

## FOREWORD

By way of Foreword to this third (and to the best of my knowledge, for want of any more material, the last) series of *Words of Encouragement*, I would quote, as typical of the spirit of Father Considine's direction, this passage from one of his letters. My advice regarding your whole spiritual life now would be—less of self-examination and even of self-reproach, more, of direct looking to God, and constant acts of thanksgiving to Him. Never forget that love is not only the best way of uniting ourselves with God, but also the best form of expiation for our past sins and negligences. The surest and easiest method of obtaining sorrow for our transgressions is to fix our glance on Our Lord and understand how loving and lovable He is in Himself and how much He has done and suffered for us. Turn your eyes away from yourself, even for self-condemnation, as much as you can. Of course, sorrow for the past is good, but not to dwell upon, but to lead us further on to know and love better Him whom we have offended." "He guided me much," wrote Cardinal Vaughan of Father Considine, "in the work of intercourse with God, and in generosity and liberty of spirit."

The very great appreciation shown throughout the whole English-speaking world for *Words of Encouragement* and *More Words of Encouragement*, and their translation into foreign languages, is surely an eloquent testimony to the permanent power of the simple teaching of this holy priest in liberating from vain fears, stimulating to generosity; and leading to more direct intercourse with God, those who put themselves, humbly and simply, under his guidance.

May these *Further Words of Encouragement* fulfil the same high function to the greater glory of God!

F.C.D.

# FURTHER WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

By Rev. D. Considine, S. J.

## Gentleness

IF I were asked what was the characteristic virtue of Our Lord during His Life and Passion, I should venture to suggest the virtue of *gentleness*.

Not a want of proper spirit. There are some who, from mere disinclination to exert themselves, would rather give way than quarrel; with others it is a matter of politeness. Real gentleness is only possible when there is a good deal of strength. It is a holding of oneself back, with a great reserve of power. An orator, a poet, or painter just moves us in proportion as we feel that there is a great deal more at the back than he might have given us had he chosen. It is a point of weakness to come to the end of our tether.

Our Lord's gentleness was always the same in all circumstances. God-Made-Man: should we ever have thought of gentleness as the special characteristic of His life?

If we want to draw near to God, it will not be by sublime thoughts, nor by outward power, but by the force of gentleness. How very few are really gentle! They are placid, or languid, or they, have no strong views; but that kind of gentleness doesn't command much respect. But if you meet one who is never cruel, never exacting—this means wonderful mortifications wonderful unselfishness. Our part in life towards others is mercy. A really gentle person never passes a harsh judgement, looks upon all gently, makes allowances and excuses for all. The compassion of Jesus was so infinite, His attitude so different from ours. If we could only find ourselves listening to Him as He related one of His parables, and then on a sudden be transported to an ordinary drawing-room, what a difference should we notice in the tone of the conversation: He looked so differently on the world, If we want to serve God with any perfection, we must be gentle. Certain defects are more abhorrent to God than others, and one is the want of charity. Defective charity is very common, and if we will keep up a grudge, so long we cannot draw near to God. It is a question of point of view, how we look at things. Whatever happens, I must be gentle: gentle in thoughts, in words, in deeds. Some people always take the gentle side, some always the hard. Are we "hanging judges" or "lenient judges"? Let us test ourselves. Why don't we be honest, and desire to be better? Take this small matter, and see if we can't become noticeable for our gentleness. If our

thoughts are gentle, our words will be so too. At the close of a day let us ask ourselves, has my judgement of others been kind and merciful? Am I always ready to pass judgement and condemn others either in public or private matters? What is my habitual attitude of mind?

We have not gentle thoughts even of God: we are unfair in our judgement of God. Instead, of thinking of God as the most loving and tender Father, we think of Him as unfair to us. "I am discontented with God, I think He behaves better to others than to me. I don't understand why I am not inundated with consolations." I don't put it into words, but that is really my thought of God.

Gentleness means patience. An ungentle person is always cocksure someone is to blame. A mistress may have to correct her servant, but there must be gentleness even in a severe correction.

When Our Lord enters your breast in Holy Communion, what characteristic does He wish to find? . . . If you wish to share in His infinite power of winning others, do so by making yourself as gentle as ever you can.

### **Diffidence**

The only reason we are not saints is because we don't give God the facility for making us so. We say, "I should consider it presumption on my part to want to love God any better than I do." He *wants* us all to be saints. There is no such thing as an incurable disease of the soul. Ask to be healed, but ask wholeheartedly, and believing in God's desire to cure you. If you don't believe He will help you fully, He won't help you fully.

You and I could do immensely better than we do, if only we had more faith and hope. There were such stores of grace waiting for us, and we never put out~ our hands to take them. God would have us be as impatient as possible to get the better of our faults. Can we believe that God will turn aside and take no notice of us when we cry out to Him to help us to be better? If I do want to get near to God, I can. It is possible to be humble; to be generous, to be courageous, to be mortified, to have a great love for His Sacred Heart and His Holy Mother. It is true that God does love me. If God brings that home to you, take that one thing, and work on that.

