

The Inner Life

by Francois Fenelon

The sermon emphasizes the importance of knowing and loving God above all else, and renouncing our own will and desires in order to truly experience God's love and blessings.

Scripture: Matthew 19:23, Luke 6:24, 2 Corinthians 8:9, James 2:5, Revelation 3:17

Topics: "Spiritual Wealth", "Gods Mercy"

Description

Rich, defined as having an abundance of valuable possessions, is a frequent topic addressed by the Lord Jesus in the New Testament. While it often refers to material wealth, it is also used figuratively in James to describe those who are rich in faith. God is described as rich in mercy, overflowing with love and compassion towards us, as seen in Ephesians 2:4.

Transcript

I. OF THE LITTLE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD THERE IS IN THE WORLD. WHAT men stand most in need of, is the knowledge of God. They know, to be sure, by dint of reading, that history gives an account of a certain series of miracles and marked providences; they have reflected seriously on the corruption and instability of worldly things; they are even, perhaps, convinced that the reformation of their lives on certain principles of morality is desirable in order to their salvation; but the whole of the edifice is destitute of foundation; this pious and Christian exterior possesses no soul.

The living principle which animates every true believer, God, the all and in all, the author and the sovereign of all, is wanting. He is, in all things, infinite--in wisdom power and love,--and what wonder, if everything that comes from his hand should partake of the same infinite character and set at nought the efforts of human reason. When He works, his ways and his thoughts are declared by the prophet to be as far above our ways and our thoughts as the heavens are above the earth (Isaiah lv. 9).

He makes no effort when He would execute what He has decreed; for to Him all things are equally easy; He speaks and causes the heavens and the earth to be created out of nothing, with as little difficulty as he causes water to descend or a stone to fall to the ground. His power is co-extensive with his will; when He wills, the thing is already accomplished. When the Scriptures represent Him as speaking in the creation of the world, it is not to be understood as signifying that it was necessary that the word of command should issue from Him, in order that the universe he was about to create should hear and obey his will; that word was simple and interior, neither more nor less than the thought which he conceived of what He was about to do and the will to do it.

The thought was fertile, and without being rendered exterior, begat from Him as the fountain of all life, the sum of the things that are. His mercy, too, is but his pure will; He loved us before the creation of the world; He saw and knew us, and prepared his blessings for us; He loved and chose us from all Eternity. Every new blessing we receive is derived from this Eternal origin; He forms no new will respecting us; it is not He that changes, but we. When we are righteous and good, we are conformable to his will and agreeable to Him; when we depart from well doing and cease to be good, we cease to be conformable to Him and to please Him.

This is the immutable standard which the changeable creature is continually approaching and leaving. His justice against the wicked and his love towards the righteous are the same thing; it is the same quality that unites Him to everything that is good, and is incompatible with everything that is evil. Mercy is the goodness of God, beholding our wickedness and striving to make us good; perceived by us in time, it has its source in the eternal love of God for his creature. From Him alone proceeds true goodness; alas! for that presumptuous soul that seeks it in itself!

It is God's love towards us that gives us everything; but the richest of his gifts is that we may love Him with that love which is his due. When He is able by his love to produce that love in us, He reigns within; He constitutes there our life, our peace, our happiness, and we then already begin to taste that blissful existence which He enjoys. His love towards us is stamped with his own character of infinity: it is not like ours, bounded and constrained; when He loves, all the measures of his love are infinite.

He comes down from Heaven to earth to seek the creature of clay whom he loves; He becomes creature and clay with him; He gives him his flesh to eat. These are the prodigies of Divine love in which the Infinite outstrips all the affection we can manifest. He loves like a God, with a love utterly incomprehensible. It is the height of folly to seek to measure infinite love by human wisdom. Far from losing any element of its greatness in these excesses, He impresses upon his love the stamp of his own grandeur, while He manifests a delight in us bounded only by the infinite. O! how great and lovely is He in his mysteries! But we want eyes to see them, and have no desire to behold God in everything.

II.

ON THE NECESSITY OF KNOWING AND LOVING GOD.

IT is not astonishing that men do so little for God and that the little which they do costs them so much. They do not know Him; scarcely do they believe that He exists; and the impression they have is rather a blind deference for general opinion than a lively and distinct conviction of the Divinity. They suppose it is so, because they do not dare to examine, and because they are indifferent in the matter, their souls being distracted by the inclination of their affections and passions for other objects; but their only idea of Him is of something wonderful, far off and unconnected with us. They think of Him as a stern and powerful Being, ever making requisitions upon us, thwarting our inclinations, threatening us with great evils, and against whose terrible judgment it behooves every one to be on his guard. Such is the inward thought of those who think seriously about religion, and their number even is small enough. "He is one who fears God," say they; and in truth such an one fears only, but does not love; as the child is in awe of the master who punishes him, or as the servant is in dread of the blows of one whom he serves from fear, and of whose interests is he utterly regardless. Would he like to be treated by a son or a servant as he treats God? It is because God is not known; if He were known, He would be loved. God is love, says the apostle John (1 John iv. 8, 16); he who loves Him not, does not know Him, for how could we know love without loving it? It

is plain, then, that all those who have hitherto only feared God, have not known Him.

But who shall know Thee, O! my God? He who shall seek with his whole heart to know Thee, who shall know himself with approbation no longer, and to whom all that is not Thou shall be as though it were not! The world cannot receive this saying because it is full of self, and vanity, and lies, and is empty of God; but I trust that there will always be souls hungering for God, who will relish the truth which I am about to set forth.

O my God! before Thou madest the Heavens and the earth, there was none other but Thee. Thou wert, because of thy years there was no beginning; but Thou wert alone. Out of Thee there was nothing, and Thou did'st rejoice in this blessed solitude; Thou are all sufficient in Thyself, and thou hadst no need of anything out of Thyself, for none can give unto Thee, and it is Thou that givest to all by thine all-powerful word, that is, by thy simple will. To it, nothing is difficult, and it doeth whatsoever it will from its own pure impulse, without succession of time and without labor. Thou didst cause that this world, which was not as yet, should begin to be; not as the workmen of the earth, who find the materials for their work ready made to their hands, and whose art consists in bringing them together, and arranging them by slow degrees in the requisite order; Thou didst find nothing ready made, but didst create all the materials for thy work. It was to nothing that Thou didst say, "Let the world be," and it was. Thou didst only speak and it was done.

