

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.'

Spiritually interpreted, Jerusalem is the vision of peace, and symbolizes contemplation in the perfect love of God. For contemplation is nothing other than the vision of Jesus, who is our true Peace. Therefore if you really desire to attain this blessed vision of true peace and to be a true pilgrim to Jerusalem, I will set you on the right road as far as I can, although I have never been there myself. The beginning of this high road that you must travel is reformation in faith, which, as I have already said, is grounded in humility, faith, and the laws of the Church. And if you have been reformed by the Sacrament of Penance according to the laws of Holy Church, you can rest assured that, despite your earlier sins, you are on the right road. If you wish to make swift and substantial progress along this road, you must constantly bear in mind two things, humility and love. That is, I am nothing, and I want only one thing. Fix the true meaning of these words permanently in your subconscious mind and purpose, so that they will guide you even when you are not thinking of them. Humility says, 'I am nothing, I have nothing.' Love says, 'I desire one thing only, which is Jesus.' When deftly touched by the finger of reason, these two strings, secured by the thought of Jesus, make sweet harmony in the harp of the soul, for the lower you strike on one, the higher the sound on the other. Under the influence of humility, the less you feel that you are or possess, the greater will be your love and longing for Jesus. I am not speaking merely of the kind of humility that a soul feels at the sight of its own sin or weakness, or of the sorrows of this life, or when it sees the better lives of other Christians; for although this kind of humility is sound and wholesome, it is still of an elementary and worldly type, not pure, gentle, and perfect. I am speaking rather of the humility that a soul feels by grace as it contemplates the infinite Being and wondrous goodness of Jesus. And if you cannot yet see this with the eyes of the soul, do believe in its reality. For having once caught a glimpse of His Being, whether by true faith or

by spiritual experience, you will see yourself not only as the most wretched of men but as worthless, even though you had never sinned. This is perfect humility, for in comparison to Jesus, who is All, you are nothing. You should also realize that you possess nothing, like a vessel that stands empty, incapable of filling itself; for however many good works you perform, spiritual or bodily, you have nothing until you feel the love of Jesus within you. It is this precious liquor alone that can fill your soul, and no other. And since this alone is so precious and noble, you must realize that whatever you may have or achieve is of no value or satisfaction without the love of Jesus. Put everything else behind you and forget it; only then can you have what is best of all.

A real pilgrim going to Jerusalem leaves his house and land, wife and children; he divests himself of all that he possesses in order to travel light and without encumbrances. Similarly, if you wish to be a spiritual pilgrim you must divest yourself of all that you possess; that is, both of good deeds and bad, and leave them all behind you. Recognize your own poverty, so that you will not place any confidence in your own work; instead, be always desiring the grace of deeper love, and seeking the spiritual presence of Jesus. If you do this, you will be setting your heart wholly on reaching Jerusalem, and on nothing else. In other words, set your heart wholly on obtaining the love of Jesus and whatever spiritual vision of Himself that He is willing to grant, for it is to this end alone that you have been created and redeemed; this is your beginning and your end, your joy and your bliss. Therefore, whatever you may possess, and however fruitful your activities, regard them all as worthless without the inward certainty and experience of this love. Keep this intention constantly in mind and hold to it firmly; it will sustain you among all the perils of your pilgrimage. It will protect you from thieves and robbers - that is, from evil spirits - for although they may rob and assault you with different

virtue and prevent sin. Such a custom should never be abandoned, for you must always try to cultivate humility, patience, temperance, purity, and all other virtues. But any custom that prevents the adoption of a better should be abandoned as soon as time and circumstances permit. For instance, if someone is accustomed to recite a certain number of rosaries, or meditate in a certain way for a fixed time, or watch, or kneel for a set time, or observe any other outward custom, such customs should sometimes be set aside when there is reasonable cause, or if greater grace is given by other means.

CHAPTER 22: *How anyone on this road will have to fight enemies, and how he must conquer them by the knowledge of our Lord Jesus, by sacramental confession, sincere contrition, and satisfaction*

**Y**OU are now on the road, and you know how to proceed. But beware of enemies who will set themselves to obstruct you if they can. Nothing distresses them more than your desire and longing for the love of Jesus, and their whole purpose is to uproot this from your heart, and turn you back again to the love of earthly things. Your chief enemies are the bodily desires and foolish fears which the corruption of human nature stirs up in your heart, and which would stifle your desire for the love of God and take full possession of your heart. These are your deadliest enemies. There are also others, for evil spirits employ all their tricks to deceive you. But you have one remedy, as I told you before. Whatever they say, do not believe them; keep on your way, and desire nothing but the love of Jesus. Let your answer always be, 'I am nothing, I have nothing, I desire nothing but the love of Jesus.'