God does not distribute His graces to all alike: each one of us has a different personality and we show our own affection to one another in different ways. So with God. He does not expect the same signs of affection from each of us. But He wants me to love Him and serve Him, according to the nature He has given *me*: in *my* way, aided by His grace.

### **Want of Magnanimity**

Narrowness of conscience, over-sensitiveness with God, want of expansiveness, want of practical belief in His love: these are the faults of God's friends. To be always thinking of God's judgements, and that He is coming down upon me—is this a disposition befitting a child of God? How can we do much if we are always thinking of God as a hard master, letting us out as it were on a ticket of leave? You make it impossible to do heroic things for God when you have such unworthy thoughts of Him: and then comes the feeling, my service is not acceptable; God is behaving badly towards me.

Our hearts are the size of a gooseberry, where God is concerned. We want a big heart, which. He is only too ready to give.

But there is something that stops us. If you don't get rid of this big stone in the way, you'll never get far forward. Don't think anything hopeless: there is no spiritual disease without a remedy. We sometimes expect too much of ourselves—sometimes too little. We are apt to lose heart on looking back to our former efforts and the resolutions we made. This desolation of mind belongs to persons who expect too much. What God likes us to say is that we are very grateful that we have made a step in advance; He will then take us up and plant us a mile further on. Some, if they have not done everything, think they have done nothing. Checking the tongue, checking conceit—don't let us ever tire of thanking God for helping us in what seem small matters.

Remember, too, that time is of no consequence; intensity is what matters. In one second we can make an act of contrition better than if we have been six weeks about it. Anything encouraging in the spiritual life is an immense help. Many might be heroic if they would only *believe* God is calling them to higher things. As long as we feel that we are

going to get better, we do get better.

### **Self-Examination**

It is very difficult to hit the correct mean between too much and too little. There are persons who lead their lives in a happy-go-lucky sort of way they object to what they call a rule of thumb, or to anything introducing order. “Don’t pester us,” they say, “with all your spiritual meditations and nostrums, teaching us to be always watching, like children sowing seeds and digging them up to see how they are going on.

In others there is too great a tendency to introspection, and there is a danger of becoming too fond of investigation.

It is a great thing to have elasticity in our spiritual life—a liberty of spirit.

It is not a good thing not to see God’s finger in little providences. In one way there are no such things as sacred and profane. The Holy Ghost does speak directly to souls more than they think. Our spiritual life is advancing even when we are not concerned with spiritual things at all. It is not a good thing to divide up one’s life, so much time for God, so much for the world; we should bring God into everything. . . . A saint doesn’t differ from a sinner by having a hundred ways of praying; one thought will occupy a saint a very long time. . . . God can give us inspirations in a ballroom: people get such inspirations in most unlikely places. I don’t mean to depreciate our use of means—only to encourage you. We can’t believe too much in God’s following us everywhere. Let’s get help *always*; some people seem to fancy we can only have certain times of audience with God.

For scrupulous persons it is not good to be always poking about in the gutter of their souls; to them I say the less you think the better. But for ordinary people, it is a good thing to have a general notion of our spiritual countenance. It is not good to be in a fog. Am I humble? I don’t know. Have I uncharitable thoughts? I don’t know. These matters belong to the interior operations of grace. *Really* spiritual people have very just and right notions about themselves, though with a tendency to find fault with themselves, and sometimes they’ll say they were guilty when they were not. They are honestly humble.

### **Distractions in Prayer**

Are they wrong? Is there any sin in them?

Generally, they are due to physical causes, or to cares and bothers for which they who suffer from them are not responsible. Is God so unfair as to expect us to keep our thoughts fixed on Him when He does not give us the power? He looks at our hearts, and when a person comes, wishing to please Him, He makes little account of our imperfections. If I really love Him, what does He care? It is a waste of time to bewail things in which there is no sin. Our minds are human instruments, and follow the same laws, in things human or divine. Try and see what the things are that so absorb us: If you find these distractions run along the same lines, go into them, examine them. Why cannot I keep my mind off that subject? that person? that grievance? Pluck on to the root. Having found the cause, take it in hand. If we had only one-tenth of the prudence in spiritual things that we have in temporal, how differently we should act! But there is no use in getting flurried about it. We must be prepared to feel very foolish, and to trip time after time. Don’t let us be shocked at ourselves; we are very wretched creatures, but when God holds the lamp to our faults and imperfections, He means us to correct them. When God tells us to remedy a thing, we *can* remedy it.

The troubles of life are another occasion of distractions. Our Lord says: Don’t be worried about tomorrow. All worry is needless—is wrong. Feeling that we are very broken reeds to depend on, we get worried. If only we understood better that not a hair of our head falls without our Father knowing it. Not a toothache, not an attack of neuralgia, not a hard word said to us without our Father permitting it. We think that on our doing our best everything depends. We *must* do our best, but it is not on us that it all depends. St. Ignatius was so confident of God’s government of the world that even if the Society he had so laboured to establish had been swept away, he said it would not take him more than a quarter of an hour to get over it.

