man is strongly inclined to refer all his Actions to Himself

We have seen the conditions man would be in had sin not interfered, and had man continued in his dependence on God. But urged by the devil, he refused obedience, so that the whole order of creation was overthrown: he desired independence from God in order to find blessedness by his own sovereign will; he severed his union with God and cut himself off from the fountain of divine grace where he had found blessedness. Thrown upon his own resources and void of divine life, he was deprived of that happiness which would satisfy his intellectual and moral exigencies. No longer did he find the Hand that would minister to him and satisfy his hunger and thirst. This act that had separated our first parents from God, and the original sin which we all inherit at the first instance of our existence have brought about for all of us the destruction of the originally established order, and as a result our whole being has suffered radical dislocation.

Sin has separated us from God. Moreover, in place of the former thirst for God and perfect dependence on Him we now find ourselves turning to our own resources and seeking complete independence for ourselves. This new tendency towards ourselves disposses us to make self the beginning and the end of all we do. We wish to be self-sufficient and autonomous, and even if we think we ought to turn to God for an increase of grace, we try to acquire the divine life as if it came from ourselves. The ultimate motive of our actions is no longer God, as it ought to be, but our own self, and all creatures outside of us, also become ends in themselves, chosen solely for our personal exaltation.

Evils flowing from Selfishness and Pride

Selfishness is the root of all evil. It causes us to put our interests in place of the interests of God, to act as if we existed merely for ourselves, as if all had to be at our service, as if nothing else mattered but our own eminence and perfection. If fully developed, selfishness is the source of unspeakable evils and the cause of immense ruin, and although divine grace may subdue selfishness in the heart of man, there still remain countless ways in which it can break through again and retard us in the practice of virtue. Even if opposed with some success it still creeps secretly into our intentions, tainting our acts of virtue, giving rise to temptations, keeping us from advancing in perfection, causing many faults, and often developing dangerous illusions.

The root, the nerve, the most striking assertion of this vice is pride. “Radix omnium malorum superbia.” It is the characteristic of a proud man to look upon himself as independent of all exigencies and circumstances of his existence, to wish to live by his own resources, absorbed by his own interests, and solely for the sake of himself.

These manifold disorders and tendencies caused by pride taint all our relations with the world around us. Just as before the fall, when the divine life of grace permeated our whole being, all creatures served to draw us nearer to God, so now, influenced by selfishness and pride, our relations with the world serve to inflate us more and more with our own self. It is in this sense that all creatures have become accursed to us through the sin of our first parents.

Selfishness and pride, so deeply rooted in our soul, and infecting all our faculties, also dispose the trend of our imagination and place this highly susceptible faculty entirely at their service. All that is seen is colored and distorted, and our whole outlook is warped. Souls under the sway of these vices easily fall into great excesses, and even though they have enough will-power to resist with some success, still they will long remain entangled in numerous and varied imaginations, like a fly in a spider’s web. This is the malady of our intelligence. Such is the disorder in fallen man.
Evils caused by Sensuality

The disorders of man's sensitive nature have become the source of great moral evils. If the soul in its search for objects that would gratify its longings and produce happiness is not filled with the divine life of grace, then it will turn to creatures. This tendency of our sensitive life is a consequence of original sin. Blinded and indifferent towards divine life, the soul turns to external creatures and contacts these through the senses and imagination which acquire strong cravings for pleasure and thus become attached to creatures for their own sake.

The more the senses enter into contact with creatures to find pleasure there, the more does the soul become void of the things of the spirit and of God, while inclination of our whole sensitive life towards creatures increases. The soul finds no appetite for things of the spirit, it becomes enslaved to the senses and their cravings, to created goods, finally to sin. "Qui facit peccatum, servus est peccati." Thus once more is realized for man the malediction of creatures, which cease to gratify but rather cause toil and suffering, and even deepen man's perverseness.

Man, degraded to servitude of the senses, is no longer able to exercise control, or even to judge properly in his relations, and is blindly given over to the grossest and most shameful vices, hardly differing from the beast, living a mere animal life. What carries him to such excessive depravity, and what always gives such force to all that affects his sense life is the vivacity of his passions, which is aided and intensified by his imagination. The senses receive their impressions from contact with things present, the imagination from things actually absent, and as a result reason is superseded by blind cravings.

These impressions and the reactions they generate are passionate, violent and pertinacious. Our susceptibility to sense pleasure is in proportion to the influence which we have permitted our sense appetite to exercise. If then the violence of the passions is not counteracted by divine grace, the soul becomes their plaything and their slave, and degenerates more and more.

Appalling Effect of the present actual Condition of Man

Man finding himself in a state of disorder, separated from God and tending to drift farther away from Him, finds himself wholly unable to love and to will, or even to discover a means that would bring him closer to the source of divine life and enable him to participate in it. He cannot even know or desire a good of the purely natural order. Adding to this his selfishness and pride, his unstable sense life, the conflict of passions, and the unbridled restlessness of the imagination, we may make the following observations.

1) The intelligence is largely obscured, and a deceptive light tends to make good appear evil, and evil good. And even if grace unites us to God and draws us towards Him, our evil propensities will continue to distort our view and prevent us from distinguishing the Hand of God, His love, His intentions, and the workings of His providence.

2) The heart is weighed down by a great languor concerning God and concerning anything that would bring us nearer to Him. Though easily set afire by creatures, the heart remains cold, dull and indifferent before its Supreme Good.

3) The will is extremely weak in doing anything that brings us closer to God, in keeping His commandments, in doing what pleases Him, while there is no lack of force, or energy, of resolution, if we can please our pride or self-interest, or if we wish to follow our passions.

We have seen the ravages of sin in our intellectual and sense faculties. This contagion extends
over all our powers, which also contribute in drawing us to creatures and in extranging us from God. This condition becomes fixed, renders us more susceptible to evil, and places many obstacles in our way to God.

Lastly, sin has stained even the inherent constitution of our natural temperament. We will find hardly a man free from any defects in his natural dispositions. And though some are more fortunate than others, all have their shortcomings.

There are two distinct ways in which weakness of temperament is manifested. Either our dispositions as such make us more or less prone to vice or in the ordinary exercise of our powers we simply tend to excess or defect. In the first case, if for instance, we incline to generosity, our pride will be quickened. If we are naturally energetic, we will tend to anger and resentment. If we are of an easy-going nature, there is danger of laxness and idleness. There are very few so naturally well-balanced that their only trends are towards virtue, being at the same time free from any inclination to vice, and as it were, perfectly prepared for unhampered supernatural growth.

Conclusion

How can we expect to save our souls when we are overwhelmed by a multitude of evils which amplify each other, thus rendering our position even more wretched? But when we are most helpless, grace and the mercy of God come to our aid and we need only be faithful. Let us set to work at once for we never begin too soon, nor finish too late. But whenever we tarry, we are lending a hand to the foe who will rise up and crush us.
CHAPTER VII
Means of Growth in Holiness

Religious Life

Not only has God called us to the apostolic life, which demands a high degree of holiness of a priest but He has called us also to be members of a congregation to live the religious life. This is an additional proof that God wishes to raise us to that fulness of holiness belonging to our state in life as missionaries because of all the means of sanctification the religious life is the most efficacious.

General Considerations on the Advantages of the Religious Life for the Missionary

We must admit that we have received graces in abundance and that during our years of formation we have been trained thoroughly in their development. All things in our life are conducive to the acquisition of great holiness. And yet, in spite of all this, we see only too well how difficult it is to succeed. Upon analysis we shall discover what holds us back, why we fall short of our goal. We shall see that if we were faithful to our rule, all obstacles would disappear, and we would grow in holiness without fail.

We know that our heart, ever bent toward pleasure and satisfaction, must be checked and held under control. The influence of the things around us and of all that feeds our passions must be curtailed as much as possible. Disorderly desires and the ease with which they can be fostered and gratified, too often lead us to turn off from the appointed road and prevent us from attaining the exalted degree of holiness essential for the missionary priest. Only in so far as our worldly and purely natural life has been crushed by mortification can we expect a real growth in holiness.

A missionary who does not belong to a community or society depends solely on his own counsel and good-will and on the ordinary graces which are given lavishly to those chosen by God. He is however in great danger of falling short even of the most mediocre sanctity and he will experience the greatest difficulty in living up to the exalted standard of his calling. His soul is like a field upon which precious seed has been scattered, but which, having no fences, is difficult to protect. The seed is trampled underfoot and remains barren; enemies may come and sow weeds; wild beasts may work further destruction. If, added to all these obstacles the soul itself is poor, it is nearly impossible to see that the gardener will be only too inclined to become increasingly negligent. Tillage will be neglected, and the land instead of good fruit will yield but thorns and briers.

Quite different is the situation of the missionary who is also a religious. Effectually supported by the common life and the example of his confreres, finding strength to overcome his own inclinations and defects, sheltered against danger from without, receiving special graces by the mere observance of the rule, the Religious has only to exercise good-will to remain faithful to the grace of his priestly state. His soul is like a well-kept garden surrounded by walls. The precious seed sown by the owner falls on rich and well irrigated soil, bearing fruit a hundredfold. And even should the soil be inadequate, special care will be lavished upon it and it is bound to improve. If the gardener is watchful, few weeds will come and these will be eradicated with care. Watchfulness can prevent the enemy from planting even the tiniest weed, and unless there be a break in the wall, no outsider no wild beasts will intrude to destroy the Divine seed.

Should such a thing happen, the disaster is great indeed. Trespassers will smother the tender plants, thieves and wild beasts will strive to lay waste the beautiful garden. And while the wall is broken, the garden receives no attention or watering, and may easily become a dry and barren
wilderness. But even now a cure is possible, provided the gardener hastens to repair the wall. This must be done at once, and when it has been done the gardener must set to work immediately, and keep careful watch, all the while quickly rooting out what has been planted. Even though there are no signs of growth, the seed may still be good. Thus the original condition can be restored. At times this is extremely wearisome and laborious work, but it must be done without delay and with great zeal. Then at the sight of the perseverance and the eagerness of the gardener, the owner of the garden will grant again his original favors, and take upon himself the greater part of the work.

Although this allegory is easily applied, still I want to repeat its truths in ordinary language.

It is true that the grace of our state possesses great powers of sanctification and is followed by many particular graces which lend strong support to us in our weakness. Besides, our priestly functions, such as work among souls, preaching, the administration of the Sacraments, and above all Holy Mass, offer us inestimable assistance and should suffice to keep us on the road to holiness. On the other hand, we must remember that the great number and excellence of our graces and helps exact of us in turn a higher degree of holiness, and a more perfect concurrence with the Divine Will than is expected of the ordinary servant of God. Thus it is that actually our difficulties increase, the greater benefits we receive from God, and that the tendencies of our weak and fallen nature must be restrained and controlled by an extraordinary effort. This is precisely what is so difficult for the missionary who is on his own, while for us who live the religious and common life, it is our very strength.

Difficulties of a Missionary, Who is on his own, to grow in Holiness

The independent missionary can only with great difficulty come to a knowledge of the high degree of sanctity to which he is called; and even at best his knowledge will be vague and often superficial.

Free to dispose of his time and work and to regulate his relations with others, his soul is fully exposed to the attacks of sloth, carelessness and levity. He becomes easily entangled in awkward relations with others, and there are numerous things to impede his spiritual growth and release his passions. His soul, concerned more with things outside than with its own life is like to the field without fences, and even under the most rigorous surveillance it is difficult to avoid dissipation in his ordinary relations with men, and to safeguard those exquisite plants, the lofty virtues of priestly holiness.

The missionary who is on his own, and who is free to use his resources and to obtain whatever brings pleasure will not be easily able to deny himself natural comforts and gratifications whenever they are within reach. Love for privations and sorrow becomes increasingly difficult and a spirit of mortification and sacrifice for the salvation of souls is almost impossible of attainment.

Master of his own will, he becomes the plaything of every obstacle and caprice, and pride with ingenious cunning will pervade all his activities. His relations with the world, unless regulated, infallibly lead to dissipation. How difficult it is to keep one's vices and passions in check, when left alone to control one's own nature.

When a man is not bound by rule in the use of his time, in his work and aspirations, what a formidable task it is to spur his piety, to sharpen his faith, to nourish an interior spirit, to think often and earnestly of his priestly work and to fulfill his duty in the spirit of God! It can be done only by the aid of regular exercises, joined to many other precautions, all of which is unfeasible for the independent missionary. He may take firm resolves in this regard and even practise them for a time, yet nature will win the upper hand, and his fidelity will weaken.
Considering all these difficulties and our human frailty, we can understand why so few priests attain a consummate sacerdotal holiness. Not grace, but fidelity is at fault.

