

NIHIL OBSTAT quominus liber cui titulus  
“THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CHRISTIAN LIFE”,  
auctore Père Gardeil, O.P., imprimi possit

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# THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CHRISTIAN LIFE

*by*

Père Gardeil, o.p.

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## FOREWORD

The studies published in this volume served as the theme of a retreat given in 1923 to the Little Nursing Sisters of the Poor, of the Dominican Third Order at Beaune. It was not the first time that Père Gardeil had taken as his subject, within the framework of regular spiritual exercises, the doctrine of the Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit. Already, to speak only of his ministry in this congregation, he had preached on this subject in similar circumstances at Orleans in 1917, and at Verviers in 1923, and there is every reason to believe that other communities profited, through him, from a spiritual doctrine of which he had long made himself a master<sup>1</sup>.

Whilst particularly adapted to the needs of men and women consecrated to God in the religious state, his teaching will be no less profitable to priests and layfolk aiming at a deeper spiritual life. “The spirit bloweth where it listeth.” The beneficent dew of its gifts, and of its fruits, is the privilege of no particular way of life : it is free to fall on everyone sanctified by grace. It will be, then, in the truest sense of the words that we shall find, in these pages, a retreat upon the Christian life.

A point to which a little attention may be usefully directed : this is not a fundamental, or more precisely, *the* fundamental retreat on the Christian life. The activity proper to the gifts—at least according to the nature of things, will operate only on the basis of the theological virtues, by which the soul is brought into contact with the

<sup>1</sup> Père Gardeil had already in 1903 published a work on this subject: “The Gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Dominican Saints” (Paris : Gabalda) ; and some years later he was responsible for the article on the “Gifts of the Holy Spirit” for the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*.

divine life, and on the foundation of the moral virtues, by which our life is directed in the ways of God. To these bases of the Christian life, Père Gardeil devoted another series of conferences, the benefits of which he here assumes his hearers to possess. Nevertheless, this series, particularly the first conference, recovers sufficient ground to place the reader at the correct angle, without need of further explanation, or danger of losing track.

The text of this retreat is not from the hand of Père Gardeil who, according to his custom, spoke *ex abundantia cordis* ; it has been noted down by one of his hearers. But Père Gardeil has himself carefully reviewed the notes, which he also adopted for his personal use. It is therefore a work authenticated by its master, whose imprint it quite unmistakably bears. The religious whose hand has piously transcribed these conferences has happily succeeded in retaining, along with the austerity of its theological exposition, something of that interior flame, restrained yet so ardent which characterises the style of Père Gardeil as at once a work of the truth and the labour of an apostle's heart. May, these pages, then, if God so will, continue and extend the supernatural action of one who was, and ever remained, a theologian, a man of the divine science, but one who had understood and felt this science to be at the same time, wisdom, the delectable knowledge, *sapida scientia*.

II. D. Gardeil, O.P.

Le Saulchoir.

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## INTRODUCTION

### The Holy Spirit in Christian Life

We need, firstly, to be quite clear about the place of the Holy Spirit in our Christian life and, in particular, about his inspirations. For this we shall need to take a comprehensive view of the wonders of this Christian life which we are destined to live in its perfection, for the religious life is the perfection of the Christian life : it is no life apart, its roots are thrust deep down in the Christian life. It is more perfect, because it derives from a greater love, greater because it not only refrains from the forbidden, but denies itself the permissible : therein lies the difference between the Christian and the Religious life. For the one, and for the other, the commandment is the same : Thou shalt love thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. There are Christians more holy than ourselves/ because they lead a deeper life, more sacrificing, more heroic. But they are not on this account in the state of perfection, because they make no official profession to tend towards perfection by the denial of permitted good ; they may indeed so deny themselves, but this is not their principal care.

#### I

### The Christian Life

**T**HE Christian Life, so named because it has been brought to us by Christ our Lord, is our eternal life in heaven begun here and now, with all that constitutes and



completes it, with all its elements—save one alone : we do not see God. And, in consequence, our charity is not inflamed as it will be by the Divine vision ; it is also, always possible for us to lose this life, whilst in heaven we shall be inseparable from it.

Do we possess God now as really and substantially as in the life of eternity ? Yes. We enjoy this happiness when we are in a state of sanctifying grace ; we possess God as really as do the blessed.

God is everywhere, and he is everywhere fully. It is not easy for us to get an idea of this God, whose infinite spirit, is, in a special manner, in all things. Our soul is in all our body ; God is in all creation. Wherever he creates, conserves, activates, there he is fully. When we speak of the immensity of God, we mean that he is everywhere present, not only as we are present to that which we see, but personally, really and substantially. He cannot make without creating ; and where one creates, there one is, without any intermediary. God is then in all things.

But how much more he is in the souls of the just ! If he exists, is fully present, in all created things, it is of necessity ; since from him all that is derives its being, but he is present to his creation essentially, with complete indifference on the part of the created thing, incapable of so much as suspecting his presence, void of the least knowledge that it receives its God. God imposes his presence upon it. But in the human soul, God finds already a remote power of knowing him and of loving him ; and when this soul possesses sanctifying grace, which is a sharing in the divine nature itself, enabling it to make acts reserved to God himself as their object, to know him and to love him, then the soul has power to lay hold on its God ; it becomes divinised. The soul itself, from the level of

its creaturely estate, can make that sovereign act whereby God apprehends himself, possesses himself by his knowledge and his love, in his own eternal life. When the soul is able thus to lay hold on God, he dwells in it in a twofold manner, first by this presence necessary to all being, and secondly because the soul, by knowledge and by love, is enabled to open itself up to this presence, to receive its interior guest, and to entertain him. This is the meaning of the dwelling of God in the souls of the just. God in them is at home. The soul, a living spirit, opens itself up to receive the divine Spirit, to know him, to love him, to enter into relationship with him—a relationship not of equality, but no less intimate since on the part of each there is love and understanding.

The Christian life, then, is the personal dwelling of God with the soul, which lays itself open to receive him. This is effected by that power which raises up sons to God, of which St John speaks in his Gospel (John, 1, 12). We have all this if by divine mercy we are in a state of grace. God makes his place in our innermost selves ; there, when we desire his presence, we must seek him out, our interior guest, the friend with whom we can lead with some degree of familiarity an intimate life, full of blessings for those who understand.

The soul in this state is a sort of seedling of eternity. All that will be in the plant is contained in the seed ; it needs only the nourishment of rain and sunshine to spring up and grow to its fulness ; but this process does not change its nature. Our soul with its capacity for possessing God, and God the principal of fertility in the interior of the soul—this is the seed of heaven, of beatitude ; at bottom, heaven and the just soul are one and the same ; in the latter all is prepared, but the time of harvest is not yet come. This gift is received at baptism ; in the little

baptised child there is God, substantially present, and by sanctifying grace it is empowered to possess itself of him.

When we arrive at our eternal life we shall not need to look to the east or to the west ; there is the life, welling up from the depths of the soul sanctified by grace ; it will be the revelation of all that we have been : ' That which we shall be, has not yet appeared ' says St Paid, but this already is. In the depths of our souls is found all that will make our blessedness. The Father is there, the Son is there, the Holy Spirit is there ; there the Father begets his Word ; the Word, perfect expression of the Father, reflects the Father ; together they love one another infinitely, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from their love. This is the intimate life of the Perfect, in love and knowledge. The Christian soul, by faith, is witness to this divine performance, and is cast by it into a state of adoration.