## **The Agony in the Garden**

All meditations should have a bearing on our practice. The Passion of Our Lord is incomparably the most effective part of His life. The Agony in the Garden covers our troubles of mind as distinct from physical suffering. Very often suffering is worse in the anticipation than in reality. . . . Not a day of our lives ought to pass without Our Lord's Passion helping us. When things go badly with us, uncertainty of the future, ingratitude, headaches, there is no method so quick to increase our love as at once to unite our pain with His. . . . Observe that Our Lord makes no change in His habits; though He knows that Judas will betray Him there, He goes, as His wont, to the Garden of Gethsemane. Learn from that not to run away from trials and troubles. Cast away one cross, you will find a heavier.

"He began to pray." Feeling the near approach of His Passion, He betakes Himself to extra prayer: not a variety of prayers, only: "Let this Chalice pass from Me." He was really human. The thought of the dreadful sorrow coming on Him absorbed Him. "And being in an agony, He prayed the more earnestly." If we could be more in earnest, it would be a great blessing. If a matter touches us nearly, we can think of nothing else. Therefore, if any trouble threatens us, prayer is an excellent preparation. Go to God as soon as you are dreading anything, and pray as Our Lord did with His whole heart and soul—with tears of blood. We wonder God doesn't give us things we have asked for for twenty years. Have we really asked for them? And with real importunate prayer?

The difficulty of bringing His human will to accept the suffering He saw before Him almost shattered His mortal frame. The early Christians tore this passage out of the Gospels for fear of the Jews being scandalized. But what a practical help it is to us. If you tiptoe through life, and avoid all that is bitter and hard, and beg to be saved from trial, maybe you'll never understand what Our Lord's Agony in the Garden was.

## **Thoughts on Hell**

God, if He had chosen, could have given us Heaven without our having worked for it. Meriting Heaven is an extra happiness—and the best for us. . . . If we behave badly, we deserve punishment. If we are to have freewill, it follows that while we can elect to love God, we can also refuse to do so.

What is Hell? The banishment from God's company.

The pain of sense is the most likely to affect us, and frighten us away from sin. "Fire" is taken as the greatest form of pain. . . . A great help to us to have the motive of fear. How many things we keep away from because they bring us bodily discomfort! What thanks we owe to God for providing us with such a motive for avoiding sin!

We should be careful of the delusion that we are so confirmed in grace that the thought of hell is not necessary for us. . . . The pain of loss should be a far greater deterrent than the pain of sense. Once we have parted from our body, the attractions of the world don't exist. As a special key is made for the wards of a special lock, in a much truer sense does the soul belong to God. . . . He has given us a thirst He alone can satisfy.

Perfect health, absolute liberty, unbounded riches—these things are not enough: only God can *fill* the soul. Here we get distractions, but when once we quit this world, the craving for God is only short of infinite because we are finite creatures.

If it were possible to take the pains of hell into Heaven, and have God, they would be a laughing matter.

The contradiction in the soul in hell—a craving for God, and yet—it would be a greater suffering to carry into Heaven one unforgiven mortal sin than to stay in the depths of hell. The drawing to God—and the repulsion from Him! How can any soul remain in enmity with God! how can they cast themselves away! Nothing happens all at once. If I love a person one moment, I don't hate him the next. St. Teresa said if she hadn't corrected a certain venial fault she would have ended by falling into hell.

Don't be timorous in conscience; God does not wish us to fall. He is infinitely merciful to sins of frailty—the sins we should fear most greatly are deliberate, cold-blooded sins: sins which perhaps in the beginning don't seem very much, but which we take~ to our hearts, and which vitiate our spiritual life. Sins too that make us critical, cynical, ready to judge others, to indulge in hard thoughts of God and our neighbour.

Ask to be allowed to help to save souls from rejecting God who loves them so much.

## **The Duty and Privilege of Thanksgiving**

In the epistles of St. Paul, the Apostle uses so many words connected with thanks. Even the Pharisee gives thanks he is not as others are. The duty appears to have been very present to the mind of the Jews.

“Always giving thanks—in everything.” How far is this a true description of our own state of mind? What is implied in the thought of gratitude? To acknowledge an obligation. Every breath ought to acknowledge it. God has drawn us out of nothing, and all we are is due to God’s action, not only in the past but in the present. That I exist at all is a matter of thanksgiving. If that thought is deep in our hearts, it will put us into an attitude that is not common. All God’s attributes, His power, His justice, His purity—and this grain of dust! It makes me have the proper idea of myself. It would, if carried out, make sin impossible. When we resist God’s will, it is because we think we have some rights of our own. We could not, if we had, the deep conviction of our own nothingness, and of the all-greatness of God:

It is a sort of condition of nearness to God that we should always realize our position as creatures. Every moment we are receiving back from God the gift of life. We can’t exist for five minutes of ourselves. No instalment of life from five minutes to five minutes: we receive it every moment. What folly and wickedness on the part of a creature to be setting himself up against God, when every moment of his life is a fresh gift from Him. The recognition of His omnipotence and our insignificance is a prelude to great graces in prayer.