Advantages of the Religious Life for the Missionary

We cannot regard too highly the grace of being called to the religious and common life. In our vocation to the apostolate we are receiving not only the most powerful graces which can serve as sources of very great sanctity, but we have been surrounded by most efficient safeguards against our purely natural leanings, our predominant passions and the mortal dangers particular to our type of work.

The religious life has taught us the nature and the value of true apostolic sanctity. It is God Himself Who stands guard over our soul, when by His Holy Will, He regulates the use of our time, our work, and our relations with others. Thus we are defended against all bad habits and dangers arising from contact with outsiders, dangers that would lead us back to our former life, which was purely natural and dead to Divine grace.

The vow of poverty and its practice prevents us from desiring, or even from considering comforts, gratification and conveniences where we might otherwise be tempted. Not possessing anything, and being obliged by our vow to become perfectly detached even from the few things we seem to have, we are not at all affected by the things around us.

The practice of obedience is the means by which God eradicates all iniquity from our souls and destroys the source of so many infidelities that arise from our independence of will. No longer are we subject to our own caprice or to the obstinate faults of our own character, as we were when we governed our own will and our own doings. Moreover, obedience most efficaciously aids us in rooting our pride from its most secret recesses, and protects us against being carried away by the heavy assaults it makes upon us. Egoism receives its deathblow because obedience makes us practise the most basic and essential form of self-denial, namely, the sacrifice of our intellect, which touches the very source of egoism. Should some selfishness remain, it would be only in a few details, easily overcome by good-will and vigilance. The regularity of our religious life is a safeguard against dissipation; for by it all our external actions and relations, already chastened by obedience, are restricted, and directed in conformity to general as well as to particular rules of the Institute. Natural zeal is tempered and mortified, and our vices and perverse inclinations cannot grow beyond our control or become dominant. Some earnest effort to grow in perfection will easily overcome any remaining obstacles.

Moreover, when we live in an atmosphere of religious integrity and eagerness for sanctification with confreres whom we love and whose example can edify us; when we are aided by the prayers and good works of the whole Congregation, and are bound to the regular daily exercises which serve to maintain an interior spirit; when we are urged in so many ways to perform our sacerdotal duties as it befits men of God; when we earnestly practise poverty, obedience and strict regularity, it needs but an ordinary amount of good-will to assure us of a steady flow of abundant graces. In this way we shall come to possess a strong faith, a firm wish to grow in holiness and in a sound religious spirit. We shall find strength and courage to accept pain and sorrow with love and to endure them in the spirit of the saints.

Thus could we compare the soul of the religious missionary to a garden filled with precious plants, well kept, abundantly watered, and surrounded by a wall which serves as a protection against the outside world.
Fidelity to the Rule is absolutely necessary to realize the Benefits of the Religious Life

Once we cease to observe our rule, the wall is broken, all of God’s blessings are soon scattered, and all our prerogatives as religious are lost. As missionaries we would not be able to persevere, our souls would be harrassed by assaults from without, and all the good that may have been developed would be ruined: “And the last state of that man is worse than the first.” (St. Luke 11: 26). But there is a remedy, should such a thing happen. We must raise the wall again, close the breach, and once more practise our rule in all its points, and with new fervor. This is not an easy and painless task; but it is only proper that we should have to pay for our disregard of the holy rule, the guardians of our soul. But when we actually do make a new effort and begin again to adhere firmly to our rule, when we refuse to give in to those momentary weaknesses and illusions by which our laxity seeks to persuade us in small matters that we have quite sufficient reason to yield to temptations against the rule, when we stand firm, Divine aid will not be refused. God will give us again the facility to remain faithful, and with our new resolve, the work of our sanctification will continue as before, and the prerogatives of our religious life will be restored.

Once we have removed the greater number of those obstacles which Divine grace ordinarily encounters in our weak and fallen nature and in the circumstances of our life, we will find less difficulty in remaining faithful and we can feel justified in being more certain of perseverance. If God encounters less resistance, His grace will expand in our soul with great vigor, and if we continue to persevere in our resolve to grow in holiness, we shall attain the sanctity that befits a missionary priest.

There is one more consideration that will give us an additional proof of the importance of keeping the rule. The apostolic and priestly life demands a degree of sanctity surpassing even that of privileged souls. This sanctity must be rooted in the graces of our sacerdotal state. But in order for this grace to unfold, our soul must possess the virtues and supernatural vitality which the grace has fully unfolded does the grace of our priesthood find us in the necessary dispositions, so that it can develop as intended by God and in conformity with our particular assignment. But to acquire the full supernatural life that is due to Baptism and which is essential for the growth of priestly and apostolic graces, we cannot find better aid than in the religious life, where the mere observance of our initial promises almost suffices for a relatively perfect spiritual expansion.

Conclusion

If we consider all this, can we doubt even for a moment the immense blessings of a vocation to the religious life? This is a clear indication of God’s desire that we become saintly priests and saintly apostles. Can we fail to realize the extreme importance of a perfect observance of the rule? Finally, how could we be filled with joy, zeal and courage without being ready to forego all rather than fall short in points of the rule or fail to have the proper religious attitude!
CHAPTER VIII

Further Means of Sanctification

Self-Abnegation

If man had never fallen from his original state of sanctity, we could without hesitation take pleasure in all the created things around us and could freely exercise our powers of mind, will and body, not only without danger to the life of God in our souls, but even to its advantage. For the earth was given to man that he might enjoy it during his temporary sojourn. “Terram autem dedit fillis hominum.”

God breathed in him a spirit of life in order that man might become a creature of living activity. At first not only were all things within him innocent, but all things around him became for him the image and likeness of His God, and served to develop in him the life of His Heavenly Father and Sanctifier.

But when sin had entered the world and had spoiled God’s beautiful creatures, all this entirely changed and now all creation has become for us a danger, drawing us away from God, and sowing death in our soul. Thus, our greatest adversary is within our very selves, namely, our evil habits and our unbridled and perverted faculties.

Ever since the fall, the use of creatures holds two dangers for us, which will infallibly overcome us if we were abandoned to our personal strength alone. Either we run the danger of suffering spiritual death through the total loss of the divine life in our souls, or we will at least suffer a partial loss, which quite often leads ultimately to a complete separation from God. To oppose these evils and to insure our victory over them, God gives us the powerful aid of His grace. And that we may fight with profit and be assured of success, He gives us in addition the means to remain faithful to His grace. To conquer death and even to rise again when we have fallen away from Him through our perverse use of creatures, He gives us His laws. “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. Thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not steal, etc.” (Matt. 19: 18). These laws are minimum requirements, they are like fragments of bread that prevent a starving man from dying. They serve as a fence, as borderlines between life and death, as curbs on our vices and passions to keep us from falling into abyss.

But to assure us against a spiritual death, and to help us recover from the ills and infirmities of our soul, to restore the divine life in us in all its perfection, God has taught us the practice of total self-abnegation and of denying to ourselves any pursuit of gratification in creatures. “If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.” (Mark 8: 34).

Let us examine now how abnegation can be efficacious against all the ills of the soul; why it leads to perfect holiness, and to what objects it should be extended.

Self-abnegation is the only Remedy against all the Disorders of the Soul

Self-abnegation is an efficacious remedy against sin, which is the manifestation of disorder of the soul. Those who are content with merely observing the commandments are in great danger of falling frequently into sin. They are like men walking above a precipice, upon a slope so steep, that they are constantly drawn downwards and may easily slide into the abyss. They do not see, and they risk mistakes which may lead to a fall. They are unstable and weak, they stagger, and cannot keep themselves erect even when walking on the edge of an abyss. They are gay and without misgivings. Indeed, what a coincidence of fortunate circumstances if they should escape disaster.
But this is the picture of those who are content with just avoiding sin, who do not hesitate to permit themselves every pleasure and gratification, as long as no grave sin is involved, they actually walk on the edge of a precipice. They forget that the lower passions, highly responsive to pleasure, expose them to frequent falls into sin in their pursuit of gratification and enjoyment. This inclination is always strong. If even the most vigilant experience it, how much more those who, by giving way to every pleasure, have sharpened the susceptibility of their senses and quickened their bent for evil! Occasional falls tend to produce habits of sin, lesser sins are soon followed by grave sins, which generate permanent vices, and soon God will be abandoned entirely.

The evil is intensified by a darkening of the intelligence as the natural consequence of attachment to pleasure and gratification. This clouding of the intelligence often leads to illusions, to blindness of danger, even if the danger is immediately threatening and overwhelming. The unhappy man will persuade himself that there is no sin at all involved, or only a small fault, while actually the sin is considerable and staring him in the face.

Moreover, a certain slackness of soul soon sets in. All of us, to a greater or lesser degree, are frail and infirm of soul. But habitual seeking of gratification aggravates our state. Every gratification saps the strength of our soul, and habits of self-indulgence enervate us more and more. With our power of resistance undermined, with our innate tendency towards evil and with our intellect darkened by vice, how can we expect to evade sin when danger arises? The only certain protection against falling into sin and losing one’s soul is abnegation of self and of all creatures.

Some there are who say that they abhor mortal sin and would die rather than commit even one; that they are continually on their guard, and that they scrupulously shun all pleasures that are forbidden under pain of mortal sin. They would not admit, even to themselves, that they are actually indifferent toward venial sin, that fundamentally, though without being quite clear about it, they give little attention to so-called ‘light’ sins. These people are in real danger, and, if they continue to hold this attitude, they may suffer a frightful surprise when they face their Sovereign Judge.

What is the cause of this ease with which people ignore venial sin? Is it not that they refuse to forego the pleasures of this life, that they wish to be undisturbed and to gratify every whim? And yet there is only one certain way of salvation—self-denial.

Others aim higher. They make firm and lasting resolutions to avoid even venial sin. If they were told that what they are about to do was a venial sin, they would not do it, even if it meant pain, sadness or murmurings. But they do not want to offend God in any way. As a rule people in such dispositions would also refuse to commit imperfections. However, notice that they do not wish to renounce pleasures and licit gratifications. They allow themselves as many of these as circumstances permit. Moreover, they do not really make an earnest war against their defects. Well, such fall every day into numerous venial sins, and they may easily commit grievous faults, which to their minds, are merely light faults or perhaps even only imperfections.

They pay no attention to attachments of the heart, they do not advert to the sources of pride and selfishness, nor to the defects of their character. Hence, as they advance in age, they become more and more imperfect and wanting in every way.

If we consider the entanglement of all the evils that strive to overwhelm us, would we not look for more efficacious means to weed out sin from our souls? Now there is one means and only one—abnegation. It is true, we can save ourselves by keeping God’s law, but the means of observing His law is abnegation.
There are two defects in such a calculating attitude, which would decide human acts merely in view of their not constituting a mortal or venial sin or an imperfection, and it is just such a frame of mind, which dooms to failure even those who would work earnestly at their perfection and who would never want to offend God.

First, such a disposition remains purely theoretical, and is maintained only through force of memory, or through semi-conscious imagination, without giving rise to any practical application. The desire to be perfect exists together with a disregard for one's attachments, defects and shortcomings.

The second defect lies in this that while really wishing to become perfect, we pay attention only to acts which are forbidden under pain of mortal or venial sin, or which are clearly imperfect. But we totally disregard the fact that it is almost impossible to remain free from frequent venial sins, and even from occasional mortal sin, while we remain attached to ourselves, bent on enjoying the world without trying to root out our pride and overcome our faults of character; instead of firmly and constantly resisting the disorders of the lower appetites, we give free rein to the restless cravings of the soul, even for things that are lawful.

In this war which we must wage against the enemies that are within us, we cannot limit ourselves to half-measures. We must fight energetically and generously on every point where the enemy's presence is felt or may be found. In short, the only really powerful remedy we can apply to all our wills is self-abnegation.

Even if we undertake such a fight sincerely and effectively, we must always remember that it is a defensive warfare. If we were in a well-fortified place which an enemy had great difficulty in taking, we would be justified in-contenting ourselves with remaining on the defensive. But this is not the proper strategy against spiritual enemies. Our soul is a camp which the enemy desires to take. We are defending the camp, but we are on an incline, with the enemy holding the heights. If we content ourselves with remaining on the defensive, we shall lose ground continually and will be in danger of being hurled down.