God is there ; we still, however, have a road to travel. On the one hand we have attained our object, since we possess God ; on the other, this possession is not irrevocable, nor do we enjoy the vision of his perfection and his glory. Our full and final enjoyment of everlasting beatitude is still to be won by the works of the Christian life. The little child dying after baptism is transported directly to the place of the divine vision ; to us is still the labour of bearing fruit to God's gifts in us. We have seen his part ; now it is up to our efforts. The road leading us to eternity is long and difficult, and sown with obstacles ; there are, too, different degrees of attainment, we may arrive at our end more or less quickly, more or less perfectly, obtain an enjoyment of the vision more or less complete ; a greater or lesser possession of this infinite good.

## The Function of the Holy Spirit in the Christian Life

**G**OD does not regard inactively our labours in treading the road which brings us to our final end. In the first place it is he who called our souls into being, endowed them with grace, and those infused virtues we call the theological and moral virtues, he who gave them also the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Still more, it is he himself within us who conserves, maintains and motivates the life we hold from him. In our spiritual life, we make not one single act, but God is there.

here "that we must consider the function and place of the Holy Spirit in our life. In the work of creation, all is common to Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father has willed that, to bring about our salvation, the Son should take flesh and suffer for us ; and, this work of our salvation accomplished, Father and Son together have willed that the Holy Spirit should continue it by the sanctification of our souls. -

Christ our Lord is, surely, ever there ; he is the Head of the Church, the source of supernatural life through the sacraments, the dispenser of actual grace, teaching us through the Church, surrounding us with his divine vjaction. But above all, he is always sending us his Holy Spirit : I will send you the Holy Spirit, he said, He will teach you, and bring all things to your minds. He will be your comforter for my absence. Upen-thoTioly-Spirit-has-  
 m· myotoriouQ-wiscpthe-ea^ . for XduX sanctification.  
 Hë"îsTteTüaster ofthe road, entr-ustod-by-the-Father and the Son with bringing us to everlastmg frfe.

There are two ways in which the Holy Spirit leads us. He, the breadth of love of Father and Son, acts upon us

with inspirations. which take a double "Cbufgg. Sometimes he simply leaves us to act by ourselves—to make acts of faith, hope or charity, acts of prudence, justice, fortitude or temperance ; we ourselves set these acts in motion ; it is under the impulse of divine love, yet we ourselves hold the mastery, rule the conduct of our lives. <Eox,,example, t&\_make—aft—act—of adoration,—person^—application is n«ccssaxy^wc-feci miTS<51ves'mirki"ng the effort p the same for an act of justice or charity—we-.think. out the best wap to do-it;-we-take-eare-not-to' injure-charity by word ox we take,stoang action..to repress rnm natural impulses, I^e Holy Spiritjis not absept, he is the f^rst causé himself applying our supernatural enfcrgies to the /cts we make, but vye retain tjtê direction, Tpis is basis of the Christian life : fhp^supernatyjâl, but personal government of ourselves by the Christian virtues. j

"This way hasjits difficulties : we ate nr such imperfect pOssessionof thgse Christian virtues ! We find it so easy to fall inf6 faults mbpfc or léss «.graÿe ; less grave, we hope in the religious' life. /There «jrê sq/manÿ pitfall^ difficulties and temptations 'vy^ich v^é shall not escape even in the religious life/ Cannot the Holy Spirit, who has already done so much in giving usTKe spiritual forces whiclTare the VilTue^^gffd^yas^lielped us to use themTn/practice,

to take over our direction himself, what a difference that wpuld make, what, confidence then to overcome our frailties;

Yes, the Holy Spirit will do this. This «mmbkl intervention is assured us by what are called the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost ; gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord. The Holy Spirit, by inspirations corresponding to his gifts, presses us on to action, and in his hands we become

no more than instruments. We lose the first place in the direction of our conduct ; filled with divine assistance we have only to give our consent to his work ; the task becomes easier, difficulties are eliminated.

Sijlch is the difference between the two ways of working out ,bur salvation. We may compare them to the respective progress made by a rowing boat and a sailing boat. Progress byybar depends on the physical strength we expend and our skill at control of the boat, and we retain mastery over our craft ; but with sails and a favourable wind less labour is| çéquired, greater speed is attained, and w.e become less t^ed.

To act by the active virtues of faith, hope and charity, and by the infused moral virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance with all their ramifications, requires an effort. This remains the basic way of life, for the wind of the Holy Spirit is not always blowing. Nevertheless, this additional means, this wind of the Holy Spirit, is guaranteed us by the very fact that with sanctifying grace we do possess the gifts, which were infused in us at baptism\* >

in

### Some Important Observations

1. The gifts are not to be confused with the inspirations of the Holy Spirit ; they are powers in the soul making it receptive to the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a sail to catch the wind of the Holy Spirit. We are not by nature so divinely receptive, but the soul loving God by grace offers itself to the Spirit of Love, Spirit of Knowledge, Fortitude, Understanding . . . ; we ourselves set the sails with the ordinary aid of grace, and the Holy Spirit blowing

guides us on our course. The gifts of the Holy Spirit and his inspirations may be compared with a wireless set sensitive to sounds received over incalculable distances. A few wires have the gift of catching and centralising the waves of electricity, and by means of them thoughts are communicated across the ether. The gifts are like these receiving wires in our soul, able to receive the inspirations of the Holy Spirit to our spiritual advantage. The greater love the soul has for God the more receptive it becomes.

The gifts are not of greater importance than charity ; they will not enter into the soul where charity is not first, for charity retains its primacy. But in the soul which loves God these receptive faculties, these seven gifts, will i>ist. Weean^syt our-sailsor puJ.up^Attr wires, the wind willd^ié^y^^Jié tnpîSHiit the spiritual

powcrsGvnich will read us on our course.

T|iez <poly^tjjeP Jof W the^complete  
jpagtdr bfall %ur j^rn^ÿÿgs^ Dwelling deep in us, he  
/ now exerts his pressure from within, sometimes allowing  
I us to take action ourselves, sometimes at our call he will  
' ^charge himself with the burden of the task, fn difficulties,  
tehiptations an4 in tnalsyiwiih'teailSset'v tyive·the  
sfeôrfir'and/peâcfidând^jtréfety. Sacrifices will be demanded  
of us, but help too will be given us to make them ÿ fet  
u^qlyxr^aâ'in Xoçbur'SOpl^eye^

inspirations, and we may be sure to succeed more effectively by this| essentially divide method of submission to ipsjratibn, thafi by the jhore ord^afy m^aps of keeping tnfe direction of;thé jouriicÿ to ourselves.

3. There is no question of extraordinary phenomena, or airy spiritual ways : surely the Holy Spirit will lead us higher since he himself dwells in the highest, but like wisdom encompassing the limits of all things, the Spirit will come to our aid in the suppression of evil tendencies,

impatience, discouragement, distraction at prayer etc. . . . in little things no less than great, his power embraces the tiniest detail as well as the great events : such is the attention proper to this infinitely perfect Spirit.

Under his inspiration we are going to review all the acts of ordinary life ; only our point of view will be changed. The subject matter of their operation, is exactly the same for the gifts of the Holy Spirit as it is for the exercise of the virtues ; it is the mode of operation which differs, for now it is the breathing of the Spirit, the blowing of his wind : instead of acting on our own initiative we are instruments, not masters ; and this remains no less the one and only Christian life, and therefore the one and only religious life.

