

Golden Treatise

Golden Treatise of Mental Prayer

St. Peter de Alcantara

Translated by Giles Willoughby



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A Golden Treatise on Mental Prayer, by St. Peter de Alcántara. Translated by Giles Willoughby.

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Part I
Of Prayer

Chapter 1

Introduction

IN this chapter, we will briefly set down the fruit of prayer and meditation, that men considering the benefit of them may be incited with a prompt and more willing mind to frequent these holy exercises.

It is most certain that the malice of our own hearts is the principal cause that hindereth us from attaining to our beatitude and everlasting happiness, because it maketh us slow to godly actions, dull to virtuous exercises, and suggesteth a greater difficulty in them than there is, which if it were not, a man might walk without any molestation in the way of virtue, and at length without labor attain to his desired end. Hence it is that the Apostle saith: “I am delighted with the law of God according to the inward man: but I see another law in my members fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin.”¹

This, therefore, is the prime root and cause of all our miseries, against which there is no remedy more convenient and efficacious than devotion, which, according to St. Thomas, is nothing else but a certain promptitude and facility of the mind to do well. It doth exclude from our mind this tedious difficulty, and maketh us with alacrity apply ourselves to virtuous acts. Therefore, not without cause we may term it spiritual food, recreative and heav-

¹Rom. 7:22.

enly dew, a pleasant instinct and supernatural affection of the Holy Ghost, which doth so strengthen and transform the hearts of men that it doth beget in them a new taste and feeling of spiritual things, and on the contrary, a tedious loathing of worldly vanities.

Daily experience manifesteth this particular unto us. For we see the souls of those who arise from profound and devout prayer to be strengthened with admirable resolutions, adorned with new graces, and replenished with firm purposes of amendment of life; and frequenting pious exercises, they burn with an ardent desire of serving and loving Him with their whole heart, whom in their prayer they found the God of all goodness and benignity, desiring to suffer any grievous and burdensome cross whatsoever it be, yea, to shed their blood for His sake. To conclude, prayer is a bath, an open place, a bed of pleasure, wherein the soul recreateth and refresheth herself.

If you ask me what be the chiefeſt means to attain unto this heroical virtue of devotion, I answer with the same Doctor, that it is gotten by serious meditation and contemplation of heavenly things. For the ruminating of these in the soul, with a more attentive and profound consideration, doth beget in the will that disposition which we call devotion, which effectually rouseth and pricketh a man forward to every good work. For this cause, the exercise of prayer and meditation was frequent and familiar to men of sanctity, as judging it the easieſt means to compass devotion, which, although it be but one only

simple virtue, yet it disposeth and maketh us fit for all others, and, as it were, with spurs pricketh us forward to the performance of every good work.

I call St. Bonaventure to witness what I say: his words are these.² The inestimable virtue of prayer is able to obtain all good and remove all hurtful things. If thou wilt patiently endure adversity, be a man of prayer. If thou wilt overcome tribulation and temptations, be a man of prayer. If thou wilt trample upon thy perverse inclinations, be a man of prayer. If thou wilt know the deceits of Satan and avoid them, be a man of prayer. If thou wilt live joyfully in the work of God, and trace the way of labor and affliction, be a man of prayer. If thou wilt exercise thyself in a spiritual course, and not walk according to the desires of the flesh, be a man of prayer. If thou wilt put to flight thy vain and trifling fancies, be a man of prayer. If thou wilt feast thy soul with holy thoughts, good desires, fervor, and devotion, be a man of prayer. If thou wilt establish thy heart with a manly spirit and constant purpose in the service of God, be a man of prayer. To conclude, if thou wilt root out vice and be endowed with virtues, be a man of prayer. In it is received the unction of the Holy Ghost, which teacheth all things. Also, if thou wilt climb up to the top of contemplation, and enjoy the sweet embracings of thy beloved spouse, be a man of prayer. For by the exercise of prayer, we come to that contemplation and taste of heavenly things. Thou see'st of what great power and virtue prayer is. For the

²Bonaventure in *The Meditation of the Life of Christ*, chap. 73.

confirmation of all which, omitting the testimony of holy Scriptures, let this be an evident proof unto thee, that by daily experience, we hear and see illiterate and simple persons to have attained the aforesaid, and greater things, by the virtue of prayer. Thus St. Bonaventure.

I beseech you, can there be found a richer treasure, or a more fertile field desired? Hear another religious and holy doctor speaking about this virtue. By prayer the soul is cleansed from sin, replenished with charity, confirmed in faith, strengthened, and refreshed in spirit. Prayer establisheth the inward man, pacifieth the heart, knoweth the truth, conquereth temptations, expelleth sorrow, reneweth the senses, stirreth up languishing virtue, putteth to flight tepidity, and scoureth the rust of vices. In prayer, the quick sparkles of celestial desires are incessantly sent forth from the burning coals of divine love. Great are the excellences of prayer, and great are its privileges. Prayer unlocketh the gates of heaven, manifesteth divine secrets, and always findeth free access to the ears of God. I will add no more, for those things which have already been said abundantly express the fruits of this holy exercise.

Chapter 2

Of the Matter of Prayer

HAVING taken notice of the utility of prayer and meditation, we will now declare the matter about which meditation is to be conversant; for seeing it is ordained to this end, that the soul of Him that meditateth may be excited to the fear and love of God and the keeping of his commandments; the matter of meditation ought to be such as doth next dispose to this end and scope. And, although every creature and the whole Scripture itself be able to minister this matter unto us, yet speaking generally, the mysteries of our holy faith contained in the Creed are most efficacious and profitable to attain unto this end. For these, on the one side, contain Almighty God's benefits, the latter judgment, the pains of hell, and the glory of paradise; all which, like sharp pricks, do spur us on to the love and fear of God. On the other side, they comprehend the life and passion of our Lord and Savior, which is the spring and fountain of all our good. These two things, contained in the Apostles' Creed, for the most part yield matter of meditation; and therefore, I think, prayer and meditation ought chiefly to be conversant about them, although everyone in particular may have certain points which may more specially inflame and excite the soul to the love and fear of God.

Being, therefore, persuaded with this reason, that I might the better conduct young beginners and untrained soldiers into this way of mental prayer, and that I might

give unto them altogether prepared, and (as it were to little children) foreshowed matter of meditation, I have selected two kinds of meditations, almost taken out of the mysteries of our faith; the one serving for the morning, the other for the evening; that as the body is commonly fed with two meals, so the soul may be strengthened and nourished with two spiritual meals, by the meditation and consideration of heavenly things. Some of these are of the passion and resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ, others of the mysteries of our faith, as I said before. But those who cannot have the opportunity to meditate twice a day, after this manner they may use them: to wit, they may take to their consideration the seven former meditations in the one week, and the latter in another week; or they may chiefly insist upon those of the life and passion of our Savior; although the other is not to be neglected, especially in the beginning of a soul's conversion, to whom they are proper, when the fear of God, contrition, and horror of sin is chiefly to be regarded and sought after.

Here Follow the Seven Former Meditations

A Meditation for Monday

THIS day thou shalt call to memory thy sins, and shalt exercise thyself in the knowledge of thyself, that on the one side thou mayest truly ponder the greatness of thy offenses, and on the other side, thou mayest look into thy

baseness, and thine own nothing, and acknowledge that all the good which thou hast is from God. This consideration will get thee submission of mind and true humility, the mother of all virtues.

First, therefore, weigh with thyself the multitude of the sins of thy former life, and namely, those sins which thou hast committed when as yet thou wert not illuminated with the divine splendor to know Almighty God rightly. These, if thou dost examine with exquisite diligence, thou wilt find to be so many in number, that they will exceed the hairs of thy head; for in this time thou ledest the life of a heathen, ignorant of the divine power, and as it were without any knowledge of His sacred Deity.

Then consider how thou hast behaved thyself about the ten commandments and the seven deadly sins, and thou wilt find that there is no precept of Almighty God which thou hast not violated, nor any mortal sin into which thou hast not fallen, either in thought, word, or deed. After that, call to mind Almighty God's benefits, which He hath bestowed upon thee in the whole course of thy former life, and see whether thou canst give a good account of them or no.

Tell me, I pray thee, how thou hast consumed the days of thy infancy, thy youth, and the flower of thy manly age? how hast thou employed thy five exterior senses and inward faculties of thy soul, given unto thee by God, only to be busied about his holy service and the contemplation of heavenly things? what hast thou turned thine eyes unto, but to behold vanities? what have thine ears listened af-

ter, but lies and tales? what hath thy tongue uttered, but murmurings and blasphemous speeches? what hath thy taste and feeling been delighted in, but wanton pleasures? how hast thou used the remedy of the holy Sacraments, given unto thee as a singular gift? what thanksgiving hast thou restored for so many benefits which he hath heaped upon thee? what alacrity hast thou used to satisfy his holy inspirations? how hast thou spent thy health of body and natural forces? how hast thou dispensed thy goods of fortune? what good use hast thou made of the commodity and proffered occasions to live well? what care hast thou had of thy neighbor's welfare? what works of mercy or of bounty hast thou done unto them? what wilt thou answer in that terrible day of judgment, when thou must render a severe account of all these things! O withered tree, destined to eternal flames, except thou dost penance! what excuse wilt thou then frame, when thou must give an account of every year, of every month, of every week, of every day, of every moment!

Thirdly, consider those sins which thou hast every day committed after Almighty God hath illuminated and opened the eyes of thy soul to meditate upon heavenly things; and thou shalt find that the old Adam hath yet borne a great sway in thy actions, and that sinful root to have procreated in thee many and perverse habits.

Diligently ponder how ungrateful thou hast been to Almighty God, how unmindful of his benefits, how contrary thou hast behaved thyself against his holy inspirations, how slothful and remiss in his divine service; in

which thou scarce haſt ever used due alacrity and diligence, or such purity of intention as is requisite; nay, haſt thou not served God for worldly respects and commodity?

Enter into consideration how rigid thou art to thy neighbor, and how indulgent to thyself? how thou lovest thine own will, how thou adherest to thy sensuality, how cautious of thy honor and of every thing that belongeth unto thee. Weigh well with thyself how every day thou growest more arrogant, more ambitious, more vain, more prone to anger, more desperately bent to malice, more prone to delights and pleasures, more mutable, more inconstant, more inclined to carnal sins, and a greater lover of earthly vanities. Consider thy inconstancy in good, thy indiscretion in words, imprudence in deeds, sometimes pusillaniity in high and difficult matters, and often audacious temerity.

In the fourth place, after thou haſt taken notice of the number and order of thy sins, pause upon them a while in thy mind and weigh every one in the balance of due consideration, that thou mayest perceive with what misery thou art on every side environed. Which, that thou mayest do the better, consider these three circumstances in the sins of thy former life. First, against whom thou haſt sinned. Second, why thou haſt sinned. Third, how thou haſt sinned. Which, if thou doſt diligently penetrate, thou wilt find that thou haſt offended God, Whose majesty and goodness is immense, Who hath obliged man unto Him with so many benefits as there are sands in the sea, or drops of water in the ocean.

Why hast thou sinned, or what violent occasion hath enforced thee to any crime? a little momentary pride; a foul representation of pleasure; some small commodity placed in thy sight; and oftentimes no occasion at all, but evil custom and mere contempt of God.

But alas, how hast thou sinned? with such facility, with such notable audacity, with so little fear and conscience; yea, with such serenity and pleasure as though thou hadst to do with no other than a wooden God, Who regardeth not these sublunary things, neither understandeth nor seeth any thing that is done on the face of earth. Is this the honor due unto His supreme majesty? is this a remuneration of His benefits? dost thou with such services requite His whippings, His buffetings, and His Precious Blood shed upon the cross for thy sake? O wicked wretch, that hast offended so great a majesty, more miserable that for so slight a cause, and most deplorable that thou art not sensible of thy utter ruin: that after sin thou fearest not damnation, and so neglectest to do penance.

Moreover, it is very profitable to insist a while upon this consideration, and that thou esteem thyself nothing, and certainly persuade thyself that thou hast nothing of thyself but sin; all other things to be the gifts of Almighty God's bounty. For it is most evident that all our good, both of grace and nature, doth flow from Him; for He is the author of the grace of predestination (which is the fountain and origin of all others), of the grace of our vocation, of concomitant and preserving grace, and of the

grace of everlasting life. What hast thou, then, that thou canst boast of but sin? only this, nothing thou canst attribute to thyself, all other things belong to God: whence thou mayest clearly and manifestly perceive what He is, and what thou art, and hence conjecture what diffidence thou oughtest to have in thyself, and what confidence in God, to love Him, and to glorify thyself in Him and not in thyself, but so far as His grace doth freely operate in thee.

These things being digested with attentive meditation, as much as thou canst, urge thyself to a contempt of thyself: imagine that thou art like an empty reed, shaken with every blast of wind, without gravity, without virtue, without constancy, without stability, and, finally, without anything. Think thyself to be a *Lazarus*, four days dead, a stinking and abominable carcass, swarming with vermin, so filthy that passersby are forced to stop their nostrils, lest they smell such a nasty savor. Believe me, thou art more abominable before God and His holy saints. Think thyself unworthy to lift up thine eyes to heaven; to tread upon the earth, or that the creatures should serve thee; yea, not worthy to eat bread or breathe in the air. Cast thyself, with the sinful women in the Gospel, at our Blessed Savior's feet; presenting thyself unto Him with a confused and blushing countenance, no otherwise than the woman taken in adultery before her husband, and with inward sorrow and true compunction, beg pardon for thy sins; that, for His infinite mercy and goodness, He would vouchsafe to receive thee again into His favor, and that thou mayest dwell in His house forever.

A Meditation for Tuesday

THIS day thou shalt meditate upon the miseries of the life of man, out of which consideration thou wilt take notice of worldly vanities, and learn how much glory of them ought to be despised, seeing they are built upon so weak a foundation as our fading life, whose miseries, because they be innumerable, thou shalt take but seven of the principal for thy meditation.

First, therefore, consider the shortness of the life of man, being restrained within the limits of threescore and ten, or fourscore years; whatsoever the overplus be, it is but labor and sorrow, as the Prophet speaketh: Out of this time, if thou dost subtraēt thy infancy, which time thou didst live rather the life of a beast than a man; the time thou spendest in sleep, for then thou art deprived of the use of reason, which alone distinguisheth man from other creatures; and thou wilt find thy life to be far shorter than ever thou didst imagine. This time, if thou dost compare with the eternity of the world to come, thou wilt find it to be less than a moment. Conjecture, then, the foolish madness of the lovers of this world, who, that they might enjoy one only momentary pleasure of this transitory life, do not fear to expose themselves to the loss of eternity.

Then take to thy consideration the uncertainty of this life (which is a second misery), for not only it is most short, but the brevity itself is most uncertain and doubtful. For who is there that attaineth to the age of three or four score! how many are extinguished at their very entrance into the world? how many perish in the flower of their

youth? You know it not, saith Christ, when your Lord is to come; whether in the first watch, or second, or third, or in the cock-crowing. Which, that thou mayest the better understand, call to mind especially thy domestic friends, and other men placed in dignity and authority, whom inexorable death have, at divers ages, some younger, some older, suddenly taken out of this world, dissipating their vain and long-life promising hopes.

Ponder, fourthly, the inconstancy and mutability of this present life, never continuing in one state. The disposition of the body often changeth, not always enjoying health, but subject to frequent diseases; but if thou reflect upon the mind, thou shalt see that, like the troubled ocean, it is tossed up and down with the boisterous winds of her untamed passions, inordinate appetites, fluctuating thoughts, which upon every occasion do disturb her quiet. Consider, lastly, the instability of the goods of fortune, as they term them, to how many chances they are obnoxious, never suffering the temporal substance to stand still in one stay, thereby to make men happy and prosperous; but, like a wheel, is turned upside down without any intermission. Consider, also, the continual motion of our life, never resting night nor day, but goeth forward without ceasing, and every day more and more wasteth itself; so that it may not unfitly be compared to a candle, which, by little and little, consumeth itself, and when it giveth the clearest light, the sooner it approacheth unto its end; also to a flower, which springeth up in the morning, at noon fadeth, and at night wholly withereth

away. Which Almighty God, speaking by the Prophet Isaiah of this mutation, excellently shadoweth in these words: "*Omnis caro fœnum, et omnis gloria ejus quasi flos agri*"³: "All flesh is hay, and all the glory of it is like the flower of the field."

Which words, St. Jerome expounding, saith⁴: If one doth rightly consider the frailty of the flesh, and that we grow and decrease according to the moments of hours; never remaining in one state, and that the very thing we now speak, do, or write, passeth away as part of our life, he will not doubt to confess that all flesh is hay, and the glory thereof as a flower, or the green meadows. He that is now an infant will, by and by, be a little child, then presently a young man, growing towards his decrepit age, through uncertain seasons, and before he hath contented himself in youth, feeleth old age to come upon him. The beautiful woman which did draw after her whole troops of gallants in her youth, her face is now furrowed with deformed wrinkles, and she that before was a pleasure, is now ugly to behold.

Consider fifthly, how deceitful this life is (which is the worst condition of all, deluding the lovers of this world with a miserable blindness), for we think it amiable, when in itself it is ugly; we think it sweet, when it is full of gall and bitterness; when it is circumscribed within the shortest limits, we think it long. When it is full of misery, we think it so happy that there is no danger, no hazard that

³Is. 40:6.

⁴Hieron. l. ii Com. in Isa. cap. 40.

men will not expose themselves unto for the conservation of it: yea, with the loss of eternal glory, when they do not fear to commit those sins which make them unworthy of so great felicity.

Consider sixthly, that besides the brevity and other fore-mentioned conditions, that small time wherein we live is subject to innumerable miseries, both spiritual and corporal: that it may well be called a torrent of tears and ocean of infinite molestations. St. Jerome reporteth how Xerxes, that potent king who overturned mountains and made bridges over the seas, when, from a high place, he beheld that infinite multitude of men and his innumerable army, he wept to think that not one of those men there present should be alive after a hundred years. And presently adding, O that we could but ascend into such a turret to behold the whole earth under our feet, then would I manifest unto thee, the ruins of the world; nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; some tormented, others slain, some drowned, others led into captivity. Here marrying, here mourning, some born, others dying, some abounding in wealth, others begging. And not only the mighty army of Xerxes, but all the men of the world, in a short space, to be turned to dust and ashes.

Take notice, a little of the labors and infirmities of the body, the thoughts and passions of the mind; the diverse dangers in every state and all seasons threatening the ruin of man; and thou wilt every day more clearly understand the miseries of this life, that when thou seest what is to be

hoped for in this world, thou mayest with a noble courage condemn it.

The last of all these miseries is death, both in respect of soul or body, a thing most terrible, for in this moment the body is disrobed of all things in this world. And the soul in this point receiveth the joyful or fearful sentence of eternity.

These things well considered, thou wilt be instructed how short and miserable the glory of this world is, and how it ought to be hated and despised by thee.

A Meditation for Wednesday

THIS day thou shalt meditate on death: the consideration of which is very profitable to attain unto true wisdom, to beat down sin, and to excite men timely to cast up their accounts, which they are to make in the latter day.

Consider, first, the uncertainty of that hour wherein death is to seize upon thee; thou knowest not the day, nor the place, nor the state wherein it shall find thee; only thou believest that thou must die, for other things thou art wholly ignorant of, except that it sometimes setteth upon a man when he little dreameth of it, and thinketh it to be furthest off.

