

quoniam cum Christus apparuerit, tunc apparebimus cum eo, similes ei in gloria (1 John iii, 2). That is: Dear friends, while we live on earth we are the sons of God, for we are restored to His likeness by faith in Christ: but what we shall be is not yet revealed, and remains unknown. But we know for certain that when our Lord shall appear at the Last Day, we shall appear with Him, and be like Him in everlasting joy. If, then, you wish to know whether or not your soul is restored to the likeness of God, you can be guided by what I have said. Examine your own conscience, and consider the direction of your will, for everything depends on this. If it is turned away from every kind of mortal sin, so that you would not under any circumstances knowingly or willingly break the commandments of God; and if you have humbly confessed all your former offences against His laws, with a firm resolve to abandon these sins and a true sorrow for having committed them, then I can assure you that your soul is restored by faith to the likeness of God.

CHAPTER 10: *How one whose soul is completely restored to the image of God makes every effort to avoid sin and keep himself in perfect charity with God and his neighbour*

MOST of God's chosen lead their lives reformed in faith alone. They are resolved to avoid all mortal sins, to keep themselves in love and charity with their neighbours, and to obey God's commandments to the best of their knowledge. And whenever evil feelings of pride, envy, anger, lust, or any other grievous sin rise in their hearts, they steel their wills to resist and reject them. Should they involuntarily commit some venial fault through frailty or ignorance, they are so troubled in conscience that they cannot rest until they have confessed and received forgiveness. I am sure that all who live in this way are reformed in faith to the image of God. And if they continue

in this reformed state and are found in it at the hour of death, they will be saved and attain full reformation in the joys of heaven, although they may never have experienced any spiritual consolation or special grace of devotion all their lives. For otherwise, if you say that no one can be saved unless they have reached some level of devotion and spiritual experience that is granted only to certain special souls, then few would be saved compared with the multitude lost. It is impossible to imagine that our Lord Jesus Christ would have become man and suffered the bitter pains of death only to save those who are devout and have been granted the grace of spiritual fervour. It would have been a paltry success if He had come so far and humbled himself so profoundly for so few souls. No, His mercy reaches far more widely than that. Nevertheless, if on the contrary you imagine that the passion of our Lord was so precious and His mercy so infinite that no Christian soul will be damned, however great its sin – as some fools suppose – you are greatly mistaken. So take a balanced view of the matter, and believe as the Church believes; that is, that if by the grace of God the greatest sinner alive turns from mortal sin with sincere penitence to serve God, his soul is reformed, and were he to die in that state, he would be saved. For God spoke through His prophet, saying: *In quacunque hora conversus peccator et ingemuerit, vita vivet et non morietur* (Ezek. xviii, 21). As soon as the sinner turns from sin to God and repents, he shall live, and will not suffer eternal death. On the other hand, whoever remains in mortal sin and refuses to abandon it or amend, is not reformed to the likeness of God. Neither is he reformed if he refuses to accept the sacrament of Penance, or if he does not accept it sincerely for love of God – that is, for love of virtue and purity – but only in deference to public opinion or from fear of hell. If he dies in that sorry state, he will not be saved. His faith will not save him, for his faith is dead and loveless, and is therefore of no use to him. But those whose faith is inspired by even a

small degree of love and charity are reformed to the likeness of God. Among such are simple folk who have no special gifts of devotion or knowledge of God such as some spiritually gifted people possess, but who have a general belief in the faith of the Church without a full understanding of it; for in their case this is not necessary. In this faith they do their best to live in love and charity with their neighbours, to avoid all mortal sins, and to perform acts of mercy. All these will win a place in the joys of heaven, for it is written in the Apocalypse: *Qui timetis Deum, pusilli et magni, laudate eum* (Rev. xix, 5). Praise God, all you who fear Him, both small and great.

The great are souls who are growing in grace, or who are reformed in spirit and perfect in the love of God. The small are imperfect souls, men and women in worldly occupations, who have only a child's knowledge of God and very little understanding of Him. But these are reared in the bosom of the Church, and are nourished with the sacraments as children are fed with milk. They should all love God, and thank Him for saving their souls by His infinite mercy and goodness. For Holy Church, who is their Mother and has a tender love for all her spiritual children, prays for them to Jesus her Spouse, and obtains healing for their souls through the merits of His passion. In particular she prays for those who cannot express their own needs in prayer. Thus in the Gospel we are told how the woman of Canaan asked our Lord to heal her daughter who was possessed by a devil, and how at first He refused because she was of an alien race. But she persisted in her request until our Lord granted it, and said to her: 'Woman, great is your faith; be it done as you will.' (Matt. xv, 828.) And her daughter was made whole at that instant. This woman represents the Church, who asks our Lord to help all simple, ignorant souls who are troubled by the temptations of the world, and who cannot speak to God aright with perfect devotion nor contemplate Him with burning love. And although it may seem that

our Lord at first refuses her because her children are as it were unknown to Him, yet because of the great faith and merits of the Church He grants her everything that she asks. And so these simple souls who hold fast to the faith of the Church, trust wholly in God's mercy, humbly receiving the sacraments and obeying the laws of the Church, are saved through the prayers and faith of their spiritual mother Holy Church.