^>4. The activity proper to the gifts of the Holy Spirit is ^contained, according to St Augustine and St Thomas, in the first seven beatitudes in St Matthew's gospel. Our government by the Holy Spirit will have for its object to compass in us this poverty, meekness, etc. Each beatitude corresponds to a gift. It is enough for the Spirit to inspire the principal points : for example, where we would be labouring against our various concupiscences in detail, the Holy Spirit will give us a spirit of detachment, and all will ) be made pure by the Spirit himself, this department of our I life is put in order. The same with mourning—his breath I will come on us and produce all at once what would I otherwise require a long and patient labour.

Concerning the order of the gifts : our Lord possessed them, and exercised them all in their plenitude, so Holy Scripture began by attributing to him the most perfect, that of Wisdom. We will begin at the bottom, by that 'fear, which is the beginning of Wisdom'.

If we have a devotion to this work of the Holy Spirit in souls, let us reflect on these things, which can bring



us help in our spiritual life, and an *élan* towards perfection. Let us turn our thoughts with gratitude and submission to this divine Spirit within us, and we shall draw down his blessing upon ourselves.

## CHAPTER I

### The Gift of Fear

*The Fear of the Lord is the  
beginning of Wisdom*

(Ps. 110.10.)

THE first breath of the Spirit to touch the soul, his very first inspiration when, for instance, he converts a man from evil or initiates an advance in virtue, is the fear of the Lord.

Fear of God—the words freeze us ; we like to speak of the love of God, not of the fear, and we do so rightly. Nevertheless it is a fear we cannot evade.

#### I FEAR---GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST

There is a fear which is nothing more than being frightened, the passion of fear, purely human and to which small honour can be attributed. Some people are afraid of God in this way, and they hide themselves from him. Adam and Eve in Paradise were afraid, because they had sinned ; afraid too was the unfaithful servant who, fearing the severity of his lord, hid his talent in the earth ; and so also St Peter who, for fear of a serving girl, denied his Master. This fear is evil, leading us into sin ; it has no admission into the kingdom of God.

This fear is of another sort than true fear. It is called servile fear. When it becomes the sole motive of our good actions they are vitiated at the root. So it is with the man who serves God only from fear of his judgment and of hell, as who would say : Were it not for hell I would lead quite another life. This servile fear is bad, and is capable of begetting sin.

There is however a certain 'fear of servitude'; a fear of God's judgments and his punishments, which can be used to a good end. There are times when such a fear can help us and restrain us. In the education of children, for example, we use it when higher motives fail to appeal. Provided love of God be not excluded from it; provided it be not our sole motive, it has its value, and we can use it as a means. There are cases where it will effect a conversion, or keep us on the right path. In contradiction to protestant doctrines, the Council of Trent has defined it as a gift of God.

Lastly, there is filial fear, childlike fear. When a soul truly loves God with all its heart, seeing in him perfect Goodness, the only God, knowing him to be its loving Father, it does not on that account forget his greatness, his majesty—God enclosed, in his impenetrable secrecy, with his terrifying judgments, his infinite power. Between these two concepts, God the Terrible and God the Father, what will the soul do? Where will the impulse of its heart direct it? Will the Divine Majesty compel it to flee its Father? Or will his goodness constrain it to cast out all fear? And yet his justice remains. For the soul loving God in sincerity there is only one course, to cling to its Father's side. What shall it fear indeed, if not separation from him? The soul then shall know fear, because God is holy, and it sinful, God is great and it is small. But this will be a child's fear of the Father it knows to be good, and it will lead the soul to throw itself into his arms, seeking there security from his very greatness. Surely this fear will not be forgetful of God's majesty, justice and punishments, but it will return from these to affection, and a more ardent desire to belong to God, and never to be separated from him. How great the difference between this fear of separation from God and that servile fear which

only constrains us to obedience by making us 'afraid' of him. At bottom, this filial fear is made of love. It always remains fear ; fear to be unworthy of the majesty, perfection and holiness of God ; but a fear inspired by love. It is with this fear that the Holy Spirit will inspire us when we put into effect our gift of fear, a gift which we will only find in souls loving God.

This inspiration of fear will be seen to be intimately connected with what is called 'piety' ; that part of the virtue of religion by which we look upon God as our Father. For this reason, as St Thomas tells us, the gift of fear is one of the auxiliaries of the virtue of religion. Truly pious Christians, looking upon God as upon their Father, will receive from the inspiration of the gift of fear a superabundance of strength by which to adhere to him.

## II THE EFFECTS OF THE GIFT OF FEAR

The result of this state of submission to the spirit of fear will be that one will give oneself up to God, place oneself completely in his hands, saying 'O Lord, take me, possess yourself of me. I belong to you ; hold me, clasp me, so that I may never be separated from you.' This entire gift, this surrender of all our being- with all its powers into the hands of God, so that he may take full possession of us, is the immediate effect of the gift of fear.

The governing quality of a good tool is that it should lie well in the hand of the artisan who is to use it. Even if it be defective, provided we can take a firm hold of it we shall make better use of it than of one of improved design and higher value, but of the wrong size. It may do well for others, but it will never suit us.

The rule of the Holy Spirit has about it this in particular : that, as we have seen, God by the gifts uses us as instruments. He himself rules us by his inspirations. The gift

of fear is first in the order of perfecting the soul : ' The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom'. In fact, just as in undertaking any task we begin by putting in our hand the appropriate instrument—the labourer his tool—so, before working on our souls by his inspiration, the Holy Spirit takes hold of us. Fortitude, Piety, Knowledge, Counsel, Understanding, Wisdom—they will come ; here and now we are but at the opening of the way, and our beginning is this surrender of ourselves into the hands of the Holy Spirit who, by a progressive ascent, will lead us to the summits of Wisdom.

In effecting this surrender of ourselves into God's hands, the gift of fear becomes auxiliary to the theological virtue of hope. By hope we trust, with God's help, to come to eternal beatitude. This hope is not in ourselves and our own merits, but in God's help, the best of all our merits. God's help alone, indeed, is proportionate to his reward of eternal beatitude. In thus inspiring our dependence on the divine assistance, the gift of fear is auxiliary to hope, with which it harmonises. Truly in God's hands we are well placed to receive his help and to win, through him, to paradise.

Let us go deeper into the effects of the gift of fear.

What do we fear ? Why do we fear God ? For one reason alone—because we have in us, by our will, our liberty, the terrible power of separating ourselves from him. It is less God we fear than our own sinful wills. The effect of the gift of fear will be to make us face this perverse will and, armed with the all-powerful inspiration of the Holy Spirit, combat it, renounce it, destroy it, crucify our flesh according to the words of the psalm ' Pierce thou my flesh with thy fear'. When we fear loss of God, we fear sin and every occasion of sin : our vices down to our least failings, weaknesses and disabilities.

We have experienced this effect of the gift of fear after a good confession : perhaps we had committed some more serious fault and, looking upon it with remorse, under the eye of God, feeling him close to us, at the end of our act of faith we have turned to him as to a father and said : How could I have done that to my Father ; how could I, for such little things, separate myself from him ? We experience a feeling of contrition ; our wounded heart desires to wipe out this fault, which love of God had moved us to detest.

In the sacrament of penance the gift of fear acts at its highest level of all ; during and after absolution we remain under the influence of filial fear : the spirit of fear inspires our repentance, our sorrow and, in consequence, the desire to oppose our faults and overcome them.