Consider, secondly, that grievous separation which shall be at the point of death, not only from every thing of this present life, wherein thou lookest content, but also betwixt the soul and body, whose society was most ancient, most loving and dear. If a man taketh it grievously

to be banished, to be thrust out of his native soil, and to be deprived of that air wherein he first breathed, although he should carry all other things, his dearest things, with him, how far more bitterly would he take that general exile, wherein he most weaned from all worldly things, his house, his means, his father, his mother, his children, his friends, uncertain whither he himself must go. Then, shall he be deprived of the light and the commerce of all human creatures?

If the ox, when he is disjoined from his fellow with whom he was wont in the same yoke to be coupled, with bellowing doth express his sorrow, what sobs, what sighs wilt thou fetch, when thou shalt perceive thyself to be violently pulled from these thy confederates.

Consider, also, that anxiety wherewith the mind of the dying is tormented, when abstracted from all corporal business, he only thinketh what shall become of his body, and what shall betide his soul; how his body must be cast seven feet into the earth, to be eaten by worms; and what will become of his soul, where it is to remain, he is altogether uncertain; which thought doth surely much trouble the mind of him that dieth, when he certainly knoweth there is heaven or hell to be expected, and he at equal distance from them both, neither can he tell which of these two contraries will fall to his share.

Another no less affliction followeth, that presently he must give a strict account of all his forepassed life to the eternal judge, which men of great sanctity were wont to fear; when Arsenius in the last point of life was seen

by his disciples to weep and tremble, they asked him why he feared death, he answered: *Revera filioli, metus hic quo me videtis affici nunquam omnino a me recessit ex quo factus sum Monachus.*⁵ “Indeed, my children, the fear wherewith ye see me now afflicted hath quite left me from the time I was first made a monk.”

Then all the sins of a man’s former life come rushing into his memory, representing themselves unto him, as it were in battle array, to destroy him, but especially his grievous sins wherein he took greatest delight are continually present to his fancy, which do so torment him that they drive him into a dangerous despair of his salvation, and the remembrance of those pleasures, which before were grateful, are now most bitter unto him. That the wise man saith true: “*Ne intuaris vinum quando flavescit cum splenduerit in vitro color ejus ingreditur blande, et in novissimo mordebit ut coluber, et sicut regulus venema diffundet.*”⁶ “Behold not wine when it waxeth yellow, when the color thereof shall shine in the glass; it goeth in pleasantly, but in the end it will bite like a snake, and as a basilisk it spreads abroad his passions.”

Such a poisoned cup the enemy of mankind presenteth to the lovers of the world to drink. Such is the liquor of the outwardly gilded cup of *Babylon*.

Wicked man seeing himself environed with so many accusers, beginneth then to fear the success of his latter judgment, and to bewail himself with bitter outcries; O

⁵Simon Metaph., in vita ejus tome 4, apud Sarium.

⁶Proverbs 22.

miserable and unhappy man, that have lived thus long in darkness and walked in the footsteps of iniquity, what shall now become of me? if St. Paul saith such as a man soweth, such he shall reap,⁷ then I that have sowed nothing else but the works of the flesh, what should I expect but corruption?

If St. John saith, that no unclean thing shall enter into that heavenly city, which is paved with burnished gold, what part shall I have therein, that am defiled with all kind of luxury?

Then follow the sacraments of the church: confession, communion, extreme unction, which are the last helps of our holy mother the Catholic Church, to succor his dying soul.

From all these aforesaid circumstances, thou mayest gather with what anxiety a wicked man is oppressed at the hour of his departure. Then he will wish that he had led a better life, and what great austerity he would use if longer time might be permitted to him. Then would he vehemently implore the divine assistance, but the greatness of his infirmity, and the pangs of death approaching, will not suffer him, which will be so great that he shall scarce be able to turn his thoughts upon God.

Behold, after these, the symptoms of this last infirmity, forerunners of death and harbingers of thy last end, which certainly in themselves are horrible, and to the beholders terrible. The stomach swelleth, the speech faileth, the feet begin to die, the knees wax cold, the nostrils fall,

⁷Galatians 6.

the eyes sink, the face waxeth pale, the tongue can no longer perform its office; finally, the striving of the soul going out of the body disturbeth all the senses, and leaveth them wholly without vigor.

But who is able to express the anguish of the soul, which is far greater? for then it is in a mighty agony, both in regard of the doubtful event of her salvation, and of the strict account she is presently to make of the deeds of her whole life; as also, because she naturally loveth the body, she cannot be separated from it but with great affliction, especially knowing not what shall become of her.

Having well contemplated the soul departing the body, thou must yet make two journies more: one in accompanying the body to the grave, the other in following the soul to the deciding of her cause. And thou shalt see the event of both. Mark, therefore, the dead carcass, how they prepare a winding sheet for it. What expedition they use to carry it out of the house. Consider the solemnity and rites wherewith it is carried to the grave. How the bells ring, and everyone inquires of the dead. The office of the church also, the prayers of the standers by, the doleful tune of the church, while the body is carried to the grave and buried. The tears of friends and kindred, and all those ceremonies which are wont to be performed about the dead.

Leaving the body under the earth, accompany the soul passing to a new and unknown region, where she expecteth the sentence of the eternal judge. Imagine with thyself that thou art present at this tribunal, and the

whole court of heaven, waiting with deep silence and great attention the event and sentence of this judgment, here must be given a strict account of all receivings and disbursements. I say account, of thy life, of thy goods, of thy family, of the divine inspirations, of the means and occasions to live well, and finally, of the blood of Jesus Christ, and the use of his sacraments; and according as his account is, so the sentence shall be pronounced.

A Meditation for Thursday

THIS day thou shalt meditate upon the latter judgment, to the end that thou mayest stir up in thy soul two principal effects, which every Christian soul ought to have; to wit, the fear of God and hatred of sin.

Place, therefore, first before thine eyes how terrible that day will be, wherein all the litigious causes of the sons of Adam shall be decided, and a final end put to the processes of our whole life, and what shall be ordained of those for all eternity shall be publicly pronounced to the view of the whole world.

This day comprehendeth in it all the days of all ages, past, present, and to come; and exacteth a severe account of all the actions of all men, pouring out all the fury upon men, heaped up together from forepassed ages; because then the torrent of Almighty God's vengeance shall overflow beyond its limits, rushing with a greater violence, by how much more it was the longer detained, and at once shall overwhelm all iniquity from the creation of the world.

Consider, secondly, the dreadful signs which shall go before this day. For our Savior saith: *Erunt signa in sole, et luna, et stellis.*⁸ And all creatures of heaven and earth shall tremble, understanding their ruin to be at hand. Men also, as our Savior saith, worn and withered away, perceiving the horrible raging of the sea; and they themselves, scarce a hair's breadth distant from death. Seeing also the mighty risings and inundations of the water, and by these conjecturing the calamities and misery these prodigious signs threaten to the world, will be amazed with such a horror that they will be without life, without voice, without color or human shape; they will be dead before they die, dreading their damnation before the sentence be pronounced, imagining the future pain by their present distemper. Then everyone, out of exceeding fear, will be so solicitous of himself that he will nothing regard others whosoever they be, parents, or husbands, or wives, or friends, or companions.

Imagine, thirdly, the universal deluge of fire which shall go before this judgment; that dreadful noise of the trumpet, which one of the archangels shall blow, wherewith all the people of the whole world shall be summoned together in one place, making their appearance before the judgment seat; and last of all, that dreadful majesty that the supreme judge of the quick and the dead shall assume to himself upon this tribunal.

Fourthly, consider what exact account shall be re-

⁸“There shall be signs in the sun, and the moon, and the stars.”
Luke 21:25.

quired of everyone. Holy Job saith: "*Vere scio quod ita sit: et quod non justificetur homo compositus Deo. Si voluerit contendere cum eo, non poterit ei respondere unum pro mille.*"⁹ "Indeed, I know it is so, and that man cannot be justified, compared with God. If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one for a thousand." What then shall become of man, when God shall begin to handle him according to the rigor of His justice, when He shall speak to his conscience inwardly?

O wicked and perverse man, what hast thou seen in Me, that out of the height of impiety, despising Me, thou shouldst join with My enemies! I have created thee according to Mine own image and likeness: I have illuminated thee with the light of faith: I have seasoned thee in the Christian faith from thy infancy: I have redeemed thee with My own Blood: for thy sake I have fasted, watched, prayed, undergone tedious journeys, sweat blood, and endured many more miseries in the course of My life: for the love of thee, I have suffered persecutions, injuries, blasphemies, and the very cross itself. This cross is My witness, these nails My witnesses, which thou seest imprinted in My hands and feet: to conclude, heaven and earth that did behold My passion are My witnesses. How I have drawn thy soul. How I have redeemed thee with the ransom of My precious Blood.

How hast thou esteemed this precious pearl? bought by Me with an inestimable price. O generation of vipers, why hast thou chosen to serve My enemy with a great

⁹Job 9:23.

deal of pain, and neglected thy duty towards Me, thy Creator and Redeemer, which thou mightest have performed with a great deal of pleasure? I have called thee, and thou wouldst not answer to My vocation. I have knocked at the door of thy heart, and thou hast refused Me entrance. I have stretched My arms upon the cross, and thou hast not regarded Me. Thou despisest My counsels, promises, and threatenings. Pronounce, therefore, O ye angels, the sentence, and be judges betwixt Me and My vineyard. “*Quid est quod debui uttra facere vineæ meæ ut non fecit ei?*” “What is there that I ought to do more to my vineyard, that I have not done to it?”¹⁰

What will the reprobate and scoffers at divine mysteries answer? they that have hissed at virtue, derided simplicity, and observed better the laws of the world than of God; they that have stopped their ears at the voice of God; they who have condemned His divine inspirations; they who have been rebellious against His commandments and ungrateful for His benefits? What will those libertines say, who letting themselves loose to all vices, have lived as if there were no God at all, or that He did not regard the things that are done below? What will those say, who have followed their commodities, tastes, and pleasure for a law? “*Quid facietis in die visitationis et calamitatis de longe venientis, ad cujus confuegiatis auxilium? et ubi derelinquetis gloriam vestram ut non incurvimini sub vinculo et cum interfecitis eadatis?*” “What will ye do in the day of visitation and of calamity coming from afar? To

¹⁰Isaiah 5:3–4.

whose help will ye flee, and where will ye leave your glory, that ye be not bowed under the bond, and fall with the slain?”

Fifthly, consider that terrible sentence, which, after judgment, the supreme Judge pronounceth against the wicked; which He will thunder out with such a dreadful noise that at the sound thereof the ears of the standers-by will ring, as the prophet Isaias saith: “*Labia ejus repleta sunt indignatione, et lingua ejus quasi ignis devorans.*” “His lips are filled with indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire.”¹¹ For what flames can be so ardent as those words: “*Discedite a me maledicti in ignem æternum, qui paratus est Diabolo et angelis ejus.*” “Go from me, O ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels.” Every word of which sentence is full of bitter torment. For who is able to comprehend what this separation is, what curse, what fire, what society, and, finally, what eternity, to which the wicked are adjudged by force of this sentence?

A Meditation for Friday

THIS day thou shalt meditate upon the torments of hell, that duly pondering them, thou mayest have more awe of Almighty God and a greater hatred of sin. St. Bonaventure¹² teacheth that these torments are to be considered according to certain similitudes set down by holy men concerning this matter. Wherefore, it will not

¹¹Isaiah 30:27.

¹²D. Bonaven. in Fas. cap. 3.

be beside our purpose (as the same Doctor in the same place saith) to imagine hell a horrible confused chaos, a lake under the earth, a deep fiery dungeon; or as a spacious city, dark and terrible, burning with obscure and fearful fire, filled with wailings, howlings, weeping for the inexplicable pains.

In this miserable and unhappy place are two kinds of torments, *pœna sensus et pœna damni*, the punishment of sense, and the punishment of loss of Almighty God.

Consider that there is no outward or inward sense of the damned which is not afflicted with a proper torment; for as the damned, in all their members and senses, have offended God, using them as instruments and weapons whereby, neglecting the society and law of God, they served sin; so the divine justice hath ordained that every sense, according to their desert, should be tormented with a proper punishment; the wanton and lascivious eyes shall be tortured with the hideous aspect of devils. The ears which were open to lies, detractions, and other impurities shall ring with unwonted clamors, outcries, and blasphemies. The noses which were delighted with sweet odors shall be poisoned with an intolerable stink. The taste which was glutted with dainty fare shall be tormented with intolerable hunger and thirst. The tongue which uttered detractions and murmurings shall drink the gall of dragons. The wanton, who gave consent to their brutish desires, shall be frozen with extreme cold, and as holy Job saith: "*Ad nimium calorem transeat ab*

*aquis nivium*¹³: “Let him pass from the snow waters to excessive heat.”

The interior senses also shall not want their torments; the imagination shall now be tormented with the apprehension of present pains, the memory with the calling to mind of forepast pleasures, the understanding with the fear of future griefs, the will with an incredible hatred and raging towards God.

There, as St. Gregory saith, shall be intolerable cold, unquenchable fire, a never dying worm, a stench which none is able to endure, horrid darkness, grievous whippings, visages of devils, confusion of sinners, and desperation of all good.

Tell me, I pray thee, couldst thou endure one little moment the least part of these torments? surely it would be very grievous, if not intolerable for thee. What then will it be to suffer this whole inundation of evils, at one time in all thy members and senses, external and internal, not one or a thousand nights, but for all eternity? What sense, what tongue, what mind of man is able to conceive or express these things?

Neither are these the greatest torments the damned suffer. There remaineth yet a more grievous, which the divines do call the punishment of loss, which consisteth in the perpetual privation of the beatific vision of God and his saints, and of all that glorious and blessed society. For that is the greatest torment that depriveth man of the most excellent good. Seeing, therefore, that God is that

¹³Job 5:24.

effectual and chief good of all goods, to be deprived of Him must needs be the greatest of all evils.

These are the general torments of the damned; besides these, there are other particular torments wherewith everyone according to their sins are afflicted. The proud, the envious, the covetous, the luxurious, and other vicious have their peculiar torments; the measure of pain there, shall be proportionable to their glory and pleasure here; poverty and want to plenty, hunger and thirst to gluttony and to former delights.

To all these aforesaid torments, eternity is yet to be added, which is, as it were, the seal and key of all the rest; for if at length they should have an end, they would be in some way tolerable. That which is restrained to a certain time cannot be so insufferable; but this punishment is everlasting, without solace, without relaxation, without diminution, where remaineth no hope of an end of their torments, or tormentors, or themselves that suffer them, but is, as it were, a perpetual and irrevocable banishment, never to be recalled, which is a thing of importance to be noted, that the mind may be stirred up thereby to that saving fear and love of God.

From the eternity of torments proceedeth that great hatred wherewith they are incensed against God. Hence proceed these horrible blasphemies and curses, which with their impure mouths they rail at God, saying, cursed be God Who hath created us, and hath condemned us to an everlasting death, which doth so oppress and torment us, that notwithstanding never killeth. Cursed be His

power, which doth so grievously afflict us. Cursed be His wisdom, that hath laid open all our wickedness. Cursed be His justice, that hath exacted eternal punishment for temporal sins. Cursed be His cross, which hath not benefitted us. Cursed be His Blood, that was shed, seeing it requireth revenge against us. Cursed be the Mother of God, who although she be pious and propitious to all, yet notwithstanding hath showed herself to us cruel and unmerciful. Cursed be all the saints of God reigning with Christ, and rejoicing at our miseries.

These are the hymns, this is that harsh melody, which the damned do continually jar, railing at the Almighty God with detested blasphemies for all eternity.

A Meditation for Saturday

THIS day thou shalt meditate upon the glory of the saints of God, which may more eagerly inflame thy soul to condemn the vanities of this world and aspire to that eternal felicity.

To the end thou mayest get a better knowledge and taste of this inestimable glory, consider these five things. First, the excellency of the place. Secondly, the joy of that society. Thirdly, the vision of God. Fourthly, the glory of their bodies. Fifthly, the complete perfection of all abundant good.

In the excellency of the place, take notice of the admirable and wonderful spaciousness of it; in approved authors thou readest that the least of the fixed stars of heaven is bigger than the whole earth, and some of them

do exceed the earth two or three hundred times in bigness. Then cast up thine eyes to heaven, and consider the innumerable multitude of them in the firmament, and thou shalt see a great deal of void space, where many more may be placed. How canst thou then but be astonished at the greatness of so rare a fabric?

Then consider the beauty of that place, which no tongue is able to express, for if Almighty God, in this place of banishment and vale of misery, hath made many things of admirable and comely hue; of what great beauty, and how much adorned dost thou think that place to be, which God would have to be the ordinary seat of His glory, the palace of His majesty, the mansion of the elect, and the paradise of all pleasure!

After the beauty of the place, consider the nobility of the inhabitants, whose number, sanctity, riches, and glory are far beyond our imagination. St. John saith, the multitude are so great that they are innumerable. St. Dionysius affirmeth, that the multitude of angels do far exceed the number of sublunary creatures. Whom St. Thomas following, thinketh that as the heavens by many degrees exceed the bigness of the earth, being but, as it were, a point of them; so proportionally the glorious spirits therein contained do surpass all earthly things. What can be thought more admirable? assuredly this well pondered would make a man lose himself in the abyss of Almighty God's goodness.

Yea, without comparison every one of these blessed spirits is far more beautiful to the eye than all this visible

world. Oh, what would it be to contemplate the incomprehensible number of so rare and glorious spirits, and to understand their several offices and perfections? How the angels bring messages; how the archangels minister; how the principalities triumph; how the powers rejoice; how the dominations bear sway; how the virtues shine; how the thrones do glitter; how the cherubim do illuminate; how the seraphim do burn with love; and finally, how all with one unanimous consent do praise Almighty God.

If the conversation and fellowship of good men be so delightful, what pleasure will it be to be associated with so great a multitude of saints? To be conversant with the apostles, to talk with the prophets, to discourse with martyrs, and to enjoy the blessed familiarity of all the elect? Oh, but what will it be to enjoy His presence, Whom the morning stars do magnify? Whose beauty the sun and moon admire, before Whom the holy angels and all the celestial spirits do prostrate themselves? That *summum bonum*, that infinite good, which in itself comprehendeth all good whatsoever; oh, what content will the heart of man feel to behold Him, Who is one and all: Who although He be most simple without composition, yet containeth in Himself the perfections of all things created. What can the heart of man desire greater?

If it were so much to see and hear King Solomon, that the queen of Saba coming from far remote parts, moved with his great wisdom, should say, "*Beati viri tui, et beati servi tui, qui stant coram te semper et audiunt sapien-*

tiam tuam:”¹⁴ “Blessed are thy men, and blessed are thy servants, who stand before thee always and hear thy wisdom”; What would it be to behold that true Solomon, that eternal wisdom, that immense majesty, that inestimable beauty, that infinite goodness? and, which is more, to enjoy Him for all eternity?

This is the essential and truest glory of the saints; this is the last end and center of all our wishes. Consider, moreover, the glory of their bodies, which shall be beautified with these four gifts: subtilty, agility, impassibility, and clarity; which will be so great, that every one of the elect, as our blessed Savior saith, shall glitter like the sun in the kingdom of His Father.

If one only sun doth so rejoice and illuminate this universe, what dost thou think so many brighter suns will do, which shall there shine?