In such a difficult position, facing numerous and powerful enemies, we can be victorious only if we take the offensive. “The kingdom of God suffers violence, and the violent bear it away.” We must attack and pursue the enemy until he is destroyed. “I will pursue my enemies and will not go back till they are vanquished.” That means that we must apply ourselves to complete abnegation as an attack on the entire enemy camp in all its points; it means constant and persevering abnegation until the enemy is completely routed.

Self-abnegation is indispensable to Growth in Holiness.

If a purely defensive attitude is inefficacious for the mere avoidance of sin, how much more is it so for those who sincerely desire evangelical perfection, or who are bound by their state of life to aim for it.

When a person says that he will spare no efforts towards becoming a saint and reaching perfection according to God's design in his regard, and that he will avoid venial sin and imperfections, but that for the rest, he will permit himself all lawful gratifications, thus making his life hardly different from the lives of others, sin and imperfections excepted, that person is deceiving himself and cannot mean anything. He speaks and acts contrary to what was said and done by Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who said, “If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Luke: 9 23). Now to follow Him is to wish to be perfect. “If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, . . . and come, follow me.” (Matt.: 19 21). To be perfect therefore, we must have renounced self and become detached from creatures.
If what has been said holds true for any soul that desires to be perfect, what shall we say about ourselves, men of God, priests of Jesus Christ, who follow Him in the strictest sense of the term! What preposterous folly it would be for us not to practise perfect abnegation, not to labor relentlessly to destroy the evil tendencies of our fallen nature, to conquer all our defects! How grotesque the apostle who, following Jesus Christ, goes to war against demons, sets out to conquer souls, while he himself is filled with self, and seeks amusement and gratifications, and is still under the sway of his vices and defects! An officer in the army of the great King cannot go to war, following his Sovereign, while he still wears his old rags; he cannot boast that he will gain a victory over the demon, barring him from the heart of others, while he leaves opened wide the gates of his own heart.

But if we cannot avoid sin and practise perfection without abnegation, it is much more necessary for us to uproot the evil tendencies of our hearts, to blot out our defects and to bring about in ourselves the triumph of the life of grace in all its fullness and power.

To want to avoid all faults, to practise virtue and to grow in holiness, but at the same time to live a natural life, leaving unchecked the disorders and evil tendencies of our nature and in this way keeping alive the sources of sin, is like preserving the roots of weeds while striving to prevent them from sprouting again. There can be no holiness while our inclinations for evil are still vigorous and our defects are still manifest.

That is why it is absolutely necessary for us to apply ourselves with all the fervor of our soul towards a complete abnegation of self. This alone will enable us to uproot these tendencies to evil and to destroy these defects. Abnegation alone will produce in us a perfect development of God’s grace and its perfect dominion, so necessary for true supernatural life of the soul and for attaining real priestly and apostolic holiness.

Saint Paul has said, “Care concupiscit adversus spiritum, et spiritus adversus carnem.” Two masters are at war for the possession of our soul; the Holy Spirit, Who has set up His throne in the inmost depths of our soul through sanctifying grace; and sin, dwelling in our flesh, and spreading its influence over the entire life of our passions. Sanctifying grace tends to fill our whole life with its warm radiance, while sin tends to pour forth its darkening and contagious vapors.

The rays of grace strive to filter into our very passions to purify them and to give them light and strength. Sin strives to permeate the soul with its fumes, to darken the light that shines within, to chill its ardour and thereby to extinguish, or at least weaken in us the life of the Holy Spirit. Our soul stands between two camps. Our will and conduct will decide the issue.

We desire complete victory on the side of grace and have consecrated ourselves to God for that purpose, and therefore our practical conduct must be in absolute harmony with the Holy Spirit. To keep to a middle road, to grant part to nature and part to grace, is to open the fort of the true master to the enemy. Moreover, when we give to nature its part at the same time desiring to serve God perfectly, we arrest the action of grace, impose limitations upon it and prevent its influence over the passions. Little by little the lower passions will gain new strength, spread their influence over our intelligence and will and weaken them, and the supernatural life of the soul will decay correspondingly.

In fact, the life of nature is the proper sphere of all our depraved tendencies, defects and imperfections. And our nature is so well suited to them that they grow of themselves without cultivation, and any efforts to extirpate them are made in vain. Natural sentiments, affections and gratifications serve as a most efficacious nourishment to make them grow rapidly and in abundance.
If then, in opposition to the word of Our Divine Savior, we seek to serve two masters, if we desire to remain faithful to grace and to grow in holiness and at the same time continue to seek purely natural consolations, pleasures and gratifications, we can be sure that we will remain throughout our whole life, imperfect, deficient and wholly natural men; the sovereignty of grace over us will diminish from day to day. And who knows where this decline will lead us, who are called to true and full sanctity?

Therefore, in this conflict between nature and grace there can be no middle way. Grace must be the absolute master of our soul, it must quicken all our activities, dominate our passions, and temper and regulate our whole course of conduct. But for this it is absolutely necessary, at all times and under all possible circumstances, that we renounce anything which gives contentment, pleasure and consolation to our lower nature. The reason for this is clear, and easy to understand. Grace has been given to us to fill us with supernatural life. It tends by its very essence to inform all operations and reactions of our soul. It renders our spiritual faculties receptive for the supernatural, and bars whatever is opposed to God. If this result is not obtained, it is only because of the obstacles offered by our tendency towards evil and by our defects which are fed by purely natural habits of mind and body.

Moreover, a purely natural life will keep the soul on a level, where grace cannot act, for low habits of action and reaction fix the soul outside the sphere of grace. When therefore a man resolves to avoid any natural gratification at all times and under all circumstances, he withdraws from contact with all that is foreign to divine grace, and leaves every channel of his soul open to the supernatural. And since it is of the nature of grace to expand, and to permeate all activities, the soul will become filled with it as a result. Moreover, this renunciation removes the roots of the evil and defective tendencies of the soul. No longer will grace meet any obstacles in the way of its action.

Abnegation should be thorough and energetic

The practice of abnegation will never be a complete success unless it extends to every evil that is within us, unless it attacks the stronghold of evil at every point of its defense. As regards those defenses that cannot be carried immediately by storm, we must at least press them closely and carefully blockade them. Moreover, in the ensemble of this general attack we must gather all the energy and perseverance required for an undertaking of such importance and against such powerful enemies.

By all this I mean that it is necessary for us to renounce all the objects of which we can deprive ourselves, in order to shut out the natural and harmful impressions which these objects make upon us. As regards those objects which the order of God’s Will prevents us from renouncing, or which go with our state in life, neither our soul nor our senses must take any delight which their possession might entail. We must also be on our guard against attachment to these objects. The enemy being thus surrounded, we need only exercise a peaceful vigilance over ourselves. As regards natural gratifications, this is the way to attack and to blockade the enemy.

As for defects and vices, there are some that can be cut out entirely and this we must do with a vigorous hand. There are others, like pride and the defects rooted in our character, which are not so easily nor quickly removed. Before all else it is necessary to hem them in, to cut off their nourishment by the practice of abnegation, which is to be exercised here in two ways. First, by cutting out whatever may nurture character defects and whatever we may find as giving us satisfaction. Next, by accepting in a spirit of abnegation not only the continual shocks which we may have to endure during this process, but also the labor demanded of us in constantly offering resistance to them. On this point we must be on our guard against discouragement which may come to any soul not yet truly mortified. If we add to this a peaceful vigilance, the victory is assured.
Finally, throughout this combat, we must be full of fervor, full of energy and constancy, trusting in God and His divine grace. Whoever undertakes to walk in the way of perfect abnegation, but does so in a listless, easy-going or superficial way, will not make progress. He will even frequently practice only an imaginary abnegation, one that has no existence in reality.

This total war holds nothing that should frighten fervent and energetic souls, who understand the need of belonging entirely to God, who know that since the coming of the Savior and His precursor, the kingdom of God endures assault, and that the violent have been seizing it by force. But there are souls attached to the pleasures of this world, and others who are pusillanimous. They find everywhere unsurmountable obstacles which exist only in the weakness of their heart or in their imagination.

Two Objections against This Doctrine

There are souls of little generosity, who lose courage at the thought of renouncing forever all natural satisfactions. They cannot see how such a hard life, stripped of any pleasure or satisfaction could be borne. They see nothing but sadness and gloom. Their courage gives way and they run again after human consolations, at the same time trying to justify their conduct by persuading themselves that not all men are called to so great perfection, or that they will be able to become perfect simply by the practice of the virtues, while permitting themselves at least some lawful satisfactions. They plan to keep the latter within bounds so as to run no danger of laxness.

We must determine to set ourselves against all such thoughts should we ever feel in our heart this enervating weakness. For, even though everyone is not called to perfection, none of us can ever consider himself a belonging to this category. The very fact that we have been called to the apostolate proves that we are called to perfection. The words of our Lord are too explicit in this regard. “If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself.” (Mark: 8 34). These divine words brook no objections. God’s all-powerful voice impels and draws us towards perfection. Let us march forward with courage and generosity, refusing to consider our weakness. He Who has called us, will give us the strength to reach our goal. Each of us must say to himself, “I can do all things in Him who strengthens me.” (Phil.: 4 13).

These words of our Lord and of the Apostle silence all objections and allow of no evasion. We are under a strict obligation to tend towards perfection, and we must press towards it by abnegation. this is the will of God.

Besides, all those who do try to evade it, deceive themselves and will discover their costly error only when it is too late. They have to suffer infinitely more for giving in to the weaknesses of their nature. Their heart is not filled with joy, with that energy which is experienced by generous souls in the service of God. They haggle with God, and God bargains with them. They are so easily bewildered and troubled, whenever they feel that God demands a sacrifice of them. Now they are willing and now they are not. Their defects, so long uncurbed, cause them to commit numerous faults. They are like a sick person living on refined and dainty food, which does not contribute to their well-being, and which leaves them easily fatigued after the least bit of work. They would be much better off if they could be rid of their sickness and live on dry bread. At least they would enjoy serenity of mind and vigorous health.

It is only he who completely casts off this sickness of soul, and who generously and manfully embraces a life of perfect self-denial, that will come to know profound peace, and at the same time, burning zeal. He will be a thousand times happier than those who in their weakness permit themselves to be overcome and controlled by creatures. Divine grace will renew and strengthen them, and they will find a consolation unknown to those who fear to lose all in abandoning the consolations
Sometimes, another objection is made by souls that are attached to the things of earth. They say: “You want me to obtain perfection by an entire abnegation of self and by renouncing all things. Therefore you mean that I should at one and the same time embrace all virtues. Now spiritual authors tell us that we must not undertake too many things at once, but that we must begin by acquiring one virtue, and then another.”

But it is not I who preaches abnegation, it is our Lord Himself who has set down the conditions under which He will receive us as His followers: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, and wife and children and brothers and sister, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” (Luke: 14 26-27). No doctrine has ever found more forceful expressions in the Gospels. And to make evasion impossible, the Savior adds: “And he who does not carry his cross and follow me, cannot be my disciple.” (Luke: 14 27). In other words, it is not sufficient even to renounce all these things; but it is also necessary to carry behind our Lord the pains and adversities which will befall us. Right after this Christ tells us the parable of the man who builds a house, and of the man who goes to war; how they consider their resources, and whether or not they would be able to meet the requirements, so that, should they be deficient, they may abandon their plans. This teaches us, that unless we renounce everything, we do not possess sufficient equipment to follow Christ our Lord in battle. If we are not generous enough to prepare ourselves to renounce everything, we should not follow Him.

The words of our Savior allow of no quibbling. They are not contradicted by the views of Masters of the spiritual life, who agree that, if we wish to follow our Lord, we must make a firm and effective resolution to renounce all things and to practice abnegation; we must apply ourselves with perseverance to this task. While we might generously resist with all our power, we might also meet particular difficulties with a certain few of our inclinations. Without ceasing to oppose all our faults, we will give special attention to our outstanding defect, and fight vigorously, until it has been eradicated. After this we will deal with our other faults in the same way. It is in this manner that, during many long years, St. Francis de Sales and St. Vincent de Paul have combated,—the one combating the defects opposed to meekness, the other combating those opposed to humility. But is quite certain that both of these saints practiced abnegation at the same time on all other points.