St Thomas also teaches that the gift of fear is a powerful auxiliary of the virtue of temperance. Those who, recognising in their flesh the ever-reviving source of all their faults, truly fear God with a childlike fear, are temperate, penitent, sober and humble. The virtue of temperance has no better auxiliary than this spirit of fear which puts us on our guard against our sinful wills.

This gift of fear is therefore a help both to our piety which it prospers, to our hope which it strengthens, and to temperance, which it enables to rule.

When a person has received this gift of fear and, dreading separation from God, abandons himself totally into his hands, so that God might keep him and do with him as he wills. When he flees sin and its occasions, then such a one enters into the state of ' fearful ' souls. The fearful person fears according to the Holy Spirit.

Such a man will not become scrupulous, for scrupulosity has nothing to do with the gift of fear ; it is an infirmity,

a trial, which may be either natural or supernatural in its origins.

Neither will this man have too broad a conscience, although he will have a certain breadth of spirit, but not the sort which chooses to despise little things. He is securely established at a careful centre, equidistant from exaggerated fear on the one hand and too great breadth of conscience on the other : his conscience will be precise and fearful.

There are those the rectitude of whose bearing attracts our attention ; they are exact, upright, remote from all excess, pleasant, engaging even, but without laxity, they are animated by a sense of restraint which informs their thoughts, judgments, their very way of acting ; their attitude is in fact exemplary. True fear possesses them, inspired by the Holy Spirit ; a fear that does not freeze with dread and apprehension for it is the fear of sons, inspiring reverence towards God and withholding from the seductions of fallen nature. The Holy Spirit retains these people in that true centre, which our unaided vision finds it so difficult to determine. They are, by his inspiration, already established there.

### III DEGREES OF THE SPIRIT OF FEAR

In proportion as love increases the gift of fear will find us more docile. The soul expands. If there yet be a little stiffness left in our fear, it will be warmed and melted away, and we will be filled to overflowing with trust and confidence. For even filial fear has its degrees. At its lowest its influence is disciplinary ; but the soul will open and expand until it can say with joy these words from the psalms of Compline : ‘ He who dwells in the help of the Lord abideth under his protection ’ and ‘ Under his wings you shall hope,’ in the sense that our Lord compares himself to a mother hen gathering her chicks under her

wing. God has become such a mother to us, and under the cover of his wings, all that is left of our fear is a tremble of love, a gasp of admiration : this is the supreme transfiguration of fear.

St Rose seems to be an example of this : like a rose in the splendour of its bloom, trembling on its stem, she was nevertheless but a simple penitent ; she had explored all the degrees of fear, but in her we can see only blossoming the child of her heavenly Father.

In such a fear the angels stand before God's majesty. They enjoy beatitude, yet night and day they sing their *Sanctus*, entering ever more into the mystery of his holiness, and in his presence discovering their own imperfection and littleness—they remain enthralled in that tremble of admiration which is the supreme development of the gift of fear, in the state of glory. Sweet emotion it is indeed, since its object lies in the majesty adorning the countenance of the Father !

Let us live in this fear, and try to pass through each of its degrees. The Holy Spirit, deep in our souls, is seeking to inspire us with fear, to inflame our hearts with filial love, with fear lest we be let fall from our Father's hands, with fear of the least occasion of sin. Let us open up our souls ; let us set our sails with generosity, with confidence. So much depends on us, for it is up to us, with the help of grace, to make use of our ordinary gifts. And the wind of the divine Spirit will blow. By the breath of his wind we shall be set free from the multitudinous complications among which we labour. We grieve to find ourselves irritable, rebellious, idle in prayer ; on this occasion and that we resist temptation, we repent our falls, we receive pardon, we preserve ourselves for a while and then fall again ; we have our interior struggles, and obscure temptations with which we labour to do violence. So it is

good, so it must be ! The Venerable Agnes of Langeac said : ' A good fight to every temptation.' Still we would not wish to take too much on ourselves, unaided and alone. Since the Holy Spirit will gladly accept the government of our lives, let us make use of him : so we shall arrive more speedily and more effectively at the same result as by our warfare alone.

To do this we must love increasingly. God must be *our all*, loved above all. Is it hard to love ? Yes, it is true, God's dealings with us are mysterious!. Even in the Holy Eucharist we cannot see him, nor should we ; a price is set us to eternity. Still, there are times when we can penetrate the veil, obtain a sense of his sweetness, enter into intimacy with him. So let us be ever more united with God, and we shall become one with the Holy Spirit : ' He who adheres to the Lord (by love) is no longer but one spirit with him '2. His Spirit will pour himself out into the loving soul, and under his empire we will ascend joyfully from virtue to virtue. Instead of overturning one by one the obstacles that beset our path, we will find ourselves crossing over them. Our task in this way is carried out more easily and we find it entails less painful effort. Let us try it ! Let us put our souls under the inspiration of the Spirit of love, abandoning ourselves utterly, in fine, to God's action, for ' God begins to reign in a soul when that soul is under the inspiration of the gift of fear of the Lord, which begets the poor in spirit.'

1 God is 'disconcerting.' 2 1 Cor., 6. 17.

## CHAPTER II

### The Beatitude of Poverty

*Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of  
heaven. (Matthew, 5.3.)*

**A**T first glance we can miss the relationship which exists between 'poverty of spirit' (or poverty by desire) and the gift of fear<sup>1</sup>. What then, is the relationship between the poverty inspired in us by the Holy Spirit and the gift of fear?

#### I THE GIFT OF FEAR AND POVERTY OF SPIRIT

Remember, the gift of fear is not the gift of servile fear, gift of God though it be to souls not yet converted from sin. The gift of the Holy Ghost will, on the contrary, only be found in souls already loving God. Its effect is to draw us to him as a Father, and, in order to prevent our separation from him, to cast us into his hands, for him to do his will with us.

The first operation of the Holy Spirit will be to forearm us against the only possible obstacle in the world between ourselves and the divine will, that is, the sinful inclinations of our will, our love for sin. Now, this love for sin feeds itself on certain objects, and without them it cannot live.

<sup>1</sup> The French translation of the Latin *pauvres par esprit*, allows of two interpretations: poverty by the Spirit, poverty by desire, or aspiration. Two spirits are indeed concerned, our own spirit and the Spirit of God. If we understand our own, then we will mean a poverty of desire; if we understand the Spirit of God, we will mean a poverty inspired by him. These two interpretations are, however, in principle but one, for if we desire poverty our desire is inspired by the Spirit of God.



The world and our own passions provide the abundance on which it maintains life. What is this food ? St John says : ' All that is in the world is the concupiscence of the eyes, concupiscence of the mind and concupiscence of the flesh.' There are things in the world—this world our Lord hates—which have a power of attraction over us and which please the concupiscence of the flesh by the baser temptations, please the concupiscence of the eyes by the good things of the world, please the concupiscence of the mind by pride and independence. Nothing else is there in the world—and therefore our Lord hated it—and with them this triple concupiscence which seeks to seduce our desires, our aspirations, and our will from their loyalty to God's rule.

The inspiration of the fear of God arms us against our sinful wills, and this triple concupiscence that desires the riches of this world, by detaching us from the objects of this concupiscence ; from the flesh, from immoderate independence and from riches. This is the spirit of poverty. Perfect fear inspires in us a movement of hate of our own sinful will, of aversion from the things that nourish it ; this movement may be simply expressed as a ' will of impoverishment ' towards all these things.