Your enemies may begin by troubling your mind with doubts, hinting that your confessions have been invalid; that

temptations, your life will always be safe. In short, do as I tell you, and you will escape out of all dangers and arrive speedily at the city of Jerusalem.

Now that you are on the road and know your proper destination, you must begin your journey. The departure consists entirely of spiritual — and when necessary, bodily — activity, and you must direct this activity wisely in the following way. I regard any activity that you undertake as excellent provided that it suits your particular calling and conditions of life, and that it fosters this high desire for the love of Jesus, and makes it more sincere, more comforting, and more productive of all virtues. It may be prayer, meditation, reading, or working, but so long as the activity is one which deepens the love of Jesus in your heart and will, and withdraws your thoughts and affections from worldly trivialities, it is good. But should it grow stale and lose its value, and you consider that some other activity would be more beneficial and bring greater grace with it, then adopt it and abandon the earlier one. For although the desire and longing of your heart for Jesus should be constant and unchanging, you are at liberty to vary your spiritual exercises in order to stimulate this desire, and they may well be changed when you feel that grace moves you to do so.

The relation of spiritual activities to desire is similar to that of sticks to fire. For the more sticks are laid on the fire, the greater is the fire: similarly, the more varying spiritual exercises that a man performs to stimulate his desire for God, the stronger and more ardent it will be. Therefore, if you are free and are not bound by any particular obligation, consider carefully which activity is best suited to you, and which most fosters your desire for Jesus, and undertake it. Do not deliberately bind yourself to an unchangeable routine which would prevent your heart loving Jesus freely should you receive a special visitation of grace. For I will tell you which activities are always good and essential. Any custom is good provided that it tends to foster

some old sin lies unremembered and unconfessed in your heart; that you must give up your desire, go back to the beginning, and make a full confession. But do not believe their lies, for you have received full absolution. Rest assured that you are on the right road, and there is no need for you to ransack your conscience about the past: keep your eye on the road and your mind on Jerusalem. And if they tell you, 'You are not worthy to enjoy the love of God, so why hanker after what you cannot have and do not deserve?', carry on and take no notice of them. Reply, 'I desire the love of God not because I am worthy, but because I am unworthy; for if I had it, it would make me worthy. And since I was created to this end, although I may never enjoy it, I will still desire it, pray for it, and hope to attain it.' If your enemies see that your courage and determination to succeed is growing, they will begin to fear you.

However, so long as you are on the road they will not cease to harass you; at one time they will intimidate and threaten you, at another they will try to flatter you and seduce you, to make you abandon your purpose and turn back. 'If you persist in this desire for Jesus and continue in your first fervour, you will ruin your health or suffer from delusions and fits, as some do. Or you will beggar yourself, or suffer some injury, and no one will be willing to help you. Or the devil may put such subtle temptations in your way that you cannot resist them. For it is a dangerous course for anyone to forsake the world completely, and give himself entirely to the love of God, seeking nothing but His love, because he will encounter many perils of which he knows nothing. So turn back and forget this desire which you can never fulfil, and behave like other people in this world.'

Such are the arguments of your enemies, but do not believe them. Hold firmly to your desire and reply always that you desire to have Jesus and to be at Jerusalem. They will realize that you are so determined that you will not yield to sin or illness,

delusions, fits, doubts, temptations, hardship or poverty, life or death. You want one thing and one only, so turn a deaf ear to all their suggestions and continue regularly with your prayers and other spiritual exercises as your superior or spiritual director advises. Then your enemies will be furious, and close in on you. They will begin to rob you, beat you, and put you to all the shame they can. This occurs when all that you do, however good, is condemned and misrepresented by others. You will find that everything you wish to do to further your bodily or spiritual progress will be prevented or obstructed by others, and all your most reasonable intentions frustrated. They will engineer all these things to rouse you to anger, dislike, and ill-will towards your neighbour.

