

# HOW TO PRAY AT ALL TIMES

St Alphonsus Liguori

This beautiful little work was first published in 1753. It is therefore one of the earliest works of St. Alphonsus. The Saint entitled it: "A method of conversing continually and lovingly with God;" and to the title he added a note to say that it had been translated from the French, but that he had "augmented it with holy thoughts, affections and practices." It was surely the Saint's humility that made him thus minimise his part in the composition of the book, for as a matter of fact he entirely recast the little French treatise and made it all his own. His biographer, Father Berthe, could write of it: "In this golden little book are to be found the most familiar thoughts of the holy author." (Life Vol. I. P. 575).

It will be easily seen that the treatise has a twofold message. St. Alphonsus, like the Divine Redeemer before him, always puts the thought of God's justice, and the fear of punishment, before those who are obstinate in sin. But, following again the Redeemer's example, the saintly Doctor preaches in burning words the truth that every soul wishing to serve God may go to Him with perfect, unwavering confidence. To such souls God shows infinite tenderness and love. This message of confidence to men of goodwill, is the first lesson which the Saint teaches, with convincing force, in the following pages. The second lesson is deduced from the first : those who wish to serve God should speak to Him frequently, confidently, lovingly.

Be it remembered that this treatise is from the pen of a Doctor of the Church: every sentence of it bears the impress of his authority. A new translation of it is now given to the public in the hope that it will continue its mission of mercy, and lead men, in ever increasing numbers, to speak frequently and lovingly to God.

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*" Watch ye, therefore, praying at all times, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that are to come, and to stand before the Son of Man."—St. Luke (21-34).*

## CHAPTER I.

### GOD WISHES US TO SPEAK TO HIM WITH CONFIDENCE AND FAMILIARITY.

*What is man that Thou shouldst magnify him: or why dost Thou set Thy Heart upon him? (Job, 7-17).* Such was the astonished cry of Job when he considered the marvellous condescension of God in loving man and in longing to be loved by him. Hence, it is a mistake to think that great confidence and familiarity in treating with God is a want of reverence towards His infinite Majesty. You should, indeed, devout reader, worship Him in all humility and prostrate yourself before Him ; especially when you call to mind the ingratitude and sin of which, in the past, you may have been guilty. Yet this should not hinder you from treating Him with the most tender confidence and love. He is infinite majesty; but, at the same time, He is infinite love and goodness. In God you possess the most exalted and supreme Lord; but also a Friend who loves you with the greatest possible love. He is not offended—on the contrary He is pleased—when you treat Him with that confidence, freedom and tenderness with which a child treats its mother. Hear how He invites us to go to Him and even promises to welcome us with His caresses: *You shall be carried at the breasts and upon the knees they shall caress you. As one whom the mother caresseth, so will I comfort you (Isa., 66-12).* As a mother delights to place her child upon her knees, there to feed or fondle it : so is our merciful God pleased to treat souls whom He loves, who have given themselves wholly to Him, and placed all their hopes in His goodness.

Bear well in mind that you have neither friend, nor brother, nor father, nor mother, nor spouse, nor lover, who loves you more than God. Divine grace is that great treasure whereby we, vile creatures and poor servants, become the dear friends of our Creator Himself : *For she is an infinite treasure to men, which they that use become the friends of God (Wis., 7-14).* In order to fill our hearts with confidence, He emptied Himself, as St. Paul says (Phil., 2-7), abasing Himself to our level and conversing familiarly with us: He conversed with men (Bar. 3-38). He went so far as to become an infant, to become poor, to die publicly on a cross; He went so far as to hide Himself under the appearance of bread in order to

become our constant Companion and to unite Himself intimately to us: He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood abideth in Me and I in him (John, 6-57). In a word, He loves you as though He had no one else to love but you alone. You, too, should love Him alone, and all others for His sake. Of Him you may say, and, indeed, you should say: *My Beloved to me and I to Him (Cant., 2-16)*. My God has given Himself all to me, and I give myself all to Him; He has chosen me for His beloved, and I choose Him, of all others, for my only love: *My Beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands (Cant., 5-10)*.

Say, then, to him, often:

O my Lord! wherefore dost Thou love me thus? What good thing dost Thou see in me? Hast Thou forgotten the injuries I have done Thee? But since Thou hast treated me so lovingly, and, instead of casting me into hell, hast granted me so many favours, whom can I desire to love from this day forward but Thee, my God, my all? Ah, most gracious God, if in time past I have offended Thee, it is not so much the punishment I have deserved that now grieves me, as the displeasure I have given Thee, who art worthy of infinite love. But Thou knowest not how to despise a heart that repents and humbles itself: *A contrite and humble heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise (Ps. 50-19)*. Ah, now, indeed, neither in this life nor in the other do I desire any but Thee alone: *What have I in heaven? and besides Thee what do I desire upon earth! Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever (Ps. 72-25)*. Thou alone art and shalt be forever the only Lord of my heart, of my will; Thou my only good, my heaven, my hope, my love, my all: "The God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever."

