

TRUST IN GOD

Extracts from Notes of Retreats given by Rev. Daniel Considine, S. J.

NOTE

FATHER Daniel Considine S.J. was a well-known preacher at Farm Street. He died in 1928. These words are addressed, to use Father Considine's own phrase, to those "friends of God who would rather die than become His enemies by deliberate mortal sin." Of such, there are many in the Church of God and to them these pages are addressed in the hope that they will hear the loving invitation of the Sacred Heart: *Friend, come up higher*. Many devout souls are debarred from a loving familiarity with Our Lord because of their own lack of trust in God. Father Considine attributes this partly to the effects of Jansenism, which, under the guise of a false piety, inspired dread of God's sanctity rather than confidence in His mercy. The sovereign specific against Jansenism is confidence in the human heart of God, a confidence constantly recommended by Father Considine in all his instructions.

Diffidence

We are timid, we feel ourselves unworthy of God's love: we think of our past sins, we hesitate, we shrink back—and what is the cause of all this? *PRIDE*.

We are afraid of sanctity because we are afraid of failure, afraid of cutting a sorry figure. But if we become convinced that we can do nothing of ourselves, but that God can and will look after us, what is there to be afraid of? Do we imagine that we can attain holiness by our own exertions? Is not God powerful enough to make a saint, even of such a poor creature as ourself?

"But our past sins make us tremble." We see how we have deserved hell. But have we not been to Confession? Do we believe God has forgiven us? What a poor compliment to the good God to think of Him as a hard taskmaster raking up old faults at every turn. We talk of forgiving and forgetting. In the case of our poor fellow-creatures such language is metaphorical. Nevertheless, it is literally true with regard to God in the sense that a sin forgiven by Him is wiped out as if it had never existed.

Even to excite contrition in our hearts, it is not a good thing to ponder over our past sins. When we fall, let us say: "Well, what better could I expect of such a poor thing as I am? Were it not for God's goodness I should have fallen still lower." Then get up and go on as if nothing had happened. God is probably more pleased by the acknowledgement of our weakness than He was displeased by the fault.

Here of course we are speaking of those souls who are God's friends and who would rather die than become His enemies by deliberate mortal sin: of those souls who are too often inclined to worry over their sins of human frailty in a way which—if they were conscious of it—would be an indignity to the infinite generosity of the Heart of Our Lord.

Gradually as the soul grows more accustomed to trusting itself to God and *learns by experience* how He takes care of it, it will lose its fear and become more at home with God. As a rule, God delights in giving consolation. The spirit of God works rapidly in souls unless He meets with opposition.

The Spiritual Life

WHAT is the spiritual life like? And what is expected of those who take it up? What indications are there in Holy Writ, and in the teaching of Christ as to what the practice of holiness and virtue is like?

1st. From the Old Testament

Job says the life of man is a conflict, a struggle, a war. Don't minimize the word: a state of war. Soldiers armed, campaigns planned, nothing neglected, all to be on the alert. A time of deep thoughts; visions of slaughter, wounds, hardship, vigils, many unpleasant things. It is a matter of great consequence to know what we should expect the spiritual life to be like. It is a service of peace in the Holy Ghost—yes—but not in the sense that we can fold our arms and go to sleep, with no difficulties of any kind to molest us. My life is to be a life of struggle—not a life of occasional warfare.

In the old days, armies used to go into winter quarters, and cease fighting. In the spiritual life there is no going into

winter quarters at all. No matter how high we are in the spiritual life, we can never be sure of peace for five minutes there is no immunity from our spiritual enemy. If we don't get these conditions into our minds, we shall not understand what to expect. God says, it is not occasionally, not on Mondays, with a rest on Tuesdays, but *always*, a time of struggle. If we are soldiers worthy of our salt, really doing work for God, we must be prepared for fighting.

War is a furnace in which the baser metal is quickly separated from the good. Against chivalry, generosity, high principle, it has no power, but it consumes and reduces to ashes every kind of moral dross. What makes a man a man? Firmness, endurance, respect for authority, unselfishness, are the very groundwork of a soldier. A character that comes out from its searching has stood a supreme test. When Job had borne patiently the loss of his children and goods, Satan said to God: "Skin for skin, and all that a man hath he will give for his life: but put forth Thy Hand and touch his bone and his flesh and Thou shalt see if he will bless Thee to Thy Face."

