

Confessing Our Weakness in the Miseries of Life

by Thomas a Kempis

Thomas a Kempis reflects on the human condition of weakness and the struggle to resist temptation, emphasizing the need for divine mercy and assistance.

Scripture: Psalm 38:18, Matthew 16:24, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Galatians 5:17, 1 John 2:16

Topics: "Spiritual Struggle", "Holy Discipline"

Description

Thomas a Kempis reflects on the struggles of a disciple who confesses his weaknesses, battles temptations, and laments the constant conflicts between the flesh and the spirit. He questions the nature of life filled with troubles, miseries, and snares, yet acknowledges the allure of worldly desires that lead to love and hatred of the world. Kempis contrasts the pleasures of the world with the internal delight of virtue and the sweetness of God, urging a life of renunciation and holy discipline.

Transcript

THE DISCIPLE

I WILL bring witness against myself to my injustice, and to You, O Lord, I will confess my weakness.

Often it is a small thing that makes me downcast and sad. I propose to act bravely, but when even a small temptation comes I find myself in great straits. Sometimes it is the merest trifle which gives rise to grievous temptations. When I think myself somewhat safe and when I am not expecting it, I frequently find myself almost overcome by a slight wind. Look, therefore, Lord, at my lowliness and frailty which You know so well. Have mercy on me and snatch me out of the mire that I may not be caught in it and may not remain forever utterly despondent.

That I am so prone to fall and so weak in resisting my passions oppresses me frequently and confounds me in Your sight. While I do not fully consent to them, still their assault is very troublesome and grievous to me, and it wearies me exceedingly thus to live in daily strife. Yet from the fact that abominable fancies rush in upon me much more easily than they leave, my weakness becomes clear to me.

Oh that You, most mighty God of Israel, zealous Lover of faithful souls, would consider the labor and sorrow of Your servant, and assist him in all his undertakings! Strengthen me with heavenly courage lest

the outer man, the miserable flesh, against which I shall be obliged to fight so long as I draw a breath in this wretched life and which is not yet subjected to the spirit, prevail and dominate me.

Alas! What sort of life is this, from which troubles and miseries are never absent, where all things are full of snares and enemies? For when one trouble or temptation leaves, another comes. Indeed, even while the first conflict is still raging, many others begin unexpectedly. How is it possible to love a life that has such great bitterness, that is subject to so many calamities and miseries? Indeed, how can it even be called life when it begets so many deaths and plagues? And yet, it is loved, and many seek their delight in it.

Many persons often blame the world for being false and vain, yet do not readily give it up because the desires of the flesh have such great power. Some things draw them to love the world, others make them despise it. The lust of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life lead to love, while the pains and miseries, which are the just consequences of those things, beget hatred and weariness of the world.

Vicious pleasure overcomes the soul that is given to the world. She thinks that there are delights beneath these thorns, because she has never seen or tasted the sweetness of God or the internal delight of virtue. They, on the other hand, who entirely despise the world and seek to live for God under the rule of holy discipline, are not ignorant of the divine sweetness promised to those who truly renounce the world. They see clearly how gravely the world errs, and in how many ways it deceives.

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