What should I speak of other joys which there shall be? health without infirmity, liberty without violence, beauty without deformity, immortality without corruption, abundance without want, rest without trouble, security without fear, riches without poverty, joy without sorrow, honor without contradiction. There, as St. Augustine saith,¹⁵ shall be true glory, when every one shall be commended without error or flattery. True honor shall be denied to none that is worthy of it, and it shall be given to none unworthy, neither shall any unworthy attempt it there, where none shall be permitted but the

¹⁴3 Kings 10:8.

¹⁵D. August. 22, de Civit. Dei, cap. 30.

worthy. There shall be true peace, where they shall suffer no contradiction from themselves or others; the reward of virtue shall be Him Who gave virtue. And He hath promised to give Himself, than Whom nothing can be better or greater. For what other thing is it, that He spoke by the prophet: "*Ero illorum Deus, et ipsi erunt mihi plebs*": "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." If I do not, who is it that can satiate their souls? I will be that good which can possibly be desired of man, their life, their peace, their honor. For so is that understood which the Apostle speaketh: "*Ut sit Deus in omnibus*:" "that God be in all." He shall be the end of all our desires, which shall be contemplated without end, shall be loved without tediousness, shall be praised without ceasing.

The place of the saints, if thou dost behold the spaciousness of it, it shall be most ample; if the beauty, most delicious; if the splendor, most exceedingly bright. There shall be admirable, delightful society, no vicissitude of times; the day shall not succeed the night, nor the night the day, but all time shall be there alike. There shall be one perpetual spring, which the Holy Ghost, with a wonderful temper, shall always make green and flourishing; there shall all celebrate everlasting holidays, rejoicing with unspeakable gladness; there shall all sound their instruments of music and sing praises to Him, by whose power they live and reign for all eternity.

O celestial city, secure habitation, palace flowing with all delights, people without murmuring, quiet citizens, men without poverty. Oh, that I may at length enjoy

thee! Oh, that the days of my banishment were ended! When will that joyful day come? When shall I go out of this mortality? When shall I come and appear before Thy face, O God?

A Meditation for Sunday

THIS day thou shalt spend in reflecting on Almighty God's benefits, that thou mayest be grateful to Him for the same, and thy heart inflamed with the love of Him that hath heaped so many favors upon thee; which seeing they be innumerable, thou shalt take four of the chief to thy consideration, which are the benefits of thy creation, preservation, redemption, and vocation, besides particular benefits specially bestowed upon thee.

Touching the benefit of thy creation, examine diligently what thou wert before, what God hath given thee when thou hadst no precedent merits. Behold thy comely body well composed of its members and senses; look upon thy noble soul, beautified with these excellent faculties, the understanding, will, and memory.

Remember, that when He gave thee thy soul, He gave thee all things, seeing there is no perfection in any creature which is not found more excellent in the soul of man. Hence it manifestly followeth, that when God bestowed this great benefit upon thee, He with it bestowed what else soever thou hast.

Concerning the benefit of thy conservation and preservation, consider that all thy being dependeth upon the divine providence and disposure, without which thou

canst not move a foot or subsist the least moment of time. Moreover, for thy use He hath created the whole universal world, and all things therein contained; the earth, the sea, birds, fishes, beasts, plants, nay the very angels themselves He hath ordained to do thee service. Consider thy health, the strength of limbs, and thy very life itself, which thou enjoyest, to be the great benefits of Almighty God, who, by daily nourishment and other temporal helps, conserveth all these in their proper vigor. Observe the miseries and tribulations unto which other mortal men are subject, into which, as others, thou hadst easily fallen, had not the divine goodness protected thee.

In the benefit of thy redemption, consider the abundant good, both in quantity and quality, which He hath purchased to thee by it.

Then call to mind the bitterness of His torments, which He suffered in soul and body to ease thee; and that the acknowledgment of these favors may take a greater impression in thee, in the mystery of His passion take notice of these four things. First, Who is it that suffereth; secondly, what He suffered; thirdly, for whom He suffered; fourthly, why He suffered.

He that suffered was God; what He suffered were the most grievous torments, and such that never any mortal man did endure the like.

For whom? for most ungrateful creatures, cursed and worthy of hell fire.

Why? not for any commodity or profit of His own, or that we had merited so much by our precedent merits,

but only moved to it by His infinite love and bounty towards us.

Concerning the benefit of thy vocation, consider the grace He gave thee when He infused into thee the Christian faith, by the receiving of baptism and other sacraments, when He did enroll thee in the book of His eternity amongst faithful souls. If, after thy first vocation, when by sin thou hadst lost the innocence of baptism, He hath drawn thee again out of the mire of thine own corruption, restored thee to grace, and brought thee back again into the way of thine own salvation. What thanksgiving oughtest thou to render unto Him for so great a benefit? How great was His mercy to thee, that with longanimity He waited so many years; that He permitted thee to spend thy days in so great impurity of wickedness; that He hath often visited thee with good and holy inspirations; that He did not cut off the thread of thy perverse life, as He served others in the same place; to conclude, that He called thee with such efficacious grace, that He restored thee from death to life and opened thine eyes to contemplate His clear light? How great was His clemency towards thee, that He supported thee with His grace, not to return back again to thy former sins, but to overcome the enemies of mankind and constantly to persevere in a virtuous cause?

These are the common benefits. Besides these, there are many secret ones, known to none but those that receive them, and others, which, indeed, are not clearly known unto themselves, but only to Him that bestowed

them. How often for thy pride, arrogance, ingratitude, and sloth hast thou deserved to be left by God, as many for less causes have been? Yet, notwithstanding, He would not? How often hath God, with His singular providence, exempted thee from evil, removed occasions of offending, broken the snare that the enemy had laid for thy perdition, hath frustrated his expectation, and would not permit that his counsels and machinations should prevail against thee? How often hath He done to us as He did to St. Peter in the Gospel: "*Ecce Satan as expelivit vos, ut cribaret sicut triticum: Ego autem rogavi pro te ut non deficiat fides tua*": "Behold Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not"¹⁶? And who can know these secret benefits but God alone? Benefits which are palpable are easy to be seen, but those which are private, consisting in the working of good or preventing of ill, the mind of man cannot perfectly comprehend. Wherefore, it is meet and convenient to reason that we should render immortal thanks to God for all these benefits, and confess ingenuously that we have received more than we are able to restore, and that our obligations towards Him are so great, that with any goods of ours we shall never live to requite them, when we cannot so much as number or comprehend them in our understanding.

¹⁶Luc 22:31.

Chapter 3

Of the Time and Fruit of These Meditations

BEHOLD, Christian reader, thou hast seven former meditations, accommodated to every day of the week; not so that it is an offense to meditate upon another matter; when, as we said before, whatsoever inflameth the heart to the love and fear of God, and to the keeping of his commandments, may profitably be assumed for matter of meditation. We, therefore, out of so great a number, have selected these, both for that they contain the chief mysteries of our faith, and that in them is force and efficacy to rouse up our souls to the love and fear of God; as also to set before novices, who have need of a guide, prepared and, as it were, fore-chewed matter, lest they confusedly wander up and down in this spacious field without any certainty, now meditating upon one thing, and presently on another.

Moreover, these meditations, as we have said elsewhere, suit best those who do begin to turn from Almighty God from their wicked courses. For these had need to be helped by the consideration of these things, to the detestation and horror of sin, the fear of God and the contempt of the world, which are, as it were, the first steps to the amendment of our former perverse life; therefore, it is good that they should sometimes insist on them, that they may have the better foundation for other ensuing virtues.

Chapter 4

Seven Other Meditations of the Passion of Our Lord and the Manner How It Ought to be Meditated Upon

THERE follow seven other meditations of the passion of Christ, His resurrection and ascension into heaven; to which others of his holy life may well be added.

But we must note that in the passion of our blessed Savior, six things chiefly are to be meditated upon. First, the bitterness of His sorrow, that we may compassionate with Him. Secondly, the greatness of our sins, which were the cause of His torments, that we may abhor them. Thirdly, the greatness of the benefit, that we may be grateful for it. Fourthly, the excellency of the divine charity and bounty therein manifested, that we may love Him more fervently. Fifthly, the conveniency of the mystery, that we may be drawn to admiration of it. Lastly, the multiplicity of virtues of our blessed Savior which did shine in this stupendous mystery, that we may partly imitate and partly admire them. Wherefore, in the midst of these meditations, let us sometimes compassionate with our blessed Savior in the extremity of His sorrows; extreme indeed, both by reason of the tenderness of His body, as also for the great affection He bore unto our souls. He

did suffer them without any manner of consolation, as we shall speak hereafter in its proper place. Sometimes, let us stir up in ourselves compunction for our sins, which were the cause of these, His great sufferings. Sometimes let us kindle in our souls an ardent affection, considering His great affection towards us, which upon the cross He declared and manifested to the whole world. And the benefit which He bestowed upon us in His passion, because He bought us with the inestimable price of His precious Blood, of which only we reap the benefit and commodity. Sometimes let us ruminate upon the conveniency of the manner which His eternal wisdom would be pleased to choose to cure our miseries, to satisfy for our sins, to relieve our necessities, to make us partakers of His glory, to repress our pride, to induce us to the love and joyful suffering of poverty, injuries, austerity, and all commendable laborious exercises. Moreover, it will not be besides the matter to look into the admirable examples which did principally shine in the life and passion of our sweet Savior: His meekness, patience, obedience, mercy, poverty, charity, humility, bounty, modesty, and other of His rare virtues, which in all His actions did glitter like stars in the firmament. And chiefly to this end, let us meditate upon these things, that, as near as we can, we may imitate them. Let us shake off sloth and elevate our souls, that as much as in our power lieth, with the help of His holy grace, we may trace His sacred footsteps. This is the best and most profitable method of meditating upon our blessed Savior's passion; that is to say, that thereby we

be drawn to imitation, and so to be wholly transformed into our blessed Savior, that each one may say with the Apostle: "*Vivo autem, jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus.*" "And now I live, but not I, but Christ in me."¹⁷ Moreover, in meditating our blessed Savior's passion, we must set Him before the eyes of our souls, imagining that we see as present the pangs of His heavy sufferings; and we must not only insist upon the bare history of His passion, but we must consider other circumstances; namely, these four: first, Who it is that suffereth? secondly, for whom? thirdly, how? fourthly, why? First, He that suffereth is God, omnipotent, infinite, immense. For whom? the most ungrateful creature in the world, and less regarding His benefits. How? with most profound humility, charity, bounty, meekness, mercy, patience, modesty, &c. Why? not for His own commodity, nor our merits, but for His immense piety, mercy, goodness, and love towards us.

Last of all, let us not only contemplate His outward, but His inward torments, for much more may be considered in the soul than in the body of Christ, both for the more sensible feeling of His passion there, as also for divers other considerations therein. Thus, having set down this short preface, let us proceed to the handling of the mysteries themselves of our blessed Savior's passion.

¹⁷Gal. 2:20.

A Meditation for Monday

THIS day, after thou hast signed thyself with the sign of the cross, thou shalt meditate upon the washing of the disciples' feet and institution of the Blessed Sacrament.

Consider, O my soul, at this supper, sweet Jesus Himself to be present; contemplate that inestimable example of humility which He there proposed unto thee for imitation; when rising from the table where He sat with His disciples, He would be pleased to wash their feet. O sweet Jesus, what is it that Thou dost? O sweet Jesus, why doth Thy mighty majesty thus diminish itself? O my soul, what wouldst Thou have thought to see God kneeling at the feet of men, and prostrate before Judas? O barbarous and cruel man, could not so great humility mollify thy heart? Was not so great bounty and sweetness able to penetrate thine entrails, and to reclaim thee from thy intended mischief? can it be that thou determinest to sell this meek Lamb for so small a price? nay, if it be so, how couldst thou yet endure to behold so rare an example? I wonder it did not wound thy guilty soul with compunction for thy grievous crime? O delicate hands, how could You touch so filthy, sordid, and with sin contaminated feet? O pure and unspotted hands, how could You endure to wash those feet, that were stained with going and coming, to make a sale of Your precious Blood? O thrice happy apostles, did you not tremble and stand amazed at the sight of so great humility? What dost thou do, Peter? canst thou permit the Lord of majesty to wash thy feet?

St. Peter, wholly astonished with the admiration of this spectacle, when he saw our blessed Savior falling down at his feet, cried out, “*Domine, tu mihi lavas pedes?*” Lord, dost thou wash my feet? what, art not Thou the Son of the ever-living God? art not Thou the creator of the whole world, the beauty of heaven, the paradise of angels, redeemer of mankind, splendor of Thy Father’s glory, most deep fountain of the eternal wisdom? and dost Thou wash my feet? how cometh it to pass, that Thou, Lord of so great majesty and glory, shouldst thus debase Thyself to so vile a service?

Then consider how He washed all His disciples’ feet, one by one, and after washing, wiped them with a linen cloth wherewith He was girded; open the eyes of thy mind to behold in these mysteries a representation of our redemption. This linen cloth so wiped their feet that all the dirt which was upon their feet did stick on the linen cloth, not without mystery.

For what is more foul than man conceived in sin? What is more pure than Christ, conceived by the operation of the Holy Ghost? “*Dilectus meus candidus et rubicundus, electus ex milibus.*”¹⁸ “My beloved,” saith the spouse in the canticles, “is white, and ruddy chosen out of thousands”; yet notwithstanding most pure, most beautiful. Christ took unto Himself all the spots of our souls; from which, that He might cleanse us (as you may see Him upon the cross) He would be pleased to defile Himself with the filth of our impurity. Consider, lastly,

¹⁸Cant. 5:10.

with what words our blessed Savior closed up this humble action: “*Exemplum enim dedi vobis ut quemadmodum ego feci vobis, ita, et vos faciatis.*” “For I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also.”¹⁹ Which words do not only pertain to this present action and example of humility, but likewise to all the actions of Christ throughout His whole life, which is a most absolute and perfect rule for us to square our actions by, especially of humility, which is here to life represented unto us.

Of the Institution of the Blessed Sacrament

HE that desireth to comprehend anything of this noble mystery must certainly think that no tongue is able to express that immense love and ardent affection wherewith our blessed Savior was inflamed towards His holy church, and all faithful souls, in instituting this stupendous mystery. For when this bridegroom determined to depart out of this mortal life and to leave the church, His beloved spouse; lest this His departure should be any occasion to her of forgetting her Redeemer, He gave her this sacrament wherein He Himself is present as a pledge and memorial of his perpetual love.

Then, seeing He was to be long absent, lest His spouse should remain solitary alone, He, for His consolation, would leave Himself for her companion in this holy sacrament.

When our blessed Savior was to suffer death for the

¹⁹John 13:15.

redemption of His spouse, to enrich her with His most precious Blood and to purge her from sins, lest she should be defrauded of so great a treasure, He would give her a key in this sacrament whereby she might at her pleasure enjoy these riches; for as St. Chrysostom saith, we must think as often as we come to this sacrament, we put our mouth to the bleeding side of Christ, and from thence drink His most precious Blood, in whose merits we participate.

Moreover, this celestial bridegroom did desire to be tenderly beloved by His spouse, and for this cause would leave her this mystical meat, consecrated with most efficacious words, and therein so great virtue, that whosoever receives it worthily shall presently be struck with the darts of love.

He would likewise bestow upon His spouse some pure pledge, thereby to make her secure of the certain succession of future glory, that in hope of so great a good, He might temper the laborious difficulty and make the tedious bitterness of this present life to be more tolerable; wherefore, that the spouse might certainly believe that she shall at length attain to these unspeakable goods, He hath given her for a pawn this inestimable treasure, which is worth as much as that which is expected hereafter; that she should not doubt but that God will give her Himself in glory, where He liveth in spirit, that would be pleased to give her Himself in this vale of tears, where He liveth in the flesh.

He would, moreover, when He died, make His last

will and testament, wherein He left to His spouse a singular manna to cure all her infirmities; a gift, than which nothing can be more sovereign, nothing more precious, seeing the Deity itself is therein contained.

Lastly, He desired to feed our souls with some heavenly food, seeing they need no less nourishment that they might live spiritually, than the body needeth corporal sustenance that she might live corporally. Wherefore, this spiritual physician, when He had diligently examined and felt the pulse of our fragility, instituted this holy sacrament which He exhibited unto us under the species or form of bread, that He might declare what effect it should work in us; that is to say, that it is as necessary for our souls as bread for the body.

A Meditation for Tuesday

THIS day thou shalt meditate on the prayer Christ made in the garden, the method thereof, and the insults He suffered in the house of Annas.

Consider, therefore, how Christ our Lord, after the consummation of His mystical body with His disciples, before He entered into the tragedy of His passion, went to make His prayer upon the mount Olivet; whereby He would instruct us that in all adversities and tribulations of this present life, we fly to prayer as to a holy anchor; the power of which is so great, that it either beateth back the forces of tribulations, or (which is of greater excellence) ministereth sufficient strength to endure them with a constant and willing mind.

He took for His companions in His journey three of His disciples, whom He loved above the rest: St. Peter, St. James, and St. John. Who, as they were eye-witnesses of His transfiguration, so likewise they should be present in his agony, to behold Him, for the love of man, now transformed into a far more different shape than He was when He manifested Himself unto them in a glorious and glittering form.

That also He might open unto them His inward grief to be much greater than appeared outwardly. He saith unto them: "*Tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem. Sustinete hic, et vigilate mecum:*"²⁰ "My soul is sorrowful even unto death. Stay you here and watch with me." O words full of compassion! Then departing from His disciples a stone's cast, with great submission and reverence, He prayed His Father: "*Pater mi, si possibile est, transeat a me calix iste, verumtamen non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu.*" "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." Which prayer, when He had repeated thrice, He fell into such an agony that He sweat drops of Blood, trickling down upon the earth from His precious Body.

Consider, that partly the foreseeing of the most unspeakable torments that ever any mortal man suffered prepared for His most tender Body; partly the distinct representation of the sins of the whole world, for the expiation of which He was now to suffer death upon the cross; partly the remembrance of the ingratitude of many,

²⁰Matt. 25.

who would not esteem or reap any profit from this great benefit; struck such a deep impression into His soul that it filled it with sad and incredible anxiety, so troubled His senses and tender flesh that, all the elements of His body being weakened, the opened pores on every side sweat out drops of Blood. If the flesh, which properly suffered not this anguish, but only through a simple imagination was thus afflicted, what did His soul feel? to which, properly, these sorrows did appertain.

His prayer being ended, that counterfeit friend of Christ, Judas the traitor, came attended with a hellish band: he, I say, who renounced his apostleship to be head and captain of a troop of hell-hounds: behold in the forefront of that wicked multitude, impudently coming to his Master, Whom before he had sold, betraying Him with a kiss of peace and friendship.

In that hour, said Jesus to the company which came to apprehend him, "Are you come out, as it were against a thief, with swords and clubs? When I was daily with you in the temple, you did not stretch forth your hands against me; but this is your hour, and the power of darkness."²¹

This mystery is worthy of admiration, for what thing can be more admirable and stupendous than to see the only begotten Son of God, not only in the form of sinful man, but in the shape of a condemned man: "*Hæc est hora vestra, et potestas tenebrarum*:" "This is your hour, and the power of darkness." From which words is gathered that this innocent Lamb was left to the diabolical cruelty

²¹Luke 22:52.

of the princes of darkness, who, by their vicegerents and ministers, poured all the malice and mischief they were able to conceive against Him. Consider how much, for thy sake, the supreme majesty of God is humbled; to endure all the extremity of torments that ever any suffered in this present life, nor to die for His own faults, but for thy sins; but He did undergo this of His own accord, to free thee from the power of Satan.