The more to strengthen your confidence in God, often call to mind His loving treatment of you, and the gracious means He has used to help you to overcome your faults and to detach you from the things of this world, in order to draw you to His holy love. Fear, therefore, to have too little confidence in treating with God, now that you are determined to love Him and to please Him by every means in your power. The mercy which He has shown you is a most sure pledge of His love for you. God is displeased with a want of confidence on the part of souls who sincerely love Him, and whom He loves. If, then, you desire to please His merciful Heart, converse with Him henceforward with the greatest possible confidence and tenderness.

*I have graven thee in My hands; thy walls are always before My eyes (Isa., 49-16)*. In these words, God says to you in effect: Beloved soul, why are you timid or distrustful? I have written you in My hands so as never to forget to do you good. Are you afraid of your enemies? Know that the care of your defence is always before Me, so that I cannot lose sight of it. This is the thought which made David rejoice, as he cried out to God: *Thou hast crowned us as with a shield of Thy good will (Ps. 5-13)*. Who, Lord, can ever harm us if Thou dost surround us with Thy goodness and love?

Let the thought of the gift of our Divine Lord be the greatest motive of your hope: *God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son (John, 3-16)*. How can we ever fear, as the Apostle asks, that God would refuse us any good gift, seeing that He has deigned to give us His own Son? *He delivered Him up for us all; how hath He not also, with Him, given us all things? (Rom., 8-32)*.

*My delights are to be with the children of men (Prov., 8-31)*. If one may so express it—the paradise of God is the heart of man. Does God love you? Love Him in return. His delights are to be with you; let yours be to be with Him—to pass all your lifetime with Him, in whose company you hope to spend a blissful eternity. Accustom yourself to speak to Him alone, familiarly, with confidence and love, as to the dearest friend you have, the Friend who loves you most.

## CHAPTER II.

### IT IS EASY AND AGREEABLE TO CONVERSE WITH GOD.

If, as has been already said, it is a great mistake to speak to God with diffidence—to appear before Him as a timid slave, trembling with alarm before his prince—it would be a still greater mistake to think that conversing with God is wearisome and unpleasant. No—on the contrary *her conversation hath no bitterness nor her company any tediousness (Wis., 8-16)*. Ask those souls who love Him with a true love, and they will tell you that in the sorrows of their life their sweetest and truest consolation is to converse lovingly with God.

Now, you are not required to apply your mind so constantly to prayer as to forget your ordinary work and recreation. "Praying always" means that, without neglecting your ordinary occupations, you treat God as you treat the friends who love you and whom you love. God is ever near you, even within you: *In Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 18-28)*. He who would speak to God has no door to open; God is pleased when you speak to Him without reserve. Tell Him of your business, your plans, your griefs, your fears—of all that concerns you. Above all, do so (as I have already said) with confidence and entire freedom. For God is not wont to speak to the soul which does not speak to Him; in fact, being unaccustomed to speak to God, the soul would scarcely understand Him when He spoke. This is what the Lord complains of, in these words: *Our sister is little: what shall we do to our sister in the day when she is to be spoken to? (Cant., 8-8)*. Our sister is but a child in My love; what shall we do to speak to her if she understands not? It is the will of God that we remember His surpassing power and His rigorous justice if we despise His grace; but, on the contrary, He wishes that we should treat Him as a most affectionate friend if we love Him, and that we should speak to Him confidingly and without restraint.

It is true that God ought to be worshipped always with the greatest reverence; however, when He deigns to make you feel His presence and when He makes known His desire that you should speak to Him as to the Friend who loves you better than any other friend, then you should open your heart to Him with the greatest liberty and confidence. *She preventeth them that covet her, so that she first showeth herself unto them (Wisdom, 6-16)*. If you only desire His love, He will take the first step, without waiting for you to come to Him, and He will present Himself to you with all the graces and remedies of which you stand in need. He only waits for you to speak to Him, to show that He is near you, ready to hear and to comfort you: *And His ears are unto our prayers (Ps. 33-16)*.

By reason of His immensity, God is present everywhere; but there are two places where He dwells in a particular manner. One is in the highest heavens, where He is present by that glory which He communicates to the blessed; the other is on earth—within the humble soul that loves Him: *His name is holy who dwelleth in the high and holy place, and with a contrite and humble spirit (Isa., 57-15)*. \* Our God, then, dwells in the heights of heaven, and yet He does not disdain to occupy Himself with His servants day and night in their homes or in their monastic cells. There He bestows on them His divine consolations, the least one of which surpasses all the delights that the world offers, and which He alone does not desire who has never tasted their sweetness: Oh, taste and see that the Lord is sweet (Ps. 33-9).

Friends in the world have generally certain days on which they meet and converse; on other days they are apart; but between God and you, if you wish, there need never be one hour of separation: *Thou shalt rest, and thy sleep shall be sweet: the Lord will be at thy side (Prov. 3-24)*.

