

# WHY NOT BE A SAINT?

## CHRIST'S CALL TO ALL

**Fr John O'Brien, Ph.D.**

*Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect. -Matthew 5: 48.*

Why not be a saint?

You shrug your shoulders and say:

“That may be all right for some pious women who can spend the whole day on their knees in prayer. That may be all right for some unusual souls who climb the lonely mountain path up to the summit, far removed from mortals like me. That may be all right for some singular individuals who have no zest for this world, its pleasure and its fun.

“But not for me. I'm not cut out to be one of those alabaster saints with their eyes always turned up towards heaven, disdainful of all the beauty of this world, scorning all its joys. I like life. I like people. I like fun. Include me out!”

Such is the reaction of many people, young and old, in the world today. They turn away from the most interesting, romantic, fascinating, thrilling enterprise in all the world. Why? Largely because they do not understand what sainthood means. They react unfavourably to the caricature of sainthood which they have in their minds.

### A SISSY?

They turn a deaf ear to the invitation of the Divine Master: “Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect.” They think the career of a saint is all right for pious women and nuns and priests who have renounced the world and its pleasures. But not for red-blooded, vivacious young men and women. They know the world has its dangers. They are not ready, however, like the saints, to run away from these dangers. They have the courage to face them, and they are confident they can win without retreating.

Back in the mind, of many young people is the notion—often not expressed but present none the less—that a saint is a sissy. He flees the world, fearful of the thorns that nestle among the flowers of life's joys and pleasures. He shies away from attractive young people, fearful that he might fall in love with them. He is forever running away from danger. Many young people thus have the idea that courage is not especially conspicuous among those who are called saints. Today as perhaps never before courage is in the forefront of all the virtues receiving the world's applause.

We will undertake to show that among the most courageous of all people are the saints of God. Never is courage lacking in any saint. Always is it present to a supreme degree. True, the manner in which it expresses itself may be different. But the virtue is there in abundance. First of all, however, let us consider the true ideal of sainthood.

### WHAT IS A SAINT?

What do we mean by a saint? An unattractive, lacklustre person who rarely, if ever, smiles and who has little interest in his fellows? A joy-killer, solemn and dry, who is forever wearying people with his jeremiads about the vanities of the world and frightening them with his predictions of divine wrath? These seem to be the common conceptions. They are, however, caricatures which have little resemblance to the reality, caricatures which cause people to shy away from the ideal of sainthood because they find it so unappealing.

Contrary to this too prevalent misconception, a saint is the most attractive and likeable of all people. He is filled with constant love of God and of all His children. He is joyous, serene, and considerate. In his veins runs the milk of human kindness. True, he retains his individual characteristics. For sanctity shines through the stained-glass windows of human nature with its unending variations in temperament and personality.

Undoubtedly the distinguishing mark of eminent holiness is an all-embracing love which harbours no resentments and knows no grudges. In the countenances of all men—white, black, yellow, brown—it sees the lineaments of the face of

Christ. Sanctity means putting into practice the implications of the mighty truths of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. The supreme joy in life is the quest for sainthood. The supreme tragedy is the loss of it.

No other truth needs to be driven home more urgently to the masses of people than the real nature of sanctity. The widespread impression that a saint is some kind of queer individual who holds himself aloof from the interests and joys of human life and radiates gloom has undoubtedly alienated the ideal of sainthood from many people. It is time to point out that healthy common sense, cheerfulness, kindness, courage, and unfailing love are the authentic marks of sainthood. In fact, saintliness may be defined simply as common sense raised to the nth degree. There is no pathology in genuine holiness but only in its masquerade.

### **A HIERARCHY OF VALUES**

Saints are invariably men and women of outstanding courage. Why? Because they keep close to the source of all courage, God Himself. They do this because they have worked out a coherent scheme of values which is the essence of a philosophy of life. The failure of many lives is traceable to these people's neglect to establish a rational hierarchy of values and to make their actions conform to that scale.

With the saints the hierarchy of values is clearly defined. There are things of physical value. These minister to the needs of the body and the pleasures of the senses. They are not to be depreciated. But their limits are marked. The mistake which many worldlings make is to esteem these things objects of supreme value, the goals of their lifelong striving. The inevitable end of such a quest is dust and ashes.

Of higher value are the things which minister to the mind of man. As the mind is superior to the body, the things which conduce to the growth and development of the mind rank above the objects of physical value. The search for beauty and truth distinguishes homo sapiens from the brute animals, who never rise higher than the pursuit of food and drink and the satisfaction of the physical appetites. Knowledge, beauty, truth, wisdom are the objectives of man's long intellectual quest. While they are intangible and are unamenable to being measured by any mechanical measuring rods and scales, they are of enormous importance in enabling a man to be truly human, to live in that category of the mind and imagination whither the brutes never enter.

Higher still in the scale of values are those things which minister to man's spiritual growth and progress. Justice, righteousness, mercy, honour, love . . . who will weigh their worth or set limits to their value? The achievement of these ethical values renders man a being of unique dignity and transcendental worth. They make his face to shine with a divine radiance and with a glory brighter than that of setting suns. It is the possession of these spiritual values which makes a man godlike—the human image of the divine.

### **THE IMPORTANT THING**

Life presents a miscellany of values. The person who is to achieve integration of character must single out the highest of these values and commit himself to them through thick and thin. He cannot espouse them all, but must learn to put first things first. The initial task, therefore, in the forming of a philosophy of life is that of selection. "The seeker of his truest, strongest, deepest self," points out William James, "must review the list carefully and pick out the one on which to stake his salvation." It is upon the validity of the spiritual values that the saint stakes his all.