He had scarce spoken these words when that whole rabble of hunger-starved wolves, gaping after their prey, rushed upon this meek and innocent Lamb, hauling, tearing, and afflicting Him with as much cruelty as ever they could. O barbarous and inhuman proceedings! O cruel and savage blows, insulting violences, wherewith they tormented Him! they insulted after a horrid manner, no otherwise than conquerors return loaded with spoils, after they have put to flight their enemies, or hunters when they have caught their prey. The hands which a little before were exercised in working miracles were now bound with ropes so cruelly that they razed the skin and besmeared them with blood. Thus they led Him through the public streets of Jerusalem, following Him with insults and blows: behold Him in this journey going alone, left by all His disciples, compassed with a multitude of His enemies, forced to make such haste that He was wholly out of breath, His color changed, His face blushing, and His whole body weakened and wearied by reason of the intolerable present difficulty.

Although our blessed Savior was barbarously and al-

most cruelly handled by that blood-sucking multitude, yet, nevertheless, thou mightest have seen in His countenance a pleasant sweetness, in His eyes a comely gravity, in His manners a divine grace, which all the torments of the whole world could not so much as diminish in the least degree.

After this, go with our blessed Savior into the house of Annas the high priest, that there thou mayest take notice what favor He reaped for His mild answer, when Annas examined Him of His and His disciples' doctrine, which was, that one of the officers gave Him a cruel blow upon His cheek, saying, "*Sic respondes pontefici?*" "Answerest thou the high priest so?" To him Christ replied: "*Si male locutus sum, testimonium perhibe de malo: si autem bene, quid me cædis?*"²² If I have spoken evil, bring testimony of the evil, but if well, why strikest thou me?"

Behold, O my soul, not only the mild answer, but the print of the officer's hand in His tender cheek, His countenance notwithstanding quiet and amiable, not a whit moved at the shame of so great an affront, because He inwardly thought so low and humbly of Himself that He would have turned the other side without delay, if the rascal had desired it.

A Meditation for Wednesday

THIS day thou shalt consider how Christ our Lord was offered up to Caiphas the high priest; what torments He endured there all that night; how St. Peter

²²John 18:23.

denied Him; and last of all, how cruelly He was scourged.

Consider, first of all, how He was led from the house of Annas to the house of Caiphas; it is worth thy pains to follow Him thither; for there thou shalt see the mighty sun of justice eclipsed; there thou shalt behold that divine face, upon which the angels themselves delight to gaze, deformed with the filthy spittings of the Jews; for our Blessed Savior, standing in the midst of them, was charged by the high priest in the name of His Father to speak out what He was. He answered as befitting Himself; but they, who were unworthy of such an answer, blinded with the splendor of this great light like mad dogs, rushed upon Him, vomiting up the bitter gall of their whole malice against Him.

They began, whole troops of them, to buffet Him, to beat and kick Him; they spat upon His divine face and threw the very filth of their noses upon it. Others hood-winked His eyes with a dirty linen cloth, smiting him upon His cheek, and would in mockery have Him prophecy who it was that struck Him. O admirable and unheard-of patience and humility of the only-begotten Son of God! Oh, behold that face, which the angels of heaven do contemplate with incredible joy, besmeared with their sordid and filthy spittings!

Men, when they spit, commonly turn themselves to some foul place, somewhat remote from the sight of others. In this palace was there no place found more contemptible therein to cast their spit and filthy drivel than the sacred face of Jesus Christ? O man, that art but dust

and ashes, canst thou choose but be stirred up to humility and contempt of thyself at so rare an example?

Consider, moreover, what torments our Blessed Savior suffered all that night, how the officers that kept Him, afflicted Him that sleep should not close His eyes, derided the supreme majesty of God and loaded Him with many injurious insults.

Weigh with thyself, my soul, that now thy spouse is made the white and mark, receiving upon Himself all the darts of injurious insults that the mischievous Jews could shoot at Him. O cruel night, O unquiet night, in which Thou, Blessed Jesus, could rest no more by reason of anguish and affliction than others who took pleasure to torment Thee. The night was ordained for the rest of all creatures, that the members and senses, wearied with the labor of the day before, might then take some repose. But the wicked soldiers that kept Thee spent it in tormenting Thy senses; they did bind Thy body, vexed Thy soul, fettered Thy hands and feet with manacles, buffeted Thy cheeks, spat upon Thy face, blinded Thine eyes, so that all Thy senses, when they should have been refreshed, were afflicted.

Oh! how far did these matins differ from those which, at the same time, the blessed angels did sing in heaven? they cried holy, holy; and the Jews cried, He is guilty of death, crucify, crucify Him. O angelical spirits which understand both cries, what could you imagine or think, when you saw the inhuman cruelty wherewith He was handled on earth, Whom in heaven you adored with such

great submission and reverence? did you not wonder to see Him suffer all these extreme torments, to expiate the sins of those who inflicted them upon Him? who hath ever heard of such immense charity, that for this reason one should suffer death, to heal the grief and cure the wounds of his murderers!

The fall of St. Peter, that great pillar, did not a little increase the anxiety of this tedious night; that he, whom He entirely loved amongst the rest, whom He chose to present at His glorious transfiguration, to whom He committed the primacy of His holy church, whom He ordained to be head and prince of the apostles; that he, I say, should before His face, and in His presence, deny Him not once, but thrice, adding blasphemies and oaths that he knew not the man. Tell me, Peter, did this man seem to thee so ungodly and wicked, that in future times thou didst fear it would be a disgrace unto thee to confess Him now? didst thou not consider that thou didst first pronounce the sentence of condemnation against Him, before He was adjudged by the high priests, when thou didst not esteem Him so much as worthy of thy acknowledgment? couldst thou do a greater injury to Jesus Christ?

But Christ, sorrowful for this great fault of St. Peter, turned Himself and cast His eyes upon him, that with His gracious countenance He might reduce this wandering sheep into the sheepfold of his mercies. O admirable aspect, secret indeed, but full of signification, which St. Peter knew right well, and well understood of what force

and efficacy it was. The crowing of the cock had little availed to his compunction and conversion, had not the countenance of Christ our Savior been adjoined; Whose eyes did speak and work that stupendous change, the certainty of which, not only the flowing tears of St. Peter, but of our Blessed Savior himself, did sufficiently testify.

After all these injuries, consider what Christ suffered when He was bound to be scourged at the pillar; for the judge, when he saw that he could not pacify the fury of those infernal monsters, thought good to advise them to beat Him with rods and whips, whereby His whole body might be torn, hoping that way to mollify their obstinate and obdurate hearts; that when they saw Him so torn and mangled, they would cease further to desire His cruel death.

Enter now, my soul, in spirit into the house of Pilate, and have tears in readiness, for thou wilt have need of them, if thou shalt diligently consider what was done there.

Behold how inhumanly these abject and infamous rogues despoiled our Blessed Savior of His garments. Mark the humility of Christ, how He suffered Himself to be stripped, not so much as opening His mouth, nor uttering any word against their injurious behavior. See His sacred body bound to the pillar with many ropes, in such a fashion that on every side they might have room to torture Him.

Consider how the Lord of angels stood alone in the midst of His cruel enemies, without any advocates or

procurators that would defend His cause; yea, altogether without any one man, who, at leastwise afar off, would so much as compassionate the bitterness of His torments. Dost thou not hear the noise of rods and whips, where-with they loaded, tore, and rent the delicate flesh of Jesus, adding stroke upon stroke and wound to wound? dost thou not see His whole body in one short moment of time, with the vehemency and often reiterated blows, to be covered, as it were, with one ulcer, His skin to be drawn from the flesh, and blood from His whole body, from the crown of His head to the soles of His feet, to flow down upon the earth? especially, is it not dreadful for thee to behold the place between the shoulders, whereupon almost the whole force of the blows did light?

Consider how Christ, the Savior of the world, after that extreme cruelty of His tormentors, went up and down the palace all torn and cut, seeking and gathering up His garments, not finding one amongst those inhuman rascals that would show unto Him the least act of humanity in washing or refreshing his wounds, or lend their hand to help Him to put on his clothes. All these things are worthy of our diligent consideration, that thereby we might stir up our souls to due compassion of His miseries.

A Meditation for Thursday

THIS day thou shalt meditate how Christ was crowned with thorns; His presentation before all the people; His condemnation; His bringing out to the place of execution; and, last of all, His carrying of His cross.

The spouse in the Canticles invited us to the consideration of these torments when she said, "*Egredimini et videte filiæ Sion Regem Salomonem in diademate, quo coronavit illum mater sua in die desponsationis illius, et in die lætitiæ cordis ejus.*"²³ "Go forth ye daughters of Sion, and see King Solomon in the diadem wherewith his mother hath crowned him, in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the joy of his heart."

What dost thou do? what dost thou think, my soul? my tongue, why art thou silent? O sweet Savior, when I open mine eyes and behold this sorrowful spectacle, my heart is rent with grief. What, Lord, were not Thy former torments, imminent death, and abundance of Thy blood already shed, sufficient for the redemption of mankind? but Thou must yet be crowned with sharp thorns?

My soul, that thou mayest the better understand this sad spectacle, set before thine eyes our Blessed Savior in His former beauty, before He suffered these torments: then behold Him, on the contrary, in this miserable state. If in the first, thou dost rightly view Him, thou shalt see Him more beautiful than the sun: in His eyes a comely gravity; in His speech a gracious facility; in His actions singular modesty; in the gesture of His whole body profound humility, joined with reverend majesty.

Then, after thou hast satiated thy soul with pleasure in beholding this rare piece of admirable perfection, then turn thine eyes again, and look upon Him as He is in this present miserable state. Ridiculously clothed in pur-

²³Cant.3:II.

ple, bearing in His hand a reed for a kingly sceptre, and upon His head a crown of sharp thorns instead of a regal diadem: His eyes were dimmed, His face pale and wan, fouled and covered with the filthy spittle of the Jews; behold Him within and without! His heart consumed with grief, His body torn with wounds and blows, forsaken of His disciples, hastened to undergo death from His enemies; mocked by the soldiers, despised by the high-priests, rejected as a wicked king arrogantly assuming this title, unjustly accused and destitute of all human aid.

Do not consider these things as done and past many years since, but imagine with thyself that at this present time they are acting before thy face, not as another man's sorrows, but as thine own afflictions: set thyself in His place, and conjecture what torments thou shouldst suffer, if thy head were bored to the skull, and thy brain-pan pierced with sharp thorns? But what do I say, thorns? when thou canst scarce endure the prick of a small needle. How great, then, was the pain His tender head suffered, with this new and unheard-of torment?

The coronation of our Blessed Savior, with many mocks and scorns, being ended, the judge produced Him before the people, saying: "*Ecce Homo*": "Behold the man." If ye thirst after the death of the man, behold Him scarce a hair's-breadth distant from it; yea, He is brought to that pass, that He deserveth rather commiseration than your envy; if ye fear that He will make himself king, behold, He is so deformed that He scarce retaineth the shape of a man: do ye fear any violence from these hands

that are so straightly manacled? do ye dread any harm from a man that is cast into such a miserable and dejected state? Whose body is so mangled and weakened?

Consider, O my soul, in what state thy Savior was, when the very judge himself did think that this aspect would move His bloody enemies to compassion: from which we may gather what a miserable thing it is to see a Christian of such an obdurate heart, which cannot or will not condole with the sufferings of our Savior, when they were such that the very judge did think them sufficient to mollify the malice of His enemies. But Pilate, seeing with these exceeding torments he could no way temper or assuage their fury, went into his palace and sat in the judgment-seat to pronounce the definitive sentence against Christ. Now the cross was prepared at the door, and the fatal standard which threatened ruin to our Blessed Savior was now in readiness.

The sentence being pronounced, with the addition of more torments, they loaded His wearied shoulders with a heavy cross, to carry to the place of His execution.

But our meek Lord not only did not reject it, but out of that immense charity towards us, wherewith He suffered for our sins, obediently and willingly embraced it.

Now the innocent Isaac, with His weak shoulders, supported the intolerable burden of the cross to the place of sacrifice. The simple people and devout women followed Him weeping. For who was able to contain tears, to see the Lord and King of angels going thus on foot,

with the extremity of torments? His knees quivering, His body stooping, His eyes blinded, His face besmeared with blood, His head crowned with thorns, and His ears deafened with the noise of drums and trumpets.

Leave awhile, O my soul, this horrid spectacle, and with watering eyes, with sobs and sighs, go to the Blessed Virgin and say to her: Lady of angels, queen of heaven, gate of paradise, advocate of the world, sanctuary of sinners, health of the just, joy of the saints, mistress of virtue, mirror of purity, symbol of chastity, pattern of patience, and rule of all perfection. O me, miserable and unfortunate, what have I seen with the eyes of faith? How could I live to behold such inhuman usage? interrupting sighs will not permit me scarce to speak how I left thine only-begotten Son, loaded with a mighty cross, to which He was presently to be nailed, and carrying it to the place of execution.

What heart, what mind, what soul is able to comprehend the sorrow the Blessed Virgin Mary then did suffer? her heart fainted, and a dead sweat with extreme anguish possessed her whole body, and presently she had given up the ghost, had not the divine dispensation reserved her till better times, for her greater merit and more abundant reward.

The Blessed Virgin with speed followed the steps of her beloved Son; that ardent desire wherewith she was inflamed to see Him added vigor to her, of which sorrow had bereft her: she heard afar off the noise of arms, the concourse of people, and the sound of trumpets on every

side, publishing the passion of Christ; after that, she saw the glittering of lances and halberds; on the way she found His footsteps sprinkled with drops of blood, by which, without any guide or leader, she might easily find the way. Approaching to her Son, she lifted up her eyes swelled with tears, to behold Him Whom she esteemed dearer than her own soul.

Oh! what strife was there in the soul of this Blessed Virgin betwixt fear and love? she did vehemently desire to see her Son, but, on the other side, she dared not cast her eyes upon Him in this lamentable and afflicted state. At length, when she drew nearer, these two celestial lights beheld each other, their eyes pierced each other's souls, but grief enforced their tongues to silence; notwithstanding, their hearts did mutually discourse, and the Son unto the mother said: sweet mother, why comest thou hither, my love, O my dove? thy sorrow reneweth my miseries, and my torments crucify thy soul! return, return again into thy house; this defiled company of thieves and murderers besemeth not thy virginal purity. These and the like words they inwardly uttered all the way until they came to the place of execution.

A Meditation for Friday

THIS day thou shalt meditate upon the mystery of the cross, and the seven words which Christ spoke upon it. Rouse up, my soul, and duly ponder this great mystery of the cross, which brought forth the fruit of satisfaction, to expiate that great loss which all mankind

suffered by a tree.

Consider how, before our Blessed Savior came to the Mount of Calvary, to make His death more ignominious His cruel tormentors stripped Him of all his clothes except His coat, which was without seam: behold how patiently this meek Lamb suffereth His garments to be taken from Him, not so much as opening His mouth or speaking one word against their barbarous dealing. He permitted these things willingly, but with a great strain to modesty. He was stripped naked that we might receive a better garment to cover the nakedness of our sins, than that which Adam, the first parent of all mankind, made of the leaves of fig-trees to cover the nakedness of his body.

Some doctors think that the crown of thorns was taken off, to pull with more facility His unseamed garment over His ears, and after to be fastened on again, which could not be without a vehement pain; the sharp thorns did afresh wound His sacred head with unspeakable torment. And surely this is not unlikely, seeing in the whole time of His passion they spared Him in nothing; but the bitterest torments they could devise, they heaped upon Him, especially when the Evangelist saith, they did to Him whatsoever they would. This coat did so cleave to the wounds of His sacred body, by reason of the congealed blood, that when the barbarous hangmen drew it off with exceeding violence, they renewed again the wounds of Jesus; they pulled off with it many particles of flesh, so that the whole body of Christ, in every part flayed and bloody from the head to the foot, seemed to

be but one entire and continuous wound.

Weigh well with thyself, my soul, the immense goodness and mercy of God, manifested in these torments; behold Him that spreadeth the heavens with clouds, vesteth the green and pleasant fields with flowers, and He, that liberally bestoweth clothing upon every creature, behold Him, I say, stark naked! Consider what cold this precious body, being wounded, suffered; when they had not only despoiled Him of His garments, but His very skin was not entire, neither were His wounds bound up, but exposed to the injury of the air. If St. Peter, being well clothed, could not overcome the cold of the forepassed night, what cold dost thou think this delicate body suffered, being in every place wounded and all naked.

Then consider how Christ was fastened to the cross, and what torment He suffered when the sharp nails pierced the most sensible parts of His tender body. Weigh with thyself that the Blessed Virgin, who beheld these things with her eyes, and hearing the frequent blows of the mallet in driving the nails into the hands and feet of her Son, was not insensible, but that the heart of the Mother was pierced with the hands and feet of the Son.

When Christ was made fast upon the cross, presently they lifted it up and put it into a hole, there before prepared; behold how these wicked torturers of the innocent Jesus, pricked forward with their own malice, let the heavy cross fall into the hole with such violence that it so much strained His body, hanging only by the nails, and rent wider the wounds of His hands and feet.

Sweet Savior, can there be found a heart so hard and steely which is not mollified at such a spectacle, when the very stones did cleave asunder, as sensible of thy cruel torments?

O Lord, the sorrows of death compassed Thee round about; the storms and waves of the raging sea environed Thee on every side, the waters entered into Thy soul: Thou didst descend to the deep abyss, where Thou couldst find no footing. When Thy heavenly Father did forsake Thee, Lord, what couldst Thou expect Thy enemies would do? they cried out against Thee, and Thy friends did wound Thy heart; Thy soul was sad and heavy, neither was there any that would comfort Thee.

Lord, from these unheard-of torments and abundant satisfaction which Thou madest for my sins, I cannot but acknowledge, with all humility, the grievousness of my heinous transgressions, which were the occasions of all Thy miseries. I see Thee, my King and God, fastened upon a wooden cross with two iron nails; Thy precious and tender flesh, to be stretched without any manner of respite. If Thou wouldst a little ease Thyself upon Thy feet, the weight of Thy whole body enlargeth their wounds: if Thou wouldst leave the burden to Thy hands, the weight of it doth likewise rend their wounds. Thy sacred head could find no rest, because Thou hadst no other pillow than the sharp crown of thorns.

O Virgin Mother, how willingly wouldst thou have embraced Him in thine arms, thereon to ease and rest Himself a little: but the arms of the cross would not per-

mit thee, upon which, if He would repose, the sharp thorns struck deeper into His head. The troubles of the Son were much augmented by the presence of the Mother; which no less crucified His soul, than the Jews His body to the cross.

O sweet Jesus, in one day Thou didst carry a double cross: the one upon Thy body, the other in Thy soul; the one of passion, the other of compassion; the one pierced Thy body with nails of iron, the other Thy soul with nails of sorrow. What tongue is able to express what Thou didst suffer to see the anguish of Thy dear Mother, whose soul Thou didst certainly know to be crucified together with Thee, when Thou didst behold her heavy heart, pierced with the sword of sorrow? when with bloody eyes Thou didst look upon her beautiful face, pale and wan, and didst hear the sighs of her dying soul, lamenting that she could not die? What didst Thou suffer to see pure fountains of tears gushing from her eyes, and to hear her pitiful complaints she made in sorrowing for Thy sufferings!