*What are we to thank God for?*

Those high in God’s favour are full of thankfulness for what others pass by. It would be good to pass many days in thanking God for coming to our aid and saving us from losing our temper. Gratitude is the first thing that should come to our mind, in the ordinary events of life. At night to run over the events of the day, and thank God for all that has happened to us: the graces He has given us, the dangers He has saved us from, would help us to understand His Providence. If we thanked God for a hundred years that we have been allowed to go to Holy Communion *once*, we shouldn’t come within a thousand miles of the limits of the gratitude we owe Him. Have you ever thought that God has kept you alive for that Holy Communion you received today, and that it was a particular, personal gift from Our Lord? Supposing He sent an angel to say He wished to pass the day in your house? He does more; He comes into your breast. God doesn’t love some one less because He loves some one else also. His dealings with us are essentially personal. The fact of the sun warming one person doesn’t make it warm another less.

Now about the little things. A good test of your spiritual life is if you find satisfaction in thanking God. He is in your heart, and moving you to it. How personal His love is, and how He craves for our love! When the lepers went away, He *felt* it when only one came back to give thanks. He called attention at the Pharisee’s feast to all Mary Magdalene had done for Him; there you see Our Lord. Do we thank Him only for things put down in our prayer-books, forgetting the little things He has given us all day long—good weather—something we wanted. Our Lord is so human, so interested in so many other things than merely our duties. If you love a person, the smallest want of attention hurts you. A person in the street hustles you—it doesn’t matter—but a friend!

## **Christ and His Apostles**

Let us meditate a little on the sort of companionship to which Our Lord called His Apostles: a sort we should try to reproduce in our lives. We are all called to spread His love, whatever our vocation in life may be. There is apostolic work for all. It is said of St. Teresa that thousands of souls were granted to her prayers.

There was an astonishing intimacy between Our Lord and His Apostles. He lived with them, slept by their side, and there is the sweet tradition of how in the cold nights, He would get up and go round among them, drawing their rough coverings over them, lest they should be chilled. He did not stand on His dignity with them, and they spoke to Him as children to a father. Some of them even abused this privilege. St. Peter took upon himself, as we know, to lecture Our Lord, and Our Lord rebuked him for his worldly advice, saying, “Get thee behind Me, Satan,”\* etc. He reproved them for

\* *Matt. XVI. 23,*

their faults, but His rebukes never left a sting. We are so apt to go away when we have committed a fault, hurt and wounded. It is dreadfully wrong to waste time so. Nothing pleases Him like confidence. Whenever you feel inclined to doubt His love, and think the whole thing hopeless, remember, this discouragement is not of God, but either of your poor doubting self, or of the devil. No matter how trusting our thoughts of Him may be, they will always fall short of the truth.

And the truth is that Our Lord loves each of us with such intensity that He would go through all His Passion again *now* if that were needed to secure our happiness in Heaven. In the face of His love every difficulty crumbles to pieces. He *craves* for our love. A mother's love is nothing compared to His. And this not before we have offended Him, but at this very present moment:

“Not as though we had loved God, but because He hath first loved us, and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins.”\*\* But—no—we cannot believe it. The fear of not being forgiven goes along with sin. Judas refused to believe Our Lord could be so good as to forgive him.

Even if we do not actually despair, we often behave in a very foolish, wicked way. We allow the first effect of our sins to be an estrangement between us and God. We must hide ourselves from Him. Even of lesser sins we build up a barrier shutting us off from Him.

We have, too often, such a fine opinion of ourselves that when we fall we think the very angels must be amazed that such a wonderful, unheard-of thing has happened. We throw up our hands in horror, or go into a corner and sulk, or feel we cannot approach God till we have done some great penance. That was not the way of the saints, who being humble were not astonished at their failings. They made an act of sorrow and were just the same with Our Lord as they had been before. They were ashamed and sorry, but not surprised.

Our Lord forgives most easily, and does not want us to stay away from Him because of our sins.

To think He would withhold graces from us because of what we have done in the past is absurd.

We mustn't cry over spilt milk, or make ourselves too unhappy over past sins or faults or mistakes. As a rule it is not a good thing to think too much over the wrong we have done. After a good act of contrition and confession, as a rule, think no more about it. Don't let us sit down by the wayside and weep, but let us arise and go forward with our Friend.

### **Being Used by God**

Be persuaded that God is willing to use us, in spite of our unworthiness, for His work. Such a feeling is opposed to a worldly, dismal view of life. The Spirit of God is one of life, and hope, and freedom. St. Peter of Alcantara was once in conversation with a Spanish nobleman on the troubles of the time. “Things look very bad indeed,” said the nobleman: “what will become of the world?” St. Peter answered, “Well now, I have a plan of my own for reforming the world. I am going to begin to reform myself; and you do the same, and there will be *two* reformed.” St. Francis Xavier was told, “It's not the least use your trying to do anything with those people.” He paid no attention, simply set to work, and there was soon a wonderful change. The character of sanctity is hopefulness. God is more than able to cope with any evil. We must offer ourselves to God, and He will use us. There were very few Apostles, with all the world arrayed against them; but they had God with them, and they won their fight. No matter how much of worthlessness there is in us. Our Lord says, “My child, give Me your heart. I don't ask you to conquer that habit; you can't—but put your will in My hands, and everything will come right.” St. Teresa wanting to make one of her foundations, was speaking of it to a friend who took a discouraging view. “Sixpence and Teresa won't go far,” said the Saint, “but sixpence and Teresa and Almighty God will go very far.” Our spiritual life ought to have plenty of hopefulness, that He'll use even us for great things.