The Extent of Abnegation

It is essential that self-denial be practised particularly against a disorderly love of ourselves. “If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself... For he who would save his life will lose it, but he who loses his life for my sake will find it.” (Matt.: 16 24). This is perfect abnegation, and it omits nothing. Once made, everything has actually been surrendered to the Will of God, for self-will is the root of all our vices. And yet, along with taking such a resolution, we must contend also with our particular faults, which also spring from self-love.

But above everything else it is pride, the first fruit of self-love, that we must attend to. We must deal with concupiscence of the flesh, the cause of sensuality, and of an unbridled imagination. Concupiscence of the eyes must be curbed, for they are the source of that mental gratification which external objects seem to give.

Yet, all this is insufficient. Abnegation must extend even to the very activities of the mind and imagination, though they are merely internal. For we should adhere to nothing save God and the fulfillment of His Will in our regard.

The way of perfect abnegation will finally serve as a powerful corrective to the defects of our character, for these cannot endure in a soul so thoroughly renounced.

You see that there is a considerable task before us, and that we must set to work with persevering firmness. But have faith and courage; God is with us. He asks only our constant and active good-will. Having this, success is assured.
CHAPTER IX

Practical Union

Our souls are united to God when His grace has become the life-giving principle that directs our acts towards Him as their end. Union with God can be found in two ways, in practical union, in reference to our common acts and habits, and in the contemplative union of mental prayer.

Practical union, of which we will treat in this chapter, is a state in which we have renounced all natural activities and reactions, so that the grace of the Holy Spirit is able to quicken and govern all our activities. Once nature has ceased entirely to rule our life, and has been supplanted by the supernatural life of grace, we enter into a habitual state of union with God. Sanctifying grace will then grow considerably and increase its control over our inclinations, which are turned more and more towards God, bringing us ever closer to Him. The degree of union with God is determined by the extent and intensity of grace in ruling over our activities.

When grace predominates, not only will things offensive to God be instantly and forcefully cast aside, but man will tend with joy to that which God expects of him and even to those things which would increase God’s friendship. Then too will the manner in which we perform our tasks become more perfect. If the Spirit of God fills the soul in every instant of life, every phase of our conduct is marked by the supernatural. In conforming to the Will of God, the smallest detail is carried out with the same perfection as great things; the most insignificant and indifferent acts are divinized, without any special intention, by the lofty dispositions ruling all our conduct. Truly may we say that supernatural life has now, as it were, become natural.

This practical union, which gradually transfigures not only our religious activities, but every act of our life, resides in the intention. Such intentions are formed, when the dispositions and activities of the soul, through adherence to the divine life of grace, are centered in God.

An intention, as the term indicates, is a tendency of the soul towards an object, and to render the dispositions and actions of the soul truly meritorious, its tendencies must be directed by free will. In other words, practical union with God, rooted in the intentions, demands a deliberate correspondence with the workings of sanctifying grace, the means by which we come to possess God. Thus, by the very fact of clinging to grace in every deliberate act, the soul reaches out towards God; without it there could be no union with Him.

We speak of actual union when we correspond to every impulse of grace only after a particular choice; when we are constantly disposed to be guided by grace we call it habitual.

Obstacles to Practical Union

Whenever we, living in a state of practical union with God, act from natural motives alone, we blunt this source of life even if the act as such is good or indifferent. When evil enters, our union with God is broken off. If we are prompted by both grace and nature, the influence we allow the latter to wield will correspondingly weaken our union with God.

These observations hold true also if we live in habitual union with God. But this state we may add, cannot endure if nature still holds sway over us, even in matters of great worth, unless we fight vigorously against the pressure of nature. This can be done by reverting often to deliberate acts of actual union, at the expense of nature, and thus giving grace the ascendancy in all our actions.

The reason for this is found in the struggle between these two principles for mastery. Unless
grace predominates, we are more open to the pressure of nature because of our great weakness, which comes from the control nature has over our disposition. Furthermore, our lack of recollection, so common among us who live an active life, is not conducive to constant correspondence with grace, and it is exceptionally difficult to keep nature from gaining the upper hand and from controlling almost all we do. When this happens, we can no longer consider ourselves as being in active union with God.

We have yet to consider our bad habits and defects of temperament, which will certainly play a great part in drawing us from God. Whenever our union with God is impeded, it is quite difficult trying to enter into it again, because grace has lost its hold on the soul and can restore us to our former state only with great difficulty. In other words, neglect of God, particularly if it is habitual, destroys in the soul, little by little, all docility to the movements of grace, which were previously followed with great facility.

How Practical Union with God is intensified

We see how important and even how necessary it is to reduce as much as possible the influence of natural intentions in determining our activities, and still more in determining our general habits of character. We accomplish this by frequently reverting to the principles of faith and of love in order that the influence of grace which unites us to God, may become more and more prevalent and dominating. Moreover, we must not omit to watch over our vices and defects, and to this end the spirit of meditative prayer is of great importance in maintaining the soul in its habit of considering all with the eyes of faith, and in disposing the heart of love.

Now we can see the absurdity of a mere pretense of piety, which, although desiring union with God, refuses to cast off one's natural affections and self-seeking, one's vices and defects. Only God matters, God alone in all things, "and let the earth keep silence before Him," (Habakkuk: 2: 20).

We cannot attain to habitual union with God without applying ourselves with much zeal to the observance of the precepts of evangelical perfection, and, above all, to the practice of perfect abnegation, stressed so much by our Lord.

Besides, we must be very faithful to the action of interior grace, performing all our acts through faith and love and with the sole desire of pleasing God. "If anyone love me, he will keep my word," (St. John: 14 23). This word of our Lord refers to the precepts of the gospel, as well as to faith and love, which are expressions of sanctifying grace, which again is the expression of Jesus Christ. "And my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him." (St. John: 14 23).

Therefore, in our individual acts, and in our general attitude, our intention really becomes a means of union with God, provided faith, love and hope enter into it, and if the will adheres to these. Faith, hope and love are necessary, because it is in these three that the action of grace resides. Adhesion of the will is required because it is in the will that the practical activity of the soul lies. Intentions are sanctified and tend towards God through faith, hope and love, and therefore, through determinations of the will. If the will acts without being affected by the supernatural virtues, there is no union.

It seemed necessary for me to give these explanations, as a protection against erroneous ideas, or rather against illusions which one meets frequently in this question of intention.

Illusions as regards Intentions

Whenever we want to perform a good action in co-ordination with our natural inclinations, we
try to form our intention in such a way as to raise the act to a supernatural level. When we attempt to perform an action which is good in itself, but feel prompted by an evil consideration, by one of our weaknesses, or by our passions, we try to purify our intention.

Now in forming and in purifying our intention, we can easily fall into illusions. As regards the first, when we form our intention, and try to see with the eyes of faith and try to act through our love for God, we are content with building up in our minds a false supernatural consideration. At other times we make, as it were, a mental effort which seeks to put our intention in the direction of God. This effort, though physical, is entirely in our mind, a mere mental straining, while at bottom, our soul still remains attached to nature. The action proceeds from a movement of nature and terminates in one’s own satisfaction. We are actively united with ourselves, and our interior action has only the attire of a supernatural intention, and this in our eyes alone. The only good found in such an effort is a certain amount of good will which gave rise to it. More often it is but the product of a self-love which seeks to be able to say to itself, “This deed was done with perfection.” At other times it is only a mere natural desire for holiness.

In the second case, while pretending to purify our intention, we leave the roots of our evil tendencies untouched, without seriously fighting against them. Content to hide them from our eyes we permit our passions their ordinary play. We may elicit a contrary act, but this is usually a mere figment of our mind. We convince ourselves that we are acting with a pure intention, when we say to ourselves, “My God, I do this for Thee, and not to satisfy my own evil promptings,” or “I reject this bad intention.” But all the time the evil motive remains master of our heart. The will adheres to it, and the whole trend of the soul in performing the action is evil, since the disposition of the heart has remained unchanged.

Means of forming and of purifying our Intention

Now then, how can we act with a pure and right intention? We must try to develop in ourselves an habitual disposition of all our spiritual faculties towards God. We must form a permanent and unwavering disposition of faith and of pure charity, making our will pliant for God and adhering to everything that is agreeable to Him. With this end in view, we must try to break down the evil inclinations of our soul, striving to become indifferent to whatever is purely natural, and suppressing any feverish movement that results from a natural attachment, or from the prospect of pleasure or gratification. It is only by such radical means that we will reach a constant, supernatural disposition towards God, entirely free from natural desires and passionate cravings.

But since this is a long and tiring occupation, we must take a resolution which will be not only general and practical, but firm and lasting. And should we meet with a difficulty, we must not satisfy ourselves with an insincere or superficial intention, but must carry our attack on the evil down to the very bottom of our heart, and there by practising total abnegation with a resolute purpose we will root out its natural tendencies in its ultimate sources. Therefore we must repress any action arising from our depraved or natural inclinations and lacking a motive that would make it necessary or truly useful. But should utility or necessity require such an act, we should remain calm, renew ourselves in the love of God, and strive to look upon what we are about to do with calm detachment as regards its attractiveness. For while the passions are stirred, we have to act with moderation and peace. There is always so much to be gained by such a determined and sincere way of acting. Still, we cannot expect complete success, unless we practice complete abnegation, extending over all our powers. That is the only truly efficacious means of controlling and offsetting the inclinations of nature.

An example will make this clearer. A priest experiences a natural, at times disorderly affection for a person whom he directs, and is thus inclined to converse with this person. Sometimes the
inclination is not a good one, though we would not brand it as an altogether evil one. He receives this person to speak with her. Her coming has satisfied him, either by a tendency of nature which is not really evil — and union with God is then suspended — or by an evil inclination — which would block union with God. How then does he proceed? He wants to converse with this person, because he finds a satisfaction in such conversation, and still, he would reproach himself for surrendering to a purely natural desire. He wants to be always united to God and realizes that by thus giving satisfaction to his heart he draws away from God and become displeasing to our Lord. Or, should the satisfaction be entirely out of order, he would reproach himself for abandoning God. And so he begins to think, on receiving this person, that he is obliged to do so in order to procure the glory of God by speaking to her of holy things, and sanctifying her soul by spiritual advice. He even makes some effort to feel this desire of seeking God’s glory or this soul’s sanctification. He reflects and sees how he formed and purified his intention. But all the time the original disposition remains, and his heart is unchanged. He is suffering from an illusion. The purity and holiness is unchanged. He is suffering from an illusion. The purity and holiness of his intention is entirely imaginary. He has fabricated a superficial idea of an act inspired by faith. And yet no genuine love of God motivated him, it is only the love of man that prompts him. The will is adhering to its object not because of pure or selfless love, but because flighty imagination guides the heart. It is the disposition of the heart which always determines whether or not an act be supernatural. If a supernatural attraction dominates the heart, supernatural acts will follow; and if the will is drawn by natural or evil attractions, natural or evil acts will follow.

How then should we act in such a situation? If actually the conversation is neither necessary nor useful, we should avoid having it. And in order to know this, we have to recollect ourselves, putting our heart in a state of detachment and indifference, and examining the question before God. If the interview is necessary, as for example for the person’s confession, or if it is really useful, as for example the direction demanded by the soul’s condition, we should receive her, though only to the extent and in the way dictated by necessity or usefulness. We must constantly watch over our heart, check any disorderly anxieties we may feel, and resist any satisfaction which might result from these meetings. These same principles will dictate the proper conduct for us in other circumstances of a similar nature.

Rules for discerning whether the Inclinations of the Soul proceed from Nature or from Grace

We will make a general observation in reference to the movements of our soul towards God, in order that we might recognize whether they actually spring from interior grace, or whether they are mere effects of nature.

We may feel an attraction towards some object, accompanied by supernatural considerations or motives. If the attraction exists only in the mind or in the imagination, while the heart remains indifferent to it, and if this movement is a vivacious, all-absorbing and enthusiastic one, grace has usually little or no share in it, and nature is dominant. We can be certain that pride plays a great part in practically all of these cases, where we experience great liveliness, excitement, or enthusiasm. If grace is the source of our activity, these emotions may participate to give brightness and joy to the mind, though it is especially the heart that grace enraptures, and it is there that the strongest impression is made. Grace inclines the heart in proportion to the measure of light that is given to the mind, and it is the heart that the driving force endures; remaining ever so much longer than joy might last in the mind. Extending its influence, the will receives a strong impulse in accord with the dispositions and tendencies of the heart. Here are the reasons for this rule.