CHAPTER II: How reformed souls need to fight constantly against temptations to sin: and how a soul may know whether it yields to temptation or not

THIS reformation in faith is easy to acquire, but not so easy to maintain, so that anyone who is truly reformed to God's likeness must devote much effort to keeping this likeness whole and pure, so that it does not degenerate into the image of sin through weakness of will. A reformed Christian dare not be idle or thoughtless, because the image of sin grips him firmly and constantly offers sinful suggestions, so that unless he is very watchful it is very easy to assent and fall. So he must be always fighting the evil suggestions of this wicked image, for he cannot come to terms with it or comply with its unlawful demands. If he does so, he deceives himself; but if he fights against it he need have little fear of yielding to it, for the struggle itself will dispel any false sense of security. It is right that a man should be at peace with all things except the devil and this sinful image, against which he must fight constantly in mind and body until he has overcome them. But he will not entirely overcome them in this life, while he carries this image with its evil influence within him. I do not deny that by the grace of God it is possible to win the upper hand over this image, to the extent that the soul will not follow or assent to its temptations; but it is not possible to be liberated from it

entirely, for no one can avoid feeling the pull of evil suggestions, bodily desires, or vain thoughts in this life.

I think it possible that a soul which is reformed in feeling and transported by love into the contemplation of God may be so remote from the influence of the senses and vain-imagination, and temporarily so withdrawn from physical influences that it is conscious of nothing but God; but this condition is not permanent. I repeat that everyone must fight against this sinful image, and in particular any who is reformed only in faith, for he may easily be deceived by it. Saint Paul speaks for such souls when he says: *Caro concupiscit adversus spiritum et spiritum adversus carnem* (Gal. v, 17). A soul restored to the likeness of God fights against bodily impulses roused by this sinful image, and the image resists the will of the spirit. Saint Paul understood this twofold struggle, and said: *Inveni legem in membris meis, repugnantem legi mentis meae, et captivum me ducentem in legem peccati* (Rom. vii, 23). I have found two laws in myself, one in my soul, and another in my body which fights against the former and often makes me the unhappy prisoner of the law of sin. By these two laws I understand him to mean these two images. The law of the spirit is the restoration of the reasonable soul to the image of God, while the law of the flesh is sensuality, which I call the image of sin. A reformed soul lives its life subject to these two laws. As Saint Paul says: *Mente enim servio legi Dei, carne autem legi peccati* (Rom. vii, 25). In my will – that is, in my will and reason – I serve God; but in my body – that is, in my bodily desires – I serve the law of sin. However, although a reformed soul is subject to the law of sin inasmuch as it involuntarily feels temptations to wickedness arising from the corruption of our bodily nature, Saint Paul forbids it to despair, and quotes his own experience: *Non enim quod volo bonum hoc ago; sed malum quod odi, hoc facio. Si autem malum quod odi, hoc facio, non ego operor illud, sed quod habitat in me, peccatum* (Rom. vii, 19, 20). I do not do the good that I wish; that is, I wish to

escape the influence of the flesh, but I cannot. And the evil that I hate – that is, the sinful impulses of the flesh – I do. But although I feel them and often take involuntary pleasure in them, I shall not be condemned or held responsible for them, because I hate them. And why? Because they are due to the corruption of this sinful image, and not to my own inclination. In this passage Saint Paul encourages all souls who are reformed in faith not to fear the power of this sinful image and its irrational impulses too greatly, so long as they do not willingly yield to them. Nevertheless, many people who are truly reformed are needlessly troubled on this point. For instance, when they have felt pride, envy, greed, lust, or any other grave sin stirring within them, they are sometimes not sure whether they have yielded to them or not. This is not surprising, for man is weak, and in time of temptation his mind is so troubled and confused that he cannot think clearly or make a free decision; consequently pleasurable desires come upon him unawares, and establish themselves in his mind long before he realizes it. This is why doubts arise in some people, who are not sure whether they have sinned during temptation or not.

On this point, I think that a person can find out whether he has consented or not in the following way. A man may be tempted to some sin which appeals so strongly to his senses that it affects his judgement and obsesses his imagination. But if he controls himself and refuses to yield to these sinful desires, finding them so distasteful that if he could put them out of mind he would do so; and if, when the temptation has passed, he is glad to be rid of it, he may rest assured that however strongly his senses pressed him to sin, he did not yield or commit any mortal sin. But the best safeguard for a simple person who is weak and simple is that he should avoid over-confidence, and should not assume that sensual impulses of this kind are blameless, for he might easily lapse into carelessness and false security. On the other hand, he should not be over-scrupulous or naïve,

imagining that all these impulses are mortal or grave venial sins. Neither of these opinions is true. So let him regard them all as sins or faults and be sorry for them, without trying to discover whether they are mortal or venial. But if his conscience is seriously troubled he should visit his confessor without delay, and reveal them to him either in general or particular. He should make especial mention of any temptation that is beginning to take root in and possess his heart, drawing it down to sin and worldly vanities. And when he has received absolution, let him trust firmly in God's forgiveness, and cease to trouble his mind as to whether his sins were mortal or venial. Let him instead devote more attention to guarding himself against them in the future. If he does this, he will find peace of conscience.

