

HOW TO TALK TO GOD

From the writings of St. Alphonsus Liguori, adapted by D. MacKinnon, C.S.S.R.

This pamphlet, in the simple and clear, but ardent and soul-stirring words of a great Saint, is intended to show everyone how to speak intimately with their God.

Job was amazed.

When he realized how God had dedicated Himself to helping man — how He had demonstrated that His heart's one interest was to love man and to be loved by man, the holy old saint cried out tremblingly, "What is man that you make so much of him? Why do you pay him any heed"?

God is infinite majesty. At the same time He is infinite goodness and love. He is the greatest personage you will ever know. But He loves you with the greatest love possible. He is not annoyed when you confide in Him.

NO GREATER LOVE

Think of it! There is no friend or brother, no father or mother, no spouse or lover, who loves you more than God. By the incalculable gift of Divine Grace the most miserable creatures can become intimate friends of God. God emptied Himself, annihilated Himself as it were, to increase our confidence. He humbled Himself to the extent of becoming a man so that He could talk with men.

He became an infant. He lived in poverty and died in public on a criminal's cross. He went even further—He hid Himself under the appearances of bread that He might be our constant companion. "He that eats My flesh and drinks My blood lives continually in Me and I in him".

MEET HIM HALFWAY

God loves you as though you were His only love. You must know no other love but Him. You must be able to say of Him in all truth "My beloved is mine and I am His". God has given Himself entirely to me. I give myself completely to Him. He has made me His beloved. I want Him more than anything else in the world.

Ask Him often, "Lord, why do You love me so? What good do You see in me? Have You forgotten the wrongs I did you"?

"You have been so good to me. You could have sent me to hell. Instead You made me Your favorite. I am resolved for the future to love only You. If I have wronged You in the past, my God and my All, it is not the punishment I deserve that tortures me now, but the hurt that it caused You. You are worthy of an infinite love".

PICTURE IT

By way of strengthening your confidence in God, think often of His love for you. Try to visualize the pains He took to save you from your own mistakes and your attachments to worldly pursuits because He wanted to draw you to Himself. And now that you have made up your mind to love and to please God with all the strength you have, be on your guard against too little confidence in Him. The mercy He has shown you is the surest pledge of the love He bears you.

He is displeased with a want of trust in the souls that love Him. If you want to please Him, talk to Him—from today on —with the greatest confidence and tenderness you can express.

HIS BEST PROOF

Above all, think of the gift God has given you in Jesus Christ to enliven your confidence. Remember, God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son.

"How can we fear," pleads the Apostle, "that God will refuse us anything when He has seen fit to deliver up His own Son for us all. Must not that gift be accompanied by the grant of all other blessings?"

It is a grave mistake to be restrained before God—to come to Him as a fearful and confused slave would stumble

into the presence of his prince. But it would be a greater mistake to think that talking with God is something sad and bitter. It is not. His conversation is not bitter nor His company tedious. Ask a soul who really loves God. He will tell you that he has no greater relief for the sorrows of life than in conversing lovingly with God.

It does not require your mind's continual application. You need not become oblivious to your work and your recreation. Rather you must act towards God as you act on occasion towards those whom you love and by whom you are loved.

Your God is ever near you. He is even within you. In Him we live and move and have our being. There is no barrier to stop those who want to talk to Him. He wants you to treat Him with confidence—to tell Him of your work, your plans, your griefs, your fears—of all that concerns you. Above all, do so trustingly with an open heart.

OTHERWISE

God is not likely to speak to a soul that doesn't speak to Him. If we despise His grace, God will make Himself known as the Lord of power and might, while if we love Him, He will treat us as our most affectionate friend. That is why He wants us to speak to Him often and without restraint.

It is a fact that God deserves the greatest reverence. But if He favors you by making you feel His presence and letting you know His desire to have you speak to Him as to One that loves you above all else, then express your feelings towards Him with freedom and confidence.

TOGETHER

God is immense. He can be found everywhere. But there are two places that He makes His home in a special way. One is in the heights of heaven where His glory unites Him with the blessed. The other is on earth in the soul that loves Him. He dwells also among chastened and humbled souls. God's home is in heaven. But He does not consider it beneath Him to come day and night to the hillside cave or the lonely room of His servant to give those divine consolations which surpass the pleasures of the world. Only the man that has not known them fails to want them. Taste and see that the Lord is sweet.