But why didst Thou create all these things? They were all made for man and man was made for Thee. This is the order which is of thine appointment, and woe to him who inverts it, who would that all should be for him and shuts himself in self! He breaks the fundamental law of the creation.

No! Lord, Thou canst not yield the essential prerogatives of a creator; it would degrade Thee. Thou canst pardon the guilty soul that has warred against Thee, because Thou canst fill it with thy pure love; but thou canst not cease to be at variance with the soul which refers all thy gifts to itself, and refuses to embrace Thee as its Creator with a sincere and disinterested affection. To have no feeling but fear, is not to refer to itself to Thee, but on the contrary, to think of Thee solely with reference to self. To love Thee with a single eye to the good Thou canst bestow, is not to lose one's self in Thee, but to lose Thee in self! What then must be done in order that we may be lost in Thee? We must renounce, forget and forever lose sight of self, take part with Thee and thine, O God, against ourselves and ours; have no longer any will, glory or peace, but thine only; in a word, we must love Thee without loving self except in and for Thee.

God who made us out of nothing, re-creates us, as it were, every moment. It does not follow that because we were yesterday, we shall of course be to-day; we should cease to exist and return into the nothingness out of which He formed us, did not the same all-powerful hand prevent. Of ourselves we are nothing; we are but what God has made us, and for so long time only as He pleases. He has but to withdraw the hand that sustains us and we plunge into the abyss of annihilation, as a stone held in the air falls by its own weight when its support is removed. Existence and life, then, are only ours because they are conferred by God.

There are blessings, however, of a purer and higher order than these; a well-ordered life is better than life; virtue is of a higher price than health; uprightness of heart and the love of God are as far above temporal goods as the heavens are above the earth. If then these lower and baser gifts are held only through the mercy and at the pleasure of God, with how much more reason must it be true of the sublime gift of his love!

They know Thee not, then, O my God, who regard Thee as an all-powerful Being, separate from themselves, giving laws to all nature, and creator of everything which we behold; they know Thee but in part! they know not that which is most marvelous and which most nearly concerns thy rational creatures! To know that Thou art the God of my heart, that Thou there doest what pleaseth Thee, this it is that elevates and affects me! When I am good, it is because Thou renderest me so; not only dost Thou turn my heart as pleaseth Thee, but Thou givest me one like thine own! It is Thyself that Thou lovest in me; Thou art the life of my soul as my soul is the life of my body; Thou art more intimately present to me than I am to myself; this I, to which I am so attached and which I have so ardently loved, ought to be strange to me in comparison with Thee; Thou art the bestower of it; without Thee it never would have been; therefore it is that Thou desirest that I should love Thee better than it.

O incomprehensible power of my Creator! O rights of the Creator over the creature which the creature will never sufficiently comprehend! O prodigy of love which God alone could perform! God interposes himself as it were, between me and myself; He separates me from myself; He desires to be nearer to me by his pure love than I am to myself. He would have me look upon this "me" as a stranger; He would have me escape from its walls, sacrifice it whole to Him, returning it absolutely and unconditionally to Him from whom I received it. What I am ought certainly to be less precious to me than He by whom I am. He made me for himself and not to be my own; that is, to love Him and to will what He wills, and not to seek my own will. Does any one feel his heart revolt at this total sacrifice of self to Him who has created us? I weep for his blindness; I compassionate his bondage to self, and pray God to deliver him from it, by teaching him to love Him above every other object.

O my God! in these souls, offended at thy pure love, I behold the darkness and rebellion resulting from the fall! Thou didst not make man's heart will this monstrous passion of appropriation. The uprightness wherein the scriptures teach us he was originally created consisted in this, that he had no claim upon himself but acknowledged that he belonged to his Creator. O Father! thy children are sadly changed, and no longer bear thine image! They are enraged, they are discouraged when they are told they should belong to Thee as Thou belongest to Thyself! They desire to reverse this holy order, and would madly raise themselves into Gods; they desire to be their own, to do everything for self, or at least, to surrender themselves with certain reservations and conditions, and for their own advantage. O monstrous usurpation! O unknown rights of God! O the ingratitude and insolence of the creature! Miserable nothing! what hast thou to keep for thyself! What hast thou which belongs to thee? What hast thou which did not come from on high, and ought not to return thither? Everything, yea, even this I which would divide with God his gifts, is a gift of God, and was only made for Him; everything within thee cries out against thee and for thy Creator. Be still, then, thou who, having been created, wouldst deny thy Creator, and surrender thyself wholly to Him.

But alas! O my God! what a consolation is it to know that everything within as well as without me, is the work of thy hand! Thou art ever with me. When I do wrong, Thou art within me, reproaching me with the evil which I do, raising within me regrets for the good which I abandon, and opening to me thine arms of mercy. When I do good, Thou inspirest the desire, and doest it in me and with me; it is Thou who lovest good and hatest evil in my heart, who sufferest and prayest, who doest good to the neighbor and givest alms: I do all these things but by thy means; Thou causest me to do them; it is Thou who puttest them in me. These good works, which are thy gifts, become my works; but they do not cease to be thy gifts; and they cease to be good works if I look at them for a moment as emanating from myself, or if I forget that they are good only because they come from Thee.

Thou, then, (it is my delight to believe it!) art incessantly working within me; there Thou laborest invisibly like a miner in the bowels of the earth. Thou doest everything and yet the world beholds Thee not, attributes nothing to Thee; and even I myself wandered everywhere vainly searching for Thee outside of myself; I ran over all the wonders of nature that I might form some conception of thy greatness; I asked thy creatures of Thee and not once thought of finding Thee in the depths of my heart where Thou hadst never ceased to dwell. No, O my God! it is not necessary to descend into the depths nor to pass beyond the seas; it is not necessary to ascend into the heavens to find Thee; Thou art nearer to us than we are to ourselves.

O my God! who art at once so great and so condescending, so high above the heavens and so accommodated to the misery of the creature, so infinite and so intimately enclosed in the depths of my heart, so terrible and so lovely, so jealous and so easy to be entreated of those who converse with Thee with the familiarity of pure love, when will thy children cease to be ignorant of Thee? Where shall I find a voice loud enough to reproach the whole world with its blindness, and to tell it with authority all that Thou art? When we bid men look for Thee in their own hearts, it is as though we bade them search for Thee in the remotest and most unknown lands! What territory is more distant or more unknown to the greater part of them, vain and dissipated as they are, than the ground of their own hearts? Do they ever know what it is to enter within themselves? Have they ever endeavored to find the way? Can they even form the most distant conception of the nature of that interior sanctuary, that impenetrable depth of the soul where Thou desirest to be worshipped in spirit and in truth? They are ever outside of themselves in the objects of their ambition or of their pleasure. Alas! how can they understand heavenly truths, since, as our Lord says, they cannot even comprehend those which are earthly? (John iii. 12.) They cannot conceive what it is to enter within themselves by serious reflexion; what would they say if they were bid to come out of themselves that they might be lost in God?