But in the case of these difficulties and all others that may arise, employ this remedy. Fix your thoughts on Jesus, and do not allow any trouble to disturb you or occupy your attention. Remember what you have learned: You are nothing, you have nothing, and loss of worldly goods is nothing, for you desire nothing but the love of Jesus. So continue both your journey to Jerusalem and your present exercises. But if, through the ill-will or malice of the devil, your own frailty causes you to be harassed by the troubles that beset this mortal life, regain your peace of mind as soon as possible; stop worrying about difficulties, and continue with your work. Do not allow your enemies the advantage by brooding over your difficulties.

CHAPTER 23: *A general remedy against the evil influences of the world, the flesh, and the devil*

IN due course your enemies will realize that you are unshakable, and that you cannot be angered, depressed, or greatly affected by anything that they may do or say. When they find that you are fully resolved to face everything that may come to

you, whether pleasure or pain, honour or disgrace, and that your thoughts and desires are directed to the love of God alone, they will be very crestfallen. They will then proceed to tempt you with flattery and tickle your vanity. They will remind you of your good deeds and virtues, telling you that everyone praises you and speaks of your holiness, and how they all love and honour you for your holy life. They do this to trick you into believing them, taking pleasure in this foolish conceit, and becoming self-satisfied. But if you are wise you will treat all these exaggerations as the falsehoods and flatteries of an enemy who offers you a drink of poison disguised as honey. So refuse it, and say simply that you wish to be at Jerusalem.

Such are the difficulties that you will encounter, or others like them, arising from the world, the flesh, and the devil; there are more than I can enumerate now. For so long as a man allows his mind to roam freely over a wide range of subjects, he is not aware of many difficulties. But as soon as he directs his whole mind and desire to a single objective, desiring to possess it, see it, know it, and love it – that objective being Jesus Himself – he will certainly encounter many distressing obstacles. For everything that he encounters other than the object of his desire is a hindrance. I have given you some examples of this, and I add in general that any experience – whether natural or diabolic in origin, pleasant or painful, bitter or sweet, enjoyable or frightening, happy or sad – which withdraws your mind and desire from the love of Jesus to the vanities of the world, destroys the longing of your soul for Him, and preoccupies your thoughts, must be disregarded, rejected, and given short shrift.

If you have some mundane duty to do for yourself or your neighbour, get it finished as soon as possible, so that it does not preoccupy your mind. If it is not essential and does not concern you, leave it alone; do not let it worry you, but put it out of mind. Say to yourself, 'I am nothing, I have nothing, I desire nothing but the love of Jesus.' Focus your mind on this desire,

strengthen and maintain it by prayer and other spiritual exercises. Never let it go, and it will lead you on the right road, and preserve you in all dangers. Although you must face them they will not overwhelm you, and I am sure that your desire for the Lord Jesus will bring you to love Him perfectly.

On the other hand, whatever pursuit or spiritual exercise fosters and strengthens your desire for Jesus, detaches your mind from worldly desires and concerns, and kindles a deeper, fuller love of God – whether it be prayer or meditation, silence or speech, reading or listening, seclusion or company, walking or sitting still – continue to employ it for as long as it is helpful. And as regards your food, drink, and sleep, behave sensibly, and follow the guidance of your superior as a pilgrim does. For in however great a hurry the pilgrim may be, he must eat, drink, and sleep from time to time. Do the same, for although sometimes it may delay you, at others it will help you on your way.

#### CHAPTER 24: *How a soul conformed to the likeness of Jesus desires nothing but Him: and how he puts this desire in the soul, and Himself desires your soul*

**I**F you wish to learn the nature of this desire, it is in fact Jesus Himself. He implants this desire within you, and is Himself both the desire and the object of your desire. If you could only understand this, you would see that Jesus is everything and Jesus does everything. You yourself do nothing; you simply allow Him to work within your soul, accepting sincerely and gladly whatever He deigns to do in you. For although you possess the power of reason, you are nothing but an instrument in His hand. Therefore when your mind is touched by His grace and you feel yourself moved by a strong desire to please and love Jesus, you can be sure that Jesus is within you, for it is He whom you desire. Fix your eyes on Him, for He does not come in

sinned, his inward vision and spiritual light was withdrawn and his outward eyes were opened, so that he felt and saw a new light of bodily pleasure and love of the world previously unknown to him. And so he saw a new day, but it was an evil day. This was the day that Job cursed when he said: *Pererat dies in qua natus sum*. Perish the day on which I was born! It was not the day in the course of the year ordained by God that he cursed, but the day made by man, that is, the state of concupiscence and love of the world into which he was unwittingly born. It was this day and light of which he asked God that it should perish and come to nothing.