Then consider the seven words which Christ spoke upon the cross to His heavenly Father, saying, "*Pater dimitte illis: non enim sciunt quid faciunt.*" "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." To the thief: "This day thou shalt be with me in paradise." To his Mother: "Woman behold thy Son." To the people he said: "I thirst." And to God again: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" "*Consummatum est:*" "It is consummated." Into thy hands I commend my spirit.

Ruminate, my soul, with what exceeding charity He

made intercession to His heavenly Father for His enemies and persecutors; with what piety and mercy He received the penitent thief into His favor; with what affection He committed His mother to the protection of His beloved disciple; with what ardor He testified Himself vehemently to thirst after the salvation of mankind; with what clamor He thundered out His prayer expressing to the divine majesty the grievousness of His tribulations; how perfectly He fulfilled the obedience enjoined to Him by His heavenly Father; and lastly, how He yielded His soul into His blessed hands.

Every one of which words do afford us a great deal of matter for our instruction; in the first, we are taught to love our enemies; in the second, mercy towards sinners; in the third, piety towards our parents; in the fourth, to thirst after our neighbor's salvation; in the fifth, when we are oppressed with tribulations, and seeming, as it were, to be left by God, to fly to prayer; in the sixth, the virtue of obedience and perseverance; in the seventh, perfect resignation into the hands of God, which is the sum of all perfection.

A Meditation for Saturday

THIS day thou shalt meditate upon the piercing of our Blessed Savior's side with a spear; the taking down of Christ from the cross; the lamentations of the women; and other things which did occur about His burial.

First, take notice how that Christ, after He gave up the ghost upon the cross, His enemies much rejoiced at

His death. But yet, there was not an end of their insatiate cruelty, but still their increasing malice raged against Him, being dead. They divided and cast lots for His garments, and with a spear pierced His precious side.

O barbarous caitiffs! O adamantine hearts! did you think those torments He suffered before His death were not sufficient, that you would not vouchsafe to spare Him being dead? what madness did possess your souls? lift up your eyes and behold His dead face, His eyes sunk, His hanging head, and His whole body being wan and pale. Although your hearts be harder than adamant, yet let this pitiful aspect mollify them.

Behold, the centurion struck a lance into His sacred side with such violence that the very cross did tremble, out of Whose side did gush abundance of blood and water for the redemption of all mankind. O river of paradise, running forth to water the whole earth! O precious wound which rather the love Thou didst bear to us sinful men, than the enemies' weapon did inflict! O gate of heaven, window of paradise, place of rest, tower of fortitude, sanctuary of the just, nest of doves, tomb of pilgrims, flourishing bed of the spouse! Hail, sacred wound, which piercest devout hearts; hail, rose of incredible beauty; hail, precious stone of inestimable valor; hail, door through which lieth open a free passage to the Heart of Christ, an argument of His love and pledge of eternal felicity!

Consider that in the evening Joseph and Nicodemus came with ladders to loose and take down the body of our Savior; but the Blessed Virgin, after all these torments,

perceiving her Son to be taken from the cross and disposed for the grave, she took Him when He was let down in her arms, humbly beseeching that holy company that they would suffer her to come near His body and to bestow her last kiss and embracings upon Him, which upon the cross she could not do, which they would not nor could deny; for if her friends had deprived her of Him dead, which her enemies did her of Him living, they had redoubled the anguish of her soul.

When she saw her Son in this case, what grief, what sorrows can we imagine she then did suffer? angels of peace, come and lament with this blessed Virgin! lament heaven! lament stars! lament all creatures of the world! She embraced the mangled body of her Beloved Son, she hugged Him in her arms, for love administered this strength; she thrust her face amongst the thorns to come to kiss His mouth, whereby she wounded her face with the sharp pricks which she washed with flowing tears.

O sweet Mother, is this thy Beloved Son? is this He Whom thou didst conceive with great glory and bring forth with great joy? is this that bright mirror in which thou wert wont to see thyself? all that were present did likewise mourn: the other Mary's, who were there, mourned; the noblemen lamented; heaven and earth, with all creatures, mourned with the Blessed Virgin.

That holy Evangelist lamented, who often embracing the body of his dear Master, said, O my good Lord and Master, who shall hereafter teach and instruct me? with whom now shall I consult on doubtful occasions? upon

whose lap shall I now rest myself? who shall now reveal unto me celestial secrets? what sudden change is this? yesterday I rested upon Thy sacred breast, where Thou didst communicate to me the joys and glory of everlasting life, and now in recompense of that benefit I embrace Thee dead in my arms? is this that countenance which I beheld glorious and transfigured upon the mount of Thabor? is this that face which I saw brighter and more glittering than the sun?

And that blessed sinner, St. Mary Magdalen, lamented, who often kissing the feet of her Savior, said, O the true light of mine eyes, the only remedy and solace of my soul. If I sin again, who shall hereafter receive me into favor? who shall defend me from the calumnies of the Pharisees? O how altered are these feet from those I washed with my tears! O beloved of my heart, why do I not die with Thee? O life of my soul, how can I say I love Thee, when I, living, see Thee dead before me?

Thus, this blessed company did mourn and lament, watering with abundant tears the body of Jesus. The sepulchre being ready, they spiced His holy body with sweet spices, they wrapped it up in a fine linen cloth, bound His head with a handkerchief, laid it upon a bier, carried it to the place of burial, and put it into a new monument.

The monument was covered with a stone, and the face of Mary obscured with a cloud of sorrow. When there again she bade her Son adieu, she then began to be more and more sensible of her solitude; for then she saw

herself to be deprived of the greatest good. But her heart remained buried with her treasure in the grave.

A Meditation for Sunday

THIS day thou shalt consider and meditate on the descent of Christ to *Lymbus Patrum*: His resurrection; divers apparitions to the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Mary Magdalen, and His other disciples; and last of all, His glorious ascension into heaven.

Take notice, therefore, of the incredible joy the Fathers, who were detained in *Lymbus*, felt at the coming of the Redeemer, who came to free them from the dark prison wherein they were shut for many thousand years. What prayers, what giving of thanks did they render to Him, Who had brought them to the long-desired haven of their salvation? they who return from the East Indies are wont to say, that they think all their forepassed labors well bestowed, only for that joy they find the first day of their arrival into their country. If the banishment of a year or two, and the tediousness of a little troublesome journey, can breed such joy in men, what will the absence of three or four thousand years do from that pleasant and celestial country! What joy, therefore, do we think those holy Fathers had when they took possession of it?

Then, consider the excessive joy of the Blessed Virgin when she saw her Son risen from death; when it is most certain and undoubted that she felt the greatest sorrow and affliction at the ignominious death and passion that could be, her joy must needs excel the rest in

His triumphant resurrection. How great dost thou think was her content and pleasure to see her Son, Whom she grievously lamented before His death, living glorious and attended with a joyful troop of holy patriarchs, whom He brought along with Him? What said she? what did she? with what kisses did she salute Him? with what affection did she embrace Him? what pleasant rivers of tears distilled from her eyes? how earnestly did she desire to follow her Son, had it been permitted to her?

Moreover, take notice of the joy of the holy Mary's, particularly of her who stood weeping at the sepulchre of Christ, when, without doubt, she saw Him Whom her soul loved, she cast herself at His feet when she beheld Him living, Whom she sought amongst the dead.

After His Mother, He, therefore, appeared to her who loved Him most ardently and above others sought Him most diligently and perseverantly, to instruct us, that when we look for God, we must seek Him with tears and diligence.

Consider that after this, he appeared to his disciples going to Emmaus in the habit of a pilgrim; behold, how courteously He joined Himself a companion to them; how familiarly He conversed with them; how handsomely He dissembled His person; and after, with what affection He manifested Himself unto them; and last of all, how He left their tongues and lips filled with the delightful discourse of His majesty. Let thy discourse and talk be like these disciples, as they travelled in the way, of the love and passion of our Blessed Savior; and, I dare be bold to

say, that He will not deny unto thee His sacred presence.

In the mystery of our Blessed Savior's ascension, first consider, that He deferred it for forty days, that in the mean time, often appearing to His disciples, He might instruct them and with them discourse of the kingdom of heaven; for He would not forsake them by ascending into heaven before He had disposed their minds to ascend with Him spiritually.

Hence we may note that those are often deprived of the corporal presence of Christ and of sensible devotion, who, with the wings of contemplation, fly up to heaven and fear no danger. Wherein the divine providence, wherewith it curbeth and governeth the elect, doth wonderfully manifest itself, how it strengtheneth the weak, exerciseth the strong, giveth milk to little ones, prepareth stronger meat for great ones, comforteth some, afflicteth others, and to conclude, accommodates itself to all, according to their several degrees in their spiritual profit. Wherefore, he that is strengthened by divine comfort ought therefore not to presume of himself, seeing this sensible consolation is but the meat for infirm ones, and a great sign of weakness; nor he that is exercised by affliction ought, therefore, to be dejected, seeing temptation is for the most part a testimony of a valiant mind.

Christ ascended up to heaven in the presence of His disciples, that they might be witnesses of this mystery of which they were beholders; none can give better testimony to Almighty God's deeds than he who hath learned them by experience; wherefore, he that would certainly

know how good, how sweet and merciful, He is towards His, and what is the force and efficacy of His divine grace, love, providence, and spiritual consolations, let him ask those who, indeed, have had experience of them, for they, and only they, will give him the best instructions and satisfaction.

Moreover, Christ would ascend, his disciples looking upon him, that they might pursue him with their eyes and spirit, that they might have a cordial feeling of His departure; that in His absence they might fear to remain alone, and that they might the better dispose themselves to receive His holy grace. The prophet Eliseus, when Elias was to be taken and separated from Him, desired that He would give His spirit. Elias made answer: "*Rem difficilem postulasti attamen si videris me, quando tollar a te, erit tibi quod petisti: si autem non videris, non erit.*"²⁴ "Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, thou shalt have what thou hast asked; but if thou see me not, thou shalt not have it."

In like manner, they shall be heirs of the spirit of Christ, whom love doth cause to mourn for His departure; to whom His absence doth seem grievous; who earnestly, whilst they live in this banishment, desire His holy presence. Such a saint was he that said, thou art gone, my comforter, without any care of me, at thy departure thou didst bless thine, and I saw it not; the angels promised that thou shouldst return again, and I heard them not. Who is able to express or understand the solitude, trou-

²⁴ 4 Kings 2:10.

ble, cries, and tears of the Blessed Virgin, of His beloved disciple, St. Mary Magdalen, and the other apostles, when they saw Christ to be taken from them, who, together with Him, carried up their affectionate hearts? and yet, notwithstanding, it is said of them that they returned with great joy into Jerusalem; the same love and affection which made them bewail the visible loss of their beloved Lord and Master, did likewise cause that they congratulated each other; much rejoicing at His glory, for it is the nature of true love not so much to seek the commodity of itself, as the honor and commodity of the person that is beloved.

Last of all, to close up this meditation, it is left to us to consider with what glory, with what joy this noble conqueror was brought into that heavenly city; what solemnities were then instituted in the glorious paradise, how magnificently was he entertained by those celestial citizens? what a delightful spectacle was it, to see men accompanied with angels, to go in procession, and to sit upon those seats which for many thousand years were vacant. But a most ravishing joy it was, to behold the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ, far transcending all others, to sit at the right hand of His eternal Father.

All these things are worthy of thy attentive consideration, that thou mayest learn that the labors thou dost undergo for the love of God are not spent in vain; therefore, He that humbled Himself under all creatures, it was requisite that He should be exalted above all; that the lovers of true glory may trace this path, they must expect

if they desire to be above all, that first they be subject to all, even their inferiors.

Chapter 5

Of Six Things Necessary to Prayer

THESE are the exercises and meditations, Christian reader, wherewith, every day, thou mayest feed thy soul, which if thou dost rightly use, thou wilt never want matter to busy thy mind devoutly. But thou must note that meditation, if it be well performed, ought to consist of six parts; some of which go before, others follow, mental prayer.

First, before we apply ourselves to meditation, it is necessary that our mind and soul be diligently prepared for this holy exercise; as these strings of an instrument, except they be before-hand well-tuned, will never make a pleasant melody.

After preparation ought to follow the reading of some holy mystery, according to the distribution of days in the week, which in young beginners is chiefly necessary, until with continual use and custom matter of meditation offereth itself unto their memories. Then insist upon the matter to be meditated upon. To meditation we must join devout and sincere giving of thanks to God for all his benefits; then a general oblation of all the life of Christ for recompense of any benefit, and our own works to the honor and glory of God. Last of all, petition, which is chiefly called prayer, wherein we desire all things necessary for our own salvation, of our neighbors', and the good of

the whole church.

These six parts are required for mental prayer, which besides other commodities, they minister abundant matter for meditation, seeing they set before us divers sorts of meats, that if one will not relish our spiritual taste, we may fall upon another; if we be deficient in one, in another we may employ our minds and kindle our devotion.

But in every meditation, neither all these parts nor order is always necessary, although, as I said before, to young beginners it is, that they should have a certain method according to which they are to guide themselves; wherefore, in that which hath or shall be said, my intention is not to set down a general rule or immutable perpetual laws, the violation of which should be a fault; but my meaning is to introduce and bring in young beginners and novices into the right way and method of meditation; which, when they are once in use, experience, but especially the Holy Ghost, will better inform them.

Chapter 6

Of the Preparation Necessary to Prayer

IT will not be beside our purpose to handle all these parts severally; we will, therefore, first begin with preparation, which we did put first.

He, therefore, who goeth about to meditate, after he hath placed his body after a decent manner (either kneeling or standing, or composing himself in manner of a cross, or prostrating himself upon the ground, or sitting, if infirmity or necessity doth so require), let him first sign himself with the sign of the cross; then let him recollect the dispersed powers of his soul, especially the imagination, and sequester it from all temporal and transitory things. Let him elevate his understanding to God, considering His divine presence, with that due reverence and attention as is requisite; and let him imagine Almighty God Himself to be present in his soul, as in very deed he is.

If it be the morning meditation, after a general act of contrition for his sins, let him make to God a general confession; if in the evening, let him examine his conscience concerning all his thoughts, words, and works of that day; of the forgetfulness of the benefits of Almighty God; and of the sins of his former life; humbly prostrating himself in the sight of the divine majesty, in whose presence he now is, after a particular manner, saying the words of the

patriarch Abraham: "*Loquor ad Dominum meum, cum sim pulvis et cinis*:" "I will speak to my Lord, seeing I am but dust and ashes."²⁵ And singing the psalm: "To thee have I lifted up my eyes, who dwellest in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants are on the hands of their masters; as the eyes of the handmaid are on the hands of her mistress: so are our eyes unto our Lord God, until he have mercy on us. Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us. Glory be to the Father,"²⁶ etc.

And because we are not able of ourselves to think any good, but all our sufficiency is from God; and because none can say "Lord Jesus", that is to say, call upon the name of Jesus, without the Holy Ghost,²⁷ to Thee, therefore, O Holy Ghost, do I turn myself, with tears imploring Thine assistance: "Come, Holy Ghost, send forth from heaven the glittering beams of true light; come, father of the poor; come, giver of rewards; come, light of our hearts, sweet comforter, sweet guest of the soul, sweet refreshing, rest in labor, temperature in heat, in mourning a grateful solace, O blessed light, replenish the hearts of the faithful." Then followeth the prayer, *Deus qui corda fidelium*, etc.²⁸ These being said, he shall pray

²⁵Gen. 18.

²⁶Psalms 122.

²⁷1 Cor. 12:3.

²⁸*Deus, qui corda fidelium Sancti Spiritus illustratione docuisti: da nobis in eodem Spiritu recta sapere; et de ejus semper consolatione gaudere. Per Christum Dominum nostrum. Amen.* "O God, Who didst instruct the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit; grant us, in this same Spirit, to be truly wise, and ever to rejoice in

to God to bestow upon him His divine grace, to assist at this holy exercise with that attention, due recollection, fear, and reverence beseeming so great a majesty; humbly beseeching Him so to pass over this time of holy prayer, that he may return from thence fortified with new fervor, to execute whatsoever shall belong to His holy service; for prayer which beareth not this fruit is luke-warm, imperfect, and of no moment before God.

Chapter 7

Of Reading

AFTER a due preparation followeth reading those things that are to be meditated upon; that must not be too hasty, but mature, serious, and quiet; to which the understanding must not only be attentive, to understand those things which are read; but also, and chiefly, the will, that those things which are understood may give a spiritual taste and feeling. When he falleth upon any place which much moveth his affection, let him there pause awhile, that in his heart it may cause a greater impression. He must also beware not to spend too much time in reading, thereby to hinder meditation, it being a more fruitful exercise; forasmuch as things attentively considered pierce more inwardly and produce greater effect. If, peradventure, sometime it happeneth the mind be so dispersed that it cannot settle itself to prayer, then it is better to insiſt awhile longer in reading, or to join reading to meditation; or after the reading of one point, to pause upon that awhile, then after the same manner to proceed to the others: although the understanding tied to certain words which are read cannot so freely be carried into divers affections as when it is free from this bond.

It is oftentimes very profitable for a man to use some violence to himself, to expel his vain and trifling fancies, after the example of the patriarch Jacob, manfully to wrestle against them, persevering unto the end; after which fight, the victory being obtained, God doth, for the most

part, give greater devotion or more pure contemplation, or some other supernatural gift, which He never denieth to those who faithfully fight in His cause.

Chapter 8 Of Meditation

AFTER reading followeth meditation, which is sometimes of such things as can be represented to our imagination: as the life and passion of our Blessed Savior; the latter-judgment; hell; and the kingdom of heaven. Sometimes of such things as are subject rather to the understanding than imagination: as the consideration of Almighty God's benefits, His bounty, clemency, and other perfections which are in God.

These meditations are called, the one intellectual, the other imaginative. Both which, in these exercises, are to be used after a different manner as occasion requireth. When the meditation is imaginative, so that the thing meditated upon hath, or ever had, any actual existence or being, we must so frame and represent it to our fancy as though we were present in the same place, and saw with our eyes those things which were there done. This representation will make the consideration of these things more vivacious and cause a greater impression in our souls; for if our imagination can comprehend whole cities and countries, with less difficulty can it comprehend one mystery. This helpeth much to the recollection of the mind; this will retain the same busied in itself, as a bee in a hive, where she worketh and disposeth all things diligently. But in these things a moderation must be used; for to run with a violent imagination to Jerusalem, to frame to the fancy those things which are to be meditated there, doth often-

times hurt the head. Wherefore, it is good to abstain from immoderate imaginations, lest nature, oppressed with too violent apprehensions, becomes infirm and weak.

Chapter 9

Of Giving of Thanks

AFTER meditation followeth giving of thanks, the occasion of which must be taken from the matter meditated upon; for example, if the meditation be of the passion of our Savior, we must give thanks unto him, that he hath redeemed us from so great torments. If of sins, that with longanimity he hath expected us to do penance. If of the miseries of this life, that he hath preserved us from the greatest part of them. If of death, that hitherto he hath defended us from the perils of sudden death, and hath favorably granted us time of penance. If of the glory of paradise, that he hath created us to that end, that after the storms and troubles of this present life, we should enjoy eternal felicity; after this manner, we are to proceed in other meditations.