But some people are so worldly-minded and stupid that they would like to feel, hear, or see the forgiveness of their sins in the same way as they feel or see a material object; and because they cannot do so, they are so doubtful and uncertain that they cannot rest. This is foolish, because faith comes before feeling, and when our Lord healed a paralysed man, he said: *Confide, fili, dimittuntur tibi peccata tua* (Mark ii, 5). Son, believe firmly that your sins are forgiven. Since forgiveness comes spiritually and invisibly by the grace of the Holy Spirit, He did not tell the man to see or feel that his sins were forgiven, but to believe. In the same way, if a man desires peace of conscience he must first do whatever he can without feeling any spiritual assurance of forgiveness. If he does this, he will by the grace of God afterwards feel and understand that it is so. The prophet said: *Nisi crederitis, non intelligetis*. Unless you first believe, you cannot understand. For belief comes first, and understanding follows. This understanding, which may be called the sight of God when the result of grace, can only be possessed by a soul of great purity. As our Lord says: *Beati mundo corde, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt* (Matt. v, 8). Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Meaning that they will see God, not with their

eyes but inwardly, with their understanding purified and enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit to see truth. But no soul can attain this purity unless it first possesses a firm faith. As the apostle says: *Fide mundans corda eorum* (Acts xv, 9): that is, God purifies the hearts of his chosen through faith. So a person must first believe that his soul has been reformed through the sacrament of Penance, although he cannot see it, and he must resolve to live rightly and virtuously as his faith requires, so that he may in due time come to recognize and feel this reformation within him.

CHAPTER 12: *Although the soul is reformed, this image remains both lovely and ugly during this life: and how reformed and unreformed souls differ in their secret reactions*

THE soul of man is both lovely and ugly: lovely in so far as it is reformed in faith to the likeness of God, but ugly in so far as it is still corrupted by the carnal impulses and senseless urges of this sinful image. It can be ugly and bestial, and it can be lovely and angelic; ugly in its bondage to sensuality, but lovely in its search for truth by reason. It is ugly in its carnal desires, and lovely in its will to good. So the chosen soul is both lovely and ugly, and Holy Scripture says: *Nigra sum, sed formosa, filiae Jerusalem, sicut tabernacula Cedar et sicut pelles Salomonis* (Cant. i, 5). I am black but lovely, daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar and as the fleeces of Solomon. Meaning: the angels of heaven – that is, the daughters of Jerusalem on high – do not despise me because I am black, for although my skin is black as the tents of Kedar, inwardly I am lovely as the fleeces of Solomon, for I am reformed to the likeness of God. Kedar means black, and represents the devil: Solomon means peace, and represents our Lord Jesus Christ, for He is peace and the lover of peace. Solomon's fleece represents a holy angel, in whom

God dwells unseen, just as life is hidden within the skin of a living body. So an angel is compared to a fleece. A chosen soul may therefore say with humble trust in God and with a glad heart: Although my body is outwardly blackened by sin, like an unregenerate soul that is the dwelling of the devil, yet by faith and good will I am inwardly beautiful as an angel from heaven. Elsewhere the Scripture says: *Nolite considerare me quod fusca sum, quia decoloravit me sol* (Cant. i, 6). Disregard my blackness, for the sun has darkened me. The sun blackens the body outwardly, but not inwardly, and this is a parable of earthly life. So the chosen soul says: Do not condemn me because I am black, for my blackness is all external. It is due to touching and bearing this image of sin, but it is not a blackness of soul. And although a chosen soul, reformed in faith, inhabits this sinful body, is subject to the same bodily desires, and acts outwardly in the same way as an unregenerate soul, so that people cannot see any difference between them, yet there is a great difference in the sight of God. But the power to discern one from another belongs to God alone, and is beyond the knowledge and experience of man, so that we should never condemn a man for any action, the intention of which may be good or evil. For an unregenerate man is so obsessed by love of the world and so concerned with bodily pleasures that he is entirely satisfied with such things and secretly desires nothing better than to enjoy them for ever. He is insensible to the influence of grace, which would render this earthly life distasteful and move him to desire the joys of heaven. One might almost say that a man in this state does not so much carry this sinful image as be carried by it, like a man who is so ill and weak that he cannot support himself and is carried on a stretcher. For a sinful man is so weak and enfeebled through lack of grace that he cannot move hand or foot to do good, nor can he resist the smallest temptation when it comes, but succumbs to it like a beast to carrion. Although one whose soul is reformed employs his bodily senses

and is aware of their influence, at heart he despises them, and would never rest content with them. He shuns this temptation as he would the bite of an adder, and desires if possible to rest in God and offer the love of his heart to Him. Sometimes this desire is strong in him, and he longs to exchange the tedious pleasures of this life for the joys of life everlasting. Although aware of this image, a man in this state is not carried by it like a sick man, but has to carry it. However, grace gives him strength to endure and wear his body with its sinful impulses without being harmed or defiled by them, because he does not love, consent to, or practise things that are mortal sins, as do unregenerate souls.

This was literally fulfilled in the Gospel in the case of the paralytic man who was too weak to walk and was carried to our Lord in a litter. When Jesus saw his trouble, He said in His goodness: *Surge et tolle grabatum tuum, et vade in domum tuam* (S. John v, 8). Rise, take up your bed, and go to your house. The man did so and was made whole. And just as he carried on his back the bed which previously carried him, so it may be said spiritually that a soul reformed in faith carries the image of sin which previously carried him. Therefore do not be too worried about the blackness that you have acquired through carrying this image of sin. Be confident in spite of the shame and regret you feel when you look at it, and despite the sneers of your spiritual enemies who whisper in your heart, 'Where is your Lord Jesus? What are you looking for? Where is the beauty of which you speak? What do you feel except blindness and sin? Where is the image of God which you say is reformed in you?' Take comfort and be strong in faith, as I have already said: if you are, this faith will empower you to crush all the temptations of your enemies. Saint Paul said: *Accipe scutum fidei, in quo tela hostis nequissima poteris extinguere* (Eph. vi, 16). Take the shield of firm faith: with it you will be able to put out all the burning darts of your enemy.