A friend once wrote to the Russian novelist, Ivan Turgenev:

"It seems to me that to put oneself in the second place is the whole significance of life."

Turgenev thought otherwise.

"It seems to me," he replied, "to discover what to put before oneself in the first place is the whole problem of life."

Christ is the Being Whom all the saints put before themselves. They commit themselves without reserve to the spiritual values which were embodied in their fullness in His ministry of redemptive love and sacrificial service for mankind. It is loyalty to Christ that pulls the trigger of the energy of their minds and hearts and souls, issuing in deeds of kindness and love. Surrendering himself to the highest, the prayer of every heart is:

*Make me a captive, Lord,  
And then I shall be free;  
Force me to render up my sword,  
And I shall conqueror be.*

It is the distinction of saints that they not only profess such a hierarchical code of values but also translate it into action. They organize the mob of conflicting appetites into orderly battalions which respect the commands of superiors. With saints there is no disparagement of physical and intellectual goods.

There is, however, a refusal to sacrifice a spiritual good for either of these, and an unwavering insistence upon the sovereignty of the spiritual. That is why martyrs, before they went forth to the arena, the swordsman's block, or the fire, were able to say with deadly earnestness to their followers: "Fear not those who can destroy only the body. Fear God alone. For only He has dominion over both body and soul."

The life of every saint illustrates the truth of Professor Alfred Whitehead's observation: "True courage is not the brutal force of vulgar heroes, but the firm resolve of virtue and reason."

### **ST. AUGUSTINE**

Though St. Augustine had for some years past given theoretical assent to such a hierarchy of values, he had not been able to put it into practice. His conversion signals his emancipation from the chains of physical passion and the pride of intellect. His story of his emancipation is an epic in will power and in courage. His two wills, "one old, one new," he wrote, "one of the spirit, one of the flesh, fought angrily together, and my soul was on the rack."

A companion read the Life of St. Anthony to him. "You, O Lord," continues St. Augustine, "in his words were twisting me back to myself . . . were setting me before my own face, that I might see how foul I was, how distorted and filthy, how soiled and ulcered. And if I tried to turn my gaze from myself, the reader went on reading, and You did thrust myself once more before my own eyes . . . till I lay naked to myself . . . and I kept saying: Let it be now! Let it be now! And as I spoke, I made towards the resolve, and I was all but doing it, and I did it not, . . . Yet I stepped not wholly back, but I would stand still hard by, and draw breath. And again I would try . . . and all but—all but, I reached and I held; and, lo, I was not there. . . Those vanities, my loves of yore, kept plucking softly at my robe of flesh, and softly whispering: 'Will you dismiss us? and from this moment shall not this and that be allowed to you any more for ever?'. . . They did delay me so that I hesitated."

On the other side, there seemed to stand the army of the chaste, and strong, saying: "What these youths and maidens could do, cannot you? Or can one or the other do it of themselves, and not rather in the Lord their God?" The words continued to haunt him. Then one day as he sat in his garden, with the inner conflict still raging, he heard a child's voice singing some nursery rhyme: "Take it, read it; take it, read it:" Opening the Scriptures, he read: "Not in rioting and drunkenness . . . and impurities . . . but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences." (Rom 12: 13-14)

Here, then, was the challenge. Would he be courageous enough to accept it? His smouldering courage rose to a mighty flame as he seized the gauntlet flung down to him. His decision was made, his course was set, as he left that garden. He was to become a towering hero in the vanguard of the Lord and make Africa fragrant with the sweet odour of his virtue. What a new complexion courage puts on every situation in life! (See Confessions of St Augustine, Bk. 8.)

### **ST. FRANCIS XAVIER**

Consider the role that courage played in the life of St. Francis Xavier. Born of a noble family and accustomed to the comforts of the wealthy, Francis answered the plea for missionaries to the Orient. Sailing from Lisbon in April 1539, Francis did not reach India till May of the next year, after a ghastly voyage. The emigrants on the boat were the very scum of Portugal. For these rude, profane, and panic-stricken people Francis, though sick himself, sacrificed all—his food, his clothing, his cabin.

With indefatigable zeal he laboured among the natives of Goa, India, sharing their meagre food and primitive conditions of living. He brought the tidings of Christ's Gospel to labourers at the Paravar pearl fisheries and exemplified those teachings in his own life. From 1542 to 1544, Francis made the six-hundred-mile journey to Cape Comorin and back thirteen times. He moved in a world of dysentery, malaria, elephantiasis, enduring every hardship with a smile. So effective were his labours that some thirty thousand converts were won for Christ by 1545. Thence he carried the banner of Christ to Ceylon, to sensuous Malacca, to the natives of Flores and Timor, (called Papuans in his letters), to the head-hunters of Borneo, to the cannibals of Ceram, and to the superstitious pagans in the Moluccas.

### **THE GREATEST HAPPINESS**

Worn out by his long travelling, thrice ship-wrecked, attacked by some hostile Moslems who had become anti-Christian in opposition to their own holy book, forced to hide in the bush, he often starved. Did he complain or whimper about his hard lot, his torturing isolation from the cultured companions of his European homeland?

"Never," he wrote, "have I been happier elsewhere, nor more continuously."