But the everlasting love of Jesus is true day and blessed light, for God is both love and light, and He is everlasting, so that one who loves Him dwells in everlasting light, as Saint John says: *Qui diligit Deum manet in lumine* (1 John ii, 10). Whoever loves God dwells in light. But anyone who realizes that the love of this world is false and transitory, and therefore wishes to abandon it and seek the love of God, cannot at once experience His love, but must remain awhile in the night. He cannot pass suddenly from one light to the other, that is, from the love of this world to the perfect love of God. This night is nothing other than a complete withdrawal of the soul from earthly things by an intense desire to love, see, and know Jesus and the things of the spirit. This is a real night, for just as night is dark, hiding all created things and bringing all bodily activity to a halt, similarly one who sets himself to think of Jesus and to desire His love alone must try to withdraw his thoughts and affections from created things. In so doing his mind will be set free and his affections liberated from enslavement to anything of a nature inferior to his own. If he can do this, then it is night for him, for he is in darkness.

But this is a night pregnant with good, a glowing darkness, for it shuts out the false love of this world and ushers in the dawn of the true day. Indeed, the darker this night, the nearer

bodily form but invisibly, with the hidden presence of His power. See Him spiritually if you can; trust Him and follow Him wherever He goes, for He will guide you on the right road to Jerusalem, which is the vision of peace in contemplation. For this was the prophet's prayer to his Father in heaven: *Emitte lucem tuam et veritatem tuam; ipsa me deduxerunt, et adduxerunt in montem sanctam tuam, et in tabernacula tua* (Ps. xliii, 3). Father in heaven, send out your light and your truth, that is Your Son Jesus; and He will lead me by desire to Your holy hill and to Your dwelling; that is, to the experience of perfect love and to the height of contemplation.

Of this desire the prophet says: *Memoriale tuum Domine in desiderio animae. Anima mea desiderat te in nocte, sed et spiritus meus in praecordiis meis* (Isa. xxvi, 8). Lord Jesus, the thought of You is imprinted in the desire of my soul, for my soul has desired You in the night, and my spirit has longed for You in all my meditations. And I will tell you why the prophet says that he desired God in the night, and what he means by it. You are aware that the night is an interval of time between two days; for when one day is ended, another does not follow at once, but first there comes the night and separates the days. Sometimes the night is long and sometimes short, and then comes another day. But the prophet was alluding not only to this temporal night, but to spiritual night. Understand, then, that there are two periods of day or light; the first is a false light, and the second a true. The false light is the love of this world, which is inherent in man through the corruption of his nature; the true light is the perfect love of Jesus experienced in man's soul by grace. The love of this world is a false light, because it is transitory and impermanent, and so fails to fulfil its early promise. It was this light which the devil promised to Adam when he tempted him to sin, saying: *Aperientur oculi vestri, et eritis sicut dei* (Gen. iii, 5). Your eyes will be opened, and you will be like gods. In this particular he spoke the truth, for when Adam had

the true day of the love of Jesus, for the further the soul in its longing for Jesus retires from the clamour of worldly desires and impure thoughts, the nearer it approaches to experiencing the light of His love. Indeed, it is very close. This seems to be what the prophet meant when he said: *Cum in tenebris sedero, Dominus lux mea est* (Micah vii, 8). When I sit in darkness, the Lord is my light. That is, when my soul is withdrawn from all sinful inclinations as though asleep, then our Lord is my light, for then in His grace He draws near to show me His light. However, this light is sometimes full of pain, and sometimes pleasant and consoling. When one who is deeply contaminated by sin wishes to enter this darkness it is at first painful to him, for grace has not as yet accustomed him to it; so he tries to fix his mind and will on God as best he can, and to think of Him alone. And because he finds this difficult, he is troubled. Sinful habits, with the memory of former worldly affections, interests, and doings crowd in upon him with such force that his soul is dragged back to them, and he is unable to escape their influence as quickly as he would wish. So this darkness is full of pain for him, and especially at times when he has little grace to help him. Nevertheless, if this is so in your case do not be too discouraged, and do not overstrain yourself as though you could force these thoughts out of your mind, for you cannot do it. Therefore wait for God's grace, persevere, and do not overtax yourself. If you can do so gently and without forcing them, guide the desires and powers of your soul towards Jesus. Understand that when you desire Jesus and wish to think of nothing but Him, but cannot do so properly because of worldly thoughts crowding into your mind, you have in fact left the false daylight and are entering this darkness. But you will not find this darkness peaceful because it is strange to you, who are not yet enlightened and cleansed. Therefore enter it often, and by the grace of God it will gradually become easier and more peaceful. Your soul will become so free, strong, and recollected that

it will have no desire to think of anything worldly, while no worldly thing will prevent it from thinking of nothing. This darkness will then bring blessing to the soul.