You may sleep, but God will place Himself at your side and watch over you continually: *I will rest with Him and He will be a comfort in my cares and grief (Cfr. Wis. 8-9,16)*. When you take your rest He does not leave your bedside. He remains there, always thinking of you, that when you awake in the night He may speak to you by His inspirations, and receive from you in return some act of love, of oblation, of thanksgiving. Thus, He desires to continue even in the hours of the night His sweet and gracious converse with you. Sometimes also He will speak to you while you sleep, and make you hear His voice, so that in waking you may put in practice what He has spoken: *I will speak to Him in a dream (Num. 12-6)*.

He is there also in the morning, to hear from you some word of affection, of confidence; to be the depository of your first thoughts, and of all the actions which you promise to perform that day to please Him; of all the griefs, too, which you offer to endure willingly for His glory and love. But as He fails not to present Himself to you at the moment of your waking, do not fail, on your part to give Him immediately a look of love, and to rejoice when your God announces to you the glad tidings that He is not far from you (as once He may have been by reason of your sins); but that He loves you, and

*\*Elsewhere St. Alphonsus has of course written on the third special dwelling of God with men—the sacramental presence of our Lord in the holy Eucharist. In fact in the earlier editions of the saint's works the present treatise was always published with the Visits to the Blessed Sacrament.*

would be beloved by you; and at that same moment He gives you the gracious precept, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart (Deut., 6-5)*.

### CHAPTER III.

#### ON WHAT, AND HOW, WE SHOULD CONVERSE WITH GOD.

##### I. IN GENERAL.

Never, then, forget His sweet presence, as do the greater part of men. Speak to Him as often as you can, for He does not grow weary of this nor disdain it, as do the lords of the earth. If you love Him, you will not be at a loss what to say to Him. Tell Him all that occurs to you about yourself and your affairs, as you would tell it to a dear friend. Do not look upon Him as a haughty monarch who will converse only with the great and on great matters. He, your God, is pleased to lower Himself to you, and to hear you communicate to Him your smallest and most ordinary concerns. He loves you as much—He has as much care for you—as if He had no one else to think of but you. He is as completely devoted to your interests as though the only end of His providence was to help you, of His almighty power to aid you, of His mercy and goodness to take pity on you, to do you good and to win by His kindness your confidence and love. Manifest to Him, then, freely your whole state of mind and pray to Him to enlighten you that you may perfectly accomplish His holy will. Let all your desires and aims be directed to learn His good pleasure and to do what is agreeable to His divine Heart: *Commit thy way to the Lord; and desire of Him to direct thy ways and that all thy counsels may abide in Him (Ps. 36-5 and Tob. 4-20)*.

Say not: Why disclose all my wants to God, since He already sees and knows them better than I do? Yes, He knows them; but He acts as if He did not know the needs about which you do not speak to Him and for which you do not seek His aid. Our Saviour knew that Lazarus was dead, and yet He acted as if He did not know until Magdalen told Him of it; it was then that He comforted her by bringing her brother back to life.

##### 2. PRAY IN YOUR TRIALS.

When you are afflicted with sickness, persecution, temptation, or any other trouble, turn at once to God and ask His help. It is enough for you to lay your affliction before Him—to go to Him and say: *Behold, O Lord, for I am in distress (Lam. 1-20)*. He will not fail to comfort you, or at least to give you strength to suffer the trial with patience, and in this case it will prove a greater good than if He had freed you altogether from it. Tell Him of all the things that make you fear, or make you sad, and say to Him: My God, in Thee are all my hopes. I offer this cross to Thee. I resign myself to Thy will. Take pity on me and either deliver me from my trial or give me strength to endure it. He will remember immediately the promise which He made in the Gospel, of consoling and comforting all those who have recourse to Him in tribulation: *Come to Me all you that labour and are burdened and I will refresh you (Mat. 11-28)*.

He will not be displeased if you seek comfort from your friends in the hour of trial; but He wishes you to have recourse principally to Him. At least, therefore, when you have had recourse to creatures and they have not been able to console your heart, go to your Creator and say to Him: Lord, men have only words; they cannot afford me consolation. I no longer desire to be consoled by them. Thou alone art my hope; Thou alone my only love. By Thee alone do I desire to be comforted and the consolation I ask for is to do on this occasion what is most pleasing to Thee. Behold, I am ready to endure this trial for the whole of my life, and for all eternity, if such be Thy will. Only help me.

Do not be afraid of offending Him if you sometimes gently complain, saying: *Why, Lord, has Thou retired afar off? (Ps. 9-1)*. Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee, and that I desire nothing but Thy love. Have pity on me and help me. Do not abandon me.