How different is this spirit to that of the world which abandons itself without restraint to the pursuit of pleasures, honours, independence, fortune. The Spirit of God is directly opposed to this spirit of the world. St Paul says : ' The things that were gain to me—from a human point of view—I have counted an uncleanness.' Such is the change wrought in us by the Spirit of fear, that what was before the object of our carnal desires is transformed into a thing of horror, from which we withdraw in fear lest even the moderate acceptance of it should induce us to attach ourselves thereto, and so separate us from God our Father ; for we fear his impending justice, and in him is

our only refuge. Our unique security is in this spirit of poverty which he has inspired in us towards all that can nourish the sinful inclinations of our will.

It is in this way that the gift of fear is related to the beatitude of the poor in spirit.

## II THE ESSENTIAL SPIRIT OF THE GIFT OF FEAR

In the life of St Benedict Joseph Labre—albeit more to be admired than imitated for he was by no means a community man—the following anecdote is characteristic of the movement of the spirit of fear inspiring in a soul this desire of poverty in respect of every object of human concupiscence. St Benedict Joseph had a devotion to, nay a passion for, poverty. When his begging was rewarded by some gift, at the moment of receiving it he would say : ‘ Just a little, just a little,’ always fearing to receive in excess of his needs. When God’s pauper was at his last moments he was heard to whisper ; indistinctly he was still repeating with his last breath : ‘ Just a little, just a little.’

These are the little words with which the Holy Spirit defies in us all the concupiscence of the world. Just a little ! The necessary will suffice us, of more we have no need. Expressing the same idea, St Paul wrote : ‘ Having food and wherewith to be covered, let us be content.’ The rule of St Augustine exhorts us to reduce our needs rather than increase our resources, and assures us a greater contentment to be won thereby. All these are forms of the same inspiration of God who, by his divine touch, comes into our souls to inspire in them a desire for poverty of this world’s goods : ‘ He inspires in us the neglect of creatures, that we may find their Creator,’ says the *Imitation* ; which brings us back to St Augustine : ‘ With every diminution of concupiscence in us, our love of God

increases.'<sup>1</sup> The love of God will hold complete dominion when our concupiscence has been reduced to nothing.

But we must be quite sure that this detachment, this impoverishment, derives truly from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and not from intellect and pride. Such was the case with Diogenes who, observing one day a man drink from his cupped hands, broke the little vessel he had hitherto retained as indispensable, judging it to be henceforth of no use ; his pride had been set on his poverty. With us, on the contrary, it is love of God, under the divine inspiration of the spirit of fear, which removes us far from sin, and its every source. We are the children of the spirit of fear, and in him we have a helper in our combat.

### III POVERTY OF DESIRE, AUXILIARY OF THE RELIGIOUS STATE

This struggle against our triple concupiscence is the basis of our religious state. The religious state is none other than a high love of God which undertakes not only to abstain from what is contrary to that love—sin, but to sacrifice even what is permitted, and perfectly lawful. We enter the religious life by the three vows, of poverty, chastity and obedience, which are a solemn and perpetual engagement to renounce our triple concupiscence : independence of the will, worldly goods and pleasures. So, by detachment from these things, by our promise, and our daily practice of it, we shall come to master our concupiscence and to free our higher love for God, and to advance constantly in this love.

And the spirit of fear, in so far as he inspires in us this desire of impoverishment, is identical with the spirit of the

<sup>1</sup> *De Doctrina Christiana, Quaestionibus* 83. 9. xxxvi.

religious state. It is the same spirit under two forms. If it is alone the Holy Spirit who inspires us with this impoverishment, we have simply the good Christian life ; if however we undertake the discipline, the organisation of the religious life, we increase our means, but retain the same end. The distinguishing mark of the religious spirit is that element in it which is inspired by the spirit of fear.

Under the influence of the gift of fear we come back to the earth of our daily life, with its various exercises and the sacrifices which the practice of our vows demands of us in order to lessen the appeal of the objects of our concupiscences. The matter of our acts remains the same ; the spirit alone differs. Instead of struggling against each detail to acquire a spirit of detachment from the things that tend to hold us, to repress our proud thoughts, our spirit of independence ; instead of seeking to overcome our difficulties one by one, we receive the Spirit of God which, because it is founded upon a greater love, is able to inspire in us a general detachment. It whispers within, ' Just a little, whatever it is, just a little.' Independence ? —just a little ; attachment to our comforts and faculties—a little ; concupiscence of the heart, human affections—a little ; in everything, a little ! His instructions are general, not detailed. He will press on us with an all-powerful insistence, and if we deliver him our gates, we shall go on to the limits of perfection. His work is different to the sort of mining we have found ourselves compelled to do—detaching day by day, block by block, in the darkness of faith and by duty, everything opposing the divine union. Such work is, however, excellent and necessary, for the Holy Spirit is not obliged always to act in us through his gifts. But let the soul live in his atmosphere, increasing in love, leaving itself ever more in his hands, and it will become more and more impressionable, it will experience

a general and powerful desire for impoverishment, and so attain to the most minute detachments of religious life.

All our great saints reached this degree. St Dominic felt so strongly over what he considered the too generous tables of his friars, the over-comfortable convents, that he suggested to the chapter that the material administration of the friaries should be handed over to lay brethren, in order to relieve the friars of carefulness for their material responsibilities. When his constitutions had been approved, he offered his resignation to the brethren. He preferred to relinquish the generalship of his Order, than to be burdened with its preoccupations. Only a little was his accustomed need ; he was even then preparing to leave all to labour at the conversion of the Cumans at the other end of the world.

St Francis of Assisi is the true type of lovers of poverty. He surely was God's poor man, wrought by the spirit of impoverishment ; poverty with him was like a strong wind rising from the depths of his soul, and accompanying him always. He would have himself and all his followers to be ever more detached in every respect : poor in food and clothing, in their dwellings, and their mendicancy. It was St Francis's will to have no business whatever with the objects of concupiscence.

Observe that we are not speaking here of that virtue of poverty by which we make sacrifices. This is excellent, but the poverty with which we are concerned derives from the Holy Spirit ; it is like a dry wind, forcing the heart to detachment.

Our Lord is the model ; he preaches poverty under all its forms. ' If any man will follow me,' he said, ' let him deny himself, selling all that he has, and follow me.' He was seeking to inculcate in us this fundamental spirit. The spirit of fear will help us to find it again. He will

communicate it to us as a result of love. It is this spirit of total impoverishment which wills that, without prejudice to whatever is necessary for our work, we should nevertheless not become attached to it, and should wilfully deprive ourselves of what is superfluous.

#### IV PRACTICE

Let us see some of the duties which are consequent on this spirit of poverty.

1. Material goods. The spirit of ownership does not find much opportunity in the common life, but even in the best ruled communities it is sometimes necessary to make reforms ; nothing considerable, but instances will occur of objects that have not been submitted to the superior, the necessary permissions not been asked for. Surely, the scrap of material which one of St. Bernard's monks had kept to repair his habit was nothing much, and yet the saint summoned him before all the community at Citeaux, and administered a severe correction. Saint Bernard was not a cruel man, but he had seized the sense of that spirit of poverty which is at the heart of the gospel : he reflected, If I slacken, all will go astray ; Christ has bidden us become poor, and we have accepted his bidding by our vows ; this act is a positive scandal. There you have an example, and examples can be of great use, for they succeed in expressing ideas at their greatest intensity.

In this matter of poverty we must learn to possess nothing at least without permission. And even from such as may be allowed us we are to be detached. Intrusion, monopoly, the taking of what has been permitted us to use, must not excite us to indignation, lack of charity, or bitter thoughts, as does happen sometimes, when what poor little goods of the world have been left us are suddenly snatched away.