CHAPTER 13: *On three types of people; those who are reformed, those who are unreformed, and those who are reformed both in faith and feeling*

YOU will realize from what I have already said that people are of various types according to the varying states of their souls. Some are not reformed to the likeness of God, and some are reformed only in faith, while some are reformed both in faith and feeling.

For you must understand that the soul has two faculties. One is called sensibility, that is, the faculty of perception through the senses, which man shares with the animals. When this sensibility is not rightly directed and controlled, the image of sin arises; for if the senses are not ruled by the reason, the result is sin. The other faculty is called reason, and this itself has two powers, the higher and the lower reason. The higher may be termed male, since it should exercise control, and it is in this faculty that God's likeness exists, for it is only through this faculty that the soul knows and loves Him. The lower faculty may be termed female, and should obey the higher reason as woman obeys man. Its function is to understand and control mundane things, to employ them with discretion as necessary, and to reject whatever is not essential. It must always watch, respect and follow the higher rational faculty. Now a man who lives only to gratify his bodily desires like an unreasoning animal, and who has neither knowledge of God nor desire for virtue and holy living, but is blinded by pride, gnawed by envy, dominated by greed, and corrupted by lust and other grave sins, is not reformed to the likeness of God. For such a man is entirely satisfied with and subject to the image of sin. But one who fears God and refuses to obey the dangerous impulses of the senses keeps control over worldly things, and makes it his

aim to please God in all that he does. In this way the soul is reformed to the likeness of God in faith, and although it experiences the same temptations as the other soul, they cannot harm it since it does not surrender to them. But a soul which receives grace to resist all sensual temptations, both mortal and venial, and is not even disturbed by them, is reformed in feeling. For it follows the higher powers of reason, and is enabled to see God and spiritual things, as I shall explain later.

CHAPTER 14: *How sinners come to resemble the animals, and are known to be lovers of this world*

WRETCHED is the man who does not recognize the true worth of his soul, and has no wish to do so. For with the exception of the angels, whom it resembles, the soul is the highest of God's creations, and is superior to all other incarnate beings. Therefore man cannot find true rest except in God, and he should love and desire Him alone, seeking only to be reformed to His likeness. But because he does not understand this, man tries to find rest and pleasure in creatures inferior to himself. Yet man acts contrary to nature and reason if he leaves God, the supreme good and source of all life, unsought, unloved, unknown, and unworshipped, and seeks rest and pleasure in the passing pleasures of the world. But this is what is done by all who love this world, and who seek happiness in this wretched life alone. Some find pleasure in pride and conceit, and having lost all reverence for God, they labour night and day to win the honour and praise of the world. Nothing matters to them so long as they win it and excel all others, whether in scholarship or technical skill, in reputation and fame, in riches and respect, in influence and authority, in estate and dignity. Some take delight in wealth, and make it their sole object to amass vast possessions. Their hearts are so set on this that they think of nothing

but how to obtain it. Some love to gratify their bodily cravings in gluttony and lust, some in one way and some in another. And those who act in this vile manner degrade man's noble nature, and lower themselves to the level of beasts.

Pride turns a man into a lion, for he wishes to be feared and respected by everyone, and will not allow anyone to thwart his wishes by word or act. And if anyone resists his presumption he is furious, and sets on him like a lion, does on a lesser beast. One who behaves in this way is no true man, and is acting contrary to man's true nature, so that he is changed into a lion. Envy and anger turn men into dogs. They bark at their neighbours, and bite them with wicked and malicious words; they harass those who have done them no harm, and harm them in body and soul contrary to God's laws. Some people become like asses, because they are slothful in the service of God, and unwilling to show any kindness to their neighbour. They are ready enough to hurry away to Rome for worldly profit and honours, or to win popular approval. But when it is a matter of spiritual gain, of the good of their own souls, or of God's glory, they are soon bored. They do not really want these things, and if they do anything at all, they only make a grudging gesture. Some people are so obstinately ignorant and ill-mannered that they are like swine. They have no fear of God, and only seek to gratify the lusts and desires of the body. They have no respect for the dignity of human nature, and make no attempt to be guided by reason or to control the irrational impulses of their physical nature. When bodily temptation arises, they yield to it at once, and revel in it like swine. Treacherous and covetous people who rob their neighbours of their worldly goods by threats and oppression become like ravening wolves. False and deceitful people who live by trickery and guile become like foxes.

All such people, and others like them, live in no fear of God, but break His commandments, distort His likeness in them, and

make themselves like beasts: indeed, they are worse than beasts, and resemble the devils in hell. But unless those who live in these ways are reformed before their souls part from their bodies at the hour of death, their sin-blinded eyes will then be opened to the truth, and they will receive the punishment due to their wickedness. And because the image of God has not been restored in them through the sacrament of penance, and they have been reformed neither in faith nor feeling in this life, they will be accursed and cast out from the face of our Creator, doomed to lie in the depths of hell with the devil for ever. Saint John says in the Apocalypse: *Timidis et incredulis, et execratis et homicidis, fornicatoribus, veneficis, idolatris et omnibus mendacibus, pars illorum erit in stagno ardenti igne et sulphure* (Rev. xxi, 8). Those who are proud and unbelieving, accursed, murderers, lustful and covetous, poisoners, idolaters, and liars will all receive their dues in the pit of hell burning with fire and brimstone. If those who love the world would often consider how transitory it is, and how all improper love will be severely punished, they would soon learn to despise the worldly delights to which they are at present devoted. They would lift up their hearts to God in love, and do all in their power to be reformed to His likeness before they passed out of this life.