If desolation should continue for a long time and grievously afflict you, unite your voice to the voice of your afflicted Jesus and say: *My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? (Mat. 28-46)*. Let the thought humble you that having offended God you do not deserve His consolations. At the same time, remember that He permits every thing for your good, and do not lose confidence: *All things work together unto good to them that love God (Rom. 8-28)*. Say with

courage, even when you feel most troubled and disconsolate: *The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? (Ps. 26-1). Lord, Thou wilt guide me, Thou wilt save me; In Thee do I trust. In Thee, O Lord, have I hoped; let me never be confounded (Ecclus 2-11).* Reflect that God loves you more than you can love yourself. Why, then, should you be afraid? David brought comfort to his heart saying: *The Lord is careful for me (Ps. 39-18).* Let such be your sentiments, too, when you pray; and speak in this manner to God: Lord, I cast myself into Thy arms; and I desire to think only of loving and pleasing Thee. Behold me ready to do what Thou askest of me. Thou dost not only will my good, but Thou art "careful" for it. To Thee, then, I leave the care of my salvation. In Thee I rest, and will rest for evermore, since Thou wiliest that in Thee I should place all my hopes: *In peace, in the self-same I will sleep and I will rest; for Thou, O Lord, singularly hast settled me in hope (Ps. 4-9).*

*Think of the Lord in goodness (Wis. 1-1).* In these words the inspired writer exhorts us to have more confidence in the divine mercy than dread of the divine justice. For God is incomparably more inclined to bestow favours upon us than to chastise us, as St. James says: *Mercy exalteth itself above judgment (2-13).* For this reason, St. Peter exhorts us in all our fears—whether for our temporal or eternal interests—to abandon ourselves entirely to the goodness of God, who has the interests of our salvation at heart: Casting all your care upon Him, for He hath care of you (I Pet. 5-7). The royal prophet, David, has the same message of hope when he gives to God the beautiful title of our God and the God who is willing to save us: *Our God is the God of salvation (Ps. 39-18).* This means, as Bellarmine explains it, that it is the will of God, not to condemn, but to save all. He threatens with His displeasure those who despise Him; but He promises mercy to those who fear Him: in the words of the canticle of our Blessed Lady: His mercy is from generation to generation to them that fear Him

I place before you, devout reader, all these passages from the sacred scriptures, so that if you are ever troubled by the doubt as to whether you will be saved or no—whether you are of the number of the predestined or no—you may take courage at the thought that you know from God's Word that He desires to save you, if only you are resolved to serve and love Him as He asks of you.

### 3. PRAY IN YOUR JOYS.

When you receive some pleasant news, do not act like some unfaithful and thankless souls who have recourse to God in time of trouble, but forget and forsake Him when things go well with them. Show Him the fidelity that you would show to a sincere friend who rejoices in your happiness. Go at once and tell Him of your joy, and praise Him and give Him thanks, acknowledging your good fortune as a gift from His hands. Rejoice in the fact that you owe your happiness to Him, and place all your joy and comfort in Him: *I will rejoice in the Lord (Hab. 3-18), and I will joy in God my Jesus (Ps. 12-6).* Say to Him: My Jesus, I bless, and will ever bless Thee, for granting me so many favours, when I deserved at Thy hands not favours, but chastisements for the affronts I have offered Thee. Say to him, with the sacred Spouse: *All fruits, the new and the old, my Beloved, I have kept for Thee (Cant. 7-13).'*, Lord, I give Thee thanks; I keep in memory Thy many acts of kindness, past and present, to render Thee praise and glory for them forever.

But if you love your God, you ought to rejoice more in His blessedness than in your own. He who has a dear friend sometimes takes more delight in that friend's good fortune than if it had been his own. Comfort yourself, then, in the knowledge that God is infinitely happy. Often say to him: My beloved Lord, I rejoice more in Thy blessedness than in any happiness of my own, for I love Thee more than I love myself.

### 4. PRAY AFTER A FAULT.

Another mark of confidence highly pleasing to our most loving God is this: that when you have committed any fault, you are not ashamed to go at once to Him and seek His pardon. Consider that God is so willing to pardon sinners that He laments their perdition, when they depart far from Him and live dead to His grace. Therefore, does he lovingly call them, saying: *Why will you die, O house of Israel? Return ye, and live (Ezek. 18-31).* He promises to receive a soul that has forsaken Him, if only it returns to His arms: *Turn to Me . . . and I will turn to you (Zach. 1-3).* Would that sinners only

knew how mercifully our Saviour awaits them in order to pardon them: *The Lord waiteth that He may have mercy upon you (Isa. 30-18)*. Would that sinners realised the desire on the part of God, not, indeed, to chastise them, but to see them converted and to embrace and press them to His Heart: As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live (Ezek. 33-11). He has even still more consoling words: *Come and accuse Me, saith the Lord; if your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow (Is. 1-18)*. In other words, He says: Sinners, repent of having offended Me and then come to Me. If I do not pardon you, accuse Me of being unfaithful to My promises; but, no, I will keep My word. If you come to Me and repent, though your soul be dyed deep crimson with crime, by My grace it shall be made white as snow. Almighty God promises even to forget the sinner's wrong-doing if only he repents: *I will not remember all his iniquities (Ezek. 18-22)*. As soon, then, as you fall into any fault, raise your eyes to God, make an act of love, and humbly confessing your fault, place unwavering confidence in God, saying to Him: *Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick (John 11-3)*. The heart which Thou lovest is sick—is wounded. Heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee (Ps. 40-5). Thou seekest penitent sinners Behold one at Thy feet, seeking Thee. The evil is committed—what must I do? Thou wilt not have me lose confidence; even after the sin which I have committed, Thou desirest my good, and I again love thee. Yes, my God I love Thee with all my heart. I am sorry for my sin, and will never more offend Thee. *Thou art a God, sweet, and mild, and plenteous in mercy (Ps. 85-5)*; pardon me. Let me hear from Thee what Thou didst say to Magdalen: *Thy sins are forgiven thee (Luke 7-48)*; and give me strength for the future to be faithful to Thee.