What courage we must have for this warfare, but above all, what great moral courage! A courage, not founded on mere bone and muscle, on animal spirits, on a want of sensibility: such courage is frequently found among grosser, coarser natures, which do not so much condemn danger as they lack imagination to foresee it and appreciate its consequences. Moral courage resides in the soul and is concerned with the things of the soul. It does not make so much account of the life of the body as of honour, virtue. In the words of the Apostle, "Of whatsoever things are true, whatsoever modest, whatsoever just, whatsoever holy, whatsoever lovely, whatsoever of good fame," it steels a man against lightness of word or deed; it is not afraid of the jeers of the frivolous or the scoffer.

2nd. From The New Testament

Our Lord always speaks of work. "Traffic till I come." How He found fault with the man in the parable, who hid his talent in the ground! What sort of reception did he get? Does it not show that, though the spiritual life ought not to be one of hustle and bustle, still God wants effort, exertion; He wants us to be brisk. The Curé of Ars used to say: "The only good thing I can say of myself is, I am not afraid of taking trouble." We must expect hard knocks and disappointment. Don't think that a bad report. But if you complain, "I want calm of spirit, and to be filled with jubilation," that is not what the saints had. Jesus Christ, the great Model of Life—what was His life? A life of unutterable humiliation, His Divine Heart was oppressed by the thought of His Passion—a life of great pain and suffering. He is our Model. If you are working on to your goal, and heave a great sigh of satisfaction when a difficulty is over, I am very much afraid you are not going in God's direction at all. If your life is like that of a man, or woman, of the world, pleasure always at hand, everyone admiring and loving you—always successful, and then to die quietly, and be transferred, according to your own idea, to Heaven—there is grave suspicion of that life. This great flaw is in it, it does not agree with Holy Scripture. If we want to know if we are pleasing to God, and whether we belong to His chosen few, one of the first tests is this:

Am I idle? Is the day too short for what I have to do? You must *work*. I am talking of advancing in God's service. You have to suppress that odious temper; or you have the dangerous gift of saying smart things and your friends suffer from the poison of bitterness in them. *There* is something for you to do. You need not have a life filled with activities, you may be bed-ridden, and yet your life may be full of work.

About the saints, there was always a briskness, even in old age. And, leaving their passions under control, there was a vividness about them very different from mere human activity.

Don't, then, be astonished if there are storms in your life, and if you have to eat a good deal of humble pie. Very disagreeable, but very wholesome for you. If you find plenty of trials in your life, a real hurly-burly going on sometimes in your heart, well, are you not going to be a soldier and is not that sort of thing like Our Lord's life? And in the midst of all that confusion, there will be greater peace and joy than in the life of the most successful worldling.

The lesson of all this is that we cannot love God too much, or serve Him too faithfully—even in the Old Testament the words of love God uses are inconceivable. After His death for us, could anything be too loving for Him?

The Words of St John the Baptist

His preaching was mainly, "Do penance, or you all shall perish." The literal meaning of this was, you must change your mind, your way of looking at things. How important it is that of our point of view should be right; our outlook,

our purpose. When we come to be judged, this will be the question we shall be asked: "What did you live for?" Is there something at the core of our lives that is carrying us on to God?

It cannot be a narrow view of life. We ought not to live for this or that special practice. It must be broad, something that will wear, will stand weather.

Let our lives be spent simply, in working for God. It is almost impossible for most of us to live without distractions, telegrams, telephones, letters, and so on, and when we live in a perfect rush, narrow practices cannot be carried out.... Working for God gives such a reality to life.... No matter what you are doing or how you are doing it, in itself it is not the value of a grain of sand. All that the holiest person can do is not of itself of any value whatever. A human creature can only produce a human result. No book or sermon, of itself, brings you one inch nearer to God. "When you have done whatsoever is commanded of you, say, we are unprofitable servants." If this is true of the Apostles, if all they did was not of the slightest consequence, what of our imaginary good works? Of itself, an excellent preparation for Holy Communion does nothing for you: it is only grace that counts.

On your knees in prayer, or eating your dinner, no matter. If God doesn't wish you to do it, being in the chapel isn't a bit better thing to do than eating your breakfast. What Our Lady did was of value only because she was doing God's Will. God has no need of men, or of the Sacraments. He can give you as much grace in your own room as at Holy Communion, if you are doing God's Will by being there. God does not need us or our work. The one thing that concerns us is, am I doing this for God? If I *do my best*, God is pleased if I do it for Him, but it doesn't *matter* how well or how poorly I do it. I do it because it is God's Will and so He is pleased, and it simplifies life wonderfully. Do Catholics crowd into the churches for a visit to the Blessed Sacrament? They can't "*spare the time.*" If you make a resolution to visit Our Lord for only five minutes, you will please Our Lord. "There is an important work I have to do, I can't leave it." Just think: it cannot succeed unless God lets it succeed. Is it not better to do what God wants you to do, and get His blessing on your work? Nothing can succeed, even in temporal matters, without God. It is foolish to say one can't spare the time to do what He wants. The great principle of living for God must be at the bottom of our hearts, and God will make our lives fruitful. If God is not our motive-power, our lives will be all withered and shrunk up.