CHAPTER 15: *How those who love this world hinder the reformation of their souls in various ways*

BUT certain of these people say: 'I would gladly love God, be good, and renounce love of the world if I could, but I have not the grace to do so. If I had the same grace as a good man, I would live as he does; but since I have not this grace, I cannot do it.' I reply that it is quite true that they have no grace, and therefore remain in their sin and cannot escape it. But this will not help them, nor does it excuse them before God,

because it is their own fault. They hinder themselves so greatly and in so many ways that the light of grace cannot shine in them nor dwell in their hearts. Some of them are so obstinate that they do not desire grace or a good life, for they realize that if this were the case they would have to give up their love and desire for worldly things. And they do not wish to do this, because these things are so pleasant to them that they do not wish to forgo them. They would furthermore have to undertake works of penance, such as fasting, keeping vigils, praying and other practices which discipline the body and subdue its sinful inclinations. And they cannot do this because it appears so painful and unpleasant to them that they are frightened to think of it. As a result these cowardly and unhappy people continue in their sins.

Some would seem to desire grace, and begin to prepare themselves for it. But their wills are extraordinarily weak, for they immediately yield to any temptation that arises, although it is clearly contrary to the laws of God. They are so accustomed to giving way that resistance to sin seems impossible to them, and this imaginary difficulty gradually saps their will-power and destroys it.

Some, again, feel the influence of grace when their conscience pricks them for their evil life and prompts them to abandon it. But this suggestion is so painful and displeasing that they refuse to entertain it. They run away and forget it if they can, seeking outward distraction in creatures so as not to feel this inward pricking of conscience.

Besides these there are some who are so blind and brainless that they think there is no life beyond the present, and that man's soul is no different to that of an animal, but dies with the body like that of a beast. So they say: 'Let us eat, drink, and make merry. We are certain of this life, and know of no other heaven.' And there are wretches who hold these views inwardly, but do not say it outwardly. It is of such people that the

prophet says: *Dixit insipiens in corde suo, Non est Deus* (Ps. xiv, 1). The fool has said in his heart, There is no God. Every wretch who loves sin and makes this world the sole aim and delight of his soul is such a fool. He does not utter the words 'There is no God', for when he prospers he speaks of God with reverence, and says 'Blessed be God.' And when he has a grudge against God or his neighbour, he will swear by God's blessed Body, or by any of His parts. But in his mind he denies God, for he imagines that God cannot see his sin, or that He will not punish him so severely as Holy Scripture says. Or he may think that God will forgive his sin although he does not abandon it; or that no Christian will be damned however evil his life; or that if he fasts in honour of Our Lady, or says a certain prayer daily, or hears two or three Masses a day, or performs some action that is outwardly in honour of God, he will never go to hell, however gross his sin and despite his refusal to abandon it. This type of man says in his heart, 'There is no God,' but, as the prophet says, he is a fool, and will find by painful experience that He whom he forgot or ignored in times of prosperity is God indeed. *Sola vexatio dabit intellectum auditui*, says the prophet (Isaiah xxviii, 19). Suffering alone will bring understanding. For one who does not understand this now, or refuses to understand it, will do so well enough when he comes to die.

CHAPTER 16: *Those who love this world are advised what to do if their souls are to be reformed before they die*

ALTHOUGH such people are fully aware that they are not in a state of grace and are in mortal sin, they do not care; they are not sorry, nor do they give the matter a thought. They pass their time in worldly pastimes and pleasures, and the further they are from grace, the more hectic their pursuits. Perhaps some are even glad that they have no grace, so that they may,

as it were, feel more free to gratify their desire for worldly pleasures, as though God were asleep and could not see them. This is one of the gravest errors, for by their perverseness they prevent the light of grace entering their souls. For the light of grace shines on all spiritual beings, ready to enter where it is welcomed, just as the sun shines on all material things wherever it is not prevented. Thus Saint John says in the Gospel: *Lux in tenebris lucet, et tenebrae non comprehenderunt* (S. John i, 5). The light of grace shines in the darkness – that is, on the hearts of men darkened by sin – but the darkness does not welcome it. In other words, these blind hearts do not receive this light of grace or profit by it. Just as a blind man is bathed in sunlight when he stands in it, but cannot see it or walk by it, similarly a soul blinded by mortal sin is bathed in this light of grace, but is none the better for it, because he is blind and does not or will not realize his blindness. The greatest obstacle to grace is a person's refusal to admit his own blindness because of pride; or if he does realize it, he ignores it and continues to enjoy himself as though all were well with him.

I urge all who are blinded and enslaved by the love of the world in this way, and those in whom the true beauty of human nature is distorted, to consider their souls and prepare them to receive grace as well as they can. If they so desire, they may do it in this way. Once they realize that they are not in a state of grace and are burdened by mortal sin, let them consider what peril and loss they are incurring by being out of grace and alienated from God. There is nothing to prevent them falling into the depths of hell save the single thread of this physical life by which they hang. And what can be snapped more easily than a single thread? Were their breathing to cease, as may easily happen, the soul would at once depart and find itself in hell forever. If they would consider this, they would tremble for fear of God's justice and of His strict punishment for sin. They would grieve and be sorry for their sins and lack of grace, and

implore God to grant them grace. And if they did so, grace would be given them. It would drive away all darkness and hardness of heart, and all weakness of will; it would give them strength to abandon the false love of the world where it leads to mortal sin. For there is no soul in this life so estranged from God by a perverse following of mortal sin that it cannot be corrected and restored by grace to purity of living if only it will humbly surrender its will to God, amend its ways, and sincerely ask His grace and forgiveness. It must accept full responsibility for its own guilty state, and not try to blame God. For Holy Scripture says: *Nolo mortem peccatoris, sed magis ut convertatur et vivat* (Ezek. xxxiii, 11). God says: I do not desire the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn to Me and live. And it is the will of our Lord that the most obstinate and misguided sinner living should be reformed to His likeness if he will but amend his life and seek for grace.