Then, in order not to be discouraged, cast your eyes upon Jesus Christ crucified; offer to the Eternal Father his merits, and confidently hope for pardon; since to pardon you he spared not his own Son. Say to him with confidence: *Look on the face of thy Christ (Ps. 83-10)*; my God, have regard to Thy Son who has died for me and for His sake grant me pardon.

Attend, especially, devout soul, to what is commonly taught by masters of the spiritual life, who recommend you to have recourse immediately to God after you have fallen, although you should repeat the fall a hundred times in the day. Having done this, do not be disturbed. If you remain discouraged and troubled because of the fault committed, you will scarcely speak to God; your confidence will grow less your desire to love God will grow cold and you will make little or no advance in the way of the Lord. On the other hand, by having immediate recourse to God, asking His pardon and promising amendment for the future, your very faults will help you to advance in divine love. Between friends who sincerely love one another it sometimes happens that when one offends the other and then humbles himself and asks pardon, their friendship becomes stronger than ever. Do you act in like manner with regard to God: let your faults only strengthen the bonds of love which unite you to Him.

## 5. PRAY IN YOUR DOUBTS.

Whenever you are in doubt about anything—whether it regards yourself or others—act like good friends do who always consult one another in their difficulties. Show the same mark of confidence to God; consult Him; ask Him to enlighten you, that you may decide on what is most pleasing to Him: *Put Thou words in my mouth and strengthen the resolution in my heart (Jud. 9-18)*. Lord, make known to me what Thou wouldst have me do, to answer, and I will obey Thee: *Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth (i Kings 3-10)*.

## 6. PRAY FOR YOUR NEIGHBOUR.

Recommend to God with confidence not only your own needs but also the needs of others. How pleasing to Him it will be if you sometimes forget yourself and speak to Him of His own glory, of the miseries of others, especially those who mourn in sorrow; of the souls in purgatory, His spouses, who long to behold Him in Heaven; and of poor sinners who live deprived of His grace. Pray to Him for sinners thus:

Lord, Thou art all goodness and worthy of an infinite love: how, then, canst Thou endure in the world so many souls on whom Thou hast lavished Thy favours, and who yet have no desire to know Thee, who have no desire to love Thee, who even offend and despise Thee? Ah, my most amiable God, make Thyself known—make Thyself loved. Hallowed be

Thy name, Thy kingdom come. May Thy name be adored and loved by all men. May Thy love reign in all hearts. Do not let me depart from Thee without granting me some grace for the unhappy souls for whom I pray.

#### 7. SPEAK TO GOD OF HEAVEN.

It is said that souls who in this life have but little longing for heaven are punished in purgatory with a peculiar pain, called the pain of languor. This surely is only just; because to have but little longing for heaven is to set little value on the happiness of that eternal kingdom which our Lord opened to us by His death. Remember, then, frequently to think of, and long for heaven. Say to God that your life seems an endless span, so great is your desire to go to Him, to see Him face to face, and to love Him. Long to be set free from your exile, from this world of sin, from the danger of losing divine grace, that you may arrive at that land of love where your heart will be given wholly to God. Say to Him over and over again: Lord, as long as I live on this earth I am in danger of forsaking Thee and of losing Thy love. When shall I leave this life, wherein I am forever offending Thee? When shall I go to love Thee with all my soul and unite myself to Thee without any danger of losing Thee again?

St. Teresa was ever sighing for heaven in this manner. She used to rejoice when she heard the clock strike, because another hour of life and of the danger of losing God, had passed. She so earnestly desired to die that she might see God, that she was dying with the desire to die. This was the subject of the loving poem which she composed: "I die because I do not die."

### CHAPTER IV.

#### HOW GOD ANSWERS THE SOUL.

In a word, if you wish to please the loving Heart of God, endeavour to speak to Him as often as you can, and with the fullest confidence that He will answer and speak to you in return. When you withdraw yourself from conversation with creatures to speak to God alone, He will not speak in a voice that strikes the ear, but in a voice that reaches the heart: *I will lead her into the wilderness and I will speak to her heart (Osee, 2-14)*. He will speak by inspiration, by interior light, by manifestations of His goodness, by a tenderness which touches the heart, by assurance of pardon, by a feeling of peace, by the hope of heaven, by intimate happiness, by the sweetness of His grace, by loving and tender embraces of the soul—in a word, He will speak in a voice easily understood by those whom He loves and who have given their hearts to Him.

### CHAPTER V.

#### THE PRACTICE OF PRAYING CONSTANTLY.

To conclude this treatise, I will recall briefly what has been said in the preceding pages, and I will suggest a practice by which you may render all your daily actions pleasing to God.

When you awake in the morning, let your first thought be to raise up your mind to God, to offer to His honour whatever you may have to do or suffer during the day, and to beseech Him to assist you with His holy grace. Then perform your other morning devotions, making acts of love and of gratitude, and praying and resolving to spend the day as if it were to be the last of your life.