By 'thinking of nothing' I mean that the soul attains recollection, stability, and integrity, so that it cannot be compelled against its will to think of, or be drawn towards, any sinful, vain, or worldly thing. The soul may then be said to think of nothing, because its thoughts are not attracted to earthly things. This nothing brings a rich reward, and this night full of great consolation to the soul that desires the love of Jesus. For it is undisturbed by any earthly thoughts, and is free to think of Jesus alone. For although the soul has banished all thoughts of the world, it is actively engaged in the contemplation of Jesus.

What, then, is the nature of this darkness? It arises solely from a grace-inspired desire to have the love of Jesus. This desire and longing for the love of God, to see Him and to possess Him, drives out of the heart all worldly considerations and affections. It moves the soul to recollection, and to ponder how it may come to this love; in this way it brings it into this precious nothing. But the soul is not in complete darkness and nothingness during this time, for although it conceals it from the false light it does not entirely conceal it from the true light. For Jesus, who is both love and light, is in this darkness, whether it brings pain or peace. He is at work in the soul, moving it to anguish with desire and longing for the light, but not as yet allowing it to rest in love, nor showing it His light. This state is called light and darkness, because the soul is hidden from the false light of the world, and has not yet fully enjoyed the true light, but is awaiting the blessed love of God which it desires.

If you want to know when you are in this secure darkness and when not, you may test the matter in this way, and in this only. When you feel that your will is wholly set on seeking God and thinking of Him alone, ask yourself whether you wish to possess anything in this life for its own sake, or to use any

creature to gratify your bodily senses. If your eye answers, 'I do not wish to see anything,' and your ear, 'I do not wish to hear anything,' and your mouth, 'I do not wish to taste anything, or to speak of earthly things.' If your nose answers, 'I do not wish to smell anything,' and your body, 'I do not wish to feel anything,' and if, lastly, your heart says, 'I do not wish to think of earthly matters, or to give my love to any creature; I wish if I can to think of and love God alone'; and when all your bodily powers respond thus - as may easily happen if you receive grace - then you have penetrated some distance into this darkness. For although unprofitable thoughts and fancies may enter your mind, and bodily desires distract you, nevertheless you remain in this blessed darkness so long as you do not allow your thoughts to dwell on them. For these foolish fancies that take your mind unawares disturb this darkness and trouble the soul, because it wishes to be free of them, but cannot. But they do not deprive this darkness of its value, for it is by this means that the soul will come to find peace in the darkness. For when the soul is released awhile from the distraction of all empty thoughts, and rests quietly in its simple desire and longing for Jesus and a spiritual glimpse of His presence, then this darkness is peaceful. And although this state of rest lasts but a short while, it brings great blessing to the soul.

CHAPTER 25: *How the desire of Jesus felt in this glowing darkness conquers every evil inclination, and enables the soul to see the spiritual light of the heavenly Jerusalem, that is, of Jesus*

THIS darkness and night, then, springs solely from the soul's desire and longing for the love of Jesus, combined with a blind groping of the mind towards Him. And since it brings so much blessing and peace to the soul, albeit of short duration, how much better and more blessed must it be to experience

His love, to be bathed in His glorious and invisible light, and to see all truth. It is this light which a soul receives as night passes and day dawns. It was this night to which I think the prophet alluded when he said: *Anima mea desideravit te in nocte* (Isa. xxxvi, 9). My soul has desired Thee in the night. For although the process may be painful, it is much better for the world to be hidden from view than for the soul to be out among the false pleasures of the world, which appear so attractive and desirable to those whose eyes are blind to the light of the spirit. For when you are in this darkness you are much nearer to Jerusalem than when you are living in that false light. So respond wholeheartedly to the stirrings of grace, and learn to live in this darkness. When you grow accustomed to it, you will soon find peace, and the true light of spiritual knowledge will grow within you; not all at once, but imperceptibly and little by little. As the prophet says: *Habitantibus in regione umbræ mortis, lux orta est eis* (Isa. ix, 2). Light has shone upon those who dwell in the land of the shadow of death. The light of grace has risen, and will shine on those who dwell in the shadow of death, that is, in the darkness that resembles death. For just as death destroys a living body and all its powers, so the desire to love Jesus that is experienced in this darkness destroys all sins, sensual desires, and impure thoughts. And by the time this takes place you are fast nearing Jerusalem. You have not yet reached it, but you will be able to see the city in the distance before you come to it because of the twinkling rays of light shining from it. For remember that although your soul dwells in this peaceful darkness, untroubled by thoughts of the world, it is not yet at the end of its journey, for it is not yet clothed in light or wholly ablaze with the fire of love. It is fully conscious of something beyond itself which as yet it neither knows nor possesses, but it has an ardent longing for it. The object of its longing is nothing other than the vision of Jerusalem, which resembles the city that the prophet Ezechiel saw in his vision.