To these benefits, we may join the others which we handled before; to wit, the benefits of our creation, conservation, redemption, and vocation. As much as in us lieth, let us give Him thanks that He hath created us after His own image and likeness, that He hath given us a memory to remember Him, an understanding to know Him, and a will to love Him; that He hath committed us to the custody of angels; that by the help of our angel guardian, He hath exempted us from many dangers, preserved us from many mortal sins, defended us from death and the malice of the devil, while we were in this case (which was no less than to free us from everlasting

death, to which, by sin, we were obnoxious). That He would vouchsafe to assume our nature upon Him, and for our sakes suffer a most ignominious death; that we were born of Christian parents; that we were regenerated by baptism; that in this present life, He hath promised grace and unspeakable glory in the world to come; that He hath adopted us for His sons; that in the sacrament of confirmation, He hath fortified us with strong weapons to fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil; that He hath given Himself to us in the sacrament of the altar; that He hath left unto us the sacrament of penance, to recover the grace which was lost by mortal sin; that He hath visited us daily with good and holy inspirations; that He hath given us grace to persevere in holy and pious exercises.

After the same method, we must proceed in accounting other of Almighty God's benefits, as well general as particular, and for all, public or private, manifest or secret, give Him thanks; and we must invite all creatures, celestial and terrestrial, to bear us company in this holy exercise, singing the song of the three children: "*Benedicite omnia opera Domini Domino: laudate et superexaltate eum in sæcula,*" etc.²⁹ And the Psalm: "*Benedic anima mea Domino: et omnia quæ intra me sunt, nomini sancto ejus. Benedic anima mea Domino: et noli oblivisci omnes retributiones ejus. Qui propitiatur omnibus iniquitatibus tuis: qui sanat omnes infirmitates tuas. Qui redimit de*

²⁹"All ye works of the Lord, bless the Lord: praise and exalt Him above all forever." Dan. 3:57.

interitu vitam tuam: qui coronat te in misericordia et miserationibus.”³⁰ “Bless the Lord, O my soul: and let all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all that he hath done for thee. Who forgiveth all thy iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases. Who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with mercy and compassion.”

³⁰ Psalm 102.

Chapter 10

Of Oblation

CORDIAL thanks being given to God, presently the heart breaketh naturally into that affection which the kingly prophet David felt in himself when he said: “*Quid retribuam Domino, pro omnibus quæ retribuit mihi?*”³¹ “What shall I render to our Lord, for all things that he hath rendered to me?” Which desire we shall in some sort satisfy, if we offer to God whatsoever we have. First, therefore, we must offer to God ourselves as His perpetual servants, wholly resigning ourselves to His holy will, howsoever He shall please to dispose of us. We must likewise direct all our thoughts, words, and works, whatsoever we shall do or suffer, to the supreme honor and glory of His sacred name. Then we must offer to God the Father all the merits of His only begotten Son, all the labors and sorrows He did undergo in this miserable world to fulfil the will of His heavenly Father, beginning from His nativity and hard manger, to His insulting crucifixion, and giving up the ghost; forasmuch, as these are all the goods and means whereof, in the New Testament, He hath left us heirs; wherefore, as that which is given us freely is no less our own than that we get with our industry, so the merits of Christ, which He hath freely bestowed upon us, are no less our own than if we had got them with our sweat and labor.

³¹Psalm 115.

Hence every man may offer this sacred oblation as the first, numbering one by one all the labors and virtues of the life of Christ: His obedience, patience, humility, charity, and His other virtues, seeing these are the most excellent of all oblations that we can offer to God.

Chapter 11

Of Petition

THIS noble oblation being well performed, we may securely and confidently proceed to the asking of any gifts and graces. First, therefore, Almighty God is to be prayed unto with inflamed charity and ardent zeal of His divine honor, for the conversion of all nations, that all people may be illuminated with the knowledge of Him, praying and adoring Him as the only true and living God. To this end, from the bottom of our hearts, we may utter the words of the kingly prophet: “*Confiteantur tibi populi Deus: confiteantur tibi populi omnes.*”³² “Let people, O God, confess to thee; let all people give praise to thee.”

Then we must pray to God for the prelates of the church: the supreme pastor, cardinals, archbishops, bishops, and other prelates, that He would be pleased so to govern and illuminate them, with the light of his heavenly grace, that they may be able to bring all men to the knowledge and obedience of their Creator.

We must also pray to God for kings and princes (as St. Paul admonisheth), and for all men placed in dignity, that by their diligent care, their subjects may live a quiet life, well instructed with honest manners; for this is grateful to God, Who willeth all should be saved and come to the knowledge of His truth.

³²Psalm 66.

Then for all the members of His mystical body; for the just, that He would be pleased to conserve them in their sanctity; for sinners, to convert them from their wicked courses to the amendment of their lives; for the dead, that He would free them from the expiating torments wherein they are detained, and bring them to their eternal rest.

We must pray to God for the poor infirm captives, bond-slaves or others, in whatsoever tribulation; that for the merits of His dear Son, He would vouchsafe to help and free them from all their miseries.

After we have prayed for the good of our neighbors, let us, at length, entreat for our own necessities, which discretion will teach everyone in particular (if he be not altogether ignorant of himself) what they are. But, that we may set down a method for beginners, we will lead them into this pathway. First, therefore, we must pray to God that through the merits and passion of His only begotten Son, He would pardon our sins, give us grace to avoid them, and to expiate them with good works worthy of penance; but especially to implore for help and assistance against those evil inclinations and vices in which we are most addicted, laying open to our heavenly physician all the wounds of our diseased souls, that with the ointment of holy grace He would heal them.

Then let us ask for the most excellent virtues wherein the whole perfection of a Christian man consisteth; for example, faith, hope, charity, fear, humility, patience, obedience, fortitude in adversity, poverty of spirit, contempt of the world, true discretion, purity of intention, and oth-

ers like to these, which are placed in the supreme top of a spiritual building. Faith is the prime root and foundation of a Christian; hope is a staff to defend us from all tribulations of this present life; charity, the end of all perfection; fear of God, the beginning of true wisdom; humility is the basis and groundwork of all virtues; patience is the strongest armor against the fury of our enemies; obedience is the most grateful oblation to God, wherein man offereth himself for a sacrifice; discretion is the eye of the soul; fortitude, the hand thereof, wherewith it bringeth all works unto perfection; purity of intention directeth all her actions unto God. We must after pray for other virtues which may help us forward in the way of perfection; as sobriety in meat and drink, moderation of the tongue, custody of the senses, modesty and composition of the outward man, sweetness in giving good example to our neighbors, rigor and severity towards ourselves, and the like.

Last of all, we must conclude this petition with a fervent imploring of the divine love, and here to pause awhile, so that the chiefeſt part of time be spent in an earnest desiring of this grace and favor, seeing that in the divine love all our felicity doth consist; to that end, this prayer following will not be unprofitable.

A Prayer for Obtaining Divine Love

GRANT, I beseech Thee, O Lord, that I may love Thee with all my soul, with all my heart, with all my strength; O my only hope, my perfect glory, my refuge and solace; O my dearest of all friends, sweet spouse, flourishing spouse, sweeter than any honey, delight of my heart, life of my soul, joy of my spirit; O bright day of eternity, clear light of my bowels, paradise of my heart, origin of all my good; O my chiefest strength, prepare, O Lord, in my soul a delicious bed, that according to Thy promise, there Thou mayest dwell and make Thy mansion. Mortify in me whatsoever is displeasing to Thee, and make me a man according to Thine own heart. Pierce the marrow of my soul, wound my heart with the darts of dear affection, and inebriate me with the wine of love.

When shall I perfectly please Thee in all things? when shall I cast from me all things contrary to Thee? when shall I be wholly Thine? when shall I leave to be my own? when shall nothing live in me but what is Thine? when shall I embrace Thee with ardent affection? when wilt Thou inflame and consume me with the flames of love? when wilt Thou pierce and replenish me on every side with Thy sweetness? when wilt Thou lay open and manifest to my poverty that precious kingdom which is within me, that is to say, Thy sacred self, with all Thy riches? when wilt Thou unite me perfectly unto Thee? when wilt Thou transform and swallow me up wholly in Thee, that from

Thee I may never depart? when wilt Thou remove from me all obstacles which hinder me, that am not one spirit with Thee? O beloved of my soul! O delight of my heart! look down upon me and hear me, not for my own merits, but out of Thine infinite goodness, instruct, illuminate, direct, and help me in all and through all, that I neither speak or do any thing, but that which I shall know to be grateful before Thy sight.

O my God, my love, my joy, my pleasure, my fortress, and my life! why dost Thou not help the poor and needy, imploring thy assistance! Thou who fillest heaven and earth, why dost Thou suffer my heart to be empty? Thou who clotheest the flowers and lilies of the fields with beauty; Thou who nourishest the birds of the air; Thou who sustaineest the least creature of the earth; why art Thou unmindful of me, that forgetteth all things for the love of Thee? O immense goodness! I had knowledge of Thee too late, that I loved Thee no sooner. O new and ancient beauty! O miserable was my state, when I lived without Thy love! O wretched was my condition, when I knew Thee not! O intolerable blindness of my heart, when I saw Thee not! I sought Thee far abroad, when Thou wert within me; yet, at length, though late, I have found Thee! let not Thy mercy suffer me, O Lord, that ever I forsake or leave Thee again.

And, because to have eyes to see Thee is one of the chiefest things that pleaseth Thee, Lord, give me the eyes of a solitary turtledove, to contemplate Thee; give me chaste eyes full of modesty, humble and amorous, sancti-

fied and Weeping, attentive and discreet eyes, which may understand and perform Thy will; Lord, give me grace to behold Thee with such eyes, as Thou mayest look upon me again as Thou didst upon Peter, when he denied Thee, and didst move him to bitter compunction for his sins. Look upon me as Thou didst upon the prodigal child, when Thou didst run to embrace and kiss him; or as upon the publican, not daring to lift up his eyes to heaven. Behold me with those eyes, that Thou didst invite Mary Magdalen to penance, and to wash Thy feet with tears; or, with those eyes wherewith the spouse in the Canticles incited Thee to her love, when Thou saidst: "*Quam pulchra es amica mea, quam pulchra es! oculi tui columbarum.*"³³ "How beautiful art thou, my love, how beautiful art thou! thy eyes are dove's eyes."

That my aspect be pleasing, and that the beauty of my soul be grateful unto Thee: do Thou, I beseech Thee, bestow the gift of virtues and graces upon me, to deck and trim myself, whereby I may live to glorify Thy holy name for ever and ever.

O merciful and holy Trinity! Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, one only true God, teach, direct, and help me in all. O Father omnipotent, I beseech Thee, by the greatness of Thine immense power, to confirm and strengthen my memory in Thee only, and to replenish it with holy and pious thoughts. O Son most wise, illuminate my small understanding with Thy eternal wisdom, to know Thy everlasting truth and my own misery. O Holy Ghost, love

³³Cant. 4:1.

of the Father and the Son, with Thy incomprehensible goodness, make my will conformable to Thy divine pleasure, inflame it with such a fire of Thy holy love, that no waters which arise from the turbulent fear of evil suggestions, may be able to extinguish it. O holy Trinity and one God; I would to God I could do nothing else but praise and love Thee, and as much as all Thy holy saints; I would to God I had the love of all creatures in me alone; I would, with a willing mind, transfer and turn it to the love of Thee, although this were nothing, in respect of what Thou deserveſt. Only Thou Thyself canſt worthily love and praise Thyself, because none else besides Thee is able to underſtand Thy incomprehensible goodness, and therefore the juſt poise of love resideth only in Thy ſacred breaſt.

O Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, Queen of heaven, lady of the world, mansion of the Holy Ghost, lily of purity, rose of patience, paradise of pleasure, mirror of chaſtity, veſſel of innocence: intercede for me, miserable banished wretch, and beſtow upon me a portion of thy abundant charity.

O all ye ſaints of God, and ye angelical ſpirits, who burn with a vehement affection of your Creator, eſpecially ye ſeraphim, who inflame both heaven and earth with love, do not forſake my miserable ſoul, but purify it as you did the lips of Iſaiah from all vice and uncleanness, and ſet it on fire with the flames of your ardent love, that I may love and ſeek our Lord God, reſting and remaining in him for ever and ever. Amen.

Chapter 12

Certain Lessons to be Observed About Meditation

HITHERTO we have only set down plentiful matter for meditation, which, for the present, is very necessary, because the greatest part of men either neglect or disdain this exercise because they want sufficient matter to consider upon; now we will briefly handle those things which pertain to the form and method of meditation, of which, though the Holy Ghost be the principal master, nevertheless, experience teacheth us that certain lessons are likewise necessary; because the way to heaven is cragged and full of difficulties, therefore, there is need of a guide, without which many have gone astray a long time from the right path, or at least have not attained to their desired end so soon as they expected.

The First Lesson

Go Where the Spirit Leadeth

THE first lesson, therefore, is that we do not so adhere to those things, which above we have digested into several points and times, as that we should think it a fault to fall upon other things, wherein the mind may reap more abundant fruit; for seeing devotion is the end of all those exercises, that which cometh nearest to this scope is always to be accounted best; which ought not lightly,

upon every occasion, to be done, but with a clear and manifest profit.

The Second Lesson

Will Before Understanding

WE must be wary of too many speculations in this exercise, and use rather efficacious affections of the will than curious discourses of the understanding: wherefore, they go not in the right way that meditate of divine mysteries as though they were to preach them to the people in a sermon; which is rather to dissipate than to recollect the spirit, and to wander abroad than to be busied in their own home. Therefore, he that will meditate with fruit to his soul must come to it like an humble simple creature, bringing rather a will disposed to taste these holy mysteries profitably, than acrimony of understanding to discuss them learnedly: for this is proper to those who give themselves to study, not to those who consecrate themselves unto devotion.

The Third Lesson

Moderation

IN the preceding lesson, we declared how the understanding is to be moderated and subjected to the will; now, we will prefix some limits to the will, out of which she cannot deviate without a fault. That, therefore, she be not too immoderate in her exercise, we must know that devotion is never to be expressed with the violence

of our arms, as some do think, who with constrained sorrow do wring out tears and commiseration, while they consider the torments of Jesus Christ; for this doth rather dry the heart than make it capable of divine visitations (as Cassianus doth excellently teach); moreover, this extraordinary force doth often hurt the body, and by reason of the burden which this violence bringeth with it, the mind is left so nauseous that it feareth to return again to these exercises. When experience teacheth that it is the cause of so much trouble, he, therefore, that will fruitfully meditate upon the passion of Christ, let him not be too anxious for sensible commiseration, but let it suffice that he exhibiteth himself present to his sufferings, beholding them with a simple and quiet eye, and considering them with a tender compassionate heart, rather disposed to entertain that affection which Almighty God's mercy shall suggest, than that which shall be wrung out with violence; which, when he hath done, let him not be solicitous nor sorrowful what other things God doth deny or will not give.

The Fourth Lesson

Attention and Moderation

HENCE we may gather what attention is to be observed in prayer; wherefore, the heart must not be languishing, remiss, or dejected; but quick, attentive, and elevated to heavenly things. And as it is necessary to come to God with such attention, elevation of the mind, and abstrac-

tion from sensible things, so it is no less necessary to temper sweetly this attention, that it be neither hurtful to bodily health, nor impediment to extinguish devotion. For when any be so intensive to the matter they meditate upon, without any respect to their infirm nature, do oftentimes so dull their brains that they be unapt for other exercises; on the contrary, there are some, to avoid this danger, are so remiss and lazy in their attention that easily they suffer their minds to be distracted with other idle thoughts.

These two extremes, that they may be both avoided, such moderation is necessary that the head be not weakened with too violent attention, nor the thoughts permitted carelessly to wander out of supine negligence; in which thing, we must imitate a good rider upon an untoward horse, who neither holdeth him in too hard, nor looseth the reins upon his neck, but guideth him equally, that he giveth not back nor goeth forward too speedily. So we must strive in meditation, that attention be moderate, diligently resisting evil thoughts, but not violent with anxiety.

We must note also, that these things we here speak of, attention are chiefly to be taken heed of in the beginning of meditation; for it often happeneth that those who are too violent in the beginning do founder in the midst of meditation: as travellers making too much speed in their setting forth are tired in the midst of their journey.

The Fifth Lesson

Perseverence

AMONGST all lessons this is chiefly to be observed, that when in meditation we cannot presently perceive that sweetness of devotion we expect, not, therefore, to wax pusillanimous, or leave off from the exercise begun, but patiently, with longanimity, expect the coming of our Lord: seeing it beseemeth the excellency of the divine majesty, the utility and baseness of man's condition, the importance of the business we have in hand, to stay awhile before the gates of His sacred palace. If He cometh presently, after a little expectation, with many thanks let us with gratitude entertain this undeserved favor; if He maketh longer delays, let us humble ourselves before Him and confess that we do not deserve this grace: if He vouchsafest not to come at all, let us bear it patiently with a quiet mind, and content ourselves that we have offered ourselves, with all we have, unto Him as a grateful sacrifice; that we have denied our own proper wills, resigning them unto His power; that we have crucified all our inordinate appetites; that we have fought against our passions and vices; and, finally, that we have performed whatsoever was in our power to be done; and although we have not worshipped Him with sensible devotion, yet let it suffice us that we have worshipped Him in spirit and in truth, as He requireth.

Last of all, let us persuade ourselves that this is the most dangerous and chiefly to be feared rock of this present

navigation, and the place wherein the true and faithful servants of God are tried and distinguished from infidels; from which, if we shall depart in safety, in all others we shall have a prosperous success.

The Sixth Lesson

Cut Not the Time Short

THIS lesson not much differeth from the former, which, notwithstanding, is equally necessary: and this it is, that the servant of God must not content himself that he hath felt a little sensible taste from meditation, as many do when they have shed a little dry tear, or felt a little mollifying of the heart, that they have attained to the scope and end of this exercise. But they are far deceived; for even as to make the earth fruitful, one little shower which layeth the dust is not sufficient, but it must have a great deal of rain, thoroughly soaked into the roots of the plants, before it can give any hopes of a fruitful year; so the abundance of celestial waters are necessary to our souls, for to make them bring forth the fruit of good works. Wherefore, we are not without cause admonished by spiritual men that we should spend as much time as possibly we can in this holy exercise, and it is better to insist on some long time together, than by fits, for when the time is short it will be almost all consumed in quieting the imagination and recollecting the heart, and it often happeneth that whilst we should reap the fruit of our former trouble, meditation is quite broken off.

Concerning the prefixed time for meditation, it seemeth to me, whatsoever is less than two hours, or an hour and a half, is too little for this exercise; because almost one hour is spent in tuning the instrument of our souls, repressing idle and unprofitable thoughts, and recollecting the mind from temporal things; and some time, also, is necessary to spend in reaping the fruit of our prayer in the latter end.

Although I cannot deny, but after some pious action, the mind is better disposed for meditation, for as dried wood quickly burneth, so the mind that is well disposed is sooner kindled with this celestial fire.

The morning also is the best time for meditation, because the mind is then most free from fancies, and therefore can with better facility apply itself to this holy exercise. But who, by reason of the multiplicity of outward affairs, cannot spend so much time? yet, at leastwise, let them, with the poor widow in the gospel, offer up to God the small mite of their sincere affection. And no doubt but he who provideth for all creatures according to their several necessities, will graciously accept it, if their culpable negligence doth not deserve the contrary.