Father Saint-Jure recommends you to make a compact every morning with God, that every time you make a certain sign, such as placing your hand upon your heart, or raising your eyes to heaven or to the crucifix, or the like, you intend thereby to make an act of love, of desire to see God loved by all, of oblation of yourself, and other acts of the same kind. When you have made these acts, place your soul in the wound of the side of Jesus and under the mantle of Mary, and beg of the Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus and Mary, to protect you during the day. Then, before all things else, be sure to make your meditation, or mental prayer, at least for half an hour. Meditate especially on the sufferings and contempt which Jesus endured in His Passion. This is the subject dearest to fervent souls, and the one best calculated to set hearts aflame with divine love. If you desire to make progress in the spiritual life there are three devotions which must be particularly dear to you: Devotion to the Passion of our Lord, to the Most Blessed Sacrament and to the Blessed Virgin

Mary. In all your meditations repeat again and again acts of contrition, of the love of God and of oblation of yourself. The venerable Father Charles Caraffa, founder of the Congregation of Pious Workers, says that one fervent act of love made thus in the morning is sufficient to maintain the soul in fervour throughout the whole day.

Perform your more important acts of devotion with great care, such as going to confession, receiving Holy Communion, reciting the divine office, and other similar duties. Whenever you are going to begin some external occupation, like study or work, or the duty of your state in life, do not forget to offer it to God, praying His assistance to enable you to perform it well. Afterwards follow the example of St. Catharine of Siena and retire often to the cell of your heart in order to unite yourself to God. In a word, whatever you do, do it with God and for Him. When you leave your room, or go out of the house—and when you return—say a Hail Mary, and thus recommend yourself to the Blessed Virgin. At your meals, whether you find them pleasant to your taste, or not to your liking, offer all to God. On rising from table, say, as grace, some little prayer like this: Lord, how good Thou art to one who has offended Thee! During the day give some time to spiritual reading; and make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament and to our Lady. In the evening say the Rosary, examine your conscience, make acts of faith, hope, charity and contrition; promise to serve God more fervently and to receive the holy sacraments during life and at death, and form the intention of gaining all the indulgences within your power. When you go to bed, reflect that you have deserved to lie in the fire of hell; then, with a crucifix in your arms, compose yourself to sleep, saying: *In peace, in the self-same I will sleep and I will rest (Ps. 4-9)*.

(Here, in passing, I would remind the reader of indulgences which are attached to various acts of devotion; and also I would remind him of the desirability of renewing each morning the intention of gaining all the indulgences possible during the day. For reciting the acts of faith, hope and charity there is an indulgence of seven years and seven quarantines each day. If they are recited daily for a month, a plenary indulgence may be gained on the condition of going to confession and Communion and of praying for the intentions of the Church; this indulgence may be applied to the souls in purgatory or to oneself at the hour of death.

In like manner, form the intention of gaining also all the indulgences granted for saying the Rosary on beads properly blessed, the Angelus three times a day, the Litany of our Blessed Lady, the Salve Regina, the Ave Maria, and the Gloria Patri; for saying, "Blessed be the holy and Immaculate Conception of the most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God"; as also for saying, "Blessed and praised every moment be the most holy and divine Sacrament"; for reciting the prayer Anima Christi, etc.; for bowing the head at the Gloria Patri and at the most holy names of Jesus and Mary; as also for hearing Mass; for making half an hour's mental prayer—for this there is a partial indulgence, and also, if the meditation is made daily, a plenary indulgence on the usual conditions of confession, Communion and praying for the intentions of the Church; for genuflecting before the Blessed Sacrament\*; for kissing the cross.)

In order to keep yourself recollected and united to God as far as the imperfections of human nature permit, endeavour, by means of what you see and hear, to raise your mind to God and to recall the things of eternity. For instance, when you see running water, reflect that your life is rushing on in like manner and taking you nearer to death. When you see a lamp going out for want of oil, reflect that thus your life will one day flicker out and be extinguished. When you see graves or the bodies of the dead, think of what will happen to yourself one day. When you see worldly people rejoicing in their wealth or distinction, have pity on their folly, and say to yourself: For me God is sufficient: *Some trust in chariots, some in horses, but we in the name of the Lord (Ps. 19-8)*. Let them glory if they wish in vanity. Be it mine to glory only in the grace of God and in His holy love. When you see monuments erected to the dead, or take part in the funeral ceremonies of the great ones of this world, ask yourself the question: If their souls are lost, what will all this pomp avail them? When you look out over the ocean and see it now calm and tranquil and now lashed to fury by the winds, consider the difference there is between a soul in sin and a soul in the state of grace. When you see a tree that is withered, reflect on the fact that a

\*The recent edition of the *Raccolta*, No. 116a, quotes this indulgence in these terms: "Any exterior act of reverence when passing a Church or Chapel where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved," 100 days T.Q. For kissing the cross, the new *Raccolta* gives no indulgence.

soul without God is fit for nothing but to be cast into the fire. If you ever happen to see one who has been guilty of some great crime, trembling with shame and fear in the presence of his judge, or his father, or of his Bishop, consider what the terror of the sinner will be in the presence of Jesus Christ, his judge. When thunder crashes through the heavens, and you grow alarmed, reflect how those miserable souls that are damned tremble as they hear continually in hell the thunders of the divine wrath. If you ever see one who has been condemned to suffer a painful death, and who says, "Is there, then, no longer any means of my escaping death?" consider what will be the despair of a soul when it is condemned to hell, as it says: "Is there, then, no longer any means of escaping from eternal ruin?"

