

CHAPTER 24: *On prayer, as an aid towards purity of heart and other virtues*

PRAYER is helpful, and enables us to acquire purity of heart by the destruction of sin and the winning of virtues. The purpose of prayer is not to inform our Lord what you desire, for He knows all your needs. It is to render you able and ready to receive the grace which our Lord will freely give you. This grace cannot be experienced until you have been refined and purified by the fire of desire in devout prayer. For although prayer is not the cause for which our Lord gives grace, it is nevertheless the means by which grace, freely given, comes to the soul.

You may now perhaps desire to learn how to pray, to what you should direct your thoughts during prayer, and what form of prayer is best for you to use. As to the first, my answer is that when you first wake and are ready to pray, you may feel sluggish and heavy; obsessed by unprofitable thoughts and fancies, or preoccupied by thoughts of a worldly or personal nature. It is essential to rouse your heart by prayer, and stir it to devotion as strongly as you can.

CHAPTER 25: *How we should pray, and the matter of our thoughts in prayer*

WHEN you pray, detach your heart from all earthly things, and use all your efforts to withdraw your mind from them, so that it may be stripped and freed of these things and rise continually to Jesus Christ. You will never be able to see Him as He is in His divinity, nor can your imagination conceive of Him as He is; but devout and constant recollection of

the humility of His precious humanity will enable you to experience His goodness and the grace of His divinity. If, when you pray, your heart is lightened, helped, and freed from the burden of all worldly thoughts and affections, and rises up in the power of the spirit to a spiritual delight in His presence so that you are scarcely conscious of earthly things or are little distracted by them, then you are praying well. For prayer is nothing other than the ascent of the heart to God, and its withdrawal from all earthly thoughts. Therefore prayer is compared to fire, which of its own nature always leaves the earth and leaps into the air. Similarly, prayerful desire, when touched and kindled by the spiritual fire of God, constantly leaps upwards to Him from whom it comes.

CHAPTER 26: *On the fire of love*

THOSE who speak of the fire of love do not always fully understand what it is. Indeed, I cannot myself tell you what it is, but I can tell you that it is not physical, nor is it a bodily sensation. A soul may experience it during prayer and devotion, but although the soul dwells within the body, it does not feel it through its bodily senses. For although it may happen that the working of this fire in the soul may cause a sensation of bodily heat, as though the body warmed in response to the exertions of the spirit, nevertheless the fire of love is not a bodily sensation, for it is caused by the spiritual desire of the soul. Nobody who experiences this devotion has any doubt on the matter, but simple people sometimes imagine that because it is called fire it must be hot like natural fire. And that is why I have mentioned this.

CHAPTER 27: *How the vocal prayers ordained by God or approved by Holy Church are best for those who are under obligation to use them, as well as for those who are beginners in prayer*

I WILL NOW give you my opinion on the second point: namely, how to know what kind of prayer is best. You should understand that there are three degrees of prayer. The first is vocal prayer, whether enjoined by God, as is the *Our Father*, or more generally by Holy Church, such as Matins, Vespers, and the other Hours. There are also prayers written by devout persons and addressed to our Lord, our Lady, or the Saints. As to this kind of prayer, known as vocal, I am certain that, since you are a religious and are bound by custom and rule to recite Matins and the Hours, it is proper for you to say these as devoutly as you are able. In reciting Matins, you say in particular the *Our Father*, and in order to stir you to greater devotion it has been ordained that you should also say psalms, hymns, and such like which, like the *Our Father*, have been inspired by the Holy Spirit. So it is not right to say the Divine Office hurriedly and carelessly as though the obligation were a heavy burden. So stir your affections and collect your thoughts, that you may recite it with greater care and devotion than any other prayers, in the sure knowledge that since it is the prayer of Holy Church, there is no vocal prayer so profitable to your regular use as the Divine Office. Therefore put away all heaviness, and by God's grace you will transform a duty into a delight, and an obligation into great freedom. If you do not, it will be an obstacle to your spiritual life. As well as the Divine Office you may, if you wish, use the *Our Father* and other such prayers, and I think it will be best for you to use those in which you find most joy and spiritual comfort.

This form of prayer is usually more helpful than any other spiritual exercise to a person in the beginning of his spiritual life. For unless he is granted especial grace, a person is at first undisciplined and worldly, and he cannot meditate on spiritual things because his soul is not yet cleansed of his former sin. And so I think it best for such to use the *Our Father*, the *Hail Mary*, and to recite the Psalms. For one who cannot readily pray with the spirit, because the feet of his knowledge are lamed by sin, needs to have a firm staff to support him. This staff is the particular forms of vocal prayer ordained by God and Holy Church to help men's souls. By this prayer the soul of a worldly man, who is always relapsing into worldly thoughts and carnal desires, is raised up and supported as if by a staff. He is nourished by the sweet words of the prayer as a child is nourished with milk. And he is guided by it so that his mind does not fall into errors and foolish fancies. There is no possibility of a mistake in this form of prayer for anyone who will patiently and humbly persevere in it.