The intimate companionship of Christ transmuted all these sufferings into joy and kindled a courage that quailed before no odds. "Who is he that can hurt you," he was accustomed to ask, in the words of St. Peter, "if you be zealous of good?" Here is the transparent source of that flaming courage which wrote the name of Christ high in the skies of the Orient and deeper still in the hearts of its children.

Francis was not yet ready, however, to rest upon his oars. There were the islands of Japan which still remained to be brought under the sweet yoke of Christ. With meticulous care he prepared for that conquest. He studied the language and translated St. Matthew's Gospel into the Japanese and learned it by heart. Then, like a modern Godfrey de Bouillon advancing to attack a Saracen stronghold, Francis marched on single-handed for the conquest of the land of the Rising Sun. So deeply did he plant the faith of Christ in the hearts of the Nipponese that neither the attrition of four centuries of circumambient paganism nor the persecution of Shinto emperors has been able to eradicate that ancient Christian colony.

### **A SYMBOL OF COURAGE**

There still loomed up before Francis, however, the land of China, with its teeming millions. How ardently Francis yearned to bring to them the life-giving Gospel of Christ. At last, in 1552, he sailed for China, but was able to reach only the island of Sancian, off the coast of the Chinese mainland. Sick with fever and attacked by shivering fits, he grew too weak to continue.

"Shall I reach China?" he wrote. "I do not know. Everything is against it."

Alone, with only a devout Malabar servant from India and a fervent Chinese boy, his condition became worse. Though bled and re-bled, he passed into delirium. He now reverted to the language of his childhood, Basque. Constantly on his lips was the name he loved most of all—the name of Jesus. Under his black cassock were the signatures of his dear friends in distant Spain and Rome, signatures he had cut from their letters and which, along with a copy of the vows he had made to Christ, he wore next to his heart.

### **IN HIS SERVICE**

My friend, Father Charles C. Martindale, S.J., of Oxford, in his book, *What Are Saints?* sketches thus vividly the deathbed scene of this bold warrior for Christ:

"Imagine a mere framework of a hut, the palm-leaf thatch in fragments; the wind, setting the little lamp flaring and flickering; the ceaseless sound of waves; the Crucifix, fastened up by the Chinaman, with China invisible behind it, and the white face and shining eyes of Francis, who was all but speechless now, seeing nothing but the Crucifix, the memorial of Christ and of His death. Now were the maps rolled up, now was the travelling done with. Now was [Saint] Ignatius [Loyola], far away at his desk in Rome, now was even he bidden a last farewell. Now was the thrill of Paris, and now was

the home in Spain- since which he had known no home—handed over to God, and left there. ‘Into Your hands’ I commend it all; my life and my eternity. The night of 2 December passed by. Only the Chinaman watched by the dying saint. At 2 o’clock on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, when the winds and the waters grew restless, Francis, too stirred. The unmistakable and ultimate change touched him. The vigilant native rose, put a lighted candle into the hand of Francis, and held it there. Perhaps, in the breeze of the dawn, it expired. But at that same hour, all alone, save for the Chinaman and the companionship of Christ Crucified, Francis Xavier died.”

Probably no other man since the days of St. Paul won so many souls for Christ as did this dauntless soldier of the Lord. Despite the lapse of four centuries, Christians of Goa, Travancore, Ceylon, Mailapur, Japan, and the islands of Malay Archipelago still thrill at the mention of his name.

His coffin at Goa shows that he was small in stature, having been only about five feet tall, but he had the courage of a giant. With St. Paul he was able to say: “In all things we suffer tribulation, but are not distressed; we are straitened, but we are not destitute.” With the Psalmist, too, he could say: “Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me.” Soldier of peace, athlete of God, conqueror of the Orient for Christ, St. Francis Xavier stands as a symbol of a courage that never waned in the doing of gallant deeds of service for the Divine Master.

### **PETER CLAVER: APOSTLE OF NEGRO SLAVES**

The great apostle of negro slaves is St. Peter Claver. Graduated from the University of Barcelona, Peter decided to devote his life to the service of the Lord. Learning the sad plight of the slaves, Peter cast his lot with them. In 1610 he landed at Cartagena in the Caribbean, where for forty-four years he was the servant and the protector of the unfortunate blacks, who were torn away from their homes in Africa to be beasts of burden for the white man.

Early in the seventeenth century the masters of Central and South America needed labourers to cultivate the soil and exploit the gold mines. The coasts of Guinea, the Congo, the Angola became the market for slave dealers. To these traffickers petty kings sold their subjects and their prisoners. Because of its position in the Caribbean Sea, Cartagena became the chief slave mart of the New World.

Each month saw a thousand or more brought to its port. The slaves were brought for a dollar and sold for two hundred dollars. Even though half the cargo might die, the traffic remained enormously profitable. Neither the censures of the Pope nor the protests of churchmen could prevail against the greed of the merchants. Unable to suppress the vile traffic, the missionaries strove to alleviate it.

### **“BLACK CATTLE”**

Foremost among these missionaries was Peter Claver. He met each boat and took the fear-crazed slaves under his special care. Their condition was pitiable in the extreme. They had been packed in bundles of six, with chains around their neck and ankles, wedged under decks where no sunshine ever penetrated and in a stench into which no white officer would put his head for fear of his fainting. Once in twenty-four hours they would be given water and maize. They were called “black cattle” and treated as such. About a third died on board. Out of one cargo of five hundred there died one hundred and twenty in a single night.