When you behold beautiful scenes in the country or along the sea coast, or when you look at flowers or fruit, and are pleased by the sight or the perfume, say: For me God has created these lovely things in this world, that I may love Him. What delights has He not prepared for me in heaven? Seeing fair plains and beautiful hills, St. Teresa used to say that they reproached her with her ingratitude to God. The Abbot de Rance, founder of La Trappe, declared that the beauty of creation around him obliged him to love God. St. Augustine had the same thought: "The heavens and the earth and all Thy works cry out to me to love Thee." There is a story told of a certain holy man, that in passing through the fields he would strike with a little stick the flowers and plants which he found on his way, saying, "Be silent; do not reproach me any longer for my ingratitude to God. I have understood you; be silent; say no more." When St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi held in her hand any beautiful fruit or flower, she used to feel herself glowing with divine love, saying to herself, "Behold, my God has thought from eternity of creating this fruit, this flower, in order to give it to me as a token of the love which He bears towards me."

When you see rivers or streams, reflect that as their waters run towards the sea, and never remain still, so ought you ever tend towards God, who is your only good. When you happen to be in some vehicle drawn by horses' say: "See what labour these innocent animals go through for my service; and how much pains do I myself take in order to serve and please my God?" When you see a little dog, which for a miserable morsel of bread is faithful to its master, reflect how much greater reason you have to be faithful to God, who has created and preserved you, and heaps upon you so many blessings. When you hear the birds sing, say: "Hearken, O my soul, to the praise which these little creatures are giving to their Creator; and what are you doing?" Then do you also praise him with acts of love. On the other hand, when you hear the cock crow, recall to your memory that there once was a time when you also, like Peter, denied your God; and renew your tears and your contrition. If you see the house or the locality in which you fell into some sin, turn to God and say in your heart: *The sins of my youth and my ignorance; remember not, O Lord (Ps. 24-7).*

When you see valleys fertilised by waters that descend on them from the heights of the mountains, consider that grace in a similar manner leaves those who are proud, to flow into hearts that are humble. When you see a church beautifully adorned, consider the beauty of a soul in grace, which is truly the temple of God. When you look upon the sea, consider the greatness and immensity of God. When you see fire, or candles lighted on the altar say: "For how many years ought I to have been burning in hell? But since Thou, O Lord, has not yet condemned me to that place of woe, grant that my heart may now burn with Thy holy love, even as this fuel or these candles." When you behold the heavens and the stars, say with St. Andrew of Avellino: "My feet will one day tread upon those stars."

Recall also frequently the mysteries of our Saviour's love; and when you see straw or a manger or a rocky cave, remember the Infant Jesus and the stable at Bethlehem. When, you see a hammer, or a saw, or a plane, or an axe, recall how Jesus laboured like any ordinary young working man in the cottage at Nazareth. If you see cords, thorns, nails, or beams of wood, think of the sorrows and death of the Most Holy Redeemer. When St. Francis of Assisi happened to see a lamb he shed tears, as he exclaimed: "My Lord like a lamb was led to die for me." When you look at an altar, a chalice, or a chasuble, recall to mind the great love which Jesus has shown us in giving Himself to us in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

Following the example of St. Teresa, often offer yourself to God during the day, and say: "Behold me, O Lord, ready to do what Thou wilt. Make known to me Thy holy will; I am eager to do all that Thou askest of me."

As the hours go by, make repeated acts of divine love, for—to quote St. Teresa again—these acts of love are the fuel

by which divine love is kept burning within the heart. One day, when the Venerable Sister Seraphine of Capri happened to see the convent mule, the thought occurred to her that the poor animal could not love God. She expressed her compassion in these words: "Poor brute you can neither know nor love God." Then a wonderful thing happened—tears welled into the animal's eyes and forthwith began to flow abundantly. Do you imitate the saintly sister's example. When you see, creatures incapable of knowing or loving God, use the intelligence that He has given you to repeat many acts of love.

If anything painful or disagreeable happens to you, immediately offer to God what you have to suffer, and unite your will to His. Accustom yourself to repeat in every trial: It is the will of God; it is my will also. Acts of resignation are the acts of love dearest to the Heart of God.