He describes (Ezech. xl) how he saw a city set on a hill sloping toward the south, which measured no more than a rod in length and breadth, that is, six cubits and a palm. But when he was brought into the city and looked about him, he thought it very spacious, for he saw many halls and rooms, both public and private, with gates and porches outside and in, and more buildings than I can describe many hundred cubits in length and breadth. It was extraordinary to him that this city which was so spacious within appeared so small when he stood outside. This city symbolizes the perfect love of God, set on the hill of contemplation. To a soul that has no experience of it but has a sincere desire for it, the city appears small, no longer than a rod, which is six cubits and a palm. Here six cubits represent man's struggle for perfection; the palm, a little experience of contemplation. He sees clearly that here is a reward that transcends anything that human efforts can attain, in the same way as the palm extends beyond the six cubits, but he cannot be sure what it is. But if he can enter the city of contemplation, he then sees much more than he discerned at first.

CHAPTER 26: *How one may recognize the false lights caused by the trickery of the devil from the true light of knowledge which comes from Jesus*

**B**EWARE of the devil who walks at noon, and who makes his false light appear to come from Jerusalem. For the devil knows that our Lord Jesus shows the light of truth to those who love Him, so he shows a false light in place of the true light to deceive the unwary. However, the soul can distinguish the light of truth that comes from God from that which is an illusion of the devil. I will illustrate this by an example taken from the heavens.

Sometimes there appears in the sky a ray of light that seems

to be the sun itself, but is not; and sometimes the sun itself appears. The distinction between the two is this. The false sunlight appears only between two black rainclouds. Because the sun is near, a light shines from behind the clouds which looks like the sun itself, but is not. The true sun shines only when the sky is clear, or at least not overcast by black clouds. Now to apply this illustration: some people seem to forsake the love of the world and wish to attain the love of God and the light of understanding, but they are not willing to pass through this darkness that I have mentioned. They will not look at themselves honestly and humbly, and examine their former life and present sinful state, nor recognize their own nothingness before God. They make no effort to enter upon an interior life, and put aside all worldly things. They will not stamp out the sinful impulses of pride, envy, anger and such like that arise in their hearts by constantly reaching out to Jesus in prayer and meditation, silence and tears, and in other spiritual and corporal exercises as devout and holy people have done in the past. But directly they have outwardly forsaken the world—or soon after—they imagine that they are holy, and able to understand the inner meaning of the Gospels and holy scripture. And provided that they can fulfil the commandments of God literally and avoid bodily sin, they think that they love God perfectly. So at once they want to preach and instruct everyone else, under the misapprehension that they have received the grace of understanding and perfect charity by a special gift of the Holy Spirit. They are even more strongly impelled to do this when they feel themselves suddenly endowed with great knowledge after little previous effort on their part, or with what seems to be fervent love which drives them to preach truth and righteousness to their fellow-men. They regard this as a grace from God, a blessed light granted to themselves before all others. But if they examine these things carefully, they will realize that this light of knowledge and fervour does not come from the true Sun, that

is our Lord Jesus, but from the noonday devil who makes his spurious light resemble the sun. You can recognize this impostor by the example I have given.

This light of false knowledge shown by the devil to a soul in darkness is always seen between two black rainclouds. The higher cloud is presumption and self-conceit, while the lower is oppression and depreciation of our neighbour. So whatever appearances of knowledge and fervour may shine in a soul, if they co-exist with presumption, conceit, and disregard for our neighbour, it is not the light of grace given by the Holy Spirit, even though the knowledge may be true in itself. If it comes suddenly, it is of the devil; and if it comes after prolonged study, it is the fruit of man's own mental powers. So we can tell clearly when this false light of knowledge is not the light of the true sun.