As for me, my Creator, I shut my eyes to all exterior things, which are but vanity and vexation of spirit, (Eccles. i. 14,) that I may enjoy in the deepest recesses of my heart an intimate companionship with Thee through Jesus Christ thy Son, who is thy Wisdom and Eternal Understanding. He became a child that by his childhood and the folly of his cross, he might put to shame our vain and lying wisdom. Cost what it may, and in spite of my fears and speculations, I desire to become lowly and a fool, still more despicable in my own eyes than in those of the wise in their own conceit. Like the apostles, I would become drunk with the Holy Spirit, and be content with them to become the sport of the world.

I find Thee everywhere within. It is Thou that doest every good thing which I seem to do. I have a thousand times experienced that I could not of myself govern my temper, overcome my habits, subdue my pride, follow my reason nor will again the good which I had once willed. It is Thou that must both bestow the will and preserve it pure; without Thee I am but a reed shaken by the wind. Thou art the author of all the courage, the uprightness and the truth which I possess; Thou has given me a new heart which longs after thy righteousness, and which is athirst for thine eternal truth; Thou has taken away the old man full of filth and corruption, and which was jealous, vain, ambitious, restless, unrighteous and devoted to its own pleasure. In what a state of misery did I live. Ah! could I ever have believed that I should be enabled thus to turn to Thee, and shake off the yoke of my tyrannical passions?

But, behold a marvel that eclipses all the rest! Who but Thee could ever have snatched me from myself, and turned all my hatred and contempt against mine own bosom? I have not done this; for it is not by our own power that we depart from self; no! Thou, O Lord, didst shine with thine own light into the depth of my heart which could not be reached by any other, and didst there reveal the whole of my foulness. I know

that, even after beholding, I have not changed it; that I am still filthy in thy sight, that my eyes have not been able to discover the extent of my pollution; but I have, at least, seen a part, and I desire to behold the whole. I am despised in my own sight, but the hope that I have in Thee causes me to live in peace; for I will neither flatter my defects nor suffer them to discourage me. I take thy side, O God, against myself; it is only by thy strength that I am able to do this. Behold what hath God wrought within me! and Thou continuest thy work from day to day in cleansing me from the old Adam and in building up the new. This is the new creation which is gradually going on.

I leave myself, Father, in thy hands; make and re-make this clay, shape it or grind it to atoms; it is thine own, it has nought to say; only let it always be subservient to thine ever-blessed designs, and let nothing in me oppose thy good pleasure for which I was created. Require, command, forbid; what wouldst Thou have me do? what not do? Exalted, or abased, rejoicing or suffering, doing thy work or laid aside, I will always praise Thee alike, ever yielding up all my own will to Thine! Nothing remains for me but to adopt the language of Mary: "Be it unto me according to thy words," (Luke i. 38.)

Let me, O my God, stifle forever in my heart, every thought that would tempt me to doubt thy goodness. I know that Thou canst not but be good. O merciful Father! let me no longer reason about grace, but silently abandon myself to its operation. Grace performs everything in us, but does it with and through us; it is by it, therefore, that I act, that I forbear, that I suffer, that I wait, that I resist, that I believe, that I hope, and that I love, all in co-operation with grace. Following its guidance, it will do all things in me, and I shall do all things through it; it moves the heart, but the heart must move; there is no salvation without man's action. I must work, then, without losing a moment, that I may put no hinderance in the way of that grace which is incessantly working within me. All the good is of grace, all the evil is of self; when I do right, it is grace that does it; when I do wrong, it is because I resist grace. I pray God that I may not seek to know more than this; all else will but serve to nourish a presumptuous curiosity. O my God! keep me ever in the number of those babes to whom Thou revealest thy mysteries, while Thou concealest them from the wise and prudent!

Thou causest me clearly to understand that Thou makest use of the evils and imperfections of the creature to do the good which thou hast determined beforehand. Thou concealest thyself under the importunate visitor, who intrudes upon the occupation of thy impatient child, that he may learn not to be impatient, and that he may die to the gratification of being free to study or work as he pleases. Thou availest thyself of slanderous tongues to destroy the reputation of thine innocent children, that, beside their innocence, they may offer Thee the sacrifice of their too highly-cherished reputation. By the cunning artifices of the envious, Thou layest low the fortunes of those whose hearts were too much set upon their prosperity. It is thy hand that sends death upon him to whom life is a constant source of danger, and the tomb a harbor of refuge. It is Thou that makest his death a remedy, bitter enough, it is true, but effectual, for those who were too fondly attached to him, and thus, while saving one, by removing him from life, Thou preparest the others, by that very act, for a happy death. Thus Thou mercifully strewest bitterness over everything that is not Thyself, to the end that our hearts, formed to love Thee and to exist upon thy love, may be, as it were, constrained to return to Thee by a want of satisfaction in everything else.

And this is because Thou art all Love, and consequently all Jealousy. O jealous God! (for thus art thou called!) a divided heart displeases Thee; a wandering one excites thy pity. Thou art infinite in all things, in love as well as in wisdom and power. Thou lovest like an infinite God when thou lovest; Thou movest heaven and earth to save thy loved ones; Thou becomest man, a babe, the vilest of men, covered with reproaches, dying with infamy and under the pangs of the cross; all this is not too much for an infinite love.

Our finite love and limited wisdom cannot understand it; how should the finite comprehend the Infinite? it has neither eyes to see it nor a heart to take it in; the debased and narrowed soul of man and his vain wisdom are offended, and can perceive no trace of God in this excess of love. But for myself, it is by this very character of infinity that I recognize it: this is the love that does all things; that brings to pass even the evils we suffer, so shaping them that they are but the instruments of preparing the good which, as yet, has not arrived.

But ah! when shall we return love for Love? When shall we seek Him who seeks us and constantly carries us in his arms? When He bears us along in his tender and paternal bosom, then it is that we forget Him; in the sweetness of his gifts, we forget the Giver; his ceaseless blessings, instead of melting us into love, distract our attention and turn it away from Him.