When they arrived, they were covered with sores, vermin, and filth. Frantically homesick, half-crazed by fear because of the brutal way in which they were treated, and terror-stricken at the prospect of worse evils in store for them, they were, indeed, objects of pity. Despite their awful stench, Peter washed them, dressed their sores, made beds for them, clothed them, spoke words of kindness to them. Beneath the repulsive fear-ridden countenance of each of them, Peter saw the lineaments of the gentle face of Christ, and he caught an echo of the divine voice whispering: “Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these, My least brethren, you did it to Me.” If each of them had been a king, Peter could not have been kinder to them.

His solicitude was not limited to their physical needs, but embraced their spiritual wants as well. He instructed them in the teachings of Christ and baptized them. He enquired of the needs of each and defended them against their oppressors.

He visited the villages into which the slaves were sent, and continued to minister to them and to attempt to curb the brutality of their masters.

### **THE BASIC TRUTH**

Opposition came not only from slave-traders but also from so-called Christians, who thought that Peter profaned the sacraments by his administering them to these “black cattle,” who, they intimated, scarcely possessed a soul. Fashionable women of Cartagena refused to enter the churches where Peter conducted services for the slaves. Thus was he caught between the fire of the greedy slave merchants and that of influential members of the Christian community.

Here a strange thing happened. Peter had been of a timid and non-assertive nature. But now that danger was threatening his flock, his latent courage rose to a flame. Manfully did he stand his ground and continue to blaze a new trail of kindness and mercy for the downtrodden and enslaved black man. Engaging in no recrimination, bearing his humiliations patiently, Peter worked harder than ever—if that were possible—to win for his flock in the eyes of all the essential dignity of human personalities made in the image of God.

Peter knew that if that basic truth could be driven home to the conscience of all Christians its implications would inevitably trace themselves out in the amelioration of the black men’s lot and in their eventual emancipation. In his long ministry among them he is said to have baptized more than three hundred thousand slaves, raising them to the high dignity of children of God and heirs of heaven.

### **A SLAVE MADE KING**

In addition to ministering to the Negro slaves, if each of whom had been a king, Peter could not have been kinder to them, Peter also laboured for those other afflicted creatures, the lepers at St. Lazarus. Thither he would bring lint, bandages, ointments, material for mosquito curtains. He would assist in the dressing of their sores, and the mantle of his cassock he was continually giving as a robe for the leprous, a veil for lupus-gnawed faces, and a pillow for the dying.

From the hospital Peter went to the prisons. He would visit each inmate and say a word of mercy and hope. He made it a custom to be with the condemned man at the time of his execution, and also sought to reconcile him beforehand with his God. When occasionally the rope would break, he would take the shrieking victim in his arms and hold him to his heart.

Towards the end of his life he was so worn out and exhausted from his ceaseless labours that he had to be strapped to his horse when he made his rounds of the harbour, the prison, and the leper house. The bottom edge of his cassock was always in rags, as the slaves, prisoners, and lepers tore shreds from it and venerated them as the relics of a saint. They cut his signature, from certificates and fought for the very hair the barber clipped from his head. The towels stained with the blood that doctors had drawn from him when he was sick were treasured beyond all price. They were regarded as were those cloths and kerchiefs which were carried from the body of St. Peter, as is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. (19:12)

### **“ST. PETER CLAVER”**

Sometimes when riots broke out and a mob of Negroes were running amuck, Peter would be sent for in haste, and his very presence would quell the riot. When an entire population was fleeing from the vicinity of a volcano, Peter would send them a message to remain there till he arrived on the next day. They did so. Then he led the Negroes, who were still quivering with panic, around the still-active crater and planted a cross on its lips. No one was hurt. “The hesitating youth,” says his biographer, “had become the indomitable man and walked serene along the very razor-edge of peril.”

When news of his death, on 8 September 1654, spread throughout the city, the people rushed in throngs to his home. There he lay, holding in his clenched hand his little picture of the lay-Brother [Saint] Alphonsus Rodriguez, who first told him of the crying needs of the West Indies missions. It was Peter’s way of saying thanks to the humble doorkeeper at Majorca, for his having pointed to a field so ripe for service to the most unfortunate of all God’s creatures. Then children filled the streets, refusing to move, calling for “St. Peter Claver”. Then a new army assembled: it was an army of the

Negroes, who pushed their way through all the throngs and broke through the guard at the door to gaze for the last time upon the face of their shepherd and their defender, dearer to them than all the world.

### **WELLSPRING OF LOVE**

They stooped and kissed the floor of the room that held his body, so sure were they that he was a man filled full of God and now His saint. No king expiring upon the silken cushions of his regal bed ever left such emptiness in the hearts of his subjects as did Peter Claver in the hearts of the Negro slaves, the prisoners, and the lepers of Cartagena. He had declared himself "the slave of the Negroes forever." They made him their uncrowned king.

Peter Claver felled no enemy with his sword, struck no one; even when abused, he did not strike back. Yet his life was filled with courageous deeds. It was not mere sentiment that brought him hurrying to meet each shipload of vermin-infested, stinking slaves. It was courage and love.

So dreadful was the ordeal of washing these Negroes and caring for them that when the tolling bell sounded the arrival of a new ship, Peter would break out in a cold sweat as he remembered the previous experience. Yet back and back and back again he went during forty-four years. There is the courage which rested for its support, not upon flying banners or martial airs or the plaudits of cheering multitudes, but upon the principles of the nobility of service to the downtrodden and the afflicted, service done in the name of Jesus.