When you have to arrive at some decision, or to give some important advice, ask God's help before you do so. Repeat as often as you reasonably can during the day: Incline unto mine aid, O God, as St. Rose of Lima was accustomed to do. To obtain this help of God turn frequently to the crucifix or to the picture of our Blessed Lady (which, of course, you will have in your room) and do not fail to invoke frequently the names of Jesus and Mary, especially in time of temptation. God, being infinitely kind, has the greatest desire to communicate His graces to us. The Venerable Father Alphonsus Alvarez saw our Lord, on one occasion, with His hands filled with graces, going about seeking souls to whom He might dispense them. But He will have us ask Him for them: Ask and you shall receive; otherwise He will withdraw His hands. He will, on the contrary, stretch them out to us and willingly open them to us if we invoke Him. Who ever had recourse to God, asks Ecclesiasticus, and God despised him by refusing to hear him? Who hath called upon Him, and He despised him? (2-11). David declares that God shows not only mercy, but great mercy, to those who invoke Him: *For Thou, O Lord, art sweet and mild; and plenteous in mercy to all that call upon Thee (Ps. 85-5).*

How good and kind God is to those who lovingly seek Him! The Lord is good to the soul that seeks Him (Lam. 3-25). He is found even by those who do not seek Him: *I was found by them that did not seek Me (Rom. 10-12)*; with far greater willingness He will anticipate those who seek Him in order to serve and love Him.

I conclude with a thought from St. Teresa. It is this: The souls of the just should do on earth, through a spirit of love, what the Blessed do in heaven. In heaven the saints occupy themselves only with God; all their thoughts are for His glory; all their pleasure is to love Him. Do you act in the same way. During your life on earth let God be your only happiness, the only object of your affections, the only end of all your actions and desires, until you arrive at that eternal Kingdom, where your love will be consummated and made perfect, and your desires will be completely fulfilled and satisfied.

## APPENDIX

### Method of MENTAL PRAYER or Meditation According to St. Alphonsus.

#### I. PREPARATION.

A recollected life and regular Spiritual Reading are the best remote preparation.

For the immediate preparation, make three short but fervent acts

(1) An Act of Adoration of God present to the soul.

Example: O my God, I believe Thou art really here present; I bow down and adore Thee. Thou art so good, I am so sinful; Thou art so great, I am only nothingness; etc.

(2) An Act of Sorrow for Sin:

Example: O my God, I am heartily sorry for all my sins of thought, word, deed, and omission, and by the help of Thy holy grace I will never sin again.

(3) A Petition for Light and Strength:

Example: O my God, give me light to see Thy holy Will, give me grace to do Thy Will. O Wisdom of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, direct me in all my ways. O Love of the Sacred Heart, consume me in Thy fire.

Add a Hail Mary to the Blessed Virgin and an ejaculation to St. Joseph, your Patron Saints and Angel Guardian.

## II. BODY OF THE PRAYER.

Use the mind in thinking on some subject as much as is necessary in order to pray fervently. But do not imagine that very much is necessary in order to pray. Do not wait for a great fire to burn up in your soul, but cherish any little spark you may feel.

To help your mind, read a text of Scripture or a short Meditation out of a book. St. Teresa used a book in her Meditations for seventeen years.

Meditate for a few minutes on any thought that has struck you; that is, think for a short time on what it means, what lessons it teaches you, and ask yourself: What have I done about this hitherto? What shall I now do? But remember, you think only in order that you may pray.

The great benefit of Mental Prayer consists less in meditation or thinking than in acts, prayers and resolutions, which are the fruits of Meditation. The thinking is the needle which draws after it the golden thread of acts, prayers and resolutions. The thread is more important than the needle. The chief part of the time of Meditation should, then, be spent in making:

### 1. Acts and Affections.

Examples.—Acts of Humility: "My God, I am nothing in Thy sight." Act of Thanksgiving: "My God, I thank Thee for Thy goodness." Act of Love: "My God, I love Thee with my whole heart. I wish to please Thee in all things. I will only what Thou wilt. I love Thee because Thou art infinitely good. Do with me and mine all that pleases Thee, because it is Thy will." Acts of love and of contrition are golden chains binding us to God. St. Thomas says: "Every act of love merits eternal life." Make then many simple but fervent acts of love and sorrow.

### 2. Prayers of Petition.

In mental prayer, it is extremely useful, and, perhaps better than all else, to make many earnest petitions for the graces you want. Always ask, above all, for (a) the perfect forgiveness of all past sin; (b) the perfect love of God; and (c) the grace of a holy death. "At first," said Father Paul Segneri, S.J., "I used to employ my time of prayer in reflections and affections, but God opened my eyes, and then I gave myself to petitions, and if I have any good, it comes from this practice."

### 3. Resolutions.

"The progress of a soul," says St. Teresa, "does not consist in thinking much of God, but in loving Him, and this love is gained by resolving to do much for Him." Make one practical resolution that you mean to keep during the day.

## III. CONCLUSION.

Three short fervent acts:

- (1) Thank God for the light He has given you.
- (2) Renew your resolution to abstain from some fault or to do some good thing, during the day.
- (3) Ask the Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus and Mary, to help you to keep it.

At the end of meditation, always pray for poor sinners and for the souls in Purgatory.

N.B.—The acts and prayers of petition should occupy the most of the time. Thus, in a half-hour's prayer, give three minutes to the preparation: think for five minutes and then pray.