2. Honours and distinctions. Opportunities to rise to

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honours and distinctions seldom happen in the religious life ; superiors themselves are warned by their rules that they should be fathers rather than masters, and that their happiness should lie in putting themselves at the service of others. Nevertheless, thoughts of self-elevation will arise. Interiorly at first, we seek to lift ourselves up in our own eyes, sometimes by putting others down. Then we continue exteriorly by affirming our own abilities, by confidence in our own judgments and preferences. Here is our human nature again ; we are still men and not angels. But to all this the Holy Spirit whispers within us the words of the *Imitation* : ‘ Love to be unknown and counted for nothing.’ It is the thought of St Benedict Joseph Labre under another form. ‘ Just a little.’ Little of honour, little of esteem—even with regard to the value of our own judgments, not to feed our concupiscence, our sinful will, for fear of beginning a separation from God. Such is the object of the gift of fear. The greater the detachment we realise, the surer we will be not to become separated from God. He alone counts ; let us be warned against nourishing the concupiscence of pride.

3. Obedience. We have not been made to obey, but to command in our degree, under God’s government, to whom alone we owe ultimate obedience. Nevertheless, we have not willed to retain this personal mastery over our acts ; we have discovered a trap in our mastery, and realised that in trusting to the guidance of our own eyes we would be completely led astray ; by our vows we have abdicated our liberty, in respect of our rule, nay, in every respect of life, we are no more our own. True we may adopt the initiative in some little details which have not been foreseen by our rule, but in principle everything is foreseen, and our superiors can exact of us every renunciation of self-will. If we had the spirit of

impoverishment, we should anticipate these renunciations, we should no longer need the biddings of superiors to coax us, we should more and more seek submission and dependence of every sort. In following the inspirations of the Holy Ghost we will be led to do rather more than less in this respect, yet always with the reservations of prudence. The Holy Spirit will never lead us against the safe laws of prudence, any more than against our rule, or against obedience. It is the same Holy Spirit who has given us both prudence and our rule, and he cannot inspire us against one or the other. This principle can be applied to everything, but it is especially in respect of poverty that one can be misled to the degree of imprudence.

4. Human affections. Lastly we may not give a free rein to the thoughts and regrets of our human affections. Poverty of heart will place us beyond reach of the harms which may come from the affections and from those lower harms too which strike at us through the senses. The penitent soul avoids the sweet things and finds its pleasure in the bitter, for love of God, so as to avoid ever being separated from him.

This spirit of poverty is like the grain of mustard seed in the gospel. Its expression in our souls is very small, very humble, just a whisper deep within : ' A little.' But this quiet whisper has such great power. By it we are forearmed against every opportunity to gratify our concupiscence, even before it occurs, and when it does, we are in good form to withstand its temptation. Dwelling in our most inward being the Holy Spirit acts for us as an instinct, an additional sense whose function it is to warn us of occasions and circumstances which can serve as nourishment for our sinful wills, profit our concupiscence and make us run the risk of separation from God, and which impels us to withdraw, whispering in us, ' a little, the least



possible.' This, of course, always without exaggeration, keeps us to the common way of life and the rule of virtue practised about us. Such is the spirit of God, the gift of fear.

Those souls, especially in the religious life, most sensitive to the touch of the Spirit, and who seek of material things ever less, rather than more, will receive a great reward. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' They are set on the certain way, they have only to persevere, and the wealth of heaven is theirs even now, albeit a limited possession. They have accepted the spirit of impoverishment and kept it ; they have said : I esteem created things as an uncleanness, I no longer desire to do business with the lesser goods. All their treasure is in God, they possess the kingdom of heaven. Doubtless this is but a beginning, a lower gift. But the Holy Spirit who has breathed upon them will not desert them ; and making them by his other inspirations, ascend from perfection to perfection, he 'will lead them at last to that ultimate possession of the kingdom of heaven of which poverty of spirit encompasses already the certain hope.

## CHAPTER III

### The Gift of Fortitude

*That he would grant you to be strengthened by his Spirit, with might unto the inward man.*

(Eph. 3.16.)

**H**ERE we are in the hands of God, this refuge to which the gift of fear has directed us ; here with our all powerful Father, as good instruments in his hands. Now he will be able to do something with us, his work, to bring us up by the ways of the interior life, even to life without end.

When the craftsman has well grasped his tool, he proceeds to attack the task, and the quality of this attack is strength and vigour. So it follows quite naturally that the gift to be used after that of fear is fortitude, strength, in order that, under the Holy Spirit, we can do our work vigorously, defend ourselves against obstacles that beset the way, and beat out the track to the fulness of everlasting life.

#### I THE VIRTUE OF FORTITUDE

Fortitude is a virtue of the utmost importance in the Christian life, and it is important for us all. Lofty ideas and fervent desires will not suffice if they are without the support of a strong will. Our Lord Jesus Christ has not left this out of his teaching. In his praise of the Precursor he pauses in admiration : ‘ What went you out into the desert to see,’ he cries, ‘ a reed shaken in the wind ? ’ (Matt., 7.29.) What comparison was there between the

frailty of a reed and that voice thundering in the desert ? No, John the Baptist is a man of strength.

When our Lord himself lifted his voice in the sermon on the mount, ' He spoke as one having power, and not as the scribes and pharisees' (Luke, 11.21). Jesus is a man of strength. Strong to bear the pain of his agony and, raising himself above his sorrow, strong to accomplish his Father's will. He stood in his strength before Pilate ; he stood before Herod ; he stood before the delirious crowd. And at the last hour, his task complete, did he not say, returning his soul to his Father in a supreme act of self-possession : ' Into thy hands I commend my spirit ' ?

The strength of our Lord was strength at its source ; but we in our degree can imitate him. He loved to speak in praise of strength, ' When a strong man armed keepeth his house, those things are in peace which he possesseth.' It is the picture of the just man who has the virtue of fortitude ; he keeps his house, he is strong, all his possessions are in peace ; there is no temptation, no ambush strong enough to overcome the well-armed man. In contrast, let us consider our Lord's judgment of weakness. He points to the man who is weak, whose armour is not enough : ' What king,' he said, ' having five thousand men, would engage with him who comes against him with twenty thousand, but first he will sue for peace ? ' (Luke, 14.31). To sue for peace in the interior life is to give up.

Fortitude, then, is our need, and, when it is put at the service of truth and righteousness, and of the will to do good, there is no better labourer at the task to do than fortitude, no better protector of the task accomplished. We need fortitude in the doing of the work, and in the protection of the work once done.

Among the gifts that accompany his grace the Holy Spirit has given us the virtue of fortitude to this end.

Fortitude can also be a human virtue, acquired by the repeated acts of those who labour and strive to lead an honest life, and to fulfil their appointed tasks. A greater quality is required of that fortitude which undertakes, with, human means, a human will and intelligence and passions, the lofty task of our salvation, exposed to so many dangers. Yet, in order that the child of God which comes to the age of reason shall not be at the mercy of the obstacles which will beset it, God gives it, with the sanctifying grace of baptism, the virtue of fortitude. The child finds this virtue in himself already formed, he has but to make it grow. The Christian is already a man of strength, he has the virtue of strength, he can enter into the labours and struggles of life. It is profitable to realise that if we find ourselves weak and not doing all in our power in the accomplishment of our duty, the reason lies in neglect of this resource of God who provides in us the gift of fortitude.