DAYLIGHT PROGRAM

God is with you in the early morning to hear some word of affection and confidence from you, to be the first recipient of your thoughts and of all your actions which you promise to perform that day to please Him — and even of the sorrows which you offer to endure for His glory and love. And if God is with you without fail each morning in this first waking moment, you must not be negligent in giving Him a look of love in return.

Don't be like the majority of men who forget Him. Speak to Him as often as you can. The Rulers of the earth would grow weary of you. God does not. And if you love Him, you will not be lost for something to say to Him.

Tell Him everything that affects you and your affairs as you would an intimate friend. Don't think of Him as a haughty aristocrat who will speak only with important people on important subjects. God takes pleasure in abasing Himself to talk to us. He enjoys the tale of our tiniest trouble. He loves you and cares for you as though He had nothing else on His mind.

Don't say: "Why tell God all my needs? He knows them already, better than I." He does know them. But He acts as if He didn't. Our Lord knew quite well that Lazarus was dead, but He acted as if He didn't until Mary told Him. It was then that He comforted her by bringing her brother back to life.

TROUBLES

When you are tried by sickness or temptation, persecutions or any other sorrow, go to Him at once to ask His helping hand. It is enough for you to tell Him the trial you are enduring. "Take note of my anguish, O Lord."

Tell God all the fears and worry that torment you. "My God," you should say, "all my hopes are in You. I offer you this trial. I resign myself to your will. Take pity on me—deliver me from it or rather give me the strength to bear it."

Don't fret that God will be offended if you occasionally complain, "Why have You retired afar off, Lord? You know that I love You and want nothing but to love You. For love's sake, help me. Do not leave me abandoned."

If desolation lasts so long that it becomes overbearing, unite your voice to that of Jesus dying in agony on the cross.

"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" Still, this trial should serve only to humble you further, remembering that the man who has offended God deserves no consolations. And your confidence should be increased by the realization that God does all things and permits all things for your good. All things work together unto good.

Even when you feel utterly abandoned, have the courage to say, "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? Lord, You have to enlighten me. You have to save me. I trust You. I have hoped in You, O Lord, let me never be put to shame."

Knowing that there is no one who put his confidence in God and was lost, you will find peace. For no one has hoped in the Lord and been confounded.

"Think of the Lord in goodness," the Wise Man pleads. "Instead of dreading divine justice, put more confidence in divine mercy." "Mercy exalts itself above judgment" adds St. James, "God is immeasurably more inclined to favor than to punish." And St. Peter feels that whether our cares are spiritual or merely temporal, our duty lies in abandoning ourselves to divine goodness, which after all, takes the greatest pains with our welfare. "Cast all your anxiety upon Him", he says, "because He takes care of you."

The idea lends a beautiful meaning to the title David gave our Lord when he said, "Our God is the God of salvation." —a text St. Robert Bellarmine explains as meaning that the action which properly singles out God as our God, is that instead of condemning, He wants to save all men. If he does threaten those who disregard Him, He constantly promises mercy to those who fear Him. Didn't our Blessed Mother sing in her Magnificat, "He has mercy on those who fear Him"?

AFTER A FAULT

Another mark of confidence most especially pleasing to your most loving God is for you to fall at His feet at once and beg His pardon when you commit a fault. Remember that He is so inclined to forgive sinners that He pleads with them, "Why must you choose death, O House of Israel? Come back and live."

If sinners but knew the loving mercy with which The Lord waits so that He may have mercy on them. If sinners only knew the desire God has, not to chastise them, but to see them converted. He wants to embrace them, to press them to His heart. "As I am the living God", says the Lord, "I desire not the death of the wicked but that they be converted and live. . . . Come and accuse Me", says the Lord; "If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow."

In a word, God has declared that when a soul repents all his transgressions shall be forgiven.

So, as soon as you fall into any fault, raise your eyes to God, make an act of love and with a humble confession of your fault, hope confidently for God's pardon. Tell Him, "Lord, he whom You love is sick. The heart You love is sick and full of sores. Heal my soul for I have sinned against You."

CHRIST'S CRY

And just so that you do not lose heart, take a careful look at Jesus Christ on the Cross. If you offer the eternal Father His merits, you can hope for pardon with certainty. It was to bring pardon to you that He spared not even His own Son. Tell Him, "My God, look at Your Son, dead for my sake. For the love of that Son, forgive me."