CHAPTER 17: *How reform of feeling and faith cannot be achieved all at once; it is effected by grace after a long time and with much bodily and spiritual effort*

As I said previously, this reformation in faith can be achieved quite easily. Reformation in faith and feeling must follow; this is not so easily attained, and comes only after patient and prolonged effort. For all God's chosen are reformed in faith, although they may still remain in the lowest degree of charity; but reformation in feeling comes only to souls who reach a state of perfection, and it cannot be achieved all at once. A soul can reach it only through great grace and by prolonged spiritual effort, but it must first be healed of its spiritual sickness. Its bitter passions, bodily desires, and unregenerate feelings have to be burned out of the heart by the fire of desire, and new feelings of burning love and spiritual light have to be infused by grace.

Then the soul begins to draw near to perfection and reformation in feeling.

The soul's progress is like that of a man who has been brought near to death by bodily illness. Although he may be given medicine which restores him and saves his life, he cannot immediately get up and go to work like a man in full health. His bodily weakness prevents this, so that he has to wait a good while, continue with his medicine, and carefully follow his doctor's instructions until his health is fully restored. Similarly in the spiritual life, although one who has been brought near to spiritual death by mortal sin can be restored to life by the medicine of the Sacrament of Penance, and saved from damnation, he is not at once healed of all his passions and worldly desires, nor is he capable of contemplation. He must wait a long time and take good care of himself, and he must order his life so as to recover full health of soul. However, if he takes the medicines of a good doctor and uses them regularly and with discretion, he will be restored to spiritual vitality all the sooner, and will attain reformation in feeling.

Reformation in faith is the lowest state of chosen souls, and below this level they cannot well be; but reformation in feeling is the highest state attainable by a soul in this life. But a soul cannot suddenly leap from the lowest to the highest state, any more than a man who wishes to climb a high ladder and sets his foot on the lowest rung can at the next instant fly to the top. He has to mount each rung in succession one after the other until he comes to the highest. So it is in the spiritual life. No one is suddenly endowed with all graces, but when God, the source of all grace, helps and teaches a soul, it can attain this state by sustained spiritual exercises and wisely ordered activity. For without His especial help and inner guidance no soul can reach a state of perfection.

CHAPTER 18: *One reason why comparatively few souls achieve reformation in faith and feeling*

YOU may say that since our Lord is so good and gracious, and bestows His gifts so freely, it is surprising that so few souls come to be reformed in feeling, compared with the vast number who do not. It might seem that He is estranged from those who by faith have become His servants, or that He has no regard for them; but this is not true. I think one reason why people are so seldom reformed in feeling is that many who have been reformed in faith do not make a whole-hearted effort to grow in grace, or to lead better lives by means of earnest prayer and meditation, and by other spiritual and bodily exercises. They think it sufficient to avoid mortal sin, and continue to live in the same way. They say that it is enough for them to be saved, and they are content with the lowest place in heaven, wanting nothing higher.

It is possible that some of the elect who lead an active life in the world behave in this way, and this is not altogether surprising, because they are so busy with necessary worldly matters that they cannot devote proper attention to spiritual progress. This is a perilous condition, for they are rising and falling, up and down all day, and never attain any stability in their attempt to lead a good life. However, their way of life affords some kind of excuse. But there are others who have no need to be occupied in worldly business, and who do not have to work very hard to support themselves—for instance, religious of both sexes who vow themselves to a state of perfection in a religious order, or layfolk who are naturally capable and intelligent. People like these could achieve a high state of grace if they set themselves to do so, and they are all the more culpable if they remain idle and make no attempt

to grow in grace, or to attain the love and knowledge of God.

It is most dangerous for a soul that is reformed in faith alone to make no effort to seek God and grow in grace, nor to engage in spiritual activity. It may so easily lose ground already gained, and fall back again into mortal sin. For while the soul remains in the body it cannot stand still; it must either grow in grace or relapse into sin. It behaves like a man drawn up out of a pit, who refuses to leave the edge once he is out. He is certainly a fool, for a little gust of wind or a single incautious movement on his part will send him headlong in a worse condition than before. But if he moves right away from the edge and stands on firm ground he will be much safer, even should a great storm arise. It is similar in the spiritual life with one who has been drawn up out of the pit of sin by reformation in faith. If he thinks himself safe enough once he is no longer in mortal sin, refusing to step away, and staying as close as possible to the brink of hell, he is a fool, for at the smallest temptation of the devil or the flesh he falls into sin again. But if he leaves the pit—that is, if he makes a firm resolve to grow in grace, and makes a real effort to win it by prayer and meditation, and by other good works—then although he may undergo violent temptations, he will not easily relapse into mortal sin.