It was the courage of loving those who, on first impressions, were ugly, filthy, and stinking, and loving them with all his heart, mind, soul and strength. It was the courage of fulfilling Christ's law of love when it was most difficult to do so. For an ounce of courage that springs from hate, a ton flows from the mighty wellspring of love. Love transformed a hesitant, timid youth into a bold and gallant servant of God, causing him to blaze new trails through the dank, dark jungles of our prejudice and greed, trails which lead to the dawning of a new day of social altruism and human brotherhood.

### **"LOVE CASTS OUT FEAR"**

More and more psychologists, psychiatrists, psycho-analysts, and all others who deal with the problems of human behaviour are coming to recognize the supreme service of love in the washing away of the multitudinous mental quirks and complexes which fear breeds. Love achieves the simplest and the most effective catharsis of all such phobias. It builds self-confidence and courage.

Writing, not as a moralist, but as a good psychologist, William James in his *The Varieties of Religious Experience* observed: "Love your enemies! Mark you, not simply those who happen not to be your friends, but your enemies, your positive and active enemies. Either this is a mere Oriental hyperbole, a bit of verbal extravagance meaning only that we should, as far as we can, abate our animosities, or else it is sincere and literal.

"Outside of certain cases of intimate individual relation, it seldom has been taken literally. Yet it makes one ask the question: Can there in general be a level of emotion so unifying, so oblitative of differences between man and man, that even enmity may come to be an irrelevant circumstances and fail to inhibit the friendlier interests aroused? If positive well-wishing could attain so supreme a degree of excitement, those who are swayed by it might well seem superhuman beings, Their life would be morally discreet from the life of other men, and there is no saying . . . what the effects might be; they might conceivably transform the world."

Saints like Peter Claver have played their part in transforming the world from the slavery-approving civilization of the seventeenth century to one that finds it abhorrent in every way.

### **CHRIST AND STATESMANSHIP**

Saints are people whose dominant motivation is not fear, but love. That love extends to all mankind, even to one's enemies. Love dries up the bus pockets of hatred and cauterizes them with deeds of kindly service. "Fear is not in love," says St. John, the beloved disciple of Our Lord, "but perfect love casts out fear, because fear does imply punishment, and he that fears is not perfected in love." In that brief utterance St. John has expressed a profound psychological truth whose

therapeutic implications psychiatrists will be unravelling to the end of time. The best way, both morally and psychologically, to overcome one's enemies is to love them. Lincoln perceived this truth and practised it.

At a dinner in Washington he spoke kindly and even in endearing terms of some of the Confederates.

"I am surprised, Mr. President," said an elderly lady near by, "to hear you speak of our enemies in such a kind way. I should think you would seek to destroy them instead of trying to love them."

"But do I not destroy them as enemies," replied Lincoln, "when I make them our friends?" Such a procedure is not only good Christianity but good statesmanship as well.

Love rejoices in the excellence of others and wishes them well. Jealousy is a perversion of that capacity, twisting the sensitiveness of the other's superiority from its legitimate paths of rejoicing and into the pathological tangents of petulance, peevishness, anger, fear.

"Against the superiority of another, said Goethe, "the only remedy is love."

Love enables a man to open wide his eyes to another's excellence, to admire and rejoice in it; and thus he enriches himself through his frank recognition. He shares through appreciation in that excellence. Excellence in others, like great works of art, enriches all who view it with admiration. The saints, with their supreme capacity for loving all mankind and scorning all temptations towards pettiness, envy, or selfishness, are thus like the immortal works of art which enrich every generation, which open the eyes of men to beauty.

### **FAITH BREEDS COURAGE**

The saints are people of great faith. God and the invisible realities of the spiritual world are more vivid and real to them than are the material objects which impinge upon their senses. They are not bitten by doubts which paralyse the nerves of action; nor are they palsied with questionings which transform forthright conduct into endless vacillations. They are not fissured personalities, but well-balanced, integrated personalities. They know where they are going and how to get there. They are willing to face opposition and endure hardship and suffering in order to achieve their goal. They know that as long as they have God on their side they cannot lose. For God and one constitute a majority.

In thus affording one a consciousness of the presence of God, religious faith is a source of courage. The doubter, the sceptic, is exposed to a devastating sense of loneliness and isolation. He feels like a sequestered being in an alien world. "How lonely we are, observes Thackeray, "in the world! how selfish and secret! everybody! . . . Ah, sir; a distinct universe walks about under your hat and under mine; all things in nature are different to each; the woman we look at has not the same features, the dish we eat from has not the same taste to the one and the other; you and I are but a pair of infinite isolations, with some fellow-islands a little more or less near to us:"

While this feeling of isolation may come at times to everyone, it is the sceptic who is particularly haunted with this sense of cosmic loneliness. To the believer dark skies and rainy days may come, but he knows they will pass and soon the sun will shine again. He is at home in his Father's vast temple, and knows that he can never wander beyond the reach of the everlasting arms.

### **THE MAID OF ORLEANS**

St. John of Are offers a striking illustration of the courage that springs from a deep religious faith—her faith in the mission which she believed to have been entrusted to her by God. A simple peasant girl rides forth to drive the English from Orleans and to crown the Dauphin Charles king of France. In February of 1429, accompanied by six men-at-arms, she sets forth on her perilous mission to the court of the Dauphin at Chinon. Her calm assurance of the success of her mission overcomes the doubts of Charles, who outfits for her an army of about five thousand men.