If God sees I am a very stupid person, yet sees I am living for Him, I am much more in His sight than if I were one of the most brilliant people, and living for myself or for the world. *It is only being a failure in God's eyes that matters.*

Let us broaden our outlook, make it truer and higher, it will save us from trouble and anxiety of mind. Whatever I do, however wise, unless I do it for the Kingdom of Heaven, it is valueless in God's sight.

The Scribe

LET us think of someone who offered himself to God. He was a Scribe, and was moved to enthusiasm by what he had seen and heard. "Master," he cried, "I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." This man was worked up, yet how passing the effect! Our Lord's answer chilled him: I have no address: "the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His Head." What are the dispositions we ought to have to follow Our Lord's Call? He is very glad to hear anyone say: "I will follow Thee." We say to Him: "Ask anything, Lord, You shall have it." If that were genuine, we should be saints in a week. A saint says sincerely: "Ask anything, Lord." He wants us to follow Him closely, to be at His side. He will not push us away, when we repine and complain that we are not getting on in the spiritual life, as we ought; it is not His doing.

Our Lord penetrates to the very heart of our purpose—"Why does He pass me over?" you say. Are you ready for Him? You would have to give up many pet schemes—we must let Him choose His own direction, and often we shall find it in the way opposite to the one we have taken. I often tell Our Lord He has only to go in front, I am ready to follow. Am I? At the first turning, I leave Him. I ask to become confirmed in grace, in recollection. Three weeks pass and we see no great change and we say: "Thou goest very slow, Lord," and we follow Him no more.

It was rather a shock to the Scribe that Our Lord was not better off than the foxes. Our Lord says, "If you follow Me, you must be ready to go anywhere." We are like limed birds, attached to all sorts of things we should not trouble about. If God is my Father and my dear Lover, why need I trouble about the affection of creatures? I am afraid of my fellow-creatures, how they look at me, what they think of me, and I don't trouble about what God thinks. For fervent

service we must cut all bonds asunder. If we were not kept down by this or that rope, we could fly to God. You must give yourself up without reserve. Our Lord says, "I cannot do much with you if you do not do this." I am talking of the meshes in which we are all wrapped and held.

The first lesson Our Lord gives us is, "If you want to have your own way, and want to manage your own life, you cannot take service under Me. I expect My servants to consult Me." "Whatever God is good enough to ask of me, I will give Him," is the frame of mind He wants. One of the signs of sanctity is an unruffled mind. We ought to have an undisturbed peace of soul whatever happens. It is so difficult to find anyone elastic in the spiritual life. God wants us to follow the smallest indication of His Will. We want our hearts widened and enlarged. What Our Lord wants is a consecration. The secret of happiness is to do what Our Lord orders. Our Lord wants His followers to be perfectly detached; and if you are not happy, you are clinging to certain things He does not want you to do. This world doesn't grow things which will content you for any length of time.

If Our Lord has raised you a little above the ordinary level, you will find your life will never follow the lines you would have expected. Things have gone in a way you would have never guessed. . . . What God wants is a messenger He can send anywhere; an instrument that never resists; a servant who will do anything. What is there more disagreeable to ourselves than a servant who does everything unwillingly, and won't do a stitch more than she can help?

If you say always: "That is my Lord's will, and I am quite content"—that is the soul He loves. Let the motto of your life be, "What does Our Lord wish me to do?" Think over what has been wanting in your life hitherto, and surrender your whole self to Him. "Come, follow Me."

Unselfishness

"CHARITY seeketh not her own." The theory of the world is the exact opposite to the one the Apostle lays down. We have all grown up in the teaching to "seek our own"; we are trained to make an idol of ourselves. Everyone ought to look after herself, be her own centre: all little empresses in our own rights. We call it proper self-respect. "I" come first. We have our rights, and must push them.

The more I gather about myself power, riches, rank, the better. I must have a kingdom of my own, which I can rule. My will is given me so that I may get my own way: my mind, that I may impose it on others. The first thought is, How will this affect *me*? A fine day—not, is it good for others, is it good for *me*? "You surely don't think I am here to look after others, and if I don't look after myself, who else will look after me?" How dreadfully narrow we most of us are! If we are of a strong character, we push others aside; if of a weak, we feel great resentment at being pushed aside by others.