III.

ON PURE LOVE.

The Lord hath made all things for Himself (Prov. xvi. 4), says the Scripture; everything belongs to Him, and He will never release his right to anything. Free and intelligent creatures are his as much as those which are otherwise. He refers every unintelligent thing totally and absolutely to Himself, and He desires that his intelligent creatures should voluntarily make the same disposition of themselves. It is true that He desires our happiness, but that is neither the chief end of his work, nor an end to be compared with that of his glory. It is for his glory only that He wills our happiness; the latter is a subordinate consideration, which He refers to the final and essential end of his glory.

That we may enter into his designs in this respect, we must prefer God before ourselves, and endeavor to will our own happiness for his glory; in any other case, we invert the order of things. And we must not desire his glory on account of our own salvation, but, on the other hand, the desire for his glory should impel us to seek our own happiness as a thing which He has been pleased to make a part of his glory. It is true that all holy souls are not capable of exercising this explicit preference for God over themselves, but there must at least be an implicit preference; the former, which is more perfect, is reserved for those whom God has endowed with light and strength to prefer Him to themselves, to such a degree as to desire their own happiness simply because it adds to his glory.

Men have a great repugnance to this truth, and consider it to be a very hard saying, because they are lovers of self from self-interest. They understand, in a general and superficial way, that they must love God more than all his creatures, but they have no conception of loving God more than themselves, and loving themselves only for Him. They can utter these great words without difficulty, because they do not enter into their meaning, but they shudder when it is explained to them, that God and his glory are to be preferred before ourselves and everything else to such a degree that we must love his glory more than our own happiness, and must refer the latter to the former, as a subordinate means to an end.

IV.

ON PRAYER AND THE PRINCIPAL EXERCISES OF PIETY.

1. TRUE prayer is only another name for the love of God. Its excellence does not consist in the multitude of our words; for our Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask Him. The true prayer is that of the heart, and the heart prays only for what it desires. To pray, then is to desire--but to desire what

God would have us desire. He who asks what he does not from the bottom of his heart desire, is mistaken in thinking that he prays. Let him spend days in reciting prayers, in meditation or in inciting himself to pious exercises, he prays not once truly, if he really desire not the things he pretends to ask.

2. O! how few there are who pray! for how few are they who desire what is truly good! Crosses, external and internal humiliation, renouncement of our own wills, the death of self and the establishment of God's throne upon the ruins of self love, these are indeed good; not to desire these, is not to pray; to desire them seriously, soberly, constantly, and with reference to all the details of life, this is true prayer; not to desire them, and yet to suppose we pray, is an illusion like that of the wretched who dream themselves happy. Alas! how many souls full of self, and of an imaginary desire for perfection in the midst of hosts of voluntary imperfections, have never yet uttered this true prayer of the heart! It is in reference to this that St. Augustine says: He that loveth little, prayeth little; he that loveth much, prayeth much.

3. On the other hand, that heart in which the true love of God and true desire exist, never ceases to pray. Love, hid in the bottom of the soul, prays without ceasing, even when the mind is drawn another way. God continually beholds the desire which He has himself implanted in the soul, though it may at times be unconscious of its existence; his heart is touched by it; it ceaselessly attracts his mercies; it is that Spirit which, according to St. Paul, helpeth our infirmities and maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. (Rom. viii. 26.)

4. Love desires of God that he would give us what we need, and that He would have less regard to our frailty than to the purity of our intentions. It even covers over our trifling defects, and purifies us like a consuming fire; "He maketh intercession for the Saints, according to the will of God. (Rom. viii. 27.) For "we know not what we should pray for as we ought," and, in our ignorance, frequently request what would be injurious; we should like fervor of devotion, distinct sensible joys and apparent perfections, which would serve to nourish within us the life of self and a confidence in our own strength; but love leads us on, abandons us to all the operations of grace, puts us entirely at the disposal of God's will, and thus prepares us for all his secret designs.

5. Then we will all things and yet nothing. What God gives, is precisely what we should have desired to ask; for we will whatever He wills and only that. Thus, this state contains all prayer: it is a work of the heart which includes all desire. The Spirit prays within us for those very things which the Spirit himself wills to give us. Even when we are occupied with outward things, and our thoughts drawn off by the providential engagements of our position, we still carry within us a constantly burning fire, which not only cannot be extinguished, but nourishes a secret prayer, and is like a lamp continually lighted before the throne of God, "I sleep but my heart waketh." (Sol. Song v. 2.) "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh, shall find watching." (Luke xii. 37.)

6. There are two principal points of attention necessary for the preservation of this constant spirit of prayer which unites us with God: we must continually seek to cherish it, and we must avoid everything that tends to make us lose it.

In order to cherish it, we should pursue a regulated course of reading; we must have appointed seasons of secret prayer, and frequent states of recollection during the day; we should make use of retirement when we feel the need of it, or when it is advised by those of greater experience, and unite in the ordinances appropriate to our condition.

We should greatly fear and be exceedingly cautious to avoid all things that have a tendency to make us lose this state of prayer. Thus we should decline those worldly occupations and associates which dissipate the mind, pleasures which excite the passions, and everything calculated to awaken the love of the world and those old inclinations that have caused us so much trouble.

There is an infinity of detail in these two heads; general directions only can be given, because each individual case presents features peculiar to itself.

7. We should choose those works for reading which instruct us in our duty and in our faults; which, while they point out the greatness of God, teach us what is our duty to Him, and how very far we are from performing it; not those barren productions which melt and sentimentalize the heart; the tree must bear fruit; we can only judge of the life of the root by its fecundity.

8. The first effect of a sincere love is an earnest desire to know all that we ought to do to gratify the object of our affection. Any other desire is a proof that we love ourselves under a pretence of loving God; that we are seeking an empty and deceitful consolation in Him; that we would use God as an instrument for our pleasure, instead of sacrificing that for his glory. God forbid that his children should so love Him! Cost what it may, we must both know and do without reservation what he requires of us.

9. Seasons of secret prayer must be regulated by the leisure, the disposition, the condition, and the inward impulse of each individual.

Meditation is not prayer, but it is its necessary foundation; it brings to mind the truths which God has revealed. We should be conversant not only with all the mysteries of Jesus Christ, and the truths of his Gospel, but also with everything they ought to operate in us for our regeneration; we should be colored and penetrated by them as wool is by the dye.