Devout soul, put great store in the unanimous counsels of the masters of the spiritual life. Though you have been unfaithful to God a hundred times in a day, run to Him immediately each time and ask Him for peace immediately. Otherwise you will remain downcast and disturbed at your fault. Your trust in Him will fail. Your desire to love Him will grow cold. You will not be able to go forward in the way of the Lord. On the other hand, by having immediate recourse to God's forgiveness and by promising amendment, your very faults will serve to advance you further in divine love.

And have trust enough to recommend not only your own needs, but those of others, too. How pleasing it is to God that sometimes you forget your own interests to speak with Him about the spread of His glory or about the troubles of others or about poor sinners living deprived of His grace — or about the souls of His suffering spouses in purgatory.

HEAVEN-HIGH HOPE

There is said to be a special penalty in purgatory, the pain of languour, for souls who showed little longing for heaven in this life. This is only right. Not caring much about getting to heaven, is setting little value on an eternal kingdom purchased for us by the death of our Redeemer.

Long frequently for heaven, devout soul. Tell God that it seems like a thousand years to wait before you can see Him and love Him face to face. Build up a great desire to leave this land of banishment, this scene of sinning, with its danger of losing God's grace, to come to a land where you can love Him with all your strength. Tell Him often, "Lord, as long as I live on this earth, I will be in danger of losing Your love. When can I leave this life in which I am always offending You? When will I be able to love You with my whole soul and unite myself to You without danger of losing You anymore?"

St. Teresa thought constantly in these terms. The striking of a clock was a real joy for her. It meant that another hour of life and the danger of losing God was past. Her desire to die in order to see God was so great that she was actually dying with this desire. "I die because I do not die," was how she phrased it in her beautiful Canticle.

It comes down to this: If you want to please the loving heart of God, try to speak to Him as often as you can. Speak to Him with complete confidence. He will not refuse you an answer in return. True, He does not speak to you in a voice that your ears can hear. But your heart will be able to pick out His voice — when you leave creature conversations to talk to Him alone. "I will lead her out into the wilderness and I will speak to her heart."

MORNING MEMO

By way of a practical summary, I do not want to omit the suggestion of a devout practice that will make all the actions of your day pleasing to God.

As you get up in the morning, let your first thought be to offer all that you will do or suffer that day to God's glory, and to ask the help of His grace. Then make the other Christian acts: of thanksgiving and love, of prayer — and of the resolution to live that day as though it were the last of your life.

Father Saint Jure recommends that you make a contract with our Lord in the morning that every time you make a certain sign during the day, for example raising your eyes to heaven or to the crucifix or placing your hand on your heart, your intention will be to make it an act of love, or of desiring to see God loved, or of offering yourself to God.

When you have made these acts place your soul in the side of Jesus and under the mantle of Mary. Ask the Eternal Father for the love of Jesus and Mary to protect you during the day.

Immediately afterwards, before you do anything else, meditate for a few moments on the sorrow and shame that Jesus Christ felt upon the cross.

In the course of this meditation make repeated acts of contrition and love of God and of self oblation. Father Charles Caraffa, the venerable founder of the Pious Worker Priests, said that one such fervent act of love of God made in the morning is enough to keep the soul fervent throughout the entire day.

Afterwards, besides your special acts of devotion such as Confession and Communion, don't forget, when you start some other kind of work, be it study or work or whatever it may be, to offer it to God. Ask His help to do it perfectly. Don't forget the practice of St. Catherine of Siena of withdrawing frequently into the cell of your heart and uniting yourself with God.

In short, whatever you do, do it with and for God.

If you enter or leave the house or your room, always recommend yourself to the divine Mother by saying a Hail Mary. Say your grace before and after meals. Don't forget to do some spiritual reading during the day and to visit the Blessed Sacrament and the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. Say your Rosary each day at night. Examine your conscience and recite the Christian acts of Faith, Hope, Charity, Contrition, and Amendment. Make the resolution to receive the Holy Sacraments during your life and at the hour of your death and to gain all the indulgences that you can. When you retire to bed remember that you really deserve to be lying down in the flames of hell. Grasp your crucifix as you fall asleep and say, "As soon as I lie down I fall peacefully asleep in the arms of my God."