First, we often read in Scripture that the grace of God goes to the heart. “Behold, I will allure her and will lead her into the wilderness; and I will speak to her heart” (Hosea 2 16). “My
son, give me thy heart” (Proverbs: 23:26). Moreover, divine grace always adjusts itself to our nature, continually raising it to its proper state. And this proper and normal condition of our nature consists in this that the mind, having perceived the objects is disposed in such a way that the will in its decisions will always follow the dispositions of the heart.

Advantages of a Practical Union

Practical union with God, i.e. constantly transforming all our activities, is very beneficial for our souls and gives rise to the many wonderful graces that are required for leading a holy life.

1) A Soul united to God in this way abandons little by little the errors that spring from an obstinate attachment to one’s own views, its judgements are freed from the control of purely natural influences, and therefore, from prejudices and rash conclusions. The soul acquires trustworthy and useful habits, and a certain discernment in the things of God, for its own guidance and for the direction of souls, as also for the works of God which it will have to perform. Such a man forms correct judgements of persons, things, and circumstances in accordance with the thought of God. “The spiritual man judges all things” (1 Cor.: 2:15). It is not a light as clear as that found in fervent meditation, but rather a practical perception of things divine. It discerns their value and their shades by a kind of instinct, a calm insight, which proceeds from divine grace, and which is almost always free from errors of the imagination.

2) Entire abandonment to the action of grace renders the soul docile and pliable before the holy will of God, which the soul’s filled with strength, is discouraged or disheartened by nothing. Indifferent to the mere creatures of this world, nothing can agitate it. Irritations, contradictions, sufferings and humiliations, even death itself, cannot disquiet it. The senses, it is true, continue to be affected by the ordinary pains and trials of our daily lives, but the soul no longer experiences disturbing commotions; it remains calm and docile, and master over its power and actions.

3) The soul enjoys profound peace, not only as a natural effect of the calming of the passions, but also and particularly because of the life of God in us. And this peace gives the soul a supernatural stability, one which we cannot understand unless we possess it. It does not weaken in the midst of sufferings and tribulations, but often it is felt even more in such conditions, because sufferings, no matter what kind, tend to strengthen the union with God in a soul that is perfectly renounced.

4) What is especially remarkable is that in the midst of sufferings and afflictions, the soul which is so disposed, experiences a greater serenity and cheerfulness of heart in its contact with creatures. It is a quiet and restrained gladness, and still one that is very real and more profound than that which springs from the gratification of nature. The reason for this is the effect had on the soul by the interior action of grace. The soul may indeed be afflicted in its natural sensibilities, but at the same time it is humbly and lovingly submissive and fully abandoned to the holy will of God. Its interior gladness is not shaken at all but rather increased by the bruises received from without. It resides in the profoundest depths of the soul, at the very source and root of its life, whereas the gayety caused by the satisfaction of nature, though more noisy in as much as it affects the senses and the imagination, is more superficial and much weaker.

5) Finally, if we are habitually united to God in all our activities, we will be abundantly provided with graces requisite for our present circumstances, together with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, requisite for our particular state of life, and for the accomplishment of God’s designs. For God always gives the graces of state which flow from the particular sacrament we have received. And when He calls us to some extraordinary work for His glory, He provides all the special gifts that are adequate for the task. This is in keeping with His infinite wisdom, which must supply to an incapable instrument working for His glory whatever will render it capable of fulfilling the designs of His Mercy.
CHAPTER X

Mental Prayer and Recollection

The Nature of Mental Prayer, and how it differs from Practical Union

Mental prayer consists in turning away, and withdrawing our mind from creatures, and applying it directly to God in a spirit of faith for the purpose of loving union with Him.

Thus, in both mental prayer and practical union, the soul unites itself to God through faith and love. Still there is a difference. In practical union, the soul keeps up relations with creatures in accord with the order of God’s will, but it obeys and cleaves to grace with which it is animated and unites itself to God in its labors. But in mental prayer, the soul momentarily breaks off all relations with creatures and musters all its faculties concentrating them on God in a spirit of faith in order to unite itself to Him in love.

Three things especially characterize mental prayer, the mustering of all faculties, the steady attention in an exclusive spirit of faith, and a clinging of the soul to God for the sake of closer union with him. It is particularly in this last act that love is at work. As regards its form, the perfection of mental prayer consists in the recollection and absorption of the soul in God; as regards its purpose, it consists of growth in divine love.

From this we see that mental prayer comprises three acts: recollection, fixed adherence, and a union of wills in love.

Recollection

Recollection is the most important of the steps. When this recollection is present, the rest follows quite naturally. For it is impossible that a soul be recollected without first having its attention fixed on God by some reflection of faith. And if these conditions are fulfilled, a union of love with God follows inevitably.

Recollection cannot be introduced from without, but must come from within ourselves. And this it can do in three ways: special grace may be granted at this particular moment, a grace which attracts all the powers of the soul, without any contribution on our part; or we may live in a state of habitual fidelity to grace, causing us to become detached from all things and to live wholly for God: finally in cases where the soul has only started on the road to perfection and often remains indifferent to divine impulses, grace may act upon it in such a way as to bring about good-will and a firm determination to make its mental prayer in a spirit of faith.

In the first case, where a special grace of recollection is given instantaneously without any effort on our part, it is given ordinarily, in order to bring about in the soul a conversion from evil to good or to greater perfection, or to confer a particular favor on the soul. If God favors a saintly person with some extraordinary gift, it is always preceded by an interior grace, which establishes the soul in profound recollectedness by attracting all the powers with great force.

This grace of recollection is also given to souls who have, in varying degrees, attained to a state of affective mental prayer. Although in these cases the soul plays some part in bringing about this state, it remains primarily the work of affective grace. In the highest and most perfect degrees, grace does almost everything, and often renders recollection entirely passive.

In the second case, the soul, living in God and dead to itself, is very receptive to God, tending
towards Him without hesitancy, and converging all of its affections upon Him. It is God Who holds sway over such a soul, while creatures are easily set aside. The spirit that is held down in others by the shackles of nature, soars to heaven. The aid of grace being constantly available, the soul that wishes to engage in mental prayer whether from duty or through imagination, has only to will in order to find recollection. Moreover, to these souls recollection has, as it were, become a second nature, for its reflections upon God during the day are very frequent. And if these reflections were keen and palpable, fixing one’s mind upon mental prayer will become more easy and recollection will become more intense.

In the third case, that of souls less advanced, recollection is much more difficult, and demands a more firmly determined will together with a certain amount of effort on our part. Affections of the heart are still divided and our love of God is weak. Very often the fervor needed to render the graces of recollection efficacious is wanting, and a forced recollection is not recollection at all. Besides, the faculties of a soul in this state, so little accustomed as they are to compose themselves in God, are inclined to waste themselves upon creatures, finding it hard to concentrate for any length of time. They easily become weary and must relax.

Recollection then demands a will that is determined to make a good meditation, and firmly resolved to apply vigorous pressure to a heart that is still weak, to give a strong impetus to recollection and to hold on to it energetically. However the will should not be rigid and obdurate; this would be contention rather than genuine recollection.

Finally, the mere will to apply oneself is not sufficient, a certain amount of labor, a certain diligence is needed to curb the wanderings of the imagination to guide and to feed our devotion. We will have very great difficulties to overcome in order to arrive at that recollection, without which mental prayer is impossible, with such dispositions, when we are not absolutely dead to self, when we do not live entirely to God, when we have not conquered all our principal defects, and finally when we do not habitually live under the guidance of divine grace. These difficulties are still greater because of the active life we lead, where we are in constant relations with creatures. These add force to all the impediments that spring from our defects.

**Obstacles to Recollection**

The first obstacle springs from an attachment to a person, to a thing, or to ourselves. In the first case, even if no evil enters, the attachment will encumber the heart, even soften it, always robbing it of true fervor, and thus it will become an obstacle to grace. The first necessary condition for recollection of the soul in God is fervor together with a strong attraction towards God.

Attachment to things is a less important obstacle on the way to recollection because it implicates our love for God in a lesser degree. And yet it is a serious obstacle, imparting to the soul as it does a certain coldness towards the things of God, and a sort of preoccupation. The soul leans less towards growth in perfection, and there are fewer of those graces that are so necessary for recollection.

Attachment to self is the worst of all obstacles. Over and above the drawbacks just mentioned, there is the constant temptation to pride which is often yielded to; the soul is agitated and at the same time tends towards sloth and other vices that are incompatible with recollection in God.

Therefore if we find such attachments in ourselves, we must act with energy and generosity, and engage in mental prayer with a firm resolution of directing that prayer against these attachments until they have been thoroughly eradicated.
II) Another difficulty in recollection comes from our dispositions to lead too natural a life. Although the loftiness of our calling should be sufficient to keep us constantly in a state of self-denial, faith and charity; although our very activities, our pains, sufferings, contradictions and perils of life, should keep us close to God, still we cannot deny that, in reality, because of the dispositions of our fallen nature and its great weakness, we are in great danger of sliding back into a merely natural life and of carrying a natural attitude into even the most sacred of our activities. But manifestly, this is a great misfortune, and our recollection in God during meditation becomes very difficult, at times almost impossible.

One who is accustomed to see and to act and respond in a purely human way, cannot rise to the level of the supernatural whenever he desires to do so. I am sure we have good intentions when we pray, but we also have our nature with us. We may want to consider a truth or motive of faith and to yield to divine inspirations; we may try to stir ourselves to acts of love, to rise above the natural for this particular period of meditation; we may struggle hard and set before ourselves striking thoughts, or use the methods given by spiritual writers and in this way succeed in recollecting ourselves for the moment. But the result will usually be imaginary and will not last. Most of the time we will be unsuccessful in our efforts and simply pass the time in dull boredom. Grace alone can lead us to true and lasting recollection.

On the other hand, a man who lives constantly a supernatural life of grace, is very much in his element whenever he engages in mental prayer. He has only to apply himself and the action of grace becomes manifest. Easily recollected, he is receptive to special graces, and his recollection becomes more and more intense, more absorbing, more determined and more solid. But the man who is still controlled by nature can attain true recollection only through an extraordinary grace, which by its very essence tends to draw him out of the purely natural. And so mental prayer will remain impossible as long as we persist in leading a natural life for it is precisely this most essential element which is lacking.

But that is not all the evil. To live continually under the sole influence of nature brings to the soul a certain coldness towards all that is supernatural; a certain fainthearted cowardice, particularly for interior acts of religion; and above all, routine, that pernicious routine, the source of the missionary's lukewarmness and consequent ruin. As a result, the soul cannot enter into itself, cannot muster its powers, and thus it loses all of its taste for mental prayer.

Finally, a missionary who is constantly leading a mere natural life can barely remain unsullied. All of his disorderly inclinations, his former vices and defects come to life again; grace is withdrawn; conditions of sin come to prevail unapprehended; and mental prayer becomes impossible. In this state no matter what means are applied to make a meditation, they are of no avail. We simply have to get out of this state.

The following observations might be found useful:

a) A missionary of the Congregation will rarely descend to such a degree of laxity that he becomes subject to nature in every respect. But it may happen to a considerable degree, and the difficulty in recollecting himself in mental prayer will be proportionate to its extent. It is therefore necessary to adopt definite means against it as soon as one realizes that such a condition exists.

b) It happens rather frequently that, while we preserve fundamentally a spirit of faith and piety, we allow the natural life to enter into the occupations in which we are engaged. We become accustomed to our functions and we take delight in them, not so much from zeal for God’s glory or an account of the good resulting from them, but because of the satisfaction of nature. We let ourselves be controlled by natural propensities without being aware of it, and thus we fulfill our duties in a purely human way. We are just like the artist who loves his art and exercises it with natural affection.
The result of this is that the mind is constantly occupied with the work at hand, with persons and things involved, and interior recollection becomes exceedingly difficult. This difficulty is all the greater because of the fact that we cannot abandon our activities, and though we may struggle against nature and try to escape its pressure, preoccupation with our daily tasks will remain with us and continue to render interior recollection difficult.

And yet we must set ourselves to work and earnestly strive to eradicate every influence of nature; we must apply great energy and perseverance towards fulfilling our functions with a disposition and an intention that are purely supernatural. And even when we have reached this state, we may still find our recollection entangled in distractions that have remained from our former condition, though they are nonetheless real on that account, as I shall show later.