The Seventh Lesson

Use Consolations Well

THE seventh lesson is that he that is visited with divine consolations in or out of prayer, ought to have a special care to spend that time, above others, with fruit unto

his soul; for whilst this prosperous gale doth blow, he will go further in his journey towards heaven in one hour than otherwise he hath or shall do in many days. So did the holy Father, St. Francis, do, of whom St. Bonaventure writeth that he had such a solicitous care of divine visitations, that whensoever upon the way he was recreated with them, he would either go before or stay behind his companion awhile, until he had digested this divine morsel sent unto him from heaven. They who are negligent and careless to answer divine visitations are commonly chastised with this punishment from God—that when they seek they will hardly find them.

The Eighth Lesson

Ever Seek Contemplation

THE last lesson, and that of greatest moment, is, in this exercise of prayer, we must join meditation to contemplation, seeing one is, as it were, a ladder unto the other; wherefore, it is the part of meditation, with diligent attention, to consider and ponder celestial things, first one, then another, that at last some pious affection may be stirred up in the soul, like him that with a steel striketh fire out of a flint; but it is the property of contemplation, which followeth meditation, to enjoy this kindled fire; that is to say, to embrace that affection, which, with much labor, he hath sought and found, in deep silence and tranquillity of spirit, not with many discourses and speculations of the understanding, but with a pure

simple relation and eye to verity. Hence a certain doctor saith, that meditation doth discourse with labor and small profit, but contemplation without any trouble and with much fruit; the one doth seek, and the other findeth; the one doth chew, and the other eateth the meat; the one doth reason and consider, the other contemplateth those things she loves and tasteth; and, in fine, the one is the means, the other is the end; the one is the way and motion, the other the term of the way and end of the action. From these things which we have said, that rule or axiom is very frequent amongst spiritual masters, which few of their scholars do rightly understand: that is, *fine adepto media omnia cessare*: the end being attained unto, all means do cease. For example, the mariner resteth when he hath arrived to his desired haven. So he that meditates, when, by the means of meditation, he shall come to the rest and sweet taste of contemplation, ought to leave the cragged way of reasoning and discourse, contenting himself with the memory of Almighty God alone; whom he may behold as present to his soul, and quietly enjoy that sweet affection which he shall vouchsafe to bestow upon him, whether it be of love, admiration, joy, or the like; and the reason is, because the end of this business consisteth rather in love and affection of the will, than in speculations of the understanding. When, therefore, the will hath captivated the one, and attained to the other affection, all reasoning and speculations of the understanding are to be left, that the soul may bend all her forces to it, without a confused wandering to the actions of the other

powers. Therefore, a certain doctor giveth this counsel to those who perceive themselves to be inflamed with the fire of divine love: that they should quite abolish all other thoughts and speculations, never so sublime and subtle; not that they are evil, but because, for the present, they hinder a greater good. And this is no other than, after we have come to the end, to leave meditation for the love of contemplation; which we may do (to speak particularly of this matter) in the end of every exercise; that is to say, after the petition of divine love, as above said, and that for two reasons; first, because it is supposed that the labor of the finished exercise hath produced some fruit of devotion towards Almighty God, as the wise man saith: "*Melius est finis orationis, quam principium*:" "Better is the end of prayer, than the beginning." Secondly, it is expedient that, after labor in prayer, the understanding rest awhile and recreate itself in the arms of contemplation.

Here let everyone resist whatsoever imaginations shall present themselves unto his mind; let him still his understanding; let him fasten his memory strongly upon God, considering that he is placed in his holy presence. But let him not adhere to any particular contemplation of God, but only content himself with that knowledge which faith hath ministered unto him; and to this, let him add his will and affection, seeing this is only that which embraceth God, and in which the whole fruit of meditation consisteth.

The weak understanding is little able to conceive or comprehend anything of God, but the will can love Him

very much. Let him, therefore, rouse up himself from temporal things, and let him recollect himself within himself, that is to say, to the center of his soul, where is the lively image of God; here let him hearken attentively, as though he heard Almighty God speaking from a high turret; or as though he held him fast, being present in his soul; or as though there were no other persons in the world besides God and himself. Nay, I say more, let him quite forget himself, and those things which he doth; for, as one of the ancient holy fathers saith, prayer is then every way complete, when he that prayeth doth not consider that he is before God in prayer, and this is to be done, not only in the end of the exercise, but in the midst, and in every part of meditation. For, as often as this spiritual sleep shall sweetly oppress any one, that is to say, when the understanding is drowned as it were in a sleep (but the will watching), let him quietly enjoy this delicate meat as long as it shall last. But when it is digested, let him return again to meditation, in which we must behave ourselves like a gardener; who, when he watereth a bed of his garden, after he hath once sprinkled it with water, waiting awhile until it be drunk in, then sprinkleth again, that at last it may thoroughly wet the earth, that it may become more fruitful.

But what the soul, cast into this heavenly sleep and illuminated with the splendor of this eternal light, doth enjoy—what satiety! what charity! what internal peace!—no tongue is able to express. This is that peace which exceedeth all understanding; this is that felicity, a greater

than which cannot be imagined in this vale of misery.

There are many so inflamed with this fire of divine love, that their interiors, at the very memory of this blessed name, without any meditation at all before, do rest in joy. These need no more consideration or discourses to love God, than a mother needs motives to love her child, or the bride her husband. Others there are so absorbed in God, not only in prayer, but also in outward business, that they wholly forget themselves and all creatures for the love of Him. Neither are these effects of divine love to be admired, seeing worldly love causeth oftentimes greater matters in the minds of men, that it makes them mad. What! shall we attribute less efficacy to grace than unto nature and sin? When, therefore, the soul shall feel this operation of divine love, in what part of prayer soever it happeneth, let him never refuse it; although he spent all the time of this exercise in it, without any manner of consideration at all, for that point be purposed to meditate upon (except he be specially obliged unto it); for, as St. Augustine saith, vocal prayer ought to be left, if it hurteth devotion; so, meditation ought to be deferred, if it hurteth contemplation. But as it is necessary to leave meditation for this affection, and to ascend from the lesser to the greater, so, oftentimes, this contemplation is to be left for meditation, when it is so vehement that the corporal health receiveth some damage thereby. This oftentimes happeneth to those who, taken with the pleasure of this divine sweetness, give themselves too indiscreetly to these exercises, and use them too immoderately, to whom, as

a certain doctor saith, this will be the best remedy—that they desist from contemplation, turning their minds to some other good affection; as of compassion in meditating on the sufferings of our Savior; or about the sins and miseries of this world, to exonerate the heart, diverting it from that too much intension.

Part III

Of Devotion, and of
Those Things
Which Thereunto
Belong

Chapter 1

What is Devotion

AMONGST all the troublesome difficulties to which they who frequent the exercises of prayer and meditation are subject, none is greater than that which they suffer from the defect of devotion, which often is felt in prayer. For, if they have this, nothing is more sweet, nothing more pleasant, nothing more easy, than to insist to prayer and meditation. But, if that be wanting, nothing more hard, nothing more difficult, nothing more burdensome than to pray. Wherefore, seeing we have already spoken of prayer, meditation, and the method to perform it, now it will not be beside our purpose to treat of those things which partly promote, and partly hinder and extinguish, devotion in the mind of man; as also to lay open the temptations which are obvious to those who frequent these pious exercises; and, last of all, to annex some certain lessons which may not a little avail to the well performance of this business. We will, therefore, begin from the definition of devotion, that it may manifestly appear what a precious pearl it is for which we war.

Devotion, as St. Thomas saith, is a virtue which maketh a man prompt and ready to every virtuous deed, and stirring him up to do well; which definition evidently sheweth the necessity and utility of this virtue, as containing more in it than any man can imagine.

For the better understanding of this, we must know that the chief impediment that hindereth us from leading

a virtuous life is the corruption of human nature, proceeding from sin, which brings with it a vehement inclination to vice and a great difficulty to do well; this makes the way of virtue cragged and troublesome, although in itself considered, nothing in this world is so sweet, so lovely, so beautiful.

The divine wisdom hath ordained the help of devotion as a most convenient remedy to overcome this difficulty; for, as the north wind dissipateth clouds and maketh a clear sky, so true devotion expelleth from the mind the tediousness of this way, and maketh us with alacrity prompt to pious actions. This virtue doth so far forth obtain the name of virtue, that likewise it is a special gift of the Holy Ghost: a heavenly dew, an assistance obtained by prayer, whose property is to remove all difficulties happening in prayer and meditation; to expel tepidity, to minister alacrity in the divine service, to instruct the understanding, to strengthen the will, to kindle in our hearts heavenly love, to extinguish the flames of unlawful desires, to engender a hatred and loathing of sin and all transitory things; and, last of all, to him that possesseth it, to infuse a new fervor, a new spirit, a new mind, and new desires to do well. For as Samson, as long as he had his hair, did exceed all men in strength, but when that was cut he was as weak as others; so the soul of every Christian, recreated with the help of devotion, is strong and valiant. But when it is deprived of it, it becometh infirm and weak. But above all the praises which can be heaped upon this virtue, this is the chief: that although it be but only one virtue,

yet it is a prick and motive to all. They, therefore, that desire to walk in a virtuous way must get this for a spur, for without it, he will never be able to rule his rebellious flesh.

Hence it manifestly appeareth in what the true essence of devotion doth consist; not in tenderness of heart or abundance of consolations, wherewith they who meditate are often recreated, except if a prompt alacrity of the mind to do well be thereunto adjoined; especially seeing it sometimes happeneth that the one is found without the other, Almighty God so disposing for the trial of His servants. Though I cannot deny but that these consolations do often proceed from devotion and promptitude of the mind to do well, and, on the contrary, the true devotion is not a little augmented by the same consolations and spiritual tastes; and, therefore, the servants of God may lawfully desire and ask them, not for the delight they bring with them, but because they do greatly increase devotion, which maketh us, with alacrity, to apply ourselves to virtuous actions, which the kingly prophet testifieth of himself, saying, "*Viam mandatorum tuorum cucurri, cum dilatasti cor meum*": "I have run the ways of thy commandments when thou hast enlarged my heart"; that is, when thou hast recreated me with the sweetness of thy consolations, which are the cause of this, my readiness.

Now let us treat of the means whereby this virtue is to be attained unto, which will bring no small profit with it; for, seeing it is the spur to all other virtues, to set down the means whereby it is to be obtained is no other thing than to prescribe the means to get all other virtues.

Chapter 2

Nine Means or Helps Whereby This Virtue of Devotion May Be Attained Unto with the Least Difficulty

THE things which promote devotion are many, of which we will handle a few. First, it helpeth much devotion, if those exercises be undertaken with a generous resolution, ready to undergo what difficulty soever shall occur, for the obtaining of this precious pearl. For it is certain that nothing is excellent which is not difficult, of which kind is devotion, especially in beginnings.

Secondly, a diligent custody of the heart from every vain and unprofitable thought, from affections, strange love, and turbulent motions, doth much promote devotion. For it is evident that every one of these is no little hinderance, seeing this virtue chiefly requireth a quiet heart, free from all inordinate affection, and so well composed as the strings of a well tuned instrument.

Thirdly, custody of the senses, especially the eyes, tongue, and ears, seeing that by these the heart is much distracted. For those things which enter in through the eyes and ears do strain the mind with divers imaginations, and consequently disturb and trouble the peace and tranquillity of the soul. Wherefore, one not without cause said

that he that meditateth must be deaf, blind, and dumb; for by how much less he wandereth abroad, with greater recollection will he rejoice at home.

Fourthly, solitude helpeth devotion much, for it doth not only remove the occasions of sin and take away the causes which chiefly disturb the heart and senses, but it maketh a solitary man to rouse up himself from temporal things, to be present to himself, and converse incessantly with God. To which, the opportunity of the place doth admonish, which admitteth no other society.

Fifthly, the reading of spiritual books doth not a little nourish devotion, because it administereth matter of consideration, abstracteth the mind from all things created, stirreth up devotion, and causeth that a man doth sooner adhere to the consideration of those things which in reading offered him a more pleasant taste, that, that wherewith the heart aboundeth, may oftener occur to his memory.

Sixthly, continual memory of Almighty God, and daily imagination of his sacred presence, that always thou art in His sight, with a frequent use of aspirations, which St. Augustine calleth jaculatory prayers; for these do guard the palace of the mind, conserving devotion in her fervor, that a man is always willing to do pious actions and ready to holy prayer. This lesson is one of the principal instruments of a spiritual life, and the only remedy for those who have neither time nor place with opportunity to insist on long prayer and meditation; and they which do thus bestow their labor to frequent aspirations, will,

in a short time, profit much.

Seventhly, perseverance in good exercises, that so times and places be duly observed, especially morning and evening, as fittest times for prayer.

Eighthly, corporal abstinence and austerities do much help devotion: fasting from meat, a frugal table, a hard bed, hair cloth, discipline, and the like. As they originally proceed from devotion of the mind, so they do not a little cherish, conserve, and nourish the root from whence they spring, which is devotion.

Lastly, works of mercy are a great spur unto devotion, because they increase the confidence we have to appear before God, and to be presented before His sacred majesty. They do accompany our prayers; and, finally, they merit that they be sooner heard by God, especially seeing that they proceed from a merciful heart.

Chapter 3

Nine Impediments to Devotion

As there be nine things which do promote devotion, so likewise there be nine impediments that do hinder the same.

The first impediment of devotion is sins, not only mortal, but also venial, for these, although they do not quite abolish charity, yet at least they diminish the fervor of it, and consequently make us less apt to devotion. Wherefore with all diligence they are to be avoided, not only for the evil they bring with them, but also for the good which they hinder.

Secondly, remorse of conscience proceeding from sins when it is in extremes, because it doth disquiet the mind, weakeneth the head, and maketh a man unfit for acts of virtue.

Thirdly, anxiety of heart and inordinate sadness, for with these, the delight of a good conscience and spiritual joy of the inward mind can hardly suit and agree.

Fourthly, too many cares which do disquiet the mind, like the Egyptian prefects who did oppress the children of Israel with too immoderate labors, nor would ever suffer them to take that spiritual repose which they should have often had in prayer. Yea, at that time, above others, they disturb the mind, endeavoring to seduce her from her spiritual exercise.

Fifthly, a multitude of affairs which take up our whole time suffocates the spirit, scarce leaving for a man a mo-

ment to employ in Almighty God's service.

Sixthly, delights and pleasures of the senses, for these make spiritual exercises unsavory, and a man unworthy to be recreated with heavenly consolations; for, as St. Bernard saith, he is not worthy of the visitations of the Holy Ghost, that seeketh after worldly solace.

Seventhly, inordinate delight in eating and drinking; especially long eating and and sumptuous suppers, which make a man unapt to spiritual exercises. For when the body is oppressed with too much meat, the spirit cannot so freely elevate itself to God.

Eighthly, curiosity of the senses and understanding; as to see sights and hear new rumors, because these do spend precious time, disturb and overthrow the tranquillity of the mind, distracting it with many impertinences which can be no small hinderance to devotion.

Lastly, an intermission of our wonted exercises, except when they are not omitted or deferred for a pious cause or just necessity. For the spirit of devotion is delicate; which, when it is gone, it hardly returneth again, at least with great difficulty. For as trees and plants must be watered in due season, otherwise they wither away and perish, so devotion, except it be watered with the waters of holy meditation, doth easily vanish.

These things we have set down briefly, that they may be the better remembered; use and experience of them will afford a longer explanation.

Chapter 4

Of the Common Temptations Which, for the Most Part, Assault Those Who Give Themselves to Meditation; As Also of the Remedies Against Them

NOW let us see with what temptations they who frequent the exercise of prayer and meditation are molested, that we may provide convenient remedies for them, which be these: First, the want of spiritual consolations. Second, a multitude of unprofitable thoughts. Third, thoughts of infidelity and blasphemy. Fourth, fancies in the night. Fifth, sleepiness and drowsiness. Sixth, diffidence of going forward. Seventh, too much presumption of their own sanctity. Eighth, inordinate desire of learning. Ninth, indiscreet zeal.

These are the common temptations which do trouble those who lead a virtuous life.

A Remedy for the First Temptation, Want of Consolations

TO him that wanteth spiritual consolations, this is the remedy: that, therefore, he omitteth not his cus-

tomary exercises of prayer, although they seem unsavory and of no fruit; but let him set himself in the presence of God, coming before him as guilty of many grievous sins; let him search diligently the corners of his own conscience, and consider whether or not through his own defect he hath lost this grace; if so, let him beseech Almighty God to pardon him for this sin, admiring the inestimable riches of His divine patience in tolerating us so long.

By this means he will reap no small fruit from his aridity of spirit, taking from thence occasion of profounder humility when he considereth his own malice and perverseness in heaping up of sin; or of more ardent affection, when he seeth Almighty God's goodness in pardoning the same. And, although he enjoyeth no pleasure at all in his exercises, let him not, therefore, abstain from the continuation of them, for it is not always necessary that it should be sweet and savory to the present taste, which will be hereafter profitable. Especially when it is often seen by experience that those who constantly persevere in their intended exercises, not giving up in the time of this aridity, but continue them with what care and diligence possibly they are able, that these, I say, depart from this table recreated with many heavenly consolations and much spiritual joy, seeing they find nothing to be omitted on their parts. It is but a small matter to protract prayer for a long space when it floweth with consolations, but when these are taken away, not to desist, is an admirable act of virtue; for in this humility shineth, patience is eminent, and true perseverance in good works is manifested.

But it is necessary in the time of aridity to have a greater care of himself, watching over himself with greater diligence, to discuss his conscience more sincerely, and to observe all his words and actions more accurately. For then, when alacrity and spiritual joy (which is the principal oar of his navigation) is absent, with greater vigilance the defect of grace is to be supplied.

When thou findest thyself to be in this state, thou oughtest to think, as St. Bernard admonisheth, that the sentinels which did watch thee are asleep, that the walls that did defend thee are broken down, and therefore, the only hope of safeguard to consist in arms; when all is gone which did otherwise protect thee, safety is to be sought with an armed hand. O what deserved glory followeth such a soul, which winneth the triumphant laurel after such a manner! she fighteth a combat with the enemy, without either sword or buckler, is valiant without help, who, although she be alone, sustaineth the whole battle with as much courage as though she were compassed round about with troops of auxiliary forces.

This is the chiefest proof, whereby the sincerity and goodness of the friends of God is known, whereby the true are severed from false servants.

A Remedy for the Second Temptation, Unprofitable Thoughts

A GAINST the temptation of importune and unprofitable thoughts, which are wont to vex those that

pray and disquiet them with no small molestation, this is the remedy; to resist them manfully, provided always the resistance be not joined with too much violence and anxiety of spirit. Seeing this work dependeth not so much on our strength, as on Almighty God's grace and profound humility; wherefore, when any one is beset with these temptations, let him confidently turn himself to God without any scruple or anxiety of mind (seeing that this is no fault, or at least, a very small one), with great submission and devotion of heart, saying, behold, Lord, behold what I am! what other thing can be looked for from this excrement but such filthy savors? what other fruit can be expected from this earth, which Thou didst curse in the beginning of the world, but thorns and thistles? what good can it bring forth, except Thou, Lord, dost purge it from all corruption? This being said, let him return to continue his meditations with patience, expecting the visitation of our Lord, Who is never wanting to the humble of spirit.

If yet the tumult of these troublesome fancies doth not cease, nevertheless, let him still resist constantly, repelling the force of them to the utmost of his power. From this perseverant battle, believe me, he will reap more gain and merit than if he had enjoyed the greatest consolations in his meditation.