CHAPTER 28: *The danger of abandoning the appointed prayers of the Church for meditation too early in the spiritual life*

CONSEQUENTLY, you will realize that it is a mistake for any who have felt some fervour at the beginning of their conversion, and before their spiritual life is established, to abandon vocal prayer and outward forms of devotion and give themselves exclusively to meditation. For they often rely on their own ideas and feelings in spiritual matters for which they have not as yet received the necessary grace. By such indiscretion they frequently overstrain their minds and injure their health, so that they fall into strange fancies and misconceptions or into obvious errors, and by their foolish ideas they obstruct the grace that God gives them. The cause of all this is secret pride and presumption; for having experienced a little grace,

they consider it so great and exceptional that they fall into vain-glory, and by so doing they lose it. If they realized how little they feel compared with what God gives or may give, they would be ashamed to speak about it unless it was absolutely necessary. In the psalms David says of vocal prayer: *Voce mea ad Dominum clamavi: voce mea ad Dominum deprecatus sum* (Psalm cxlii, 1). In order to stir others to pray both with heart and voice, this prophet said: 'I cried to the Lord with my voice, and prayed to Him with my lips.'

CHAPTER 29: *The second degree of prayer, which follows the impulses of devotion without any set form*

THE second degree of prayer is vocal, but employs no particular set form. This is when anyone by the grace of God experiences the grace of devotion, and out of this devotion speaks to God as though he were bodily in His presence, using such words as best express his feelings and come to his mind at the time. He may recall his sins and wretchedness, the malice and deceits of the devil, or the goodness and mercy of God. Out of the desire of his heart he calls on our Lord as a man will do when in peril among his enemies or in sickness, showing his hurts to God as he would to a physician, and saying as David said: *Eripe me de inimicis meis, Deus meus* (Psalm lix, 1). 'Deliver me from my enemies, O God.' Or else, *Sana animam meam, quia peccavi tibi* (Psalm xli, 4). 'Heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee.' Or such other petition as comes to his mind. He knows the greatness of God's goodness, grace, and mercy, and wishes to love Him with all his heart, and to thank Him with such words and psalms as will fittingly express his love and praise of God. As David said: *Confitemini Domino quoniam bonus, quoniam in saeculum misericordia ejus* (Psalm cxxxvi, 1). 'Love and praise the Lord, for He is good and merciful.' And he will use any other prayers that he is moved to say.

CHAPTER 30: *How this kind of prayer is very pleasing to God, and wounds a man's soul with the sword of love*

THIS kind of prayer is very pleasing to God because it springs directly from the heart, and is therefore never offered without some reward of grace. It belongs to the second degree of contemplation, as I have already said. Whoever receives this gift of fervour from God should withdraw from the company of other people and be alone, so that it may not be interrupted. Let whoever has it retain it while he can, for its fervour will not remain long. For whenever grace comes powerfully it imposes a great strain on the spirit, even while it brings joy. It is also a great strain on the body if experienced often, for at the mighty surge of grace the body stirs and moves about like that of a madman or drunkard who can find no ease. This is one effect of passionate love, which in its violence utterly destroys all love of earthly things and wounds the soul with the sword of joyful love, so that the body collapses, unable to bear it. So potent is God's touch on the soul that were the most wicked sinner on earth to be touched only once by this sharp sword, he would thenceforward be a graver and better man. He would loathe all sinful lusts and desires, and cease to be attracted by the worldly things that had once been his chief delight.

CHAPTER 31: *How the fire of love consumes all physical desires, just as natural fire consumes material objects*

THE prophet Jeremiah describes this type of experience: *Et factus est in corde meo quasi ignis exaestuans, claususque in ossibus meis, et defeci, ferre non sustinens* (Jer. xx, 9). That is to say, the love and experience of God became not merely a fire, but a

glowing fire in my heart. For as natural fire burns and consumes every material object that it touches, so supernatural fire – that is, the love of God – burns away and consumes all worldly loves and pleasures in the soul. This is the fire which the prophet describes as ‘hidden in his bones’. That is to say, this love fills all the powers of my soul – mind, reason, and will – with grace and sweetness as marrow fills a bone; but its influence is internal, and is not perceptible externally. Nevertheless, this love works so powerfully within the soul that it affects the body, and makes it quake and tremble. This experience is so unlike any normal experience, and is so unfamiliar that the soul cannot understand or endure it, and the body fails, as the prophet describes. Our Lord therefore tempers it, withdraws the fervour, and allows the soul to return to a state of greater calm and repose. Whoever can pray often in this way makes swift progress in the spiritual life. He will acquire greater virtue in a short while than another person of equal merit without this grace will acquire after a long period of penance. And whoever enjoys this grace from time to time has no need to task his body with greater penance than it reasonably requires.

CHAPTER 32: *On the third degree of prayer, which is in the heart alone and is without words*

THE third degree of prayer is in the heart alone; it is without words, and is accompanied by great peace and tranquillity of body and soul. One who wishes to pray in this way must have a pure heart, for the gift comes only to those who, either through long bodily and spiritual effort, or through such sudden visitations of love as I have described, have attained quietness of soul. As a result, their affections become wholly spiritual, their hearts are continually at prayer, and they can love and praise God without serious hindrance from tempta-