III) We find a third difficulty springing from sensuality and indifference, both of which make us inattentive and drowsy, weigh us down, and rob us of any desire for the interior life. This sensuality and indifference is nature’s manifestation of its desire for rest. But when the soul acts from an impulse of grace, it acts with force and not with indifference or with a desire for rest. Recollection becomes impossible when this vice is present. Those who suffer from this evil must try to find its source. If it comes from an excessive tenderness towards ourselves we must devise means for overcoming this self-solicitude and love of ease. We shall deal with this question later on.

If the root of our difficulty lies in the nature of our temperament or in habits contracted under the influence of external conditions, such as a heavy climate or excessive heat, we must renew and increase the energetic resolutions taken during meditation; we must seek new and greater help from our ordinary spiritual exercises. And from these means must flow an immediate correction of this defect. Even in the purely natural order, we have to modify, as it were, our temperament and to transform our habitual dispositions. To do this, we have to instill great vigor into our external actions, avoid softening of the body by easy postures, and on the other hand, put more energy into our intellectual efforts. Such means as these are necessary to raise the soul from its moral prostration and to give it the stamina needed to remain faithful to grace. Once these impediments have been overcome, the difficulty of mental prayer will have ceased.

But if our debility comes from a physical condition, i.e., if it springs from a physical evil which causes faintness, prevents the application of the mind, or weakens the whole organic system, then any efforts of exerting our energies in interior acts would only aggravate matters without producing any good results. It would amount to pure contention, and this must always be avoided. We are to submit to God, bearing our affliction with humility, love and confidence. We must raise our minds to Him, frequently showing that we belong entirely to Him, and that we offer ourselves to Him with this intention, no matter what the circumstances may be.

Besides, physical incapacities cannot cause a real difficulty, because in its dispositions of belonging entirely to God the soul remains unaffected and need not lose the spirit of faith and love in its ordinary activities. Thus true recollection and mental prayer remain possible, although it may not be perceptible as such to the senses.

IV) Another difficulty I wish to mention is the result of attachment to self, springing from too natural a life and from the dispositions of our character. It consists in an excessive sensitiveness, together with a lively imagination and a self-love that is yet to be overcome.

There results from such an attachment a certain excitement of the senses and a certain elation of the imagination which are quite perplexing and often form an invincible obstacle in the way of recollection. But I merely mention it here, since I shall treat of this defect more thoroughly elsewhere.
In order to find true recollection, we must be master over ourselves, we must be free from any mental agitations and absorbing preoccupations, for it is essential that we remain in interior peace, forbearing and composed.

V) A further difficulty can arise from our customary manner of acting. We take up the work at hand with an excessive mental eagerness: we pour ourselves out, as it were, upon external things, displaying unwarranted activity and disorderly zeal. We become so entangled and so absorbed that we are unable to recollect ourselves. Such ways of acting are full of defects and are purely natural growths.

Necessity of Mental Prayer for the Missionary

Above all let us be interior men, men of prayer. For when we have lost this spirit of prayer, we have lost the source of all that is really good. Nature will soon take the upper hand, and once more we shall soon find in ourselves all our inclinations to evil, our vices, our attachments and our defects, and then it will be very difficult to become what God wants us to be, and what we easily could be, were we to preserve this spirit of mental prayer. Because recollection is the most essential part of mental prayer, we have lost everything when we have lost it.
CHAPTER XI

Mental Prayer and Steadiness of Attention

Steadiness of Attention, an Act of the Mind is greatly influenced by the Senses and by the Imagination.

In this second act of mental prayer, the soul, having found recollection, confines its attention to supernaturally turning the mind to God in a view of faith. This is precisely what characterizes mental prayer and what belongs to it alone. The other two acts, of recollection and of union of wills in love, although integral parts of mental prayer, are also found in other activities, and may even become permanent dispositions.

Attention is a purely intellectual operation, the application of the mind to an object. In prayer we speak of an active attention, that is, an act of the will whereby we turn our minds to God. We also speak of passive attention, when a view of our faith affects and lays hold of the soul, with the mind, by an attraction and an impulse of grace without any action on our part, resolutely turned towards its object. Here we will consider only the former.

Although attention is an act of the intelligence brought about by the will, nevertheless it is strongly influenced by the senses and by the imagination. Their attractions and inclinations will either help or encumber our efforts, depending on whether or not they are in harmony with supernatural considerations. If the object of our prayer affects the senses and the imagination, all the powers of our soul will act in harmony and will help to strengthen our attention, thus increasing the intensity of our meditation. At times, some sensible attraction, even though incapable of benefiting our mental prayer, will suffice to hold the imagination within the scope of the object of our meditation, giving, as it were, a negative aid. At other times, our sense faculties are affected by objects that have no bearing on the point under consideration or on the directions of grace, and are often in conflict with them. There is opposition to the action of grace, if the senses place before us something harmful, or something which, though indifferent in itself, stirs the passions violently. If this happens, recollection becomes impossible, and consequently the soul cannot fix its attention on God. Moreover, if the senses advert to objects that are harmful to spiritual values, the soul weakens under the strain of the assaults, and can no longer concentrate on divine truths, nor adhere to a supernatural view, being drawn by opposite inclinations and representations. Mental prayer is impossible. To remedy this, we must try to gain control over our senses, turning them towards objects which are related to the supernatural and which will bring peace after subduing undesirable tendencies.

Now we see the great importance of perseverance in mental prayer, not only because of the detachment taught us by the evangelical counsels, but also because of the vigilance over our susceptibilities, particularly those which are rooted in pride and resentment, for these act very forcefully upon the imagination and upon the senses, ruining all attempts at prayer.

With regard to susceptibility, I might also observe, my dear confreres, that you must be on your guard, even moreso than other men. Most of you live in a hot climate which causes disturbances in our systems and make us highly sensitive. Those who have not fully overcome their self-love, are already highly sensitive to adverse conditions, and they tend also to become complacent if things go well. Thus self-love renders us highly susceptible to and dependent on external circumstances. Furthermore, a tropical climate makes us particularly irritable and nervous. Our imagination is often assailed by suggestive and dangerous representations, which stir the passions. Many faults and bad habits which greatly impede our prayers are the result.

Although these difficulties are of an organic nature and are caused largely by climatic con-
ditions, they nevertheless intensify the evil affecting a soul that surrenders to them or neglects to resist them by a calm disposition and at least a passive resistance, which may actually be the best we can do in the majority of cases.

If the senses and the imagination are affected by indifferent objects, which, although not opposed to the supernatural, have no relation to it, these objects may agitate our passions only slightly, but they still tend to distract us from God and from prayerful considerations.

Let us examine the two sources of our difficulties, relaxation in the practice of evangelical perfection, and physical conditions.

Obstacles to Steadiness of Attention

We find here the same obstacles as those we have spoken of in the chapter on recollection (Ch. XI). But the difficulties arising from spiritual relaxation and from organic causes play a greater part here, and this because of the following reasons:

1) We cannot rise to a supernatural life and center our mind on God in a spirit of faith unless we are in a state of prayerful recollection. To remain united to God, this recollection must be abiding. But if we are careless, or if physical conditions render concentration difficult, although we have succeeded in establishing ourselves in the proper dispositions, there will ordinarily be a lack of that intensity necessary for keeping ourselves attached to God through supernatural considerations.

2) To practise mental prayer every day, we must show an unbroken fidelity to the graces given to us for this end, graces that will never fail us, since mental prayer is an obligation imposed by our rule. But how can we cultivate such unflagging fidelity, if we live all day long under conditions that are in conflict with the purpose of these graces?

The dispositions most strongly opposed to the spirit of prayer are attachment to ourselves and to creatures, a life determined primarily by nature, effeminacy, carelessness, the seeking of comfort and gratification in our activities, an excessive sensitiveness, and easily wounded self-love, absorbing anxieties and preoccupations, a desire, only too natural, to do everything to perfection. All these dispositions are in conflict with the spirit of prayer.

Since the steadiness of our attention depends ordinarily upon our attachment to the object, how can we expect to raise our mind to God and to abide in union with Him, while we remain attached to creatures, while we live a purely natural life? This seems to be the greatest difficulty, to raise the mind to the divine while living in the natural order. Ordinary graces will not suffice to overcome the obstacles of our natural faults.

But how can we advance, if by carelessness and comfort-seeking, we paralyze our will, which though so necessary for holding the mind fixed on things divine, has now grown languid from bad habits in consequence of sloth? How can we advance if we give way to every perturbation of soul caused by oversensitiveness, to weariness and gloom if no success is seen, if we are intensely preoccupied with other things, if we continue to act with excessive eagerness? All these commotions set our unbridled imagination working, upset the soul, and turn the mind from God.

Lastly there may arise a difficulty which may prove insurmountable, if in addition to the physical impossibility of proper attention, we find ourselves not only physically exhausted, but overwhelmed with duties. We will find it impossible to apply ourselves to mental prayer and to muster any attention to the subject in a sensible manner. In such a case we have to apply greater care and vigilance over our practices of self-denial, and make certain that faith and charity control
both our external and internal activities. We must show perfect fidelity to our meditations, strive to
dominate the restlessness of our souls, and avoid becoming dependent on the impressions of the
senses. If we observe these three points, we can be sure that we meditate well. Although we may
have no sensible perception of having our attention turned towards God, in reality the soul has
turned towards Him.

We may well console ourselves if we cannot meditate because of sufferings, whatever the cause,
as long as we bear it in the spirit of faith and love and in perfect submission to the Divine Will.

3) I wish to indicate a few other obstacles to fixing one’s attention on God.

First, there is a certain levity which makes the mind superficial and unable to concentrate for
any length of time. It renders difficult one’s application to serious matters, and deprives one of the
necessary earnestness and calm. In such a case we need not be alarmed, but rather adhere lovingly
to God, with determination and perseverance, showing earnestness and moderation in every respect.

Interior self-abnegation is of great help in aiding us to overcome this obstacle.

Another difficulty may arise from sloth and carelessness, which make us listless, sluggish and
drowsy. To combat this condition we must strive to enter upon every task, whether external or
intellectual, with great energy. Though we will find it particularly difficult with regard to intel-
lectual work, we need not be discouraged. First, after making a generous resolution, let us show a
vigorou activity in our external duties, which is not so difficult. Then let us fix certain times during
the day to pursue our intellectual tasks with concentrated energy, beginning with a short period
of time, perhaps half an hour. Once we have reached the state where we can readily do so, we will
gradually increase the time until we have attained the necessary proficiency. When the soul has
regained its vigor, mental prayer will no longer suffer from these difficulties.
CHAPTER XII

Mental Prayer and our Approach to God in Love

The Aim of Mental Prayer

It is an essential characteristic of mental prayer that the soul be turned towards God. The perfection of this prayer lies in the absorption of the mind and the heart in God, while its value lies in a love which, at times, is expressed by pure charity and at other times by hope; and the measure of its perfection is the purity and love of God.

Mental prayer has a twofold purpose for us. First it unites us directly to God by a special act in which we earnestly apply all our powers to some consideration about our Creator and Redeemer, in the spirit of faith, hope and love. This is a pure act of union with God.

Secondly, mental prayer gradually destroys the influence of any natural disorders, and controls our nature even in its tendency towards good whether it be of our exterior life or of our interior life. Thus we can surrender ourselves more and more to the influence of grace, calling our entire life, with all of its actions and dispositions, into a greater union with God.

Notice that if we want to acquire the first effect of mental prayer, namely some degree, we have to strive towards its second effect, with no small of vigor in every detail of life. For unless our resolution to practise complete abnegation of self and of creatures in firm, efficacious and lasting, unless we are determined to live only for God, then our union with Him in mental prayer will be imperfect, and very often will not even exist at all, but be simply a mere illusion. Because as long as we continue to indulge in self-love and self-complacency, as long as we continue to strive for human recognition, to seek material pleasures, or as long as we are controlled by our own will, particularly in our relations with our neighbour, our superior and with our subjects or equals, we can hardly expect to live under the dominion of divine grace, and may even live apart from God altogether. Therefore as long as it is only an imperfect charity that unites us to God, our mental prayer will remain imperfect, or may even become quite illusory. Our imagination and natural feelings may create what has the appearance of prayer and perfect love, but actually does not really exist. For true prayer and genuine charity can exist only if our defects, and in this way changes our dispositions. It is a good sign if at the end of our meditation we realize that our dispositions have become less imperfect. If this is not the case, then our prayer was most likely a vain illusion.