Clothed in a coat of mail, armed with the sword with which Charles Martel had vanquished the Saracens, she rides at the head of the army. She inspires them with her confidence and fearlessness, and leads them to a brilliant victory at Orleans, forcing the English to flee. All are agreed that the victory is traceable chiefly to Joan's extraordinary pluck and daring leadership. In a single week, with victories at Jargeau, Beaugency, and Patay, the English are driven beyond the

Loire. Joan has now made it possible for Charles to be crowned king of France. On 17 July 1429, holding the sacred banner, she stands besides Charles at his coronation in the Cathedral of Rheims. In an unbelievably short time Joan's courage and determination have achieved the impossible.

### **PATRIOTISM AND RELIGION**

Neither did her pluck and bravery desert her when, her mission accomplished, tribulation fell like rain upon her. Condemned as a heretic and a witch and about to be burned at the stake in the streets of Rouen, she displayed the same calm demeanour, the same fearless scorn of danger. Even when the flames mounted around her, there were no shrieking cries, no agonized pleading for release from the fiery death meted out to her by the people whose country she had freed and whose monarch she had crowned. Here was a courage which eclipsed even her spectacular victory at Orleans.

"Courage in strife," observes H. M. Tomlinson, "is common enough; even the dogs have it. But the courage which can face the ultimate defeat of a life of good will ... that is different, that is victory."

To the people of France, St. Joan of Arc is a symbol of the twin virtues of patriotism and religion, the love of country and the love of God. In travels through France I have found few if any statues of popular heroes so ubiquitous in town and countryside as those of the Maid of Orleans, with her sword held high. To me she stands a symbol of courage in victory and in defeat.

As Browning says:

*. . . Through such souls alone,  
God, stooping, shows sufficient of His light  
For us in the dark to rise by.  
And I rise.*

The life of every saint illustrates the truth that religious faith begets calmness and courage. When the Apostles awakened Christ, fearful that the storm at sea would capsize their frail bark, Christ laid bare the source of their fear when He said: "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Why are you so foolish as to fear, the Master asks, when you know that I am with you? Religious faith washes away fear and begets an inner steadfastness upon which the outward blows of adversity beat in vain.

### **THE ANCHOR**

When faith collapses, the dyke of courage is broken and fears sweep through the soul like tidal waves.

"An atheist," observes John Buchan, "is a man who has no invisible means of support." He is like a weather vane, at the mercy of every wind that blows. Psychiatrists in increasing numbers are pointing out the value of a deep religious faith as an anchor to the windward.

"A man," said Robert Louis Stevenson, "should stop his ears against paralysing terror and run the race that is set before him with a single mind." This is precisely what religion helps a man to do.

"The sovereign cure for worry," observes William James, "is religious faith. It supplies motive power for action and the enthusiasm which commits the whole man, mind and heart and soul, to the undertaking."

Said Oliver Wendell Holmes: "It's faith in something and enthusiasm that makes life worth looking at."

The weakness of Freud's position was in that he expected man to handle by his own unaided will the disruptive forces of his sub-conscious life.

"Freud has unfortunately over-looked," Jung points out in his *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, "the fact that man has never yet been able single-handed to hold his own against the powers of darkness—that is, of the unconscious. Man has always stood in need of the spiritual help which each individual's own religion held out to him. . . . It is this which lifts him out of his distress."

## THE POWER OF PRAYER

There is another powerful factor operative in the lives of saints which vivifies the sense of the divine presence and enhances their courage. That factor is prayer. Prayer means essentially the drawing closer to God by the raising of our mind to Him in adoration and supplication and the opening of one's heart to Him in love. God is the source of all strength and courage. It is not possible for us to come close to that divine source without our feeling the impact of His strength and courage upon our soul.

No one who falls upon his knee in prayer does not rise a better and a stronger man. Above the doors of the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in Cuernavaca, Mexico, I read the simple inscription: "Entra bueno, sal mejor" ("Enter a good person, leave a better one"). Though the first part of the injunction may not always be observed, the latter always is.

Tennyson recognized the mighty and all-pervasive power of prayer when he made his hero, the dying King Arthur, say:

*More things are wrought by prayer  
Than this world dream of.*

No less an authority than Dr. Alexis Carrel not so long ago bore witness to the power of prayer in the overcoming of phobias, melancholy, and other complexes. Writing in the Reader's Digest (March, 1941), Dr. Carrel states:

"As a physician, I have seen men, after all other therapy had failed, lifted out of disease and melancholy by the serene effort of prayer. It is the only power in the world that seems to overcome the so-called 'laws of nature'; the occasions on which prayer has dramatically done this have been termed 'miracles'.

"But a constant, quieter miracle takes place hourly in the hearts of men and women who have discovered that prayer supplies them with a steady flow of sustaining power in their daily lives. . . . When we pray, we link ourselves with the inexhaustible motive power that spins the universe. We ask that a part of this power be apportioned to our needs. Even in asking, our human deficiencies are filled and we arise strengthened and repaired."

Because the saints were men and women of prayer, they possessed great courage. Christ set the example for all of us. Before entering upon His Passion and death, He retired to the Garden of Gethsemani, to engage in long and fervent prayer. When He found the Apostles, Peter, James and John, who had accompanied Him, fallen asleep, He awakened them, saying:

"What? Could you not watch one hour with me? Watch you all, and pray."