tions or worldly thoughts, as I said earlier when describing the second degree of contemplation. Of this kind of prayer Saint Paul says: *Nam si orem lingua, spiritus meus orat, mens autem mea sine fructu est. Quid ergo? orabo et spiritu, orabo et mente: psallam spiritu, psallam et mente* (1 Cor. xiv, 14). Meaning, that if I pray with my tongue only, by an effort of will, the prayer is commendable but my soul is not satisfied, because it cannot taste the fruit of spiritual joy through the understanding. ‘What shall I do then?’ asks Saint Paul. And he answers: I will pray with spiritual effort and desire. I will also pray more inwardly in my spirit without effort, and will taste the sweetness of the love and sight of God. It is this perception and experience of the love of God that will satisfy my soul. This – as I understand – was how Saint Paul prayed. In Holy Scripture God speaks of this way under a symbol: *Ignis in altari meo semper ardebit, et cotidie sacerdos surgens subjicit ligna, ut ignis non extinguatur* (Lev. vi, 12). That is to say: the fire of love shall always be alight in the soul of the devout and pure man or woman; for the soul is the altar of God, and every morning the priest shall lay on sticks and feed the fire. In other words, a man shall feed the fire of love in his heart with holy psalms, pure thoughts, and fervent desires, so that it shall never be extinguished. Our Lord gives this peace to some of His servants as a reward for their labours and a foretaste of the love which they will have in the joys of heaven.

CHAPTER 33: *How to deal with distraction in prayer*

BUT you may now complain that I am speaking in over-exalted terms about this kind of prayer, since it is easy enough to talk about it, but by no means easy to practise. You state that you are unable to pray in the devout and whole-hearted way that I have described. For when you wish to raise your heart to God in prayer, many useless thoughts fill your

mind, of what you have done, of what you are going to do, of what others are doing, and such like. These thoughts hinder and distract you so much that you feel no joy, peace, or devotion in your prayer. And often the more you struggle to collect your thoughts, the more obstinate and wandering they become. Sometimes this lasts from the beginning to the end of your prayer, and you think all your efforts are lost.

When you say that I spoke in over-exalted terms about prayer, I frankly admit that I am describing something that I cannot practise. Nevertheless, I do so because we ought to understand how to pray well. And since we cannot pray well, we should humbly acknowledge our weakness and cry to God for mercy. Our Lord Himself told us this when He said: *Diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo, ex tota anima tua, et ex omnibus viribus tuis* (S. Luke x, 27). You shall love God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your strength. It is impossible for anyone to fulfil this command perfectly in this life, but our Lord nevertheless bids us love in this way. And its purpose, as Saint Bernard says, is that we should recognize our weakness and humbly cry for mercy, and we shall receive it. However, I will give you my advice on this question.

When you pray, begin by directing your will and intention to God as briefly, fully, and purely as possible; then continue as well as you can. And although your original purpose may seem largely frustrated, do not be distressed and angry with yourself or impatient with God because He does not give you feelings of devotion and spiritual joy that you imagine He gives to others. Recognize in this your own weakness, accept it readily, and humbly hold to your prayer, poor as it is, firmly trusting that our Lord in His mercy will make it good and profitable, more than you know or feel. For remember that your good intention is accepted in discharge of your duty, and will be rewarded like any other good deed done in charity, even though your mind was distracted when you did it. Therefore do your

duty, and allow our Lord to do what He will; do not try to teach Him his part. And although you know yourself to be thoughtless and negligent, yet for this, as well as for all venial sins that cannot be avoided in this wretched life, lift up your heart to God, acknowledge your sinfulness, and plead for mercy with firm trust in His forgiveness. Give up struggling against yourself, and do not worry about it any longer, as though you could force yourself not to have these feelings. Leave your prayer and turn to some other good occupation, either spiritual or physical, and resolve to do better another time. Although you fail another time in the same way – even a hundred or a thousand times – yet do as I have said, and all will be well. Furthermore, a soul who never finds peace of heart in prayer but has to struggle against distracting and troublesome thoughts all her life, provided that she keeps herself in humility and charity in other ways, shall receive full reward in heaven for all her trouble.

#### CHAPTER 34: *On meditation for sinners after they have turned wholly to God*

I WILL now tell you a little about meditation. You must understand that in meditation no fixed rule can be laid down for everybody to keep. It is the free gift of God, and depends upon the varying dispositions and states of chosen souls. And as they grow in virtue and reach a higher state, God increases their spiritual knowledge and love of Himself through their meditation. For it is apparent that one who makes little advance in the knowledge of God and spiritual things makes little advance in the love of God. This is clearly seen in the case of the Apostles; for, when they were filled with burning love by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, they were not made foolish, but were endowed with wisdom as great as man may have

in this life, which enabled them both to know and to speak of God and spiritual things. Holy Scripture says of them: *Repleti sunt omnes Spiritu sancto, et coeperunt loqui magnalia Dei* (Acts ii, 4). 'They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to proclaim the great wonders of God.' And all this knowledge was granted them in an ecstasy of love by the Holy Spirit.

There are various meditations that God puts into a man's heart. Some of these I shall describe to you, so that if you experience any of them you may take better advantage of them. At the beginning of his conversion, a man who has been tainted by worldly and bodily sins usually thinks mostly on his sins. He feels great compunction and heartfelt sorrow for them, with grief and tears, humbly and urgently asking God's mercy and forgiveness for them. If he is deeply touched by contrition because God desires to cleanse him swiftly, his sins will always remain before him, so that he can hardly endure the burden of them. And however full a confession he makes, he will still feel his conscience pricking and tormenting him, so that he thinks that he has not received full absolution for them. He can hardly rest, and could not endure such agony of mind did not God of His mercy grant him comfort at times by giving him feelings of great devotion to the Passion or some such thing. In this way God works in some men's hearts in greater or less degree as He wills it. And God's great mercy consists in this; that He will not only forgive the guilt of sin, but will remit its punishment in purgatory for a little pain and remorse of conscience here. Also, if God wishes to dispose a person to receive any special gift of the love of God, he must first be purged and cleansed by experiencing the fire of compunction for all the great sins that he has committed. David speaks of this trial of purification in many places in the psalms, and especially in the psalm *Miserere mei Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam* (Ps. I, 1).