If we pray as we should, we will necessarily be carried towards a life of self-denial and holiness. But if we have ceased to make the proper efforts, it will not be long before we will either cease to meditate, or else fall into illusions. This is almost always the case. But do not conclude from this that every time you experience a great dryness or many distractions during the time given to mental prayer, that your meditation is actually worthless because of bad dispositions.

Even if you are tempted to cease the practice of self-denial in certain points, and even if you have given in at times, do not conclude that your meditation is vain and illusory. As long as you combat your faults and your self-will vigorously and effectively; so long as you sincerely strive to detach yourself from creatures, your meditation can be very good. It is the very means that must serve you as a sharp weapon in your struggle against self.

Part of the Will in Mental Prayer

Acts of the Will

Love of God, which forms the foundation of mental prayer, consists in the adhesion, in the attachment of our will to the will of God. "Si quis diligit me, sermonem meum servabit. Qui facit
voluntatem Patris mei qui in caelis est, ipse intrabit in regnum caelorum." If we wish to attain the purpose of meditation it follows that our will also must act, acts of the will must bring the soul into actual union with God and thus strengthen our habitual closeness to Him.

The will is applied in our affections, resolutions and petitions. Affections are acts of the will by which it pours itself out before God, inspired by thoughts and reflections on divine truths. If such an affection arises, we should try to abide in it rather than to excite others, so that the impression may become a strong and lasting experience; if the affection begins to disappear, we may renew it or pass on to another point.

If you find yourselves cold, if you experience great difficulties in pouring yourself out before God, simply pronounce some short and loving thoughts and pause a while; if this does not lead to affections, remain quiet and listen to our Lord speaking to your soul. Though it may be useful at times to pronounce certain phrases that we know by heart, such as "my God and my all" generally it would be better to make use of one's own spontaneous thoughts, which appeal more strongly to the heart.

To derive the greatest fruit from mental prayer, it is not enough to merely reflect on the truth we have proposed to ourselves and to yield to its attraction. We must draw some practical conclusion with regard to ourselves. For unless we come to make resolutions, the exercise of mental prayer will have no result.

These resolutions should consist mainly of some interior practices, aiming at some interior fault or at cultivating some interior virtue, without neglecting external faults and virtues. But all should ultimately tend towards interior perfection.

Our resolutions should not remain cold and dry, but should be made with warm and living devotion, for instance by promising their faithful observance to Our Lord or to His Mother. It is a good thing, in the course of the day, to often renew our resolutions and whatever else inspired us to greater devotion.

In choosing our resolutions we must not lose sight of our great weakness and of the fact that we are utterly incapable of acquiring the least degree of virtue by our own power. Therefore, we have to pray for the grace that we need to aid us in keeping our resolutions. And whether we make our resolutions for the first time or are merely renewing them, it is important to always ask in a spirit of confidence and deep humility, for the necessary graces.

In order to strengthen our trust and to lend greater power to our requests, we can place before God some specific reason that may induce Him to give ear to our prayer. We may say to God the Father that we make our petition in the name of His Son, our Lord, recalling His promise that he would hear us whenever we make any request in the name of His divine Son. If our petition is directed to Our Lord, we can recall all that he has done for us. Or we may simply make use of some words of Our Lord or of some saint.

We must avoid separating our resolutions from our petitions. We should rather seek to unite and to combine them. And we must always beware of becoming too formal and too systematic in our relations with God.

State of Mental Prayer

For the success of mental prayer it is of the greatest importance to discover one's own proper and personal state or condition most suitable for the exercise of mental prayer, to enter into this state and to remain in it.
By state of mental prayer we understand a supernatural attitude of the soul, directed towards God and tending towards a union with Him. It is a certain condition, a position which the soul assumes at mental prayer or during moments of recollection. This personal attitude which we must try to discover, is different for everyone of us. To discover it, we have only to regard the attitude of our soul during times of recollection and fervor. We will ordinarily find our attitude to be the same at these times, and it is this state which we should enter into at mental prayer. This attitude will gradually undergo some change and become more perfect with our progress in the spiritual life.

This state of mental prayer is a fundamental attitude, not a passing act, such as ejaculatory prayers, or an act of love or praise. Such acts, like the acts of particular virtues, do enter into mental prayer, but do not constitute our proper personal state or attitude in mental prayer.

This state is supernatural, and beyond our own power. It is only by the grace of our Lord that we enter into it, and all that we can do in mental prayer is done only with the aid of the Holy Spirit. Even while meditating we cannot turn towards God and unite ourselves to Him without the help of grace. Because of this, our absolute dependence on grace, we should never want to trust in ourselves or to count on our own fidelity or initiative, but should place all our trust in our Lord. The perfection of mental prayer depends entirely on the action of the Holy Spirit.

If we wish to practice true and real mental prayer, we must enter into this state which is so proper to ourselves. Otherwise we may never really perform true mental prayer. The state of mental prayer is a way by which the soul moves towards God, a way that leads straight to Him. It is our task to discover our own way and to enter upon it. Then God will communicate Himself to the soul, provided our hearts are pure and detached. But if we leave this road, we are merely acting by ourselves, and little will ever be accomplished.

For the same reasons, if we wish to do anything else in a holy manner, we must also enter into the disposition that we assume for the exercise of mental prayer, and perform our tasks in this spirit. Our entire day should be spent in this attitude. Then will our soul be turned towards God in everything we do, even if it has as such no relation to God, and all our actions will become holy.

We should maintain ourselves in this state of mental prayer not only during this exercise, but also at holy Mass, or whenever we pray, when hearing confessions, when we are preaching, in short, during all of our activities of the day. It is the true way of remaining faithful to grace, of leading a life in the Holy Spirit, Who alone should be in us. There is no time or place where we should not act in this manner.

Those who are accustomed to live in this attitude of mental prayer are disturbed and filled with anxiety whenever they deviate from it. They are like a dislocated limb. Such souls will rest in God only while they remain in this attitude of mental prayer, and they are unable in any other attitude to orientate themselves towards God. If beginners in the spiritual life are not uneasy when they depart from their state of mental prayer, the reason for this may be that they do not yet respond habitually to the things of God absorbed as they are by their interest in creatures and in themselves.
CHAPTER XIII

Different Kinds of Mental Prayer

There are three ways in which we can approach God in mental prayer, meditation, prayer of affection, and contemplation.

In meditation we consider some supernatural truth which would be helpful to our spiritual life. In the spirit of faith we examine this truth, attempting to draw from it some practical conclusion in view of our personal needs. We seek to assimilate the truth and to arrive at definite convictions, upon which we may base our resolution. All the while we keep ourselves in a spirit of profound reverence. Even while reasoning, we do not cease to make acts of desire, submission, love, trust and humility. This is the way of meditation.

Another way of mental prayer is the prayer of affection. Attracted by some supernatural truth we respond to it, and stimulated to some extent to a sensible love of God, we spontaneously make acts of love and of other virtues.

In meditation reason predominates, although accompanied to some extent by affections and fervent aspirations. In the prayer of affection, the soul does not find time to reason or to come to definite conclusions. The soul simply gazes upon the truth. The heart responds and convictions follow.

Meditation ordinarily is concerned with moral truths, which often are abstract, unless made real and living by the affections springing up during the exercise. These reflections should always be made in a spirit of reverence. They tend to lead to practical convictions, to adapt themselves to our needs, and lead to conclusions pertinent to our personal lives.

The prayer of affection, on the other hand, does not tend to the consideration of abstract truths. Those who practise this way of mental prayer prefer to reflect upon truths whose appeal is to the heart, so that their considerations may become true affections. Ordinarily they prefer to choose one of the mysteries of our religion, since these are experienced more vividly than abstract truths, and make a deeper impression.

The third way of mental prayer is contemplation. Here the powers of the soul are fixed upon God, either by clinging simply to Him as He is in His Godhead, or by considering one of His attributes or perfections. Or, we may contemplate our Divine Lord in one of His mysteries, in His words or in His deeds. It is in a simple, unitive gaze of faith, fixed upon God or our Lord, that the soul clings to Him in charity.

In meditation and in the prayer of affection, we are active, and consequently we perform a great number of different acts of reasoning and of affection. In contemplation on the other hand, there is no movement, but only one simple, lasting, continued act, which contains in itself the numerous acts which are found in meditation or in the prayer of affection, varying however in completeness, intensity and perfection.

In contemplative prayer the soul is fixed upon God Himself or upon our divine Lord rather than upon some truths concerning God. Such truths are not seen apart, but in God. We lay hold of them by laying hold of God, while in meditation and in the prayer of affection our attention is directed to truths concerning God rather than upon God Himself or our Lord. Here God is seen in these truths and union with God is established by adhering to them.
Let us consider, as an example, the humiliation of our Lord, the scenes of His passion. In meditation the soul may reflect that Jesus merited all glory, that He could have escaped humiliations, that He willed to suffer for me to atone for my pride and to give an example of humility. From this I conclude that I must be humble, especially in some determined circumstances.

In affective prayer, we would consider the humiliation of Jesus. The thought would deeply move us. We would perhaps say to ourselves, “How could the King of glory submit to such profound abasement on the part of His creatures, who are moreover so worthless and wretched!” We may be even more aroused by the thought that it is for us that He condescended to suffer this humiliation; becoming indignant with ourselves when we realize that it was our pride that caused Him humiliation. Perceiving the ineffable goodness of Jesus towards us, the most worthless of all creatures, we will consume ourselves in acts of gratitude, of love and compassion, of self-abasement and desire, and we will resolve firmly to combat our pride. In all this we respond in our affections rather to the humiliations of Jesus than to our Lord Himself, although we direct our aspirations to Him, commune with Him, or place ourselves at His feet. For in all these affections, although directed to our Lord Himself, the soul remains focussed upon the mystery under consideration and upon whatever is connected with it, and not upon Jesus Himself. We behold Him in His humiliation suffered for our sake, and we are filled with love.

The contemplative soul, on the other hand, is entirely absorbed in Jesus Himself, as He is being humiliated for us. The same ideas which, in meditation, constitute the object of one’s reasonings and conclusions, or which penetrate and absorb the heart in the prayer of affection, these same ideas, in contemplative prayer, simply deepen the soul’s absorption in the humiliated Jesus. If these thoughts lead to new affections, these in no way draw the attention away from the simple gaze at Jesus; they in no way generate any activity, but rather render the soul even more tranquil, more attached to Jesus, and more deeply absorbed in Him.

There exists another difference. In meditation all the effort is made in the mind, which we must constantly stimulate by faith, and render fruitful, as much as possible, by a devotion inspired by charity.

In the prayer of affection all our efforts spring from the heart, which must be nourished by a great generosity in the practice of mortification and self-abnegation.

Contemplation touches equally all the powers of the soul, though in some faith may predominate, charity in others.

In meditation all activities are concentrated on the formation of convictions, which will lead to the love and practice of virtues.

In the prayer of affection, it is not necessary to form convictions and practical resolutions; they are already present. As soon as we arrive at a living realization of the truths under consideration, some firm resolution will arise. In this state of prayer the soul is in need of an ever greater purification of the senses, and of becoming less and less dependent upon affections and emotions that are merely natural, because the prayer of affection, to be fruitful, still depends on our affective and emotional life. It is by way of affections during prayer that the soul is raised to God, and these affections in turn are influenced by our emotions. Then their proper effects are produced, namely of rendering our resolutions more energetic, while concentrating on those points among the truths we are considering, which will be of the greatest practical use.

In contemplation we are already in firm possession of the truths and virtues, because we are united to God and to our Lord Jesus Christ by a deep and harmonious sympathy. We are penetrated
by these dispositions which rest on our union with God, and we embrace therefore energetically, though calmly, the virtues which we contemplate in Him.

**Mental Prayer for Missionaries**

I am going to speak of a kind of prayer, which, it seems to me, is most important for missionaries. It is a prayer peculiar to men of action, although even here there may be exceptions. The three kinds of mental prayer mentioned above (meditative, affective and contemplative) require facility for recollection, freedom from anxiety and preoccupation and a certain affective sentiment of the heart, all difficult to reconcile with the necessary activity of the missionary.