## II CHRISTIAN COURAGE

The Holy Spirit has given us that supernatural strength which was our need. It is for our desire to become enlarged to the proportion of our divine predestination. The humblest of Christian souls has a high destiny ; to become one of the elect, a saint in heaven ; such is the end God wills for it. He has chosen us, says St Paul, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to be holy and unspotted in his sight (Eph., 1.4).

No place for the pusillanimous, little souls, content with their small portion, fashioning a little life for themselves within the great Christian life. No, we can expand to the stature of their destiny, vigorous, unhesitant, never retreating, but putting our everything into life, saying : Yes, I will aim at heaven, my life is a preparation for the

summit of everlasting life. Magnanimous souls ! Magnanimity—greatness of soul, is the first form assumed by the virtue of fortitude in the Christian heart. Think of the struggle among men to secure the top place—ambition, always so little because its objects never rise above the level of earth. We must transcend it, setting our desires, our plans, at the height of God's appointed destiny for us.

But this is not all. When we have lifted up our desires, then we must labour to see that each day our activities too are set at the same level. This is the work of virtue which makes progress. To fulfil our duties as Christians, the duties of our daily life, we must get down to them vigorously. This new task of fortitude we call 'Christian Courage.' Faced with the task, it needs a courageous soul to engage it and not be rebuffed, to begin at the beginning and pursue it vigorously to the end. To take on the task of being a Christian, to apply ourselves to each and everything according to the rule of our conscience ; this requires a great virtue. It is with courage that it is done, and there is no task accomplished that is not the fruit of courage spent without count.

For us, duty presents itself in an austere form, and one difficult to maintain, that of regularity. We have a rule which traces out our duties for us ; the duties of our interior life, of our life in community, the duties of our apostolate, and those of our various occupations. Before us is a multitude of duties, all catalogued, and at every moment without truce we have an exercise to perform. Nothing demands more courage than this exercise of regularity. The religious who shows himself faithful thereto may truly say : 'I have done my duty.' This conscience of duty done is the reward of courageous souls.

We must not, however, exaggerate : to try, for example, with frail health to fulfil heavy tasks. We must take count of our possibilities and ask for permissions which will set a limit to our duties. And even accounting for dispensations and impossibilities, we shall find we have enough. Unless we have great courage, we shall not find ourselves tending to our sublime end as we ought. We shall discover it to be a trial indeed, to observe this regularity without neglect and infidelity in little things ; it is trying, but it is sanctifying, because love of God fills every repeated effort ; without this love, there is no courage. Courage in all our acts will gain great merit for us.

There is another aspect of Christian courage, less satisfying, more difficult, and also more meritorious than the first, even though it appears to effect less. We need courage to work, but there is a result to see. When we come to suffer, there is nothing. There is no going to the attack, our part is to *bear*, to bear physical pain which prevents us spending ourselves on our most cherished activities, to bear mental stress, caused by shadows overcoming our faith, or scruples, lassitude, boredom, depressions ; the afflictions our Lord experienced in agony, when he said, ' My soul is sorrowful even unto death.' Distress of heart, which can turn us inside out with anguish over those we love, dear ones from whom we are parted. Life is full of suffering of every sort. Sufferings which come from our sins, from our infirmities, from people around who, rightly or wrongly, are a burden to us. Exterior obstacles rise up against us ; our enemies triumph. Our soul is crushed. Traps are laid to draw us into evil, or a lesser good. We need courage to bear, to resist, to hold on, to master our soul, to keep it in peace before God, to possess it, in our Lord's words : In suffering you shall possess your souls (Luke, 21.19). To carry on to the end,

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without giving way, doing God's will and meriting eternal life ; this is the work of fortitude.

Lastly, our high visions, and our courage to work and bear up under tribulation are not to be thought of as occasional resources ; they belong to each succeeding minute of our life, long as it may be, its obstacles cropping up ever anew. There is another virtue which crowns fortitude—perseverance, the virtue by which we never falter, which keeps us always at the task.

The Holy Spirit has given us the seed of this fortitude at our baptism with, and in, sanctifying grace. With this energy which proceeds from the love of God, and with that love itself, we shall be able to face martyrdom, the supreme act of a human life ; to deliver ourselves to be pierced, burnt, torn asunder without complaint, our hearts intent on heaven.

### III THE NECESSITY OF THE GIFT OF FORTITUDE

It is precisely the magnitude of our end, and that quality of tenderness which our strength needs if it is to be effective, which can be a source of difficulties, an occasion of weakness to the soul. We know that grace is all-powerful and will never fail us, but grace in us now lacks that confirmation which will mark it in heaven, so exposed is it to our frailties and failures that we can even lose it altogether. The dangers are so grave, the task so great, we have reason to be afraid if, even with divine strength and the virtue of fortitude, we think of assuming ourselves the direction of our lives. Our good will does not always meet the task. How well we experience this when, after the grace of enlightenment following a good confession or a retreat, we make some resolution demanding courage, seek God's help in prayer, and then set to work—and fail ! It needed something more, an even more divine help.

The Holy Spirit takes pity on our weakness ; he will not leave us sole masters of the strength we have received from him. He will complete it by a gift. The gift of fortitude comes to help our virtue of fortitude. The gift is not founded upon that strength which is our permanent possession, which we use or refrain from using at will—albeit it is for us to set our sail—the gift comes from the Holy Spirit, and when it is he who takes possession of us, we submit to his irresistible pressure, we are no longer subject to the risks and vacillations of our own personal government.

#### IV EFFECTS OF THE GIFT OF FORTITUDE

There is a contrast to be observed in the Apostles before and after the descent of the Holy Ghost upon them. If you would portray the most fearful, cowardly, timid of all men, you have only to look at the apostles as the gospel shows them : they are afraid of everything. Peter, it is true, gives an illusion of strength, but it was not that, it was impulse which prompted him to draw his sword and strike off the ear of a soldier. Within a short time he is saving himself from the accusation of a serving maid. He was not there when Jesus was crucified ; ‘ he followed afar off,’ the gospel tells us. All the apostles had fled. And yet We can believe they had divine grace, the virtues of fortitude and charity. Our Lord called them his friends, but they had not received the Holy Spirit. Once they have received him, we find them, on the contrary, full of courage. These boatmen, rude of speech and bearing, are now at ease before rulers and strangers, speaking with assurance to the crowds and handling them with skill. The Peter who trembled before the serving maid now stands without fear before the high priest himself : ‘ We



cannot but speak ' are his words to him, ' of the things we have seen and heard ' (Acts, 4.20) ; and again, ' We ought to obey God rather than men ' (Acts, 5.29). What a difference there is between Peter with the virtue in his trials and difficulties, and Peter with the gift which has communicated such zeal [*élan*]. The Holy Spirit has taken possession of the apostles and turned them into lions. They were under his guidance for the rest of their lives. To his descent upon the apostles, and upon St Paul, we owe the expansion of Christianity, and our salvation. They gave up their lives, but their blood was the seed of Christians.

The thought of this transformation can give us infinite encouragement. The principle of the fortitude of the Holy Spirit is God's omnipotence. We say *Patrem omnipotentem*, but the Son is also all-powerful, and the Holy Spirit too, and his omnipotence is communicated to the soul in the gift of fortitude.