God is love—is joy—is absolute freedom. Compare the free, noble, generous, courageous life of one who hopes great things from God with the cramped life, full of doubt, full of misgiving, of one who is forever deploring his faults, as if God wouldn't forgive him. It isn't falling that matters, it's remaining on the road; wasting time, and making it more difficult to go on farther. The sort of life we ought to lead is being sorry for our inevitable faults, but having an absolute, trust in God. If He is all-powerful, why need I trouble about difficulties? Whenever you feel inclined to lose heart and say

\*\**I John IV.10*

it's no good, all this is not meant for me, I am too bad, too weak, etc.—that is not the Spirit of God speaking to you. But whenever your heart is lifted, and you feel there is such a thing as loving God, and feeling happy in the thought that God loves *you*—that is God within you. Somehow it is growing in my mind that God is wonderfully good to me; that He helps me not only in, Holy Communion, but all through the day, and somehow the idea of working for Our Lord, and with Our Lord, is becoming a reality—well, you have mounted to a higher plane, a different spiritual world. You are beginning to realize that what induced God to create the world was love, and what He wants of us is to be united to Him, and to work out our salvation loving Him. Loving Our Lord is the shortest and best way of becoming saints, doing all just to please Him. St. Paul lays such stress in his epistles on being thankful to God. His gratitude was unceasing. St. Paul had been a persecutor, assisting at the stoning of St. Stephen, on his way to persecute the Christians at Damascus—true; but you and I have just as much reason to be thankful to God. When we remember that every moment we live God re-creates us; when we remember He is putting every moment in our hand that priceless gift of life, it is not much to say, My God I thank Thee. In most talk, how rare to find any one speaking in praise of our long-suffering Lord! Think of it—His own creatures finding fault with Him. Why doesn't He give me more graces? Why not my heart's desire? And then we're surprised we don't go forward as we ought. What thankless, mean, ungrateful creatures we are! Everyone brings forward accusations of woe against God. I wish I were only speaking of His enemies: alas! it is of you, and me, I speak. Fault-finding with God—thinking He is very hard to you—wondering why He hasn't given you this or that grace. “God doesn't care for thanks”—a great mistake. He is greedy of thanks. Do you remember His healing the ten lepers, and nine went away, only thinking of enjoying their new happiness? Only one came back, a Samaritan. Isn't it a lifelike representation of what goes on in the world? “And,” Jesus said, “were there not ten cleansed? and where are the nine?”\* Instead of being filled with gratitude at what He gives us, we go back to our old system of finding fault. “Oh yes, Father, He did that for me, but what of this other? “Is that grateful? and lovable? To be grateful is a sign of a fine and noble nature. If you do high-minded people a very small service, how grateful they are. Never was there any one so sensitive to kindness or to gratitude as Our Lord. If you want to get a big grace, begin by thanking God over and over again for the small details of life; for another day in which to serve Him, for all His evidences of love during the day, etc. If you have done only a small thing for some friend, and he is deeply grateful for it, how it touches your heart.

Try to touch the Sacred Heart, and go on thanking Him, during the day for Holy Communion. Whatever happens, let me remember that one supreme gift He gave me this morning. That disposition of thankfulness gives us a confidence in Him that is a great help. It brings us very near to love. The more grateful you are, the more you love. It is also a great practice of humility, it reminds us we have all from Him. So I strongly recommend great gratitude for the small matters of daily life. If you are constantly thanking God for what He has done for you, you won't be tempted to find fault with Him. It delivers us from the disposition to find fault, and enables us to make some return to God for His love.

### **Our Use of Circumstance**

Everything God has made is good, and this profusion is spread that we should see what helps us to serve Him, and put away from us what would be an obstacle. It is given us to *choose* from. But men say, Does this please me? Yes: and they throw themselves upon it without control or restraint, and through their fault it becomes an occasion of temptation. He gives us free will that we may choose. One test He means us to apply: does this help me to love and serve Him? If not, I must thrust it away. Such and such a friendship — inclination — tendency — are these occasions of loving God less or more?

“I am so hedged in, it is impossible for me to be a saint.” Has God abdicated His Empire? You have never had a temptation, met a single person, had a single difficulty, He has not known of. In every part of His universe, and in every man's heart, God resides. Nothing happens that God does not permit to happen. When we complain, we either deny that God is acting at all, or that He is acting wisely. Have you the idea that there is some short cut to Heaven, which you know of, and God does not? There is no need to go into the desert to become a saint. The greatest possible delusion is to think

\* *Luke xvii. 17.*

that sanctity depends on circumstances. You have a better chance of being a saint as a man or woman in the world than as a Carmelite, if you are where God wants you to be. Be satisfied with your present life, and lead it to the full. Be content with things as they are, and make the best of them.