10. So familiar should they become to us, that, in consequence of seeing them at all times and ever near to us, we may acquire the habit of forming no judgment except in their light; that they may be to us our only guide in matters of practice, as the rays of the sun are our only light in matters of perception.

When these truths are once, as it were, incorporated in us, then it is that our praying begins to be real and fruitful. Up to that point it was but the shadow; we thought we had penetrated to the inmost recesses of the gospel, when we had barely set foot upon the vestibule--all our most tender and lively feelings, all our firmest resolutions, all our clearest and farthest views, were but the rough and shapeless mass from which God would hew in us his likeness.

11. When his celestial rays begin to shine within us, then we see in the true light; then there is no truth to which we do not instantaneously assent, as we admit, without any process of reasoning, the splendor of the sun, the moment we behold his rising beams. Our union with God must be the result of our faithfulness in doing and suffering all his will.

12. Our meditations should become every day deeper and more interior. I say deeper, because by frequent and humble meditation upon God's truth, we penetrate farther and farther in search of new treasures; and more interior, because as we sink more and more to enter into these truths, they also descend to penetrate the very substance of our souls. Then it is that a simple word goes farther than whole sermons.

13. The very things which had been, fruitlessly and coldly, heard a hundred times before, now nourish the soul with a hidden manna, having an infinite variety of flavors for days in succession. Let us beware, too, of ceasing to meditate upon truths which have heretofore been blessed to us, so long as there remains any nourishment in them, so long as they yet yield us anything; it is a certain sign that we still need their ministrations; we derive instruction from them without receiving any precise or distinct impression; there is an indescribable something in them, which helps us more than all our reasonings. We behold a truth, we love it and repose upon it; it strengthens the soul and detaches us from ourselves; let us dwell upon it in peace as long as possible.

14. As to the manner of meditating, it should not be subtle, nor composed of long reasonings; simple and natural reflections derived immediately from the subject of our thoughts are all that is required.

We need take but a few truths; meditate upon these without hurry, without effort, and without seeking for far-fetched reflections.

Every truth should be considered with reference to its practical bearing. To receive it without employing all means to put it faithfully in practice at whatever cost, is to desire "to hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. i. 18); it is a resistance to the truth impressed upon us, and of course, to the Holy Spirit. This is the most terrible of all unfaithfulness.

15. As to a method in prayer, each one must be guided by his own experience. Those who find themselves profited in using a strict method, need not depart from it, while those who cannot so confine themselves, may make use of their own mode, without ceasing to respect that which has been useful to many, and which so many pious and experienced persons have highly recommended. A method is intended to assist; if it be found to embarrass, instead of assisting, the sooner it is discarded the better.

16. The most natural mode, at first, is to take a book, and to cease reading whenever we feel so inclined by the passage upon which we are engaged, and, whenever that no longer ministers to our interior nourishment, to begin again. As a general rule, those truths which we highly relish, and which shed a degree of practical light upon the things which we are required to give up for God, are leadings of Divine Grace, which we should follow without hesitation. The Spirit bloweth where it listeth, (John iii. 8,) and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. (2 Cor. iii. 17.)

In the course of time the proportion of reflections and reasonings will diminish, and that of tender feelings, affecting views and desires, will increase as we become sufficiently instructed and convinced by the Holy Spirit. The heart is satisfied, nourished, warmed, set on fire; a word only will give it employment for a long time.

17. Finally, increase of prayer is indicated by an increase of simplicity and steadiness in our views, a great multitude of objects and considerations being no longer necessary. Our intercourse with God resembles that with a friend; at first, there are a thousand things to be told, and as many to be asked; but after a time, these diminish, while the pleasure of being together does not. Everything has been said, but the satisfaction of seeing each other, of feeling that one is near the other, of reposing in the enjoyment of a pure and sweet friendship, can be felt without conversation; the silence is eloquent and mutually understood. Each feels that the other is in perfect sympathy with him, and that their two hearts are incessantly poured one into the other, and constitute but one.

18. Thus it is that in prayer, our communion with God becomes a simple and familiar union, far beyond the need of words. But let it be remembered that God himself must alone institute this prayer within us; nothing would be more rash nor more dangerous, than to dare to attempt it of ourselves. We must suffer ourselves to be led step by step, by some one conversant with the ways of God, who may lay the immovable foundations of correct teaching, and of the complete death of self in everything.

19. As regards retirement and attending upon ordinances, we must be governed by the advice of some one in whom we have confidence. Our own necessities, the effect produced upon us, and many other circumstances, are to be taken into consideration.

20. Our leisure and our needs must regulate our retirements; our needs, because it is with the soul as with the body; when we can no longer work without nourishment, we must take it; we shall otherwise be in danger of fainting. Our leisure, because, this absolute necessity of food excepted, we must attend to duty before we seek enjoyment in spiritual exercises. The man who has public duties and spends the time appropriate to them in meditating in retirement, would miss of God while he was seeking to be united to Him. True union with God is to do his will without ceasing, in spite of all our natural disinclination and in every duty of life, however disagreeable or mortifying.

21. As precautions against wanderings we must avoid close and intimate intercourse with those who are not pious, especially when we have been before led astray by their infectious maxims. They will open our wounds afresh: they have a secret correspondence deep in our souls; there is there a soft and insinuating counsellor who is always ready to blind and deceive us.

22. Would you judge of a man? says the Holy Spirit. (Prov. xiii. 20.) Observe who are his companions. How can he who loves God, and who loves nothing except in and for God, enjoy the intimate companionship of those who neither love, nor know God, and who look upon love to Him as a weakness? Can a heart full of God and sensible of its own frailty, ever rest, and be at ease with those who have no feelings in common with it, but are ever seeking to rob it of its treasure? Their delights, and the pleasures of which Faith is the source, are incompatible.

23. I am well aware that we cannot, nay, that we ought not to break with those friends to whom we are bound by esteem of their natural amiability, by their services, by the tie of sincere friendship, or by the regard consequent upon mutual good offices. Friends whom we have treated with a certain familiarity and confidence, would be wounded to the quick, were we to separate from them entirely; we must gently and imperceptibly diminish our intercourse with them, without abruptly declaring our alteration of sentiment; we may see them in private, distinguish them from our less intimate friends, and confide to them those matters in which their integrity and friendship enable them to give us good advice, and to think with us, although our reasons for so thinking are more pure and elevated than theirs. In short, we may continue to serve them, and to manifest all the attentions of a cordial friendship, without suffering our hearts to be embarrassed by them.