I love myself, too, in my love of other people. I love my friend because she helps me, is useful to me. Few understand how largely this idea shapes their life. We are pleased or displeased just exactly as things affect *us*. Advance, we are told, your own interests: if such a line of conduct will cause inconvenience, away with it: as for other people, let them look after themselves.

Let us try and lead a more noble life. Take "unselfishness." The nearer you approach to this, the nearer you approach to the most noble life possible to our human nature. The less you exact for yourself, the higher perfection you will attain to. Just in proportion as you think of yourself and your work in reference to others rather than for yourself, the nearer you will grow to Jesus Christ Himself. Do all for the sake of God, and for others. Escape from all sorts of worry and responsibility, study only your own wishes and advantage, and you will find your conscience perpetually reproaching you.

What is God's view of sin? It is not permissible to commit with deliberation one venial sin to bring about the conversion of the entire human race. It is not lawful to tell a single lie, or give way to a feeling of uncharitableness, to bring about a thing in itself excellent and desirable. Why? Because a sin has this essential about it, it is displeasing to God. No soul in Heaven could possibly do anything against Him. It is because we do not know God, or understand how good He is, that we misconceive the nature of sin. Every venial sin gives God a great deal of pain, and so for nothing in the world must we commit it.

How can I become unselfish, thinking little of myself? How can I help living for my own comfort and

aggrandisement? I can do my actions for God, and try to keep out the thought of myself. If you are always thinking of your own aches and pains, you won't console others much. If you are always sympathising with yourself, you are a sort of Job's comforter when you go to help others. Our thoughts should be first of God; then, how can I help others? How can I shield others from trouble? True religion does not consist in trying to oust others. If it is only that you are in search of happiness, be as unselfish as you can. Are the intensely selfish, happy people? No one likes someone else to lord it over him. Who loves a selfish person? At the lowest, don't be selfish. But we are not going to take the lowest. The more unselfish we are, the nearer we draw to Our Lord. If we try to seek, not ourselves, but our Lord, we shall find Him. If we ourselves are burdened with care and trouble, try and help another in his trouble. Unselfishness gives out a kind of effulgence—light. His visit, people say, helps me to be better. The more we go out of ourselves, the more we put ourselves in the background, the more work we shall do for God.

Time and Eternity

WE must be very ignorant or very wilful if we pronounce out of hand that every short life is a failure any more than that every long life is a success. The true measure of our actions is not their time but their intensity. "One crowded hour of glorious life is worth an age without a name" is not only good poetry but good sense.

No life that has accomplished what God asked of it, and has borne the fruit for which it was fitted, can be called incomplete, nor can its end be untimely. Even the pagans of old could understand that length of days is not always a blessing. Hence the proverb: "Whom the gods love die young." They could see and feel the temporal miseries of life and esteem those happy who were soon beyond their reach. How much more can the Christian believe that God may, in mercy and not in wrath, contract the span of human life, to make it, not less but more beautiful and pure, so that of such a one the words of the Book of Wisdom might be true: "He was taken away lest wickedness should alter his understanding or deceit beguile his soul. For the bewitching of vanity obscureth good things."

This mortal scene is gay enough while it endures, full of glitter, and glare, and show, and pretence, of tinsel and make-believe, with nothing solid underneath; its laughter is hollow, its professions insincere. Even if it were to give of its best, its best cannot satisfy the hungry soul. Its prizes so eagerly coveted, so fiercely contested, only serve to sharpen the appetites they were intended to soothe. The rich always crave for more riches, the ambitious grasp at larger power. If we do not lift our eyes above the horizon of this world, and all it contains, and if we listen to its babble, and worship at its shrines, we shall attain little heart's ease, but a good deal of distraction of mind. All this world's attempts at comfort labour under one incurable defect—they are as short-lived as their origin. How can a world minister lasting consolation when it is itself hastening to its end? We who breathe its atmosphere, and have been brought up in its ways, find it hard not to take it at its own valuation. It is always telling us how fine and grand and happy it is, how good it is to have it as a friend, how dangerous for a foe. It will fawn on us if we despise it, and trample on us if we show fear. It will make a hundred promises because it never means to make them good. It can even put on a mask of piety and goodness in order the better to deceive. It will go a greater part of the way with us in order to turn down a by-path and mislead us further on. To keep us amused, to forbid us serious thought, to hoodwink us that we may not see whither we are tending, is its settled policy, and the secret of its sway. Yet all the while it is travelling towards its inevitable goal; kingdoms rise and fall, old forces enter into new combinations, ancient problems appear under novel names, everything changes but the process of change itself. A few more years, a few compared with eternity, and this earth itself and all the works with which man has covered it, its cities, its palaces, its towers, will be given over to the flames. The visible heavens themselves shall be burnt up like a scroll. What will then become of all the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them? if any man has gained the whole world he must then lose it, because it will itself have ceased to be. It will have ceased to be, but, before it vanishes he must stand its trials, and his deeds must be appraised.