### **Religion**

Religion ought to be one's whole life and one's whole day. Life is not something which, when started, goes on by itself: we are being as it were re-created every moment. True religion consists in always thinking of God; and morning and night prayers and the Sacraments once a month, or even once a week, is a warped and miserable presentment of it. What God claims of us is that we should love Him all day long. "Pray *always*"—not only at fixed times. God is residing in the very centre of my heart, and doesn't want words, but continual service.

"He is a buckler to them that hope in Him."\* What does He mean? We are entirely dependent on God. He is always with us. . . . The service of God consists in always putting ourselves in relation with God. But I must eat and drink and work; there are social duties I must perform; how can I think of God all the day long? By doing whatever we do in reference to Him. Worldly people succeed so well in forgetting God, that the thought of God is a shock. They go out of their way to forget Him.

The thought of God puts human respect out of our heart. If we remember Him we do not mind much what our fellow-creatures think and say of us. No matter what they say, no one can do us any harm without God's permission. Our religion mustn't be a thing tacked on to our lives. Not a hair of our head falls without God's permission: if then we hope in God, He will be to us a buckler and a protection.

Take an ordinary Catholic's hope in God. He finds himself in spiritual difficulties. "I find it very hard to overcome a dislike. All very well talking, I can't get on with so-and-so. What's the good of religion if I can't, try as I will, get over this dislike?" Does "hope" mean that? God doesn't ask us to do things that are too difficult. Is it at all likely He would require of us what we can't do? Hope means we believe, and if we try to do what we *can* do, He will come to our help. Jesus says, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." Who is likely to be right, God, or God's enemies?

### **Loving God**

What does Our Lord tell us is the first and greatest commandment? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy mind and all thy strength." He is so full of it, He can't say enough about it. And then we affect to doubt that He intends it for us! You are utterly wrong in your conception of Catholic life. To do that which God invites you to do can't be presumption. What I mean by invitation is this. You desire to love God. The mere wish comes from God alone. He alone is capable of putting that into your mind, it keeps coming into our mind. Would God be so cruel as to hold before us something so good for us to have and yet never give it? He *couldn't*, and He *doesn't*, do it. He goes on putting the desire to love Him into our hearts, and then, when we have persevered in loving and asking, He grants us what we asked for, and a hundred times more. What seemed above our ken once, somehow isn't above it now, and the thought of doing something for God appeals to us, and we do what we had never thought to do. There is no contradiction between having a real love of God and yet having humiliating imperfections, vanity, jealousy, etc., and certain things about which we find it very difficult to conquer ourselves.

Perhaps you've been angry with Our Lord that He didn't help you to overcome some fault. Don't imagine you don't love Our Lord, because joined with undoubted holiness, there are certain little faults which humble you. God's own hand alone can light the spark of true love in your heart: Look, you say, how conceited I am, how selfish I am, etc. If He says, do love Me more, these things won't stand in the way. Nothing will stand between you if only, you will let Him have His way. If you want to kill the invitation, take narrow views that you can't hope for this or that great grace. Listen to God. What facts have I to go upon in saying this? That supreme one, that you wish to love God. Time is of no importance to God; in a moment He can transform your heart.

\* 2 Kings xxii. 31.

Our Lord once asked a saint to make a certain sacrifice. He said, I can't. My will is stronger than myself. And Our Lord said, I'll give you greater strength; and the saint made the sacrifice. Put your faith in Him.

Don't make Him hold His hand. When God asks us to look Him in the face and ask Him for favours, and we look down on the ground and say: "Not for me," that does not please Him at all.

### **Holy Joy**

In the spiritual life, the more our hearts are fixed on God, the less importance we attach to external things. We are not distressed because we go about less well dressed than others, or have fewer amusements. So the real remedy for the difficulties of life is a share in the light of God, and we are not disturbed then at the lack of worldly joy, because God gives us a *real* joy to the soul, which is a very much higher and of a more transporting character and more powerful than any human joy at all. It has such power to absorb the soul. If we haven't it, it is not that God doesn't want to give it us; it is our own fault, and comes from our adopting low, unworthy views of life. God is willing to pour into our souls part of His own gladness, and He is the source of all happiness; wherever He is, is joy. Goodness naturally leads to joy. It would be a trump card in the devil's hand if it were otherwise. He would like you to believe if you want joy, you must go to him for it—a *lie*. All joy comes from God—what did He promise to His followers? Peace, and peace is a more tranquil form of joy. He warned them of hardships, but He promised peace. In these restless times, peace is hardly appreciated. "Don't come to Me," Our Lord says, "merely for money, or purely material things, but come to Me for unchanging peace of soul." Whether we are rich or poor, whether the world smiles or jars on us, whether we are in good or bad health, nothing of all this will touch our peace. Never give way to that false persuasion that the service of God means pain and difficulty: we never serve Him so well as in joy. Ask Him to make the tide rise high in your soul and you will overcome yourself more easily, and have an antidote to every pain and trouble that can touch you.