24. How perilous is our state without this precaution! If we do not, from the first, boldly adopt all measures to render our piety entirely free and independent of our unregenerate friends, it is threatened with a speedy downfall. If a man surrounded by such companions be of a yielding disposition and inflammable passions, it is certain that his friends, even the best-intentioned ones, will lead him astray. They may be good, honest, faithful, and possessed of all those qualities which render friendship perfect in the eye of the world; but, for him, they are infected, and their amiability only increases the danger. Those who have not

this estimable character, should be sacrificed at once; blessed are we, when a sacrifice that ought to cost us so little, may avail to give us so precious a security for our eternal salvation!

25. Not only, then, should we be exceedingly careful whom we will see, but we must also reserve the necessary time that we may see God alone in prayer. Those who have stations of importance to fill, have generally so many indispensable duties to perform, that without the greatest care in the management of their time, none will be left to be alone with God. If they have ever so little inclination for dissipation, the hours that belong to God and their neighbor disappear altogether.

We must be firm in observing our rules. This strictness seems excessive, but without it everything falls into confusion; we become dissipated, relaxed and lose strength; we insensibly separate from God, surrender ourselves to all our pleasures, and only then begin to perceive that we have wandered, when it is almost hopeless to think of endeavoring to return.

Prayer, prayer! this is our only safety. "Blessed be God which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me." (Ps. lxxvi: 20.) And to be faithful in prayer it is indispensable that we should dispose all the employments of the day, with a regularity nothing can disturb.

V.

ON CONFORMITY TO THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST.

WE must imitate Jesus; live as He lived, think as He thought, and be conformed to his image, which is the seal of our sanctification.

What a contrast! Nothingness strives to be something, and the Omnipotent becomes nothing! I will be nothing with Thee, my Lord! I offer Thee the pride and vanity which have possessed me hitherto. Help Thou my will; remove from me occasions of my stumbling; turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity (Psalm cxviii. 37, cxix. 37); let me behold nothing but Thee and myself in thy presence, that I may understand what I am and what Thou art.

Jesus Christ was born in a stable; he was obliged to fly into Egypt; thirty years of his life were spent in a workshop; he suffered hunger, thirst, and weariness; he was poor, despised and miserable; he taught the doctrines of Heaven, and no one would listen. The great and the wise persecuted and took him, subjected him to frightful torments, treated him as a slave and put him to death between two malefactors, having preferred to give liberty to a robber, rather than to suffer him to escape. Such was the life which our Lord chose; while we are horrified at any kind of humiliation, and cannot bear the slightest appearance of contempt.

Let us compare our lives with that of Jesus Christ, reflecting that he was the Master and that we are the servants; that He was all-powerful, and that we are but weakness; that he was abased and that we are exalted. Let us so constantly bear our wretchedness in mind, that we may have nothing but contempt for ourselves. With what face can we despise others, and dwell upon their faults, when we ourselves are filled with nothing else? Let us begin to walk in the path which our Saviour has marked out, for it is the only one that can lead us to Him.

And how can we expect to find Jesus if we do not seek Him in the states of his earthly life, in loneliness and silence, in poverty and suffering, in persecution and contempt, in annihilation and the cross? The saints find him in heaven, in the splendors of glory and in unspeakable pleasures; but it is only after having

dwelt with Him on earth in reproaches, in pain and in humiliation. To be a Christian is to be an imitator of Jesus Christ. In what can we imitate Him if not in his humiliation? Nothing else can bring us near to Him. We may adore him as Omnipotent, fear him as just, love him with all our heart as good and merciful,--but we can only imitate him as humble, submissive, poor and despised.

Let us not imagine that we can do this by our own efforts; everything that is within is opposed to it; but we may rejoice in the presence of God. Jesus has chosen to be made partaker of all our weaknesses; He is a compassionate high-priest who has voluntarily submitted to be tempted in all points like as we are; let us, then, have all our strength in Him who became weak that he might strengthen us; let us enrich ourselves out of his poverty, confidently exclaiming, I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. (Philip. iv. 13.)

Let me follow in thy footsteps, O Jesus! I would imitate Thee, but cannot without the aid of thy grace! O humble and lowly Saviour, grant me the knowledge of the true Christian, and that I may willingly despise myself; let me learn the lesson, so incomprehensible to the mind of man, that I must die to myself by an abandonment that shall produce true humility.

Let us earnestly engage in this work, and change this hard heart, so rebellious to the heart of Jesus Christ. Let us make some approaches toward the holy soul of Jesus; let Him animate our souls and destroy all our repugnances. O lovely Jesus! who hast suffered so many injuries and reproaches for my sake, let me esteem and love them for thine, and let me desire to share thy life of humiliation!

VI.

ON HUMILITY.

WHAT a mercy is humiliation to a soul that receives it with a steadfast faith! There are a thousand blessings in it for ourselves and for others; for our Lord bestows his grace upon the humble. Humility renders us charitable towards our neighbor; nothing will make us so tender and indulgent to the faults of others as a view of our own.

Two things produce humility when combined; the first is a sight of the abyss of wretchedness from which the all-powerful hand of God has snatched us, and over which he still holds us, as it were, suspended in the air, and the other is the presence of that God who is ALL.

Our faults, even those most difficult to bear, will all be of service to us, if we make use of them for our humiliation, without relaxing our efforts to correct them. It does no good to be discouraged; it is the result of a disappointed and despairing self-love. The true method of profiting by the humiliation of our faults, is to behold them in all their deformity, without losing our hope in God, and without having any confidence in ourselves.

We must bear with ourselves without either flattery or discouragement, a mean seldom attained; for we either expect great things of ourselves and of our good intentions, or wholly despair. We must hope nothing from self, but wait for everything from God. Utter despair of ourselves, in consequence of a conviction of our helplessness, and unbounded confidence in God, are the true foundations of the spiritual edifice.

That is a false humility, which, acknowledging itself unworthy of the gifts of God, dares not confidently expect them; true humility consists in a deep view of our utter unworthiness, and in an absolute

abandonment to God, without the slightest doubt that He will do the greatest things in us.