CHAPTER 35: *That meditation on the humanity and passion of Christ is given by God, and how one may recognize it when given*

AFTER this trial, and sometimes during it, our Lord gives to such a person – or to one who by the grace of God has preserved his innocence – a meditation on His humanity; this may be on His birth or passion, or on the compassion of our Lady Saint Mary. When this meditation is inspired by the Holy Spirit it is most valuable and consoling, and you may recognize it by this sign: when you are moved to meditate on God, your mind is suddenly withdrawn from all worldly and material things, and you seem to see our Lord Jesus in your soul in bodily form as He lived upon earth. You see Him taken by the Jews and bound as a thief, beaten and despised, scourged and condemned to death. You see with what humility He bore the cross on His back, and with what cruelty He was nailed to it. You see the crown of thorns on His head, and the sharp spear that pierced Him to the heart. At this sight you feel your heart stirred to such compassion and pity towards your Lord Jesus that you mourn, weep, and cry out with every power of body and soul, marvelling at the goodness and love, patience and humility of your Lord Jesus, who was willing to suffer such pain for so sinful and wretched a creature as yourself. At the same time you feel the goodness and mercy of our Lord so strongly that your heart leaps for joy and love of Him, and you shed many sweet tears, having a sure trust in the forgiveness of your sins and the salvation of your soul through the merits of His precious passion. Therefore, when the remembrance of Christ's Passion or of any other event in His earthly life comes to your mind in a spiritual vision of this kind, accompanied by devout love, you may feel certain that it is not the result of your own imagination or

the deception of a wicked spirit, but comes by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and is sent to open your spiritual perception to the humanity of Christ. Saint Bernard calls it the natural love of God, inasmuch as it is directed towards the human nature of Christ. It is an excellent gift, for it helps to destroy grave sins and implant virtues, and leads in time to the contemplation of the Godhead. For a person cannot come to have spiritual delight in the contemplation of Christ's divinity until he first constantly considers His manhood with sorrow and compassion. Saint Paul did this, saying first: *Nihil judicavi me scire inter vos, nisi Jesum Christum, et hunc crucifixum* (1 Cor. ii, 2). I showed you nothing at all save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Which is as though he had said: My knowledge and my trust is in the Passion of Christ alone. Therefore he said also: *Mihi autem absit gloriari, nisi in cruce Domini nostri Jesu Christi* (Gal. vi, 14). Far be from me all manner of joy and delight save in the cross and Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nevertheless he said afterwards: *Praedicamus vobis Christum, Dei virtutem et Dei sapientiam* (1 Cor. i, 23) meaning, First I preached the humanity and Passion of Christ; now I preach to you His divinity. That is, Christ the power of God and the endless wisdom of God.

CHAPTER 36: *That for various reasons, meditation on Christ's passion is often withdrawn from those to whom it has been given*

ONE cannot always have this kind of meditation at will, but only when our Lord wills to give it. To some men and women He gives it throughout their lives whenever He visits them, for some are so tender in their affections that when they hear others speak of Christ's precious Passion, or when they think on it themselves, their hearts melt with devotion, and they are refreshed and strengthened against all temptations of

the devil. This is a great gift of God. To others He at first gives it freely, and afterwards withdraws it for various reasons; if, for instance, a man falls into pride because of it, or commits some other sin which makes him unable to receive this grace. Or else our Lord may withdraw it and all other devout feelings from a person to allow him to be tried by the temptations of the devil. By this means He will lead him towards a more spiritual knowledge and perception of Himself. For He himself said to His disciples: *Expedit vobis ut ego vadam; si autem non abiero, Paracletus non veniet ad vos* (S. John xvi, 7). It is expedient for you that I withdraw My bodily presence from you, for if I do not, the Holy Spirit cannot come to you. For so long as He was with them they loved Him deeply, but it was with a natural love for His humanity. It was therefore desirable that He should withdraw His bodily form from their sight, so that the Holy Spirit might come and teach them to love and know Him in a more spiritual way, as He did on the Day of Pentecost. In the same way, it is for the good of some that our Lord should withdraw his bodily likeness somewhat from the eyes of the soul, so that the heart may devote itself with greater zeal to desire and seek Him in His divinity.

CHAPTER 37: *On the various temptations of the devil*

NEVERTHELESS a man must first suffer many temptations, and through the malice of the devil these temptations often assail men and women in various ways whenever consolation has been withdrawn. For instance, when the devil perceives that devotion has been withdrawn from a soul, leaving it as it were exposed for a while, he sometimes sends such violent and consuming temptations to impurity or greed that those so afflicted think that they have never experienced such grievous temptations in their lives, even when they gave themselves