### **Resentment**

Take a very bad case. A person has been behaving atrociously to me. I think in this case I have a *right* to be angry, and to say it is impossible to love him. My dear child, is there anyone to whom *you* have behaved badly? . . . "Oh no, I am very amiable and kind to every one." I am not speaking of that. Is there not *Some One* to whom you have behaved badly? Some One who has done you extraordinary favours? Who shows you the most tender, unceasing love, and yet whom you have continually wounded and pained, not, I hope, by grave sins, but at least by constant lesser offences? Some One who has forgiven you again and again? Is it credible that you are still committing faults against such a One? . . . Has that person who has behaved badly to you behaved one millionth part as badly as you have to God? When you have repaid to Him what you owe, go and wreak your vengeance on the person who has wronged you. . . . When His goodness is requited by unflinching generosity on our part, we may begin to complain of the conduct of others. No one can be so mean to me as I am towards God. I endure unwillingly what He sends me; I complain to others, even to Himself, of how hardly I am used. Thoughts such as these put us in our proper place and blow out the fire of resentment in our hearts.

### **Past, Present, and Future**

Some people seem to have one eye on the past and one on the future: and none on the present. God doesn't give us grace for the past, nor for the future; and if you choose to worry about it now, God won't give you the grace you lost in the past. Don't be saying, Oh, I could be very good now, if I hadn't done this or that in the past. The moment we are sorry, God forgives us. There has been a bad sin of temper. If a habit, the habit remains, and it requires a greater effort than if you had never given way; but God will give you a special grace. What a pity to trouble about the future! Try and console people of this habit of mind. "Ah," they will say, "but what about six months hence?" Don't trouble about what is going to happen further on. Before tomorrow comes, God doesn't give you tomorrow's grace. Let's do our best in the present. The saint lives neither in the past nor in the future, but tries to be always at God's beck. Don't trouble about whether you can keep your temper tomorrow. One reason why God doesn't let us know when we are going to die is that our thoughts may

not be fixed on the future. The power of concentration, in itself a great gift, means fixing our attention on what is before us. The future is in God's hands, and we are afraid He'll fail us! What simpletons we are to think we can do better for our future than to do at the present moment what God wants us to do!

"Think of God as goodness"; have a good opinion of God. Always think of God as incapable of doing a hard, unkind, cruel thing. To think of God as taking an advantage of you, as not being likely to help you in difficulties, is a folly and an injustice. The more you love a person, the more sensitive you are to his opinion. So with Our Lord. He doesn't like us to consider Him mean, or to think we have set our hearts on some spiritual thing He isn't ready to give us. If we have that high opinion of God, everything is possible to us.

### **A Man without Guile**

This was the praise Our Lord bestowed upon Nathanael.\* When Our Lord praises He picks out a quality that specially pleases Him. We hear, and naturally covet it; we should like Him to find the same quality in us, that He might praise us too.

To be guileless is not to play a part: not to want to over-reach others; not to get the better of another by deceit: of all this Our Lord does not approve. Neither is it foolishness; it is not to be stupid. There is no fold in it—nothing up our sleeve.

Nathanael's character was open: all his cards on the table. Quite open and plain: you could read his mind like looking in at an open window: no duplicity, no "two folds." How early we begin to teach children not to be simple! With most of us we are playing a part on the stage of life. To find a person absolutely transparent is very rare.

Simple with regard to God. It would seem so foolish to be otherwise. He sees even the very beginning of our thoughts. Yet how silly we are in that matter! Which of us doesn't find out that he has been practising deceit with God? If we would only tell God the truth about ourselves, without excuses!

And if we are not honest with God, how much less likely to be honest with others! The prodigal made such a simple confession: no attempt to justify himself: the whole truth.

Simplicity in meditation—no grand thoughts. Take for your model the simple prayer of the poor publican—"God be merciful to me a sinner." It is much better to take one thought and stick to it. Look at the Divine simplicity in the Agony in the Garden. The fault generally in prayer is the want of simplicity.

Try then to be simple with God. Tell Him we find things hard; we are very sorry it is hard, but so it is. In this way we are at home with God. It seems to me that God treats us in the same way we treat Him. If we will talk to Him in a, very far-off ceremonious fashion, well, He treats us in the same way.

Simplicity with our neighbour. Very often our object is only to let people see a bit of us. If there is anything we are ashamed of, we take very good care no one knows anything about it. The world's maxim is, only let that which is to your advantage be known. Bismarck scored valuable successes by simply telling the truth. No one believed him. It gives us a delicious sensation of fresh air when we come upon a really simple person. Generally; at the bottom of a want of simplicity, is pride. The holier people are, the more natural and unaffected they are. Might we not make some improvement in ourselves, and be more truthful?

Now about ourselves. We must be simple and straightforward with ourselves. If we want to be drugged and dosed with flattery, to be told we are so much better than others, etc. etc., we can get any amount of it. If we are told home-truths, we are lost in astonishment. We *create* an opinion of ourselves, and then expect others to support it. It isn't that any of us want to play the hypocrite and impostor with God and ourselves. But it is not an easy thing in practice not to be afraid to say to ourselves, I ought to be thoroughly ashamed of myself. We are accused of heartlessness, and we say, Oh, I know what my own motives are. Well, *do* you—at any rate give the benefit to others.