Since grace is good and brings blessing it amazes me when a person who has so little grace that he could hardly possess less, says: 'I have enough; I need no more.' But although a worldly man may have more possessions than he needs, I never hear one say, 'I have enough; I need no more.' He will always want more and more, and devote his whole mind and resources to obtaining more, because his greed is insatiable. Much more, then, should a chosen soul desire spiritual treasures which last for ever and fill the soul with blessing. The wise soul will never cease to desire grace, however much it may already possess, for whoever desires most will obtain most. Indeed, in so doing it will earn great riches and grow in grace.

CHAPTER 19: *Another reason for this failure, and how an unwise reliance on outward forms of devotion sometimes hinders souls from receiving greater grace*

ANOTHER reason is this. Some who are reformed in faith adopt a certain rule of life in both spiritual and worldly matters in the early days of their conversion, and imagine that they must always observe it without change, even although grace may reveal a better. They think that this rule will always be best for them, so that they love it and it becomes such a routine that, once they have fulfilled its obligations, they are quite content, and imagine that they have done great things for God. And should anything occur to interrupt their established routine, although for a reasonable cause, they are discouraged, angry, and troubled in conscience, as though they had committed a mortal sin. Those who behave in this way make it difficult for themselves to receive greater graces because they regard perfection as being dependent on certain outward forms of devotion, and in so doing they mistake a halfway sign for the end of the road.

Outward forms of devotion followed by people at the beginning of their conversion are good, but they are only ways and means leading to perfection, so that anyone who thinks that perfection consists in the carrying out of some bodily or spiritual observance that he learned at his conversion, who remains quite content with this, and who looks no further ahead, will largely halt his own spiritual development. In a very simple craft a mere apprentice can become proficient and understand everything as well on the first day as he will twenty years later. But in a noble and skilled craft the apprentice who makes no progress at all must be either dull-witted or perverse. But the service of God is the noblest of all crafts. It demands the greatest

skill, and is the highest and hardest in which to attain perfection. It is also the most profitable and richly rewarding to one who can practise this craft rightly. So it is evident that apprentices who never acquire any knowledge of it are either dull-witted or perverse.

I am not condemning these forms of devotion used by beginners, whether inward or outward, for I know them to be good and helpful. But I would have them regarded simply as aids to spiritual development, to be used only until such time as beginners discover something better. And when the soul discovers something better and more spiritual, which withdraws it a little from the influence of the body, the senses, and the imagination, then if the earlier practices prove a hindrance, they should be abandoned as soon as this can be done without causing scandal or distress to other people, and the soul should follow the way to which it feels drawn. But if neither form of devotion interferes with the other, then whoever wishes to do so may use both. In this matter I am not alluding to devotions enjoined by the Church or by monastic rule, or to those that are imposed as a penance, but only to those undertaken voluntarily.

The prophet teaches us in the Psalms: *Etenim benedictionem dabit legislator, ibunt de virtute in virtutem, videbitur Deus deorum in Sion* (Ps. lxxxiv, 7). The Lawgiver shall give his blessing; they will progress from virtue to virtue, and the God of gods will appear in Sion. Meaning that the Lawgiver, that is our Lord Jesus Christ, will give His blessing, and grant His gifts of grace to chosen souls, calling on them to renounce sin, and restoring them to His likeness by good works. With the help of His grace they will progress from virtue to virtue until they come to Sion, that is, to contemplation, in which state they will see the God of gods. They will see clearly that there is but one God, and that nothing exists apart from Him.

CHAPTER 20: *How perfection can only be attained by constant effort and by purification of the desires*

NOW you may say that since reformation in faith alone is an elementary and precarious state from which there remains the danger of a fall, and since reformation in feeling is so high and secure a state for those who can reach it, you wish to learn the best way to attain this goal, and whether there is anything in particular which helps one to win this grace of reformation in feeling. My answer is that you are well aware that anyone who wishes to reach purity of heart and awareness of God has to fight with determination and constancy against all the capital sins. Not only must they fight pride and envy, but all the others, together with those that spring from them, as I have already explained in the first Book, because all passions and bodily desires hinder purity of heart and peace of conscience. It is also necessary to establish all virtues, not only chastity and temperance, but also patience, gentleness, charity, humility, and all others. This is not effected in one particular way but in many ways, which differ according to individual dispositions. It is sometimes fostered by prayer, meditation, and good works, while a person may sometimes prove himself by enduring hunger, thirst, cold, shame, disgrace, and other troubles for love of virtue and truth. You already know this, for you read it in every book that deals with the Christian life, and everyone who tries to fire men's souls with the love of God speaks of it. So it seems that there is no special exercise or method by which alone a soul may attain this grace. It depends chiefly on the grace of our Lord Jesus, and upon great personal efforts, all of which are little enough in themselves.

One reason for this fact may be that our Lord Jesus Himself is the supreme Master of this craft and the supreme healer of

of physical sickness, without whom we can do nothing. It is therefore reasonable to require that a man should follow and practise what He teaches and inspires. But a master who can only teach his pupil one lesson has little knowledge to impart, and a doctor who prescribes one medicine for all ailments has little learning. So our Lord Jesus, who is so wise and good, reveals His wisdom and goodness to His disciples in different ways, and gives to each soul the particular remedy best suited to its need. A further reason is that if there were one particular way by which a person might come to the perfect love of God, a man might imagine that he could attain it by his own efforts, in the same way that a merchant makes his profit by his own effort. But the love of God cannot be attained in this way, for one who wishes to serve God wisely and love Him perfectly must desire God as his sole reward. But no creature can deserve to possess God through its own unaided efforts, for even if the physical and spiritual exertions of a single man were to equal those of all creation, he would not on that account deserve God as his reward. For God is supreme bliss and infinite goodness, and immeasurably transcends everything that mankind can merit, so that He cannot be won by any man's own efforts, like some material reward. God is free, and gives Himself to whom He wills and when He wills, and not for any particular achievement or at any particular time. For though a person may do his utmost throughout his life, he can never attain the perfect love of Jesus until the Lord Jesus Himself freely gives it. On the other hand, He gives this love only to those who exert themselves to the utmost, and would do even more if they could.