Arising from those hours of prayer in the garden, Christ went through the scourgings, the sufferings, and the death upon Calvary's gibbet with a courage which is an inspiration to all men and women who must bear a cross and suffer.

## A TROUBADOUR OF CHRIST

Among the most gentle and loveable of all the saints of God is Francis of Assisi. He has captured the hearts of all the world. Even those of no faith turn wistful eyes towards this troubadour of Christ, whose love for everything in nature, animate and inanimate, made him a minstrel singing always the praises of God. Yet a careful study of his life discloses that for all his light-heartedness and mirth he was among the most fearless of all. His love for everything and everyone seemed to wash every trace of fear from his soul. He offers a perfect illustration of the truth of St. John's words: "Fear is not in love."

As a youth he was a fastidious dresser, a courtier of pleasure, a suitor of beauty, eager for fun and merriment. He was actually crowned king of the revellers. As he was riding across the Umbrian plain, he met a leper begging alms. Francis had always had a special horror of lepers. Putting the spurs into his horse, he turned his face away to escape the repulsive sight. Then quickly he caught the echo of a voice whispering: "Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it not to one of these least, neither did you do it to Me." Reining in his steed, he returned and dismounted. Taking all the money he had, he gave it to the beggar and kissed his hand.

## **“IL POVERELLO”**

It was the most difficult thing Francis had ever done. But it marked the changing point in his life. He had found his client and his lifework. Henceforth he renounced all riches that he might dedicate himself to the lepers, the sick, to the ragged poor. His bride henceforth was Lady Poverty. Even the clothes on his back he surrendered. With a cloak given to him by the Bishop of Assisi, he went off into the woods of Mount Subasio, singing for joy. All the things of nature, the wind, the sun, the sky, the flowers, grass and trees, the birds and the beasts of the field, were his possessions now, his “brothers and sisters,” and God was his treasure supreme.

His love for poverty has probably never been surpassed. I saw in the church at Assisi a lovely fresco by Giotto, depicting the “holy nuptials of Francis with Lady Poverty.” It has been the theme of a thousand poets, sculptors, and painters, who have found their imaginations stirred by a wedding to so unusual a bride. It was because Francis had the courage to try to walk so faithfully in the footsteps of Him Who did not have whereon to lay His head that he had so great a devotion to poverty. The secret of this love, which, while it has provoked admiration, has mystified so many, is revealed in the following beautiful prayer, which Francis addressed to his Lord:

“Poverty was in the crib, and like a faithful squire she kept herself armed in the great combat You did wage for our redemption. During Your Passion she alone did not forsake You. Mary, Your Mother, stopped at the foot of the cross, but poverty mounted it with You and clasped You in her embrace unto the end; and when You were dying of thirst, as a watchful spouse she prepared for You the gall. You did expire in the ardour of her embraces, nor did she leave You when dead, O Lord Jesus, for she allowed not Your body to rest elsewhere than in a borrowed grave. O poorest Jesus, the grace I beg of You is to bestow on me the treasure of the highest poverty. Grant that the distinctive mark of our Order may be never to possess as its own anything under the sun for the glory of Your name, and to have no other patrimony than begging.”

In this ardent love of poverty one finds the keynote of the spirit of “il Poverello” and of the Order which he founded. Does it take courage to give up every earthly possession and to live a life of poverty till mother earth at last lends you six feet of empty space? Try it, and see.

## **“A GOD-INTOXICATED MAN”**

While Francis was gentle to others, like all the saints he was severe with himself. Self-denial was his daily food and mortification his close-fitting garment. So severe was he with his body that when he came to die he begged pardon of “brother ass the body” for having treated it with such scant courtesy. Yet, instead of his mortifications making him gloomy or irritable, it heightened his cheerfulness and deepened his joy.

His early love of song never waned, and during his last illness he spent much of his time in singing. A God-intoxicated man if there ever was one, his love of God and of all His creatures flowed from him in language so tender that the words seem like lyrics of love. Let me cite the prayer that was almost hourly on his lips, and then ask if there exists in all the literature of the world a prayer more beautiful:

“Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is sadness, joy.

“O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”

## **THE IRON CHORD**

Where will one find such pregnancy, such tenderness, such self-effacing love? Can a man utter that prayer without rising from his knees a better man? Francis and his prayer offers the world the unique proof that the highest courage is achieved in the losing of oneself in the love of God and in the service of His children. He who gains the victory over himself achieves the supreme triumph. He who empties himself in love and service to the downtrodden, the afflicted, and

the ragged poor fills himself to overflowing with joy and gladness.

Francis traced out in his daily life the implications of the amazing paradox that a man begins to live only when he forgets himself in his absorption for the welfare of others. Beneath the soft and gentle music of social altruism and unselfish service the ear, sensitive to the overtones, will not fail to detect those tones coming ever and anon from the iron chord of courage. The courage of self-conquest, the courage of joyous service, the courage of self-effacing love.

No soldier with helmet and loaded gun ever showed greater fearlessness than did Francis. In 1212 Francis set out to preach the Gospel to the Saracens. His vessel was wrecked, however, and he was compelled to return. After preaching in the towns and the countryside of Italy, Francis once again set out for the East. He made his way to Egypt, where Damietta was under siege by the Crusaders.