We stand in spirit on the height of Heaven, and look down upon the earth, or where the earth once was, at our feet. In the light from the great white Throne all things are made clear. The mists of earth break and roll away. The world's illusions, its hypocrisy, its false standards, are put to shame. Only truth, only virtue, only moral courage, above all *splendid moral courage*, are decorated here, for these honours are everlasting.

The Faults of Good People

I. *Touchiness*, *i.e.* over-sensitiveness with regard to points not of so much importance. A touchy person takes offence where none is meant. . . . To me it is very remarkable how one comes across people really very good, but who let things rankle in their soul. Let us efface ourselves, give up the luxury of being touchy. We ought to desire to be an instrument of spreading God's glory, and we ought to fit ourselves for this. It is extraordinary how we find touchiness in those who would go through fire and water for Our Blessed Lord. One of the qualities of a sterling soul is an absence of touchiness. We ought to be thinking of God's interests and the good of souls, and we waste our time over such trifles.

2. *Jealousy*. If only we could eliminate jealousy from the religious world, what good we should do! Sometimes we haven't an idea that we are jealous. How can we know? Watch—because we are not jealous about things in which we don't expect to excel, we think we are not jealous at all. We all have our ambitions; some wish to shine in society, others, again, wish to pass for very holy. When you hear others praised in a line you want to excel in, ask yourself why you are a little unhappy. We might almost say of jealousy, that it dies just a minute before we die, or after. If we could get people to work together without jealousy, it would help God's work immensely. . . . Are there any against whom I feel tempted to bear a grudge? Any of whose misfortunes I feel a little pleasure in hearing? Why am I willing to listen to conversation disparaging to someone else? Can I cleanse my soul of touchiness and jealousy? How can I become more and more unselfish, and efface myself? Let me put aside considerations of my own satisfaction. . . . Ask Our Lord in Holy Communion to free you from touchiness and jealousy.

Our Daily Task

"Do thy day's work like a good soldier of Jesus Christ." How these words seem to strike home to every one of us!

"Thy day's work." What is our day's work? Can it be true that each son of Adam has a work allotted to him by God on which he is expected to be busy, for surely the Apostle's words mean as much as this. They are indeed addressed immediately to Timothy, but no one of us is supposed or permitted to stand in the marketplace of life all the day idle. We all are by nature servants; we are parts of the great human machine, an intelligent machine, a living organization which should carry out God's purposes in this world which we inhabit.

There is no place for drones in the hives of men. For each of us there is a position and duty assigned, each one of us has to perform his own portion of the general task; we must complete our own share of the universal plan. To be a worker, to have, that is, something definite in life entrusted to our charge is the same as to live; we hold our life, we lease our life from God on that condition, we must be engaged on His business, we must execute His commands. He is a most liberal and a considerate Master, but He will not, He cannot forgo His claim to dictate, and to direct our life-work. It is not simply that He desires us to labour in order to keep us good, and to occupy our time, but there runs through all this mortal life, through all this existence of the world, a Divine design, which the Creator of it is accomplishing by means of us His creatures, in which He seeks and has appointed our aid. See, then, what is meant by the conception of duty. We all have an object here. Our Lord Himself at His last Supper said to His Father: "I have finished the work that Thou gavest Me to do." What is this object, how am I to discover it? In most cases, it is settled for us by our circumstances. Any work, if it be work and honest work, can be made God's work if we do it for God. It need not be lofty, it need not be difficult; it may be, it probably is, common, ordinary toil such as is the lot of most men. What God requires of us is that we do what we have to do, that we live our lives as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, that is that we seek the companionship, that we fight under the colours, of Our Blessed Lord, that we associate ourselves with Him, that we recognise Him as our Comrade, as our Chief.

Our day may be a short one, or it may be prolonged through many weary years, in faithfulness even to the end. What matter if in either case we are fulfilling our Master's Will? Life without God is empty and mean; if lived for God, it is, whatever our station, rich and fruitful and noble.