most to sin. So strong are these temptations that they think it impossible to endure and resist them for long, and they are certain to yield unless they have help. Consequently they are greatly distressed both by the lack of comfort and devotion that they once enjoyed, and also by the fear of falling away from God by such open sins. And by God's permission the devil does this to them to make them abandon their good intention and return to their former sin. But if a person will stand firm awhile, endure a little trouble, and utterly refuse to return to sin under any circumstances, our Lord is very near him and will soon bring him help. For God will keep him in safety, although he knows not how. As the prophet David said in the person of our Lord: *Cum ipso sum in tribulatione, eripiam eum et glorificabo eum* (Ps. xci, 15). I am with him in trouble, and in temptation I will deliver him, and will make him glorious in My joy. The devil maliciously tempts some people with spiritual sins, such as doubts about the Faith, or about the Sacrament of the Lord's Body: also with despair, or blasphemy against our Lord or His Saints, or loathing of life, or bitterness and unreasonable depression, or with undue concern about themselves and their bodily needs if they devote themselves wholly to God's service. He tempts others – especially men and women who lead the solitary life – with fears and horrible fancies, either in bodily shape or in the imagination, both in sleeping and waking, and he so vexes them that they can hardly obtain rest. He also tempts them in many other ways too numerous for me to mention.

CHAPTER 38: *On various remedies against temptations of the devil*

THE first remedy for those who are troubled in these or other ways is to put their whole trust in our Lord Jesus Christ, and often to recall His Passion and the pains that He suffered for us. Then they should understand that all the trouble

and sorrow that they endure in such temptations – when it seems to an uninstructed person that God has forsaken him – is not a sign that He is reproving or forsaking them, but is a trial sent for their amendment. Its purpose may be to purge their former sins, to increase their merit, or to prepare them to receive great grace if they will only endure and stand firm awhile, and never of their own choice return to their sin. Another remedy is that they must not fear, nor regard as sin, or take to heart any evil impulses to sin or blasphemy, or doubts about the Sacrament, or any other such ugly temptations; for to experience these temptations defiles the soul no more than the bark of a dog or the bite of a flea. They trouble the soul but do not harm it provided a man puts them aside and ignores them. It does no good to struggle against them, or to try and master them by force, for the more a person struggles against them, the more persistent they become. Therefore turn your mind away from them as best you can, and direct it to some other occupation. Should they still persist, it is best not to get impatient or discouraged, but to bear them with a sure trust in God, just as you would bear a physical pain or chastisement sent by God to purge your sins. Bear them as long as He wills for love of Him who was scourged and bore the cross for love of you. In addition, it is good to open your heart to some wise man before they take firm root; abandon your own judgement, and follow his advice. But do not be in a hurry to discuss these matters with an inexperienced or worldly person who has never felt such temptation, for he might easily reduce a simple soul to despair through his ignorance. For the consolation of those who are tempted in these ways, and who think themselves forsaken and forgotten by God, our Lord says through His prophet: *In modico dereliqui te, et in momento indignationis meae percussi te, et in miserationibus meis multis congregabo te* (Isa. liv, 7). For a little while I forsook you – that is to say, I allowed you to be troubled a little – and in a moment of wrath I smote you; that is, all the



penance and pain that you suffer here is but a moment of My wrath compared to the pain of hell or purgatory. Yet in My manifold mercies I will gather you to Me; that is, when you think yourself forsaken, then in My great mercy I will gather you to Me again. For when you think that you are lost, our Lord will come to your help, as Job says: *Cum te consumptum putaveris, orieris ut lucifer et habebis fiduciam* (Job xi, 17). That is to say, When you are brought so low by the assault of temptation that you think there is no help or comfort to be had, and that you are utterly defeated, still stand firm in hope and pray to God. You shall suddenly rise up in gladness like the morning star, and as Job said, have a sure trust in God.

CHAPTER 39: *How God allows His chosen to be tried and tempted, and afterwards comforts them and establishes them in grace*

TO comfort such people so that they may not despair, the wise man says of our Lord: *In tentatione ambulet cum eo. In primis elegit eum. Timorem, et metum, et approbationem inducet super illum; et cruciabit illum in tribulatione doctrinae suae, donec tentet illum in cogitationibus suis, et credat animae illius. Et iter directum adducet ad illum, et firmabit illum, et lactificabit illum; et denudabit abscondita sua illi, et thesaurizabit super illum scientiam et intellectum justitiae* (Ecclus. iv, 18-21). In other words, the wise man wishes no one to despair in temptation, and says to comfort him: our Lord does not forsake a man in temptation, but walks with him from the beginning to the end. For he says that He first chooses him – this is when He draws a man to Him by the comfort of devotion – and afterwards brings on him sorrow, fear and testing – this is when He withdraws devotion and allows him to be tempted. He also says that He tries him with tribulation until He has thoroughly tested him in his

thoughts, and until a man will place his whole trust in Him. After this our Lord leads him out into the right way, holds him fast to Himself, and gives him joy. Then He reveals His secrets to him, and gives him His treasure of knowledge and right understanding.

Through these words of Holy Scripture you may see that these and any other temptations, however troublesome, are necessary and profitable to anyone who is firmly resolved by God's grace to forsake sin. But he must endure them as best he may and abide God's will, refusing to return to the sins he has forsaken whatever the sorrow, pain, or fear of temptation. He must always stand firm in the struggle, and pray with trust and hope. Our Lord of His infinite goodness, who has pity and mercy on all His creatures, will in His own time lay to His hand and strike down the devil and all his power. He eases them of their trouble, and puts away the fear, sorrow, and darkness out of their hearts. He brings into their souls the light of grace, and opens their inward vision to see that all their trials were profitable. He also gives them new spiritual strength to withstand with ease all the efforts of the devil and all deadly sins, and leads them into the ways of good and holy living. If they are humble, He preserves them in these ways to the end, and then receives them wholly to Himself. So I repeat: if you are troubled and beset by any of these temptations do not be afraid. Do as I have said, and better if you can, and I trust that by the grace of Jesus Christ you will never be overcome by your enemy.