Make the intention of gaining all the indulgences you can each day, e.g. those granted for saying a blessed rosary, for reciting the Angelus three times a day, for saying the Litany of our Lady or the Hail Holy Queen, the Hail Mary,

and the Glory be to the Father, for saying the ejaculations, "Blessed be the holy and immaculate and most pure conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary" and "Praised now and forever be the Most Holy Sacrament", for reciting the prayer Soul of Christ, for bowing your head at the Glory be to the Father and at the names of Jesus and Mary, for hearing Mass.

Keep yourself recollected and united to God as much as you can in this life. Try on all occasions to raise your mind to God and fix your eyes on eternity.

If you see an elaborate funeral or pass a beautifully kept cemetery tell yourself, "If these souls are damned, what good does all this pomp do them?" Consider the difference between a soul in grace and a soul deprived of grace when you see the sea tranquil or stormy. When you see a withered tree, remember that a soul without God is good for nothing but to be cast into the fire. If you're afraid during a storm, think how the damned tremble at the sound of the continual thunder of divine wrath. If you see someone condemned to a painful death crying out, "Is there no way for me to escape this death?" Think of the despair of a condemned soul in hell saying, "Is there then no way to escape eternal ruin?"

The sight of rivers or brooks should remind you that if the water you see in them is ceaselessly running to the ocean, you should ever be hastening to God Who is your only good. When you see a horse-drawn wagon, tell yourself, "What labor these innocent animals go through for my service! But how many pains do I take to serve and please my God?" when you see the gratitude a dog shows its master for a tiny piece of bread, think how much more reason you have to be faithful to God Who has created you, preserved you and provided for you—heaped His blessings on you. When you hear the song of birds, cry out, "Listen, my soul, to the praises these little animals give to their creator. And what are you doing? Praise Him with acts of love."

When you look at a valley, remember that its fertility is due to the waters that run down from the mountain and that in the same way graces pour down from heaven on humble souls, and pass by the proud. When you see a beautiful church, remind yourself of the beauty of a soul in grace because it is a temple of God. When you look at the sea, remind yourself of the immensity and the greatness of God. When you see a fire or candles burning on the altar, tell yourself, "How many years should I have been burning in hell? But you have not sent me there, O Lord."

Frequently offer yourself to God during the day. St. Teresa used to insist that acts of love are the wood that keep alive the fire in our soul. Say, as she did so often, "Here I am Lord. Do with me what You please. Tell me Your will so that I can do it. I want to do everything you want."

If you fall into any fault, humble yourself at once and with an act of fervent love, try to rise again. When something adverse happens, offer your pain to God at once, uniting yourself to His holy will.

Become accustomed to repeating in any kind of adversity the little ejaculation, "Thus God wills; thus I will too." Acts of resignation are the acts of love most precious and acceptable to the heart of God.

When you have to make any decision or give any important counsel, commend yourself to God first. Then weigh the matter and give your opinion. Turn frequently to the image of the crucified or of our Lady that you have put in your room for this purpose. Never forget, especially in time of temptation, to invoke the names of Jesus and Mary. For God is infinite goodness. His whole desire is to communicate His grace to us.

The Venerable Father Alvarez once saw our Lord, His hands filled with graces, searching for someone to give them to. But He wants us to ask Him for them. Ask and you shall receive. Otherwise, though He will gladly open them to those who ask, He will draw His hands back. "Who has called upon the Lord," asks Ecclesiasticus, "and been despised?" While David writes that He shows not only mercy, but superabundant mercy to those who call on Him. "You are sweet and mild and full of mercy, O Lord, toward those who call upon You."

The Lord is good to the souls that seek Him! If He lets Himself be found even by those who do not seek Him, how much more willing is He, to let Himself be found by those who do seek Him, and seek Him precisely to serve Him and love Him?

"On this earth," St. Teresa tells us, "Holy souls have to conform themselves by love to what the souls of the blessed do in heaven." The saints in heaven busy themselves only with God. They have no thought or enjoyment save in His glory and love. Let it be the same with you.

May God be your one happiness on this earth. May He be the only object of your affections, the only reason for all

your actions and desires until you come to the eternal kingdom where your love will be completely perfected and consummated, and your desires perfectly fulfilled and satisfied.

Long live Jesus our Love—and Mary our hope!

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