The missionary should maintain a certain fundamental recollection although generally he will experience difficulty in preserving it perfectly; his heart is full of love for God, that love which is a continual sacrifice to God and a constant striving towards perfection. Still, this love is ordinarily deprived of the affective sensibility which facilitates mental prayer as we have seen above. It is impossible, or at least rare, for his mind to be unencumbered with the anxieties and preoccupations attendant upon the multiplicity of tasks and contacts occupying his entire day. True, he is not troubled or agitated, his soul remains firmly united to God, he performs his duties regularly and to the best of his abilities, preserving a calm spirit and peaceful heart. It is not less true, however, that this continual occupation, undertaken by him with the interest that it merits, without overstepping its reasonable limits, becomes an obstacle to that sensible application demanded by the above-mentioned kinds of mental prayer. Furthermore, he has the rigors of climate, the fatigue of his holy ministry and the weakenings of his physique to harass and enfeeble his organs, whence follows a certain dryness preventing the required application.

His prayer should be, nevertheless, fundamentally the same as that I have described, minus its pleasure and the consciousness of a successful effort. I say it should be the same. On beginning his meditation he should propose to himself the same thing: union with God, an unreserved and unrestricted gift of himself. He ought not seek sensible pleasure, but rather determine to remain disposed and faithful to grace by the pure motive of pleasing God. Thus resolved and disposed, he should begin with recollecting himself by a simple look at God, considering God within him or himself in His presence, either by contemplating Jesus in one of His mysteries or in one of His actions; or by the consideration of a sentiment, disposition, or virtue of Jesus or Mary. He will keep himself recollected by renewing or varying that consideration according to the disposition of the moment either by the thought of a great and striking truth or by the consideration of a virtue, of a vice or a fault, of a passage in holy Scripture, or of his own misery; in this case, to repeat the fruitful reflection and elicit supernatural desires.

An hour thus passed before God, although accompanied by dryness and distraction, obtains perfectly the desired end. The soul has been exercised in union with God since it did nothing the whole time save to tend towards Him by faith, hope and charity, not formulating the acts of these virtues in a sensible manner, but virtually by a continuous turning towards God. Being faithful in performing this mental prayer the soul strengthens its supernatural life and acquires facility in it. The expression of these virtues is so much the purer when it experiences less joy or when it seems to get nothing at all out of mental prayer.

The soul perfects the ordinary actions of its life by the virtues which it practices in its relations with God, with creatures and with itself. Although it lacks that sensibility and application of spirit to the details of these virtues, it has established a strong inner conviction of them and has acquired, besides, a very special strength for action. Furthermore, that supernatural disposition fortifying and strengthening itself, produces imperceptibly the foundation and the perfection of the virtues.

Finally, the soul sees plainly those faults and vices which oppose union with God. This light is
not the striking nor brilliant light resulting from prayer in which sensibility is affected, it is rather an experimental and practical knowledge which the soul acquires. If it is faithful, it will obtain great graces for self-mastery; and the more diligent it is to acquire this self-mastery and victory over its vices and faults, the more perfect will be its prayer.

Conditions necessary for good and profitable Mental Prayer

Mental prayer, thus made, obtains the results God wishes, the lest the soul deceive itself, it must attend seriously to self-abnegation. Abnegation is the foundation of the very edifice of missionary and religious life. All the hope and progress of the soul in religious life is bound up with this practice. Mental prayer is one of the principal columns on which the edifice reposeth. If the base be solid, the column will stand firm; if the base falls, the column will collapse and the edifice with it. Mental prayer, in its turn, will be a powerful aid to abnegation and support it more firmly.

Once a firm and persevering resolution is taken to practice abnegation, mental prayer, to be successful, ought not to be too closely examined in the light of progress or failure. The soul has only to raise itself by a determined and constant act of the will and to remain at peace. Very often, the prayer will be barren, assailed by distractions and even disgust. It is then that the soul will be beset by the dangerous temptation to pass judgement upon its prayers and consider it as wasted. In nearly every case, this pronouncement is the result of self-love and the desire to find pleasure in the exercise. Sometimes it is the mark of a soul still feeble in the service of God; it is easily discouraged and believes it does not know how to pray. In this case, the soul gladly takes it upon itself to surrender to distractions and carelessness. This is exactly why the temptation is a dangerous one. Very soon carelessness rules and the soul gives up mental prayer because it believes itself incapable of it. Distaste for prayer grows, often followed by discouragement, with the result that if not entirely abandoned, the time for meditation is abbreviated and, when the occasion offers, entirely omitted.

The soul must, therefore, enter upon meditation frankly and generously, not seeking to know whether it be made perfectly or poorly. It must do all in its power and leave the rest to grace and to God. The more meditation is lacking in sensibility, the greater the need for courage and perseverance. This courage and perseverance is the soul’s guarantee of the worth of its prayer and of the fruit of sanctification attached to it.

However, the soul must be on its guard against illusions and laxity. It is quite easy to go from dryness to indifference, from the impossibility of application to sloth and carelessness, from repose to negligence and inaction. Another illusion is to content one’s self with a vague application of the general rules for mental prayer. The soul tells itself that although deprived of sensible help, it is united to God by pure and simple faith and charity. This is a harmful illusion. Both vain security and restless incertitude are to be avoided and all the means to strengthen prayer employed.

There is, first of all, a positive means of making this kind of prayer good, holy and profitable: continual union with God, not only in the performance of one’s duties but in the spirit in which they ought to be done, accompanies by a mild and peaceful self-vigilance to resist the impressions of nature, especially evil nature, and to act in complete conformity with the good pleasure of God by a spirit of faith and love. Mental prayer then, will be a powerful instrument in making the soul’s whole life holy and agreeable to God.

Have recourse to God as frequently as possible during the day, with a sincere desire and steadfast will to live for Him alone and to act always according to His good pleasure, even at the expense of your own satisfaction. Do not allow yourself to succumb to giddiness, frivolous amusements, habits of curiosity, irritability, bad temper, negligence, laxity and laziness.
When unable to prepare your meditation, it is a good thing to choose some subject beforehand and consider it according to your individual tastes. You must, too, observe what is generally prescribed during the time of grand silence: first, to keep silence which means to leave off study or desultory reading or anything else that may distract your preparation; secondly, preserve your soul in peace.

During meditation, avoid laxity or impatience with yourselves, keep your souls quietly on the subject, make supernatural acts and abandon yourselves completely to Jesus and Mary with entire confidence.

What is true for morning meditation applies also to visits to the Blessed Sacrament, preparation before and thanksgiving after Mass. The subject may vary but the tendency of the soul and the manner of striving towards God should be the same.

If you are faithful in performing your meditations and other exercises in this way, with care, peace and confidence, it is impossible that your souls will not advance in true holiness.
CHAPTER XIV

Subject Matter of Mental Prayer

I still have a few words to say concerning the subject matter of mental prayer. Subjects from which we may choose are numerous; God and his divine perfections; our Lord Jesus Christ considered in His own person, in His mysteries, or in His actions; the most blessed Virgin and her mysteries, and their direct or indirect relations to the Person or mysteries of Her divine Son; the word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, or spoken by our Lord Himself, or spoken through the mouth of His servants; Christian virtues or the virtues of our state; our vices, faults and defects; the eternal truths; and at times the lives of the Saints. This demands some further explanations however.

General Rule for the Choice of a Subject

Among the different subjects given above, some are more perfect than others; some are of more help to the soul; their choice may indicate greater progress in the interior life and on the path of holiness. Nevertheless, the choice should not be left entirely to our own momentary inclinations. Some subjects, which are most suitable for some souls, and will produce excellent results, are useless, or even harmful for others.

The right kind of subject depends on our state of mental prayer, on our interior dispositions, on our spiritual progress, on the circumstances in which we find ourselves, and even on our character and temperament.

In this, as in everything else, we must put aside all self-love, which seeks to find satisfaction in ways of mental prayer too exalted and too advanced for us. We must avoid nourishment which we cannot digest, which effects nothing in our souls.

Let us confine ourselves to subjects which will profit us, which lead us more easily to union with God, though they are perhaps less elevated than others which would only leave the soul in a void. On days of recollection or during our annual retreat, when we should devote particular care to mental prayer, we may well examine, with a good spiritual director, what subjects we should choose for our mental prayer.

In matters of this sort, it is important not to be too critical, not to analyze our ways of acting too closely, not to reflect too much upon ourselves. Rather let us remember the words of St. Anthony of Egypt: "We have prayed best when we do not know how we have prayed." Let us come to a knowledge of our shortcomings, and try to correct ourselves and do better in the future.

Particular Rules

During the time following upon a conversion, grace causes in the soul deep sorrow for past faults, either because of their offense to God, or because the soul is horrified by its sins and by the fatal consequence of a possible separation from God. Such thoughts move the soul with greater or lesser intensity, and become ordinarily subjects of our mental prayer. They are very good and produce excellent effects and greatly aid our sanctification. It is important that we follow their inspiration.

Nevertheless, it sometimes happens that this attraction becomes weak and even ceases entirely. At least this seems to be the case. We know very well that we have committed many faults. Consequently we construct some motive for continuing our mental prayer upon these subjects, so that we may not lose our contrition and horror for sin. We are confirmed in this determination by the
same lively feelings we experienced before when meditating on these subjects. Should these feelings also cease, we are distressed and become restless, thinking that we no longer have any contrition for our sins. But in all this we are only deceiving ourselves, as we will always do if we rely on reasonings and arguments in our spiritual life. On the contrary, it is necessary that we follow the inspirations of grace and the attractions coming from God rather than from our own reasonings; however solid their foundation may appear.

Souls that are not yet free from attachments to things of the world and are still beginners in the exercise of mental prayer, or souls that are still walking the ways of fear rather than of love of God, are inclined to choose as ordinary subjects of their prayer the eternal truths, such as heaven, hell, or sin. Although they are rather abstract, these truths strike their imagination, gain possession of their minds, and lead to good resolutions.

There are other souls who have not yet taken the generous and absolute resolution of perfect abnegation of creatures and of self, or having taken the resolution, hold to it with little fervor; souls in whom the love of God is not very active, though good-will is not lacking, souls little advanced in the interior spirit, guided more by their mind than by their heart, though solid in virtue and of genuine piety. Such souls prefer to choose virtues, or vices and defects as subjects of their mental prayer, or other abstract truths, such as God and His attributes. Some may reflect upon these truths in a more speculative manner, others in a more practical way, though reason still prevails over their heart.

Such subjects, if considered in their practical relations to God and to His divine perfections, may also give food to the heart, and aid us in contemplation.

Sensitive and affectionate souls do well to make use of some heart that would fill them with delight. Such a heart may suffice to keep them afire with divine love for a long time.

Finally, above all else, the mysteries and actions of our Lord are the most useful subjects of mental prayer. They fill the soul and draw it to God. They speak to the mind, to the heart, and to the imagination. But it is advisable, when reflecting upon the mysteries of our Lord, to avoid a certain eagerness of the imagination. The heart should always predominate.
CONCLUSION

"Ignem veni mittere in terram." To set the earth on fire, God would have to place fiery torches in the hands of those who are charged with lighting it. Why then are there so few who would set the fire of God to the world? Is it not that saints, that souls living and acting in constant union with God, are so few? The torches of most men are condemned to a smolder, producing at the most the flame of a match. In other words, those who are chosen to be men of God, Apostles of Jesus Christ, remain lovers of themselves, men of earth, obedient to their pride, to their senses, to their weakness, to their defects, and the sanctifying grace that they received in their priesthood is kept from developing in them. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are withheld. The designs of God are obstructed. The people we were to convert remain in the night of slavery. The demons rejoice. Our Blessed Lord and His Church are sorrowful.

If only our missionaries were living in union with God, what blessedness for the poor souls under our care. How soon they would cease to resist the promptings of grace.

My beloved confreres, how crucially important it is that we live the saintly life of Our Blessed Lord. Have pity of these poor souls, have compassion for Jesus on the Cross, offering Himself for them and for us. Think of the Heart of our Blessed Mother, longing to see us holy, that we may bring souls to her Son.

How much longer and for what reason shall our wounded nature be permitted to control our activities, to form our habits, while the grace of Our Lord is smothered by the dross and smoke of our sins, when it should quicken our souls, unite us with God, draw upon us the wealth of His gifts, and drive us to battle with Satan and his kingdom. Is he and his foul empire to continue to reign only because we refuse to give up a life of weakness and misery? No, my God, no this shall not be. Come, Lord Jesus, come, lift up your servants, and live in them.