CHAPTER 40: *That a man should not yield to idleness, or neglect the grace given him by God*

AFTER you have escaped from such temptations, or if God has kept you from being overmuch distressed by them – as in His mercy He has kept many – then it is good that you

should not allow your peace to degenerate into inactivity, for there are many who allow themselves to relax too soon. If you are willing, you can begin a new exercise and endeavour, which is to examine your own soul by means of meditation in order to learn its true nature, and by this means come to the spiritual knowledge of God. For Saint Augustine says: By knowing myself I shall come to the knowledge of God. I do not say that it is essential or obligatory for you or anyone else to attempt this, unless he feels moved and called to it by grace. For our Lord gives various gifts as He wills, not all to one person or one to all, with the exception of charity, which is common to all. Therefore if a man or woman has received some particular gift from God, such as devotion in prayer or to the Passion of Christ, or any other gift however small, let him not leave it too soon for any other unless he feels sure that the other is better; but let him hold to what he has and labour steadfastly in it, desiring always a better when God will give it. Nevertheless, if after a while this gift is withdrawn and he sees a better to which his heart feels drawn, then it would seem that God is calling him to the better. Let him then set himself to acquire and develop it as fully as he can.

CHAPTER 41: *That everyone should know the extent of his own gift, and always desire a better, so that he can accept it when God wills to give it*

THE holy fathers in years gone by have taught us that we should know the extent of our gift and labour to perfect it, without pretending to have more than we know ourselves to possess. We may always desire the best gifts, but we may not always obtain them, because we have not yet received the grace necessary for them. A hound that only runs after the hare because he sees other hounds run rests when he is tired or returns

home. But if he runs because he sees the hare, he will not stop until he has caught it, tired though he may be. Our spiritual progress is very similar. Whoever has some grace, however small, and wilfully neglects to develop it, but sets himself to obtain some other grace that he has not yet been granted merely because he sees or hears that other people possess it, may indeed run for a while until he is weary, but will then return home again. And unless he is careful, he may in consequence injure his powers before he gets home. But whoever uses such grace as he has, and aspires after greater grace with humble and constant prayer, provided he remains humble, may safely pursue his quest once he feels moved to follow after the grace which he desired. Therefore desire from God as strongly as you may, without measure or discretion, all that belongs to His love and to the joy of heaven; for whoever desires most of God will receive most from Him. Do your utmost, and ask God's mercy for whatever you cannot do. Saint Paul seems to refer to this when he says: *Unusquisque habet donum suum ex Deo, alius autem sic, alius vero sic* (1 Cor. vii, 7). *Item unicuique nostrum data est gratia secundum mensuram donationis Christi* (Eph. iv, 7). *Divisiones gratiarum sunt, alii datur sermo sapientiae; alii sermo scientiae* (1 Cor. xii, 4-8). *Item ut sciamus quae a Deo donata sunt nobis* (1 Cor. ii, 12). Saint Paul says that each man has his gift from God, one man this, another that. For to each man who will be saved is given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. We therefore need to know the gifts given us by God, so that we may use them, for by these we shall be saved. For some by corporal works and acts of mercy, some by severe bodily penance, some by lifelong sorrow and penitence, some by preaching and teaching, and some by different graces and gifts of devotion will be saved and come to the bliss of heaven.

CHAPTER 42: *That a man should study to know his own soul and its powers, and to destroy the roots of sin in it*

NEVERTHELESS, there is one work in which it is both very necessary and helpful to engage, and which – so far as human efforts are concerned – is a highway leading to contemplation. This is for a person to enter into himself, and to understand his own soul with all its powers, virtues, and sins. In this interior examination you will come to recognize the honour and dignity proper to the soul at its creation, and the wretchedness and error into which you have fallen through sin. This realization will bring with it a heartfelt desire to recover the dignity and honour which you have lost. You will be filled with disgust and contempt for yourself, and with a firm resolve to humble yourself and to destroy everything that stands between you and that dignity and joy. Those who wish to make rapid progress in this task will at first find it hard and painful, for it is a conflict in the soul against the root of all sins great and small, and this is nothing other than a false and misplaced love of self. From this love, as Saint Augustine says, springs every kind of sin, both mortal and venial. Indeed, until this root is completely dug up and exposed, and as it were almost dried up by the casting out of all loves and fears of the world and the flesh, the soul can never experience the burning love of Jesus Christ. It cannot enjoy the closeness of His gracious presence, nor can its understanding be opened to a clear insight into spiritual things. This task, however, is necessary if a person is to detach his heart and mind from the love of all earthly things, from vain thoughts, and from material considerations, and from misplaced love of self, so that his soul may find no satisfaction in them. Then, in so far as the soul cannot find its satisfaction in the love and sight of Jesus Christ, it is bound to