Those who are truly humble, will be surprised to hear anything exalted of themselves. They are mild and peaceful, of a contrite and humble heart, merciful and compassionate; they are quiet, cheerful, obedient, watchful, fervent in spirit and incapable of strife; they always take the lowest place, rejoice when they are despised, and consider every one superior to themselves; they are lenient to the faults of others in view of their own, and very far from preferring themselves before any one. We may judge of our advancement in humility, by the delight we have in humiliations and contempt.

VII.

ON PRAYER.

MANY are tempted to believe that they no longer pray, when they cease to enjoy a certain pleasure in the act of prayer. But, if they will reflect that perfect prayer is only another name for love to God, they will be undeceived.

Prayer, then, does not consist in sweet feelings, nor in the charms of an excited imagination, nor in that illumination of the intellect that traces with ease the sublimest truths in God; nor even in a certain consolation in the view of God: all these things are external gifts from his hand, in the absence of which, love may exist even more purely, as the soul may then attach itself immediately and solely to God, instead of to his mercies.

This is that love by naked faith which is the death of nature, because it leaves it no support; and when we are convinced that all is lost, that very conviction is the evidence that all is gained.

Pure love is in the will alone; it is no sentimental love, for the imagination has no part in it; it loves, if we may so express it, without feeling, as faith believes without seeing. We need not fear that this love is an imaginary thing--nothing can be less so than the mere will separate from all imagination: the more purely intellectual and spiritual are the operations of our minds, the nearer are they, not only to reality but to the perfection which God requires of us: their working is more perfect; faith is in full exercise while humility is preserved.

Such love is chaste: for it is the love of God in and for God; we are attached to Him, but not for the pleasure which he bestows on us; we follow Him, but not for the loaves and fishes.

What! some may say, can it be that a simple will to be united with God, is the whole of piety? How can we be assured that this will is not a mere idea, a trick of the imagination, instead of a true willing of the soul?

I should indeed believe that it was a deception, if it were not the parent of faithfulness on all proper occasions; for a good tree bringeth forth good fruit; and a true will makes us truly earnest and diligent in doing the will of God; but it is still compatible in this life with little failings which are permitted by God that the soul may be humbled. If, then, we experience only these little daily frailties, let us not be discouraged, but extract from them their proper fruit, humility.

True virtue and pure love reside in the will alone. Is it not a great matter always to desire the Supreme Good whenever He is seen; to keep the mind steadily turned towards Him, and to bring it back whenever it is perceived to wander; to will nothing advisedly but according to his order; in short, in the absence of all sensible enjoyment, still to remain the same in the spirit of a submissive, irreclaimable burnt-offering?

Think you it is nothing to repress all the uneasy reflections of self-love; to press forward continually without knowing whither we go, and yet without stopping; to cease from self-satisfied thoughts of self, or at least, to think of ourselves as we would of another; to fulfill the indications of Providence for the moment, and no further? Is not this more likely to be the death of the Old Adam than fine sentiments, in which we are, in fact, thinking only of self, or external acts, in the performance of which we congratulate self on our advancement?

It is a sort of infidelity to simple faith when we desire to be continually assured that we are doing well; it is, in fact, to desire to know what we are doing, which we shall never know, and of which it is the will of God that we should be ignorant. It is trifling by the way in order to reason about the way. The safest and shortest course is to renounce, forget and abandon self, and through faithfulness to God to think no more of it. This is the whole of religion--to get out of self and of self-love in order to get into God.

As to involuntary wanderings, they are no hinderance to love, inasmuch as love is in the will, and the will only wanders when it wills to wander. As soon as we perceive that they have occurred, we drop them instantly and return to God, and thus, while the external senses of the spouse are asleep, the heart is watching; its love knows no intermission. A tender parent does not always bear his son distinctly in mind; he thinks and imagines a thousand things disconnected with him, but they do not interfere with the paternal affection; the moment that his thoughts rest again upon his child, he loves, and feels in the depths of his soul that though he has ceased to think of him he has not for an instant failed to love him. Such should be our love to our Heavenly Father; a love simple, trustful, confident and without anxiety.

If our imagination take wing and our thoughts wander, let us not be perplexed; all these things are not that "hidden man of the heart in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit," of which St. Peter speaks. (1 Pet. iii. 4.) Let us only turn our thoughts, whenever we can, towards the face of the Well-beloved without being troubled at our wanderings. When He shall see fit to enable us to preserve a more constant sense of his presence with us, He will do so.

He sometimes removes it for our advancement; it amuses us with too many reflections which are true distractions, diverting the mind from a simple and direct look toward God and withdrawing us from the shades of naked faith.

We often seek in these reflections a resting-place for our self-love and consolation in the testimony we endeavor to extract from them for self; and thus the warmth of our feelings causes us to wander. On the contrary, we never pray so purely as when we are tempted to believe that we do not pray at all; we fear that we pray ill, but we should only fear being left to the desolation of sinful nature, to a philosophical infidelity, seeking perpetually a demonstration of its own operations in faith; in short, to impatient desires for consolation in sight and feeling.

There is no more bitter penance than this state of pure faith without sensible support; and hence it seems to me the most effective, the most crucifying, and the least illusive. Strange temptation! We look impatiently for sensible consolation from the fear of not being penitent enough! Ah! why do we not consider the renouncement of that consolation which we are so strongly tempted to seek, as a proof of our penitence? Remember our Lord abandoned by his Father on the cross: all feeling, all reflection withdrawn that his God might be hidden from him; this was indeed the last blow that fell upon the man of sorrows, the consummation of the sacrifice!

Never should we so abandon ourselves to God as when He seems to abandon us. Let us enjoy light and consolation when it is his pleasure to give it to us, but let us not attach ourselves to his gifts, but to Him; and when He plunges us into the night of Pure Faith, let us still press on through the agonizing darkness.

Moments are worth days in this tribulation; the soul is troubled and yet at peace; not only is God hidden from it, but it is hidden from itself, that all may be of faith; it is discouraged, but feels nevertheless an immovable will to bear all that God may choose to inflict; it wills all, accepts all, even the troubles that try its faith, and thus in the very height of the tempest, the waters beneath are secretly calm and at peace, because its Will is one with God's. Blessed be the Lord who performeth such great things in us, notwithstanding our unworthiness!

VIII.

ON MEDITATION.

WHEN the solid foundations of a perfect conversion of heart, a scrupulous repentance and a serious meditation of all the Christian virtues have been laid, both theoretically and practically, we become gradually so accustomed to these truths, that we regard them at last with a simple and steady look, without the necessity of going back to examine and convince ourselves of each of them in detail. They are then all embraced in a certain enjoyment of God, so pure and so intimate, that we find everything in Him. It is no longer the intellect that examines and reasons; it is the will which loves and plunges into the infinite Good.