Those whose knowledge comes from these sources are full of spiritual pride. They are so blinded by this spurious light that they regard their own conceit and disobedience to the laws of Holy Church as perfect compliance with the Gospel and laws of God. They imagine that the following of their own inclination is freedom of spirit, and as a result errors and heresies pour from them like rain from black clouds. For their preaching gives rise to controversy and quarrels, and to contentious denunciation of other people and their ways of life. Yet they claim to be moved solely by charity and zeal for righteousness. But this claim is false, for Saint James the Apostle says: *Ubi enim zelus et contentio, ibi inconstantia et omne opus pravum. Non est sapientia haec desursum descendens a Patri Iuminum, sed terrena, animalis et diabolica* (S. James iii, 16). Wherever there is envy and contention there is instability and all kinds of evil at work. Therefore the knowledge that breeds such sins does not come down from God, the Father of Light, but is earthly, bestial, and devilish. So this false light can be distinguished from the true by these by-products of pride, presumption, disobedience,

anger, scandal, and other sins. For the true Sun does not display Himself to bestow mental light and perfect charity upon the soul unless the sky is first bright and free from clouds; that is, unless the conscience is first cleansed in this darkness by the fire of a burning desire for Jesus, which cauterizes and destroys all evil impulses of pride, vainglory, anger, envy, and other sins in the soul. As the prophet says: *Ignis ante ipsum praecedet, et inflammabit in circuitu inimicos ejus* (Ps. xvii, 3). Fire shall go before Him; that is, the loving desire for Jesus will go before Him in a man's soul, and will burn up all His enemies, that is, destroy all his sins.

For unless a soul's self-esteem is first humbled by fear, and well tried and essayed in this fire of desire and purified from all its stains by devout prayers and other spiritual exercises over a long period, it cannot endure the brilliance of spiritual light, nor can it receive the precious elixir of the perfect love of Jesus. But once it is purified and transformed by this fire, it can absorb the gracious light of spiritual knowledge and perfect love from the true Sun, Jesus Christ. In this connection Holy Scripture says: *Vobis qui timetis Dominum orietur sol justitiae* (Mal. iv, 2). The true Sun of Righteousness, that is our Lord Jesus, will shine upon you who fear Him; that is, on humble souls who acknowledging their own weakness, esteem themselves less than their neighbours, and cast themselves down before God. They know that they themselves are nothing, and they attain perfect humility through reverent fear and constant contemplation of God.

Upon these souls the true Sun will rise and illumine their minds to know truth, and will kindle their affections with burning love, so that they burn and shine. Under the influence of this heavenly Sun they will burn with perfect love and shine with the knowledge of God and spiritual things, for they will then be reformed in feeling. So one who does not want to be deceived must first humble himself and hide within this darkness

## THE LADDER OF PERFECTION

from all interference by other people, and try to forget the world entirely. He must follow Jesus with constant desire, seeking Him in prayer and meditation. For I know that the light that succeeds this darkness is sure and true. It shines from the true Sun in the city of Jerusalem to light the way for a soul struggling in darkness and calling for light, and gives it comfort in its trouble. For I do not think that a false light ever succeeds true darkness. In other words, if a man sincerely and wholeheartedly sets himself to forsake the love of the world, and by grace comes to feel and know himself as he is, and continues humbly in this realization, he will not be deceived by any errors, heresies, or delusions. For all these enter by the gate of pride, and if pride is locked out, they will find no foothold in the soul. And although they may come and seek admission, they will not be able to enter. For the grace experienced by a soul in this darkness of humility will teach it the truth, and show it that all such approaches are moves of the devil.

*CHAPTER 27: How a soul led by grace into this glowing darkness receives great benefits, and how one should prepare oneself to enter it*

**T**HERE are many devout souls who by grace enter this darkness and attain self-knowledge, but who do not yet fully understand this process. This ignorance tends to hinder their progress. They often feel their thoughts and affections withdrawn from earthly things, and they are brought into a state of deep peace, untroubled by unprofitable thoughts or bodily sensations. They enjoy such freedom of spirit that they can think of Jesus in peace, and offer Him their prayers and psalms with great joy and sweetness for as long as the frailty of human nature will permit. They are quite certain that this experience is good, but they are not sure what it is. So I would say to all such souls