suffer pain. This task is difficult and arduous to a degree; nevertheless, I am sure that it is the way which Christ teaches in the Gospel to those who wish to love Him perfectly, saying: *Contendite intrare per angustam portam; quia arcta est via quae ducit ad vitam, et pauci inveniunt eam* (Matt. vii, 14). Strive to enter by the narrow gate, for the way that leads to heaven is narrow, and few men find it. And how narrow this way is our Lord tells us in another place: *Si quis vult venire post me, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam, et sequatur me* (Matt. xvi, 24). *Item qui odit animam suam in hoc mundo, in vitam aeternam custodit eam* (John xii, 25). That is to say: Whoever wishes to follow Me, let him forsake himself and hate his own soul. In other words, forsake all worldly love and hate his own bodily life and the vain desires of his bodily senses for love of Me. And let him take the cross – that is, suffer the pain of this world awhile – and then follow Me in the contemplation of My humanity and My divinity. This way is so strait and narrow that no earthly thing may pass through it, for it demands the slaying of all sin. As Saint Paul says: *Mortificate membra vestra quae sunt super terram, immunditiam, libidinem, concupiscentiam malam* (Col. iii, 5). Slay your earthly members – not the bodily members, but those of the soul – such as impurity, lust, and immoderate love of self and earthly things. Therefore, as your efforts hitherto have been to withstand grave material sins and open temptations of the devil, which originate outside yourself, you must now undertake this spiritual task within yourself, and, so far as you are able, destroy and break up the roots of sin in yourself. I will now give you what advice I can, so that you may more readily bring this about.

CHAPTER 43: *How a man should know the high estate and dignity first given to his soul by God, and the wretched misfortune into which it has fallen by sin*

THE soul of man is a life consisting of three powers, memory, understanding, and will. It is made in the image and likeness of the blessed Trinity, whole, perfect, and righteous. For the mind was created strong and steadfast by the virtue of the Father, so that it might hold fast to Him, neither forgetting Him nor being distracted and hindered by created things; and so it has the likeness of the Father. The understanding was made clear and bright, without error or obscurity, and as perfect as might be in a body not glorified; and so it has the likeness of the Son, Who is eternal Wisdom. The will and its affections was made pure, rising like a flame towards God without love of the flesh or of any creatures, by the sovereign goodness of God the Holy Spirit; and so it has the likeness of the Holy Spirit, Who is holy Love. So man's soul, which may be called a created trinity, was made complete in the mind, sight, and love of the uncreated and blessed Trinity, Who is God. This is the dignity and honourable state natural to man's soul at its creation. This state was yours in Adam before man's first sin; but when Adam sinned, choosing to love and delight in himself and in creatures, he lost all his honour and dignity, and you also in him, and he fell from that blessed Trinity into a vile, dark, and wretched trinity: that is, into forgetfulness and ignorance of God, and into a debasing and deliberate love of himself. For as David says in the psalms: *Homo, cum in honore esset, non intellexit; comparatus est jumentis insipientibus, et similis factus est illis* (Ps. xlix, 20). When man had honour he did not know it; therefore he lost it and became like a beast. See, then, the present wretched plight of your soul. Your mind, once firmly fixed on God, has now

forgotten Him and tries to find satisfaction in creatures, first in one and then another; but it can never find true peace, because it has lost Him in whom alone true peace may be found. Your will also, once pure, taking a joy and delight in spiritual things, has now turned to a degraded love of self, of creatures, and of material pleasures. As a result your senses are corrupted by greed and impurity, and your mind by pride, vainglory, and covetousness. So deep is this corruption that you can hardly do anything good without being tainted by vainglory; and you can scarcely direct any of your senses to some desirable object without your heart becoming obsessed and inflamed by a vain desire to possess it. This drives from your heart and makes impossible all spiritual experience of, and desire for, the love of God. Everyone who lives by the spirit knows this well. It is the spiritual misery and mischief caused by man's first sin, to say nothing of all the other wickedness and sin that you have deliberately added to it. And remember, that even though you had never committed a venial or mortal sin, but had only inherited the guilt of original sin – so called because it is the first sin, and is nothing other than the loss of the righteous state in which you were created – you would never have been saved unless our Lord Jesus Christ had delivered and restored you again by His precious Passion.

CHAPTER 44: *How every person, however sinful, may be saved by the Passion of Christ if he ask it*

IF you think that I have been proposing too high a standard, and that you cannot undertake or carry it out, I will now come down to as simple a level as you wish, both for your profit and my own. But I say this, that however vile a wretch you may be, and however great the sins that you have committed, forget yourself and all that you have done, both good

and bad. Ask for mercy with humility and trust, and seek salvation through the virtue of Christ's precious Passion: you will undoubtedly receive it, and will be saved both from original sin and from all other. This applies not only to you, an enclosed anchoress, but to all other Christian souls who trust in the Passion and humbly acknowledge their wretchedness, asking mercy and forgiveness through the merits of Christ's Passion alone, and humbly approaching the Sacraments of Holy Church. Even though they have borne the burden of their sins all their lives, and never tasted the sweetness of supernatural joy or had any spiritual knowledge of God, yet if they have faith and goodwill, they will be saved through the merits of the most precious Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, and come to the joys of heaven.

All this you know well, but it delights me to speak of it, that you may see the endless mercy of our Lord, and how low He stoops to you, and to me, and to all poor sinners. Ask his mercy, then, and you will receive it. For as the prophet said in the person of our Lord: *Omnis enim qui invocaverit nomen Domini salvus erit.* Let everyone, whoever he may be, call on the Name of God – that is, ask salvation through Jesus and His Passion – and he shall be saved. Some people understand the charity of our Lord and are saved by it; others, relying on this mercy and kindness, continue in their sins, thinking that it may be theirs whenever they wish. But this is not so, for then they are too late and are taken in their sins before they expect it, and so damn themselves.