It is well worth our while to be thoroughly honest with God. It is much easier to pray. The one thing He asks of us is to

\* *John I. 47*

say we have done wrong—shockingly wrong. When we make excuses for ourselves, He doesn't like it—if we want peace of soul, simplicity with ourselves is the way to get it. We can go on deluding ourselves if we like. Ask for this grace of simplicity at the cradle of the Holy Child.

### **High Standards**

We must keep our standards high. When ships are preparing for a voyage, with what care everything is examined, to see that all is correct, compasses true, etc. We must do the same with our own souls. What is our sense of sin? Especially, how do we look at small sins? The world is continually pulling down our standard. No one willingly admits he is in the wrong, or has done anything dishonourable, so the spirit of the world leads him to try and excuse it, and show it is *not* dishonourable.

The world drinks down iniquity like water. It is of such consequence to have a proper judgement of things. The fumes of gas are very unpleasant, but one gets accustomed to them, and it is only when we get into the fresh air that we find out in what an atmosphere we have been living. Living in the world, we get, a little perverted by the low ideas of those with whom we live.

“Venial” sins—sins “more easily pardoned”—are of quite a different class to mortal sins. But if we have the proper sense of sin, we ought to shrink from, and be dreadfully sorry if we give way to, smaller sins. The world says, “Why make yourself unhappy about trifles? He makes his life miserable—nearly off his head if he thinks he has done something wrong.” It is very happy for us if this kind of talk has no effect on us. The world often takes as a scruple what is not a scruple at all. Let us try and get our standard right, and get that judgement of sin which God has. It is very little matter what the world says, if God says something different. The world is not our judge; it will be judged itself. *Are they small matters? Who is to decide?*

Let us try and attune our minds to God's mind.

### **Hope and Holiness**

If I were asked for the best sign in someone I did not know very intimately, of how far he would go in the spiritual life, and how great things he would do for God, I think I would find out how far he possessed the virtue of Hope. And by Hope I mean the practical conviction that God is not only very good, but very good to *me*.

What holds us back in the spiritual life is want of hope, want of confidence. Every one could become a saint, if he would only believe that God wants to make him one. The wonder is that, people being as good as they are, they are not a great deal better. And the reason of it is, their want of Hope. We are so shockingly inconsistent. We believe that, morning after morning, God gives us His own Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist, and that, later in the day, when we go and ask a small grace of Him, He won't give it! Could anything be more absurd and illogical?

If you want to know what point you have attained to in the spiritual life, see what you hope for. Is it a little grace, or immense graces? If you say, God has been wonderfully good to me, and I hope to get so far as to endure this humiliation for His sake, or to overcome my horrible temper; so that in place of my friends calling me a spitfire they may think I have become an angel, you have real hope, and you are very near to God. Why ask Him little things? He would more willingly give you what is magnificent than what is paltry. The difference between a saint and an ordinary person is, the saint has such much bigger ideas of God. If you say, I have misspent my life for so many years, and now it is too late, and I can do nothing for God— don't you see that you are misconceiving His power and His infinite love? We have such disrespectful and unworthy views of God. We call Him Our Father, and then treat Him as a stranger or a foe. In this ruck so many of us crawl on slowly, and when we hear this doctrine, we say, It isn't meant for the likes of us.

A saint and another person commit the same fault. The sinner draws away, and keeps aloof: the saint is very sorry, but goes on just as before; he makes no difference. It is too late, people say, why didn't I begin fifty years ago? Time is nothing to God. Does the father tell the prodigal son to go into penal servitude for six years, and then perhaps he'll receive him back again? He takes him into his house at once, puts the best robe on him, and feasts him. Widen your thoughts of

God, He never ceases to love you.

### **The Spirit of Self-denial**

We can't live a day without it. Mortification is, I know, an unpleasant subject. "If you want to serve God, mortify yourself." It is perhaps a mistake to put that too forward. A recruiting sergeant puts the pleasant things forward to attract his recruits.

But fix your eyes on Our Lord. How He loves us—and the good He has done us! We don't want to be cold—Our Lord didn't like being cold—He didn't like being buffeted. The more we love Him, the more we shall want to be like Him and live as He did. I want to do as Our Lord wants me to do. And that, *today*: the day given me. I am not going to wait for a cruel letter, or a slap in the face, or the illness of my best friend to practise resignation, or I may be exceedingly good once in five years, and I want to be good every five minutes. This was St. Alphonsus Ligouri's answer when he was asked the way to perfection: "Be happy and contented; be satisfied with what you have, and where you are." Be pleasant and meek and energetic, and let others see that religion makes people very easy to live with.

Do not be afraid you cannot be near to God if you are living a very ordinary life. When the question of the canonization of St. Ignatius arose, one of these who had known him said, "Canonize Ignatius! you might as well canonize three-quarters of the clergy—I never saw anything particular about him." . . . Fix your eyes on Jesus and Mary; you will begin afar off, but persevere, and you will draw nearer and nearer every day.

### **The Golden Maxim**

It is only by loving one another that we can bring home to each other what the love of God is.

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