### **FROM LOWEST TO HIGHEST**

Francis was not unaware of the treatment meted out by the sultan to those who fell into his hands. Yet he deliberately gave himself up as a prisoner, that he might be taken before the sultan. Standing fearlessly before the mighty warrior, Francis openly preached the Gospel of Christ. Probably never before in the history of the world had quite such an incident taken place. There was in Francis an intrepidity, a complete indifference about his own safety, that made the sultan see at once that here was no ordinary man. Overcome with wonderment and awe at the strange spectacle, the sultan sent him back to the Christian camp.

The words of Milton in *Samson Agonistes* depict the courage of Francis, who  
*Ran on embattled armies clad in iron,*  
*And weaponless himself*  
*Made arms ridiculous.*

Francis sounded all the notes in the diapason of courage. From the lowest—a disregard of his physical safety—to the highest, when he kissed the hand of the leprous beggar and emptied himself in love and service to the poor and the lowly, “il Poverello” of Assisi went all the way. Francis showed that gentleness tenderness, and love have an underlining of the iron virtue.

The Franciscan Order, which encircles the globe like a beautiful rosary of self-effacing charity, is the lengthened shadow of the personality of its Christ-like founder. True to the injunctions of its founder, the Order flourishes, not among the rich and powerful, but among the poor, the afflicted, the lowly. For these were the clients of Francis, and they are still the clients of his Order and the objects of their special predilection. No more authentic expression of the spirit of Christ’s courage and love will be found in the world today.

### **“NOT I; BUT CHRIST”**

Most men shrink from suffering and death. Yet with the example of Christ before his eyes, St. Peter had the courage not only to face his executioners calmly but also to request them to crucify him head downwards, saying that he was not worthy to be crucified after the manner of his Lord. The vast legion of men and women who died as martyrs for their Christian faith demonstrates that there is no power in the external world which can crush the naked soul of man when he is vivified by a deathless faith and an invincible will. All the saints and heroes and martyrs of the race are monuments of courage against which time will be both toothless and scytheless.

St. Paul offers a good illustration of the transforming power of religious faith and prayer. From a persecutor of the Christians he was changed into one of the most tireless propagators of the faith that ever lived. He braved all the perils of the ancient world and all the craftiness of man in his burning zeal to extend the kingdom of God on earth. He became a God-intoxicated man. With truth was he able to say: “We preach not ourselves, but Jesus Christ our Lord.” In telling of his many vicissitudes, he is quick to tell also of the courage which streamed from Christ to sustain him.

“In all things,” he says, “we suffer tribulation, but are not distressed; we are straitened, but are not destitute; we suffer persecution, but are not forsaken; we are cast down, but we perish not: always bearing about in our body the mortification

of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies. For we who live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake; that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal flesh."

Through all his external activities—travelling, preaching, writing—St. Paul never suffered the inner life of prayer and communion with God to lapse. On the contrary the intimacy of that union became intensified, so that he was able to say: "And I live, now not I; but Christ lives in me. "Was it any wonder, then, that nothing could frighten or scare him? Who could harm him? What power could hurt him?"

### **DUTY OF LOVE . . .**

"Who, then," he asked, "shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation? or distress? or famine? or nakedness? or danger? or persecution? or the sword? . . . But in all these things we overcome, because of Him that has loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

While St. Paul placed a tremendous emphasis upon the duty to love God, he did not fail to underline the duty to love our neighbour. Writing to the Galatians, he said:

"For all the law is fulfilled in one word: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another: take heed you be not consumed one of another." Would that these words might be written in the skies of all the world. If they were but heeded by the nations, how many cannons would cease to roar and how many millions of young lives would be spared a holocaust of fire?

When at last his long voyaging for Christ was finished, they led him out from his underground prison at Rome and gave him the opportunity he coveted: to seal his love for Christ with his lifeblood. A half-dozen soldiers hurried him down through the squalid slums of the Tiber. He turned his back on the theatres and palaces and temples of the Rome of Nero and went with the soldiers down the Ostian Way some three miles out. Then they turned off to the left into a little pinewoods, where a spring flowed. Old, sick, lonely, worn out with his incessant travelling, Christ's servant was stripped and flogged for the last time. His body was bruised and bleeding, but his face was radiant as he placed his head upon the swordsman's block.

### **"BETTER THAN LIGHT"**

Separate him from Christ? How he must have smiled at the thought. Unwittingly they were going to confer upon the Apostle the favour he craved most of all. They were going to unite him with Christ; now he would reach the peak of that fulfilment of which he spoke: "I live, now not I; but Christ lives in me." These are the words that might well be carved upon the cornerstone of the majestic temple, St. Paul's Out-side the Walls, which rises above his tomb and into the skies of Rome. For in teaching mankind the supreme importance of living for, in, and with Christ, St. Paul marked out for mankind the unfailing pathway that leads to a courage that fears no enemies and that never dies.

Thousands of years ago the Psalmist declared: "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?" That has been the light by which the saints, prophets, and holy men and women of God, in all ages have walked the paths of courage, righteousness and honour. Mankind, groping in the mists of uncertainty and doubt, will find that when they walk in that light their vision will become clearer, their footsteps surer; and in their hearts will echo more steadily the music of the iron chord of courage.

"Give me a light," implores the individual struggling with the baffling confusion and darkness of the present hour, "that I may tread safely into the unknown." The saints reply: "Go out into the darkness, and put your hand in the hand of God. That shall be to you better than a light and safer than a known way." While clasping that almighty hand, man will walk in the footsteps of the saints, guided safely through the labyrinth of a changing and war-torn world, by a light that has never failed.

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