But you may say: 'If this is true, then I am very surprised at what I find written in the books of some holy men. For I understand some to say that one who cannot love the blessed Name of Jesus in this life, or find great spiritual joy and delight in it, will be excluded from the supreme joy and happiness of heaven, and will never attain it. When I read such words they astonish and alarm me, for I hope that, as you say, by the mercy of God

many will be saved by keeping God's commandments and by true repentance for their past sinfulness, although they may never have felt any spiritual sweetness or inward delight in the Name of Jesus or in His love. I am therefore the more surprised that these books seem to state the contrary.' My answer to this is that, rightly understood, what they say is true, and is not contrary to what I have said. For in English the Name of Jesus means nothing other than *health* or *healer*. Now in this life of sorrow every man is spiritually sick, for no man lives without sin, which is spiritual sickness. As Saint John says of himself and others made perfect: *Si dixerimus quia peccatum non habemus, ipsi nos seducimus, et veritas in nobis non est* (1 John i, 8). If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. Therefore no one can come to the joys of heaven until he is first healed of this spiritual sickness. But no one with the use of reason can have this spiritual health until he desires it, loves it, delights in it, and hopes to have it. Now the Name of Jesus is none other than this spiritual health; therefore they speak the truth when they say that no one can be saved who does not love and delight in the Name of Jesus, since no one can have health of soul unless he loves and desires it. If a man were sick in body, nothing on earth would be so necessary and desirable to him as bodily health; for although you were to give him all the riches and honours in the world without health – were this in your power – you would not give him any pleasure. It is just the same with a man who is sick in soul and suffers the pain of spiritual sickness. Nothing is so dear to him, or so necessary and desirable to him, as spiritual health. And this is Jesus, for without Him all the joys of heaven cannot satisfy him.

I think this is why our Lord, when He became man for our salvation, did not wish to be called by any name that signified His eternal Being, His power, His wisdom, or His holiness, but only by one that signified the purpose of His coming, which was the salvation of man's soul; for this salvation was most dear

and most necessary to man. And the Name of Jesus signifies this salvation. Hence it seems true that no one will be saved unless he loves salvation and hopes to have it through the mercy of our Lord Jesus and by the merits of His Passion.

One who lives and dies in the lowest degree of charity may have this love. On the other hand, one who cannot love this blessed Name of Jesus with spiritual delight or enjoy its heavenly melody in this life will never have or experience the fulness of supreme joy possessed in heaven by one who in this life delighted in Jesus in the abundance of perfect charity. So the statement of these writers may be understood. Nevertheless, one who in this life possesses only the lowest degree of charity and keeps God's commandments shall be saved and have his full reward in the sight of God; for our Lord Himself says: *In domo Patris Mei multae mansiones sunt* (S. John xiv, 2). In My Father's house there are many different dwellings. Some are for perfect souls who in this life were filled with charity and the grace of the Holy Spirit, and sang the praises of God in contemplation with wonderful sweetness and heavenly delight. These souls will have the highest reward in the joys of heaven because their charity was greatest, and they may be called the intimate friends of God. Other souls, who are not called to the contemplation of God, and do not have the fulness of charity possessed by the Apostles and martyrs in the early years of the Church, will have a lesser reward in the joys of heaven, and may be called the friends of God. In Holy Scripture God calls them chosen souls, saying: *Comedite, amici, et inebriamini, carissimi* (Cant. v, 1). Eat, my friends, and drink deep, my best-beloved. As though our Lord had said: You who are My friends, because you kept My commandments and placed love of Me before love of the world, and loved Me above all earthly things, shall be fed with the spiritual food of the bread of life. But you who are My beloved, who not only kept My commandments, but also of your own free choice carried out My will, and furthermore loved Me

solely and entirely with all the strength of your souls, burning with My love – in the same way as the Apostles, martyrs, and all other souls who by My grace received the grace of perfection – shall drink deep of the richest and best wine in My cellar, which is the supreme joy of love in the bliss of heaven.

CHAPTER 45: *That we should strive to recover our nobility, and restore the likeness of the Trinity within ourselves*

NEVERTHELESS, although this is the truth concerning God's infinite mercy towards you and me and all mankind, we should not therefore presume upon it and be wilfully reckless in our way of living. For now that we may hope to be restored by the Passion of our Lord to the dignity and happiness which we lost through Adam's sin, we should be all the more eager to please Him. And although we may never attain it in this life, we should desire to recover some degree and likeness of that dignity, so that the soul may be re-formed by grace to a shadow of the image of the Trinity which it once had by nature, and which it will have fully in heaven. This is the true life of contemplation, which has its beginning here in this feeling of love and in the spiritual knowledge of God, which comes when the eyes of the soul are opened. This life will never be lost or taken away from us, but will be perfected on another plane in the joys of heaven. Our Lord promised this to Mary Magdalene, who was a contemplative, when He said to her: *Maria optimam partem elegit, quae non auferetur ab ea* (Luke x, 42). Mary has chosen the best part – that is, the love of God in contemplation – for it shall never be taken away from her. I do not say that you may in this life recover such entire and perfect purity and innocence, knowledge and love of God, as you had at first or shall have in the life to come. Nor do I say that you can escape all the sorrows and penalties of sin, nor that in this life