A Remedy for the Third Temptation, Wicked Thoughts

TO overcome the temptation of blasphemous thoughts, we must know as there is no temptation so troublesome to a pious mind, so likewise, there is none less dangerous; therefore, the best remedy is to condemn them, for seeing sin consisteth not in sense, but delight of those things we think of. But in these there is no pleasure, but rather torture; therefore, they may challenge the name of punishment rather than of sin; and the more vexation is in them, the further off we are from consenting unto any sin; therefore it is best not to fear, but condemn them, seeing fear maketh them more strong and violent.

A Remedy for the Fourth Temptation, Fancies in the Night

AGainst the temptations of infidelity, he who is vexed with such thoughts on the one side, let him consider the imbecility of man's condition on the other side; the greatness of the divine power, to whom nothing is impossible; those things which God hath commanded, let him always bear in mind; for others, let him never busy himself in searching curiously the works of supreme majesty, seeing the least of them do so far transcend human capacity. Wherefore, he that desireth to enter into this sanctuary of God's works, let him enter with profound humility and reverence, endowed with the eyes of a simple dove, not

of a subtle serpent; and let him bear the mind of a meek disciple, and not of a temerarious judge; let him put on the shape of a child, for such our Lord maketh partakers of his divine secrets; let him not mind to search or know the causes of God's works; let him shut the eyes of natural reason and open the eyes of faith: for these are the hands wherewith God's works ought to be handled. Human understanding is able to comprehend the works of men, but not of God, seeing they are not capable of so much light.

This temptation, seeing it is one of the greatest which doth assault men, and bringeth none or small delight with it, is to be cured with the remedy of the precedent temptation; that is, to make slight of it, for it cannot stain the soul with any great blemish, because where the will is contrary, there is no danger of any sin.

There are some who are troubled with many fears and fancies when they go to pray in solitary places, remote from the company of men, against which temptation there is no more efficacious remedy than for a man to arm himself with a courageous mind, persevering in his exercise, for this fear is overcome with fighting, not with flying; moreover, let him consider that the devil, nor any other thing whatsoever, can hurt us except God permits. Let him also consider that we are compassed about with a custody of angels, which do guard us, as well in as out of prayer; they assist us, carrying up our prayers to heaven; they help us to bring to nothing the devices of our crafty enemy, and to confound all his mischievous plots.

A Remedy for the Fifth Temptation, Sleepiness

TO overcome sleep, wherewith some that meditate are often molested, we must consider that sometimes it proceedeth from mere necessity, and then it is not to be denied the body what is its due, lest it hindereth what is our right. Sometimes it proceedeth out of infirmity; then he must take heed not to vex himself too much, seeing herein is no sin at all, but moderately, as much as strength suffereth, resisting it; now using some industry, then some small violence, that prayer doth not altogether perish, without which nothing in this life can be had secure. But when it cometh out of sloth, or from the devil, then there is no better remedy than to abstain from wine, and not to use water in abundance, but as much as quencheth his thirst; to pray upon his knees, or after some other painful gesture of the body; let him use discipline, or other corporal austerity, to drive sleep from his eyes. To conclude, the remedy for this and all others is instantly to implore His assistance, Who is ready to give it to all, so they ask it fervently and constantly.

Remedies for the Sixth and Seventh Temptations, Diffidence and Presumption

AGAINST the temptations of diffidence and presumption, seeing that they in themselves be contrary, it

is requisite to apply divers remedies. Against diffidence, let him consider that we do not rest upon our own merits, but upon Almighty God's grace; Who is so much the more willing to assist man, by how much the more he is diffident of his own forces, placing a firm hope in the goodness of God, to Whom nothing is impossible: the remedy for presumption is to consider that the most evident and certain argument is that a man is yet furthest from true sanctity, when he thinketh himself to be nearest.

Moreover, let him look upon himself in the lives of the saints who now reign with Christ, or live yet in this mortal life, as in a looking glass; to which of these he doth compare himself, he will see that he is no more than a dwarf in respect of a giant; which consideration will not a little suppress his pride.

A Remedy for the Eighth Temptation, Inordinate Desire of Learning

A GAINST the inordinate desire of study and learning, it is good to consider how far virtue exceedeth science, and how much the knowledge of God excelleth human wisdom. Hence a man may learn how necessary it is to bestow more labor upon one than upon the other. Moreover, the world hath all the excellence that can be desired, but cannot avoid this misery—that it must end with life. What, then, more miserable than to seek after that, with

so much labor and expense, which so quickly perisheth? If all things in the world could be known, they are but as nothing; and, therefore, it is much better to exercise ourselves in the love of God, the fruit whereof remaineth forever, and in whom we see and know all things. Last of all, in the day of judgment we shall not be asked what we have read, but what we have done; not how eloquently we have spoken, but how well we have lived.

A Remedy for the Ninth Temptation, Indiscreet Zeal

THE chiefeſt remedy againſt indiscreet zeal of helping others is so to attend to the good of our neighbors, that we hurt not ourselves; and so to have a care of the consciences of others, that we neglect not our own; but in assisting them, it is good to reserve so much time as is sufficient to conserve the heart in devotion and recollection. And this is, as St. Paul saith, “*Ambulare in spiritu*”: “To walk in spirit”; that is to say, that a man be more in God than in himself. Seeing, therefore, that the prime root of all our good upon this dependeth, we must strive that our prayer be so profound and long as may conserve the soul in devotion, which every short meditation is not able to do, but devout and long meditation.

Chapter 5

Other Certain Admonitions Necessary for Spiritual Persons

THE thing that affordeth greatest difficulty in this spiritual journey is to know how to come to God and to converse with him familiarly. Let, therefore, none dare to enter in this way without a good guide, and well instructed with necessary admonitions and lessons, of which we will set down a few according to our wonted brevity.

The First Admonition:

Seek First the Will of God

THE first is whereby we are taught what end we must aim at in these, our spiritual exercises. We must therefore know, that since to communicate with Almighty God of itself is most delightful, having no bitterness mixed with it, as the wise man testifieth; hence it cometh to pass that many, allured with the pleasure of this admirable and unused sweetness (which is greater than can be comprehended), come to God and frequent these spiritual actions; as reading, prayer, meditation, use of the Sacrament, for the great content and delight they take in them, so that for the principal end, wherewith they are moved, is this admirable sweetness which they vehemently desire.

This is a great error, and many are plunged into it; for seeing to love and seek God should be the chiefest end of all our actions, these love and seek themselves; that is to say, their own taste and sensible delight rather than God, which was the scope of the contemplative philosophy of the Gentiles; especially as a certain doctor saith, that this is a kind of avarice, luxury, and spiritual gluttony, no less pernicious than carnal. From this error springeth another branch: to wit, that many judge themselves and others according to the ebbing and flowing of consolations, so far that they are persuaded that a man is more or less perfect by how much more or less he is visited with divine consolations. This is a great mistake.

Against both these temptations, this general doctrine is a remedy: that everyone must know that the scope of all these exercises, and the chief end of a spiritual life, is the observing of God's commandments, and a perfect fulfilling of His divine will. To this it is necessary that our own will be mortified, that the will of God may the better live and reign in us; seeing both these are directly contrary the one to the other. But this noble victory, seeing it cannot be obtained without special favor and allurements of God, therefore we ought to frequent the exercise of prayer, the better by it (and indeed the only means) to obtain this grace, and to bring this serious business of our soul's perfection to a good and desired end. With this intention we may confidently desire of God internal consolation, as we have said before. This did the prophet David, when he said: "*Redde mihi Domini lætitiām*

salutaris tui, et spiritu principali confirma me: “Give me, O Lord, the joy of thy salvation, and confirm me with thy principal spirit.”

Hence it is manifest what end everyone ought to prefix to himself in these exercises, and how they should esteem and measure their own and other’s profit; not according to the multitude of flowing consolations, but according to those things they have constantly suffered for God, partly in fulfilling His divine pleasure, partly in renouncing their own proper wills.

And that this ought to be the end of all our prayer and reading, it appeareth by that one psalm of the prophet David which beginneth “*Beati immaculati in via, qui ambulant in lege Domini*”: “Blessed are the immaculate in the way, which walk in the law of the Lord”³⁴; which is the longest psalm in the psalter; notwithstanding, there is not one verse in it in which there is not mention of the law of God and keeping His commandments; which the Holy Ghost hath so ordained, that men may learn to direct all prayer and reading to this end and scope. From which they that do decline cast themselves into the secret snares of the enemy, who with his subtle craft persuadeth them, that something is some great matter which, indeed, is nothing; and for this cause men most exercised in spiritual matters do affirm the only touchstone of true virtue to be not that sensible delight which is found in prayer, but patience in affliction, abnegation of one’s own self, a sincere and entire fulfilling of the divine will, and, finally,

³⁴Psalm 118.

in a diligent observing of Almighty God's laws and commandments; though I must confess that prayer itself, and the frequent consolations that are found therein, do not a little conduce and help to the better effecting of these things before mentioned.

They who are desirous to know how much progress they have made in the way of God, let them examine how much they have increased in interior and exterior humility; how willingly they have put up with injuries; with what mind they have borne with others' infirmities; how they have compassionated the imperfections of their neighbors; what confidence they have had in God, in the tedious time of tribulation; how they have bridled their tongues; how they have kept their heart; how they have mortified their flesh and made it subject to the spirit: with what moderation they have behaved themselves in prosperity and adversity; with what gravity and discretion they have governed all their actions: and, above all, how dead they have been to the world, with all its pleasures, honors, and dignities; and accordingly as they have profited in these virtues, let them measure their perfection, and not according to the consolations wherewith God hath visited them. Wherefore, let everyone be sure to bear one hand, and the chiefest, over himself in mortification, the other in prayer, seeing the one cannot be attained unto without the other.

The Second Admonition

Seek Not After Visions

As it is not lawful to desire consolations and spiritual comforts, to that end that in them we should set up our rest, but only as they assist us in our spiritual progress, much less is it lawful to wish for visions, revelations, and the like; which to those who are not well grounded in humility, may be a great cause of their utter ruin. Neither is there any reason to fear that those who refuse or reject them should be disobedient to God; because when it shall please God to reveal anything, He will do it after such a fashion that he to whom such things shall be revealed shall be so certain of them, that he will have no reason either to fear or doubt, though he should himself never so much strive against them.

The Third Admonition

Boast Not of Consolations

WE must have a special care not to speak to others of those sensible consolations which Almighty God hath been pleased to recreate us with: except it be to our spiritual director. Hence it is, that that mellifluous Doctor was wont to advise everyone to have these words written in great letters in his chamber: My secret to myself: my secret to myself.

The Fourth Admonition

Be Ever Humble

MOREOVER we must always take good heed to deal with God with much humility and reverence, never to esteem ourselves so high in His favor as to neglect to cast down our eyes upon our own baseness, and to shroud our wings in the presence of so great a majesty; as holy Augustine was wont to do, of whom it is written, that he had learned to rejoyce before God with fear and trembling.

The Fifth Admonition

Keep Time for Prayer

WE have heretofore counselled the servant of God that he consecrateth some certain time of the day to recollection. But now besides the ordinary course, we say, that he must sometimes sequester himself from all business and employments, as much as is possible, and give himself wholly over to devotion, the better to nourish his soul with the abundance of spiritual dainties, recovering his daily losses, and getting new force to go forward in his spiritual journey. Which, although it be not amiss to do at all times, yet more specially, upon the principal feasts of the year; in the time of temptation; after a long journey; after troublesome business which gave matter of much distraction; that then we may exclude from our souls all exterior things, and call ourselves back again to the point from whence we did digress.

The Sixth Admonition

Discretion in Zeal

THERE be many who be not discreet in their spiritual exercises when they enjoy heavenly consolations, and it oftentimes falleth out that this prosperity doth expose them to manifest peril, for when Almighty God showereth down more abundantly this celestial dew upon their souls, they are so ravished with the sweetness of it that they addiēt themselves without measure to this only exercise; to this end they prolong the time of prayer, macerate themselves with watching and other corporal austerities, so that nature itself, at length, is constrained to sink under the burden of such indiscreet mortification. Hence it cometh to pass, that many abhor spiritual exercises, and some are not only made by this means unfit for corporal, but also dull for spiritual labors of prayer and meditation. Wherefore, in all these, there is great need of discretion, especially in the beginning, when spiritual consolations be more fervent, and commonly when discretion is least; for we must so order our diet that we do not faint in the midst of our journey. On the contrary, there be some so slothful and undevout, that under the color of discretion, immoderately make much of themselves, refusing the least labor or trouble. This, although it be dangerous to all, but especially to beginners; for as St. Bernard saith, it is impossible that he should persevere long in a spiritual course, who is indiscreet at first. He, when he is a novice, esteemeth himself wise, and when he is young governeth

himself like an old man. Neither can I easily judge which of these be more dangerous: except as Thomas à Kempis saith, the first is more incurable, for whilst the body is strong and sound, there may be hopes to cure tepidity; but when it is once weakened through indiscretion, it scarce ever can be brought to its former fervor.

The Seventh Admonition

Neglect Not Other Virtues

THERE is yet another danger more pernicious than the former, which is, that some having experience of this inestimable virtue of prayer, that all the fruit of a spiritual life doth depend upon it. Hence they persuade themselves, that in it all is contained, and that only, that virtue doth suffice for our salvation, which makes them to neglect other virtues, which are likewise the foundations and props which do uphold a spiritual building, which being taken away the whole fabric falleth to ruin; wherefore, they that seek after this one only virtue with such indiscreet avidity, the more they labor the less fruit they reap. But the servant of God that expecteth merit and comfort in the way of perfection, must not fix his eyes so much upon one only virtue, although it be never so rare and excellent, but generally attend to all; as one string upon an instrument maketh no music except we strike the rest, so one virtue cannot make a spiritual harmony in our souls, if the others be wanting; not unlike a clock, which if there be but a fault in one wheel, the others will stand; so it is in a spiritual clock, if one virtue be deficient.

The Eighth Admonition

Trust Only in God

THESE things which we have hitherto said, which do help to devotion, are so to be taken himself to Almighty God's grace, and behave himself manfully in his holy service, with this caution, that we should not put our confidence in them, but in God.

This I say, because there are some who labor to reduce all rules into art, thinking that they have attained to the perfection of that exercise if they observe exactly the rules thereof. But they who put good principles into practice will quickly attain unto their desired end, which doing, they are not to reduce grace into art, nor to attribute that to human rules which is the gift of God. Hence we say, that it is not necessary to follow these rules and lessons as depending of art, but as instruments of grace; because a man will learn thus to know that the principal means which one ought to seek after is profound humility, with the consideration of our own baseness and a great confidence in Almighty God's mercy. To the end that we may come to the knowledge of the one and the other, let us pour out tears without intermission, and continually pray, that as we wait at the gate of humility, so we may obtain by it all our desires, and persevere in humble thanksgiving to the divine bounty, without any trust to our own works, or to any thing that is ours.

ad honorem Dei

Appendix A

Notes on the Author and Text

ST. Peter de Alcántara was a friar of the Franciscan Order, born in Alcántara in Extremadura in Castile, now a part of Spain, in 1449. Even as a child, he withdrew from the other children and followed those who seemed dedicated to God. He loved the works of mercy, prayed, and frequented the sacraments, and while still a young man he travelled to a famous monastery of Franciscans near Valencia, where he grew in holiness and the esteem of his fellow friars.

Famously, he served as a counselor for St. Teresa of Ávila, encouraging her to found her first convent; this directly led to the success of the women of the Discalced Carmelites. She greatly esteemed his virtue and holiness, and provides a great deal of our knowledge about the man, who did not write about himself.

He performed great works of mortification. For seven years, for example, he wore a hair shirt made of hard knots under his habit; he used “the discipline” (a sort of small whip) frequently; he refused to cover his head, regardless of the rain or the heat of the sun; he often fasted only on brown bread and herbs, and even for his normal meals (such as peas and beans) he sometimes added in some ashes (as his father St. Francis did) to make them less palatable. He never drank alcohol, even when advised to do so by a doctor. He even slept very little, a trial which

he stated was his greatest when he was young, and therefore always knelt or stood when he was praying; when he did sleep, he did so sitting, leaning his head against a piece of wood. For this reason, he is the patron of night watchmen.

We could spend a great deal of time on the virtues of this great saint, but the above will suffice for this little note; interested persons can find more information elsewhere.

The text before the reader was originally titled *A Golden Treatise of Mental Prayer, with Divers Spiritual Rules and Directions, no less profitable, than necessary, for all sorts of people, first composed by the venerable and blessed Fr. Peter de Alcantara of the Seraphical Order of St. Francis, Beatified the 18th of April, 1622*; however, it has long been known simply as *The Golden Treatise*. It was originally written, as a book of popular devotion, in St. Peter de Alcántara's native Spanish; the translation before the reader is that of Giles Willoughby, of the Order of St. Francis, and published in Philadelphia by M. Fithian in 1844.

The prose of the translation is extremely archaic, as is the punctuation; as a result, significant edits were made to the translation to bring it into accord with modern vocabulary and punctuation standards, with occasional reference to the original Spanish to ensure that no meanings were being changed. We have also expanded some of the headings to make them more meaningful to their content. However, while these edits were sometimes significant,

this work is still absolutely Willoughby's work, and no one else's. We are grateful to St. Peter, to Willoughby, and to the whole seraphic tradition for making this powerful and important work available to us.

Praise be to Christ the King!

Appendix B

Summary of the Method of Mental Prayer

- Preparation
 - Appropriate position (kneeling, standing, prostrate)
 - Sign of the Cross
 - Gather the mind, especially imagination
 - Consider that God is present
 - Act of contrition
 - Morning: General act of contrition and confession
 - Evening: Examine conscience, contrition
 - “I will speak to my Lord, seeing I am but dust and ashes”
 - Psalm 122
 - Call upon the Holy Ghost
 - “Come Holy Ghost, send forth from heaven the glittering beams of true light; come, father of the poor; come, giver of rewards; come, light of our hearts, sweet comforter, sweet guest of the soul, sweet refresher, rest in labor, temperature in heat, in mourning a grateful solace, O blessed light, replenish the hearts of the faithful.”
 - “O God, Who didst instruct the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit; grant us, in this same Spirit, to be truly wise, and ever to rejoice

in His consolation. Through Christ, Our Lord.
Amen.”

- Ask the Holy Ghost to assist in meditation
- Reading
 - Read the material for meditation carefully, seriously, quietly, attentively
- Meditation
 - Intellectual
 - Divine mysteries; His benefits; His bounty, etc.
 - Imaginative
 - Imagining an event actually before our eyes
 - Be alert to move on to contemplation when possible
- Thanksgiving
 - Draw the subject of thanksgiving from the meditation
 - Possibly the Canticle of the Three Boys: Dan. 3:57: “All ye works of the Lord, bless the Lord; praise and exalt Him above all forever.”
 - Consider Psalm 102.
- Oblation
 - Offer yourself to God, as well as all you have and do
 - Offer Him His only-begotten Son
- Petition
 - Pray for the conversion of all nations
 - “Let the peoples, O God, confess Thee; let all people give praise to Thee.” Psalm 66.
 - Pray for the Church and churchmen
 - Pray for leaders
 - Pray for all members of the Church

- Captives, the poor, and so forth; all our neighbors
- Pray for our own necessities last
 - Mostly for virtue!
 - Prayer for Obtaining Divine Love (p. 98)

Colophon

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