But this is not your state. You must walk for a long while in the way of the sinners who are beginning to seek God; ordinary meditation is your lot, too happy that God condescends to admit you to it.

Walk then in the spirit, like Abraham, without knowing whither you go; be content with your daily bread, and remember that in the desert the manna of to-day could not be preserved until to-morrow without corrupting. The children of God must be shut up to the grace of the present moment, without desiring to foresee the designs of Providence concerning them.

Meditate, then, since now is your opportunity, upon all the mysteries of Jesus Christ and upon all the Gospel truths which you have for so long a time ignored and rejected. When God shall have entirely effaced from your mind the impression of all your worldly maxims, and the Spirit shall have left there no trace of your old prejudices, then it will be necessary to ascertain the direction in which you are attracted by grace, and to follow step by step without anticipating.

In the meantime, dwell in peace in the bosom of God, like a little child on the breast of its mother; be satisfied with thinking on your chosen subject simply and easily; suffer yourself to be led gently to the truths which affect you, and which you find to nourish your heart. Avoid all exertions that excite the intellect, which often tempt us to believe that there is more piety in a dangerous vivacity of the imagination, than in a pure and upright intention of abandonment to God. Avoid likewise all refined speculation; confine yourself to simple reflections, and recur to them frequently. Those who pass too rapidly from one truth to another, feed their curiosity and restlessness; they even distract their intellect by too great a multiplicity of views.

Give every truth time to send down deep roots into the heart; the main point is--to love. Nothing gives rise to such severe fits of indigestion as eating too much and too hastily. Digest every truth leisurely, if you

would extract the essence of it for your nourishment, but let there be no restless self-reflective acts. Be sure that your exercise will not be acceptable unless performed without agitation or tumult.

I am well aware that you will have distractions enough; bear them without impatience, dismiss them and recur quietly to your subject as soon as you perceive that your imagination has wandered. In this way these involuntary distractions will produce no injurious effects, and the patience with which you bear them without being discouraged, will advance you farther than a more continuous meditation, in which you might take more self-satisfaction. The true method of conquering wandering thoughts, is never to attack them directly with bitterness, and never to be discouraged by their frequency or duration.

Suffer yourself, then, to be quietly occupied by the subject you have chosen; only let the exercise be as holy as you can make it, to which end take the following directions:

Do not encumber yourself with a great number of thoughts upon a subject; but dwell upon each sufficiently long to allow it to afford its proper nourishment to the heart. You will gradually become accustomed to regard each truth steadily by itself, without flitting from one to another; this habit will serve to fix them deeply in your soul. You will thus, also, acquire a habit of dwelling upon your themes with pleasure and peaceful acquiescence, instead of considering them rapidly and intellectually as most persons do. Thus the foundation will be firmly laid for all that God intends to do in you; he will thus mortify the natural activity of the mind, that ever inclines it to seek novelties, instead of deeply imprinting the truths already in some degree familiar. You must not, however, forcibly restrain your mind to a subject which no longer seems to afford any nourishment; I would advise only that you should not abandon it so long as it still ministers food.

As to your affections, retain all which the view of your subject naturally and quietly induces; but do not attempt to stir yourself up to great efforts, for they will exhaust and agitate you, and even cause aridities; they will occupy you too much with your own exertions, and implant a dangerous confidence in your own power; in short, they will attach you too firmly to sensible pleasures, and will thus prepare you great trouble in a time of dryness. Be content, then, to follow with simplicity, and without too many reflections, the emotions which God shall excite in view of your subject, or of any other truth. As for higher things, have no thoughts of them; there is a time for everything, and it is of the greatest importance that nothing should be precipitated.

One of the cardinal rules of the spiritual life is, that we are to live exclusively in the present moment, without casting a look beyond. You remember that the Israelites in the desert followed the pillar of fire, or of cloud, without knowing whither it was leading them; they had a supply of manna but for one day; all above that became useless. There is no necessity now for moving rapidly; think only of laying a solid foundation; see that it is deep and broad by an absolute renunciation of self, and by an abandonment without reserve to the requirements of God. Let God, then, raise upon this foundation such a building as He pleases. Shut your eyes and commit yourself to Him. How wonderful is this walking with Abraham in pure faith, not knowing whither we go! and how full of blessings is the path!

God will then be your guide; He himself will travel with you, as we are told He did with the Israelites, to bring them step by step across the desert to the promised land. Ah! what will be your blessedness if you will but surrender yourself into the hands of God, permitting him to do whatever He will, not according to your desires, but according to His own good pleasure!

IX.

ON MORTIFICATION.

GOD calls us hourly and momentarily to the exercise of mortification; but nothing can be more false than the maxim that we should always choose that which mortifies us the most. Such a plan would soon destroy our health, our reputation, our business, our intercourse with our relatives and friends, and the good works which Providence requires of us. I have no hesitation in saying that we ought to avoid certain things which experience has shown us to injure our health, such as certain kinds of food, etc. This course will, no doubt, spare us some suffering; but it does not tend to pamper the body nor require the employment of expensive or delicious substitutes; on the contrary, it conduces to a sober, and, therefore, in many respects, mortified life.

Failures in regimen are owing to a want of mortification; they are not due either to courage in enduring pain, or to indifference to life, but to a weak hankering for pleasure, and impatience of anything that annoys. Submitting to regimen for the purpose of preserving health, is a great constraint; we would much rather suffer and be sick, than be constantly restraining our appetites; we love liberty and pleasure more than health. But God arranges all that in the heart which is devoted to Him; He causes us to fall in quietly with every regulation, and takes away a certain want of pliability in the will, and a dangerous confidence in ourselves; He blunts the desires, cools the passions, and detaches the man, not only from exterior things, but from self, renders him mild, amiable, simple, lowly, ready to will or not, according to His good pleasure. Let it be so with us; God desires it, and is ready to effect it; let us not resist his will. The mortification which comes in the order of God, is more serviceable than any enjoyment in devotion which should result from our own affection and choice.

In regard to austerities, every one must regard his attraction, his state, his need and his temperament. A simple mortification, consisting in nothing more than an unshaken fidelity in providential crosses, is often far more valuable than severe austerities which render the life more marked, and tempt to a vain self-complacency. Whoever will refuse nothing which comes in the order of God, and s

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