It seems clear, then, that neither grace alone without full support from the soul, nor a soul's individual efforts unsupported by grace, can bring it to reformation in feeling – a reformation grounded in perfect love and charity. But God's grace allied to man's effort fosters the blessed fervour of perfect love in a soul, a grace only granted in its fullness to a soul that is truly humble,

and stands in awe of God. Consequently one who is not humble and zealous cannot attain this reformation in feeling, since one who is not completely humble cannot see himself as he is. For instance, he may do all the good deeds that he can, and he may fast, watch, wear a hair shirt, and practise all kinds of bodily penance; he may perform all the outward works of mercy for his neighbour, or all the inward duties of prayer, contrition, and meditation; but if he rests content with these and relies on them, regarding them so highly that he presumes on his own merits and thinks himself good, gracious, holy, and virtuous, he still lacks humility. Even though he says and thinks that all that he does is due to God's grace and not to himself, he still lacks humility, because he will not yet renounce all credit for his good deeds, nor make himself truly poor in spirit and know himself to be nothing. And until grace enables a soul to recognize its own nothingness, and, having seen the truth in Jesus, to drop all pretence of personal merit for its good actions, it is not perfectly humble.

What is humility but truthfulness? There is no real difference. For grace enables a humble soul to see that Jesus does everything, and that the soul itself does nothing but allow Jesus to work through it as He wills. But one who is guided solely by human reason and is unaware of any alternative form of guidance finds it very hard – indeed, almost impossible and unreasonable – to do good actions and then to ascribe all merit for them to Jesus and discount his own part. Nevertheless, one who has a spiritual perception of truth knows this to be wholly true and completely reasonable. Indeed, anyone having this perception will never do less good on this account, but will be spurred to a greater and more wholehearted activity both in body and soul. This may be one reason why some people strain and torture their unhappy bodies with harsh penance all their lives, and are constantly reciting prayers, psalms, and other devotions, but never come to feel the love of God in their souls, while

others seem to do so in a short time and with less strain. The reason is that the former lack this humility of which I speak.

On the other hand, a person who takes no action at all cannot experience this grace. The idle man thinks to himself, 'Why should I bother? Why should I pray or meditate, watch or fast? Why should I undertake bodily penance in order to win this grace when it cannot be obtained except by the free gift of grace? I shall continue as I am, a man of the world, and I shall not adopt any of these bodily or spiritual exercises until God gives it. For if He is willing to give it, He does not require me to do anything; and however much or little I do, He will give it me. And if He does not will to give it, I shall never obtain it however hard I try.' But anyone who adopts this attitude can never be fully reformed, because he deliberately chooses worldly idleness, and renders himself incapable of receiving the gift of grace. He refuses to rouse himself either spiritually to a lasting desire and longing for Jesus, or physically to perform his exterior duties. So he cannot receive this grace.

Therefore one who has no real humility and will not bestir himself either inwardly alone, through deep fervour, lasting desire, and regular prayer and meditation, or else through both inward and outward activities, cannot be spiritually reformed to the likeness of God.

CHAPTER 21: *How one who wishes to reach Jerusalem, the City of Peace, which represents contemplation, must have faith, be very humble, and endure troubles of body and soul*

SINCE you wish to learn some way by which you can approach this reformation, if the Lord Jesus gives me grace I will tell you what I consider the shortest and simplest way. To explain it, I will use the simile of a good pilgrim.

A man once wished to go to Jerusalem, and since he did not know the way, he called on another man who, he hoped, knew the way, and asked him for information. This other man told him that he would not reach it without great hardship and effort. 'The way is long,' he said, 'and there is great danger from thieves and bandits, as well as many other difficulties which beset a man on this journey. Furthermore, there are many different roads which seem to lead towards it, but every day men are killed and robbed, and never reach their goal. But I can guarantee one road which will lead you to the city of Jerusalem if you will keep to it. On this road your life will be safe, but you will have to undergo robbery, violence, and great distress.'

The pilgrim replied: 'I do not mind how much hardship I have to undergo on the road, so long as my life is spared and I reach my destination. So tell me all you know, and I faithfully promise to follow your instructions.' The other answered, 'I will set you on the right road. See that you carry out my instructions. Do not allow anything that you may see, hear, or feel on the road to delay you. Do not stop for it, look at it, take pleasure in it, or fear it. Keep on your way without halting, and remember that your goal is Jerusalem; that is what you want, and nothing else. If you are robbed, beaten, insulted, and treated with contempt, do not retaliate if you value your life. Resign yourself to such injuries and disregard them, lest you suffer worse things. And if people delay you with foolish tales and lies in order to distract you and make you abandon your pilgrimage, turn a deaf ear to them and make no reply save that you wish to reach Jerusalem. And if people offer you gifts or provide opportunities for you to enrich yourself, disregard them: keep your mind constantly on Jerusalem. If you will keep to this road and do as I have said, I guarantee that you will not be killed, and that you will arrive at the place for which you long.'