#### V EXPRESSIONS OF THE GIFT OF FORTITUDE

1. Power of Strength. That very power which effected the Resurrection of our Lord is at the disposition of the Holy Spirit to bring us also back from death. There is nothing lower than death ; what can be more inert than a corpse ? This our Lord became, and God's power has raised him up. The resurrection was St Paul's great devotion. In moments of weakness he took new courage at the thought that from death God had brought life in the person of the risen Christ, and he put his confidence in the strength by which we can do all things. The Holy Spirit disposes for our use that same power, that same strength which brought our Lord out of death. And the apostle teaches the resurrection of our bodies, and also of

our souls, freed from their sins and their infirmities ; there is an end to every impotence in our Christian life. The Spirit is always living to bring us from death to life, to lead us onwards in spite of our frailties.

2. Confidence in Strength. By this gift of fortitude, under this omnipotence of God communicated to us by the Holy Spirit, what can we expect ? When souls have turned to God and he has sent down his strength upon them, they possess that absolute confidence Avhich can face every situation and stand up to every difficulty. Confidence to escape the perils ahead, to accomplish every task which is given them to do, and will be part of their pre-destiny. There is nothing beyond our power when the strength of the Holy Spirit is with us. St Paul said : ' I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus ' (Rom., 8.39, etc.). Absolute confidence was his in the strength of God which was with him, able to thrust every obstacle aside and reach the summit of all his labours ; he it was who humbly acknowledged his own wretchedness, but added T can do all things in him who strengtheneth me ' (Phil., 4.13).

With this gift of fortitude we no longer act as the sole lords and masters of our lives, but as the instruments of the power of the Spirit. There are souls who simply radiate this all-dominating confidence. Among them stands the figure of St Joan of Arc, the very incarnation of the figure of Fortitude. Whether in triumphant attack, or in bearing defeat and loss, Joan never hesitates, and she dominates in every circumstance of her life. Her career was set in the fields of battle and in courts of law ; none of it upsets Joan. Hers was that confidence to escape all dangers ; she threw herself into the mêlée, and her gift of herself was

even to death. At the last moment she clasps the cross and says once again, 'Jesus'.

3. Our victorious action. When our lives are under the action of the Holy Spirit, it follows that the activity with which we proceed to the doing of our duty and the acceptance of sufferings becomes in us a victorious activity.

The soul which is exposed to the influence of the Holy Spirit steps out into the midst of life, overcoming every trial and obstacle. When it advanced by means of the virtue of fortitude, at times it was overcome; but now under the gift the soul is invincible at its task, remains faithful to its rule, surmounts obstacles, overcomes suffering. It is distinguished by its vigour and the certainty that nothing can arrest its progress. To be sure, the soul is not yet free from narrowness, frailties, lapses from fidelity—it is still clothed in mortal flesh; nor has it yet reached the perfect realisation of sanctity, but its habitual disposition is one of calm assurance and decision, its life is a succession of victories. To no human strength is this attributed, but to the soul's docility to the Holy Spirit, to its devotion to his strength, putting no trust in self, and knowing that if, indeed, it contributes a little goodwill, yet alone it can do nothing. The soul repeats the words of St Paul, 'The weakness of God is stronger than men' (Cor., 1.25), and in this confidence it is prepared to fulfil its destiny.

To conclude: the breadth' of the spirit of fortitude is needed to build up in us the interior man, to lead a true and deep interior life. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to do this work in us; it is no less than the preparation of the eternal man, and to make us live uninterruptedly with God. He will hear us, if we will consent to be his instrument, like the brush with which the divine Artist retraces the lines of the interior man—only let us ask.

O Holy Spirit, gift of Father and Son, give us this :  
to be strengthened by that strength which is yours, so

## CHAPTER IV

### Hunger after Justice

*Blessed are they who hunger  
and thirst after justice, for they  
shall have their fill. (Matt. 5.6.)*

**B**Y justice here we are to understand holiness ; such seems to be the true sense in which it is employed in this context. There is certainly no question of the particular virtue of justice, but rather of that general justice given to us by God, which is identical with our justification by sanctifying grace. The sanctification of the soul is called justice with good reason, since it sets order within us, and keeps us right before God : this is sanctity.

i the relation of the gift and the beatitude

This beatitude is commonly explained as including the activity characteristic of the gift of Fortitude. This is a relation not immediately apparent. Strong men, however, usually have large appetites. There is a correspondence between the strength to perform a task—as well in the spiritual as in the material sense—and the appetite, the desire to do it. In the spiritual order the strong, those who can act, those who really work, they have an appetite, a hunger and a thirst to spend their energy ; they are great hearted souls, men of deep desire. It is not, therefore, a purely arbitrary relation which we see between those who hunger after sanctity and the strong in the Holy Spirit.

So much more indeed does the Holy Spirit proportion the gift of his strength to the end he has in view. And what has he in view ? He searches the deeps of the depth

of God, he sees his infinite holiness ; and this is his ideal for us. He will press us on to an infinite holiness, for the soul that is subject to the influence of the Holy Spirit must tend to a perfection without limit, so that it indeed is enhungered and athirst for holiness. Here is the relation between this beatitude and the gift of fortitude.

## II HUNGER AND THIRST FOR HOLINESS IN OUR LORD

Let us now see what is this hunger and thirst for holiness, first in the person of our Lord, secondly in ourselves.

Hunger and thirst are strong, compelling needs. By their nature they demand satisfaction. Hunger and thirst are, besides, needs that are ever recurring. Once satisfied they may be appeased for a few hours, then they revive and assert anew their demand for satisfaction. Finally, in the satisfaction of this need, a certain natural, physical contentment is experienced ; the pleasure we take in a good meal or, when we are really hungry, in a loaf of bread.

Consider these three characteristics of hunger and thirst. Our Lord's choice of words was not at random. What was this need for holiness, for justice, in our universal model, our Lord Jesus Christ ? He has made a purposeful use of these two words, hunger and thirst, to express to us the state of his own soul, the strength with which he gave himself to the work that was his to do. When the disciples returned to our Lord at Jacob's well, and pressed him to eat, he said to them, ' I have a food you know not ' (John, 4.32)—an invisible, immaterial nourishment, which, he goes on to explain, ' is to do his Father's will, and to perfect his work ' (John, 4.34). This was his compelling, recurring need which he rejoiced to satisfy, but which ever enhungered him anew. He has no word more emphatic than this : ' His Father's will,' it was his food, his necessary daily fare ; he had no other. The Apostle

tells us : ' Coming into the world, he said : Behold I come, O Father, that I should do thy will ' (Heb., 5.5). And departing this life thrice repeated : ' Father, not what I will, but what thou wilt ' (Mark, 14.36). He took not a step, but set his Father's will before him. His Father's will caused him hunger.

The gospel is always telling us, too, of the chalice for which our Lord thirsted. The first instance is when he foretells his passion and death. To James and John seeking a share in his glory, he replies : ' Can you drink of the chalice that I drink of ? ' (Mark, 10.38). In his agony we find again this chalice of his Father's will. At the outset of his sufferings our Lord experienced a movement of repulsion, of sadness and anguish at the thought of this chalice : ' Father, if it be possible, remove this chalice from me.' Yet—had he not come to drink of this ? He recovers himself before this same chalice : ' Father, not as I will, but as thou wilt,' and he accepts it. On the cross he will pronounce this incomprehensible word : *sitio*. But it is always the same chalice for which he is thirsting. They thought to bring him relief when they gave him to drink, but his thirst was not of that kind. Beside Jacob's well he had spoken of it : ' I have a water to drink of which you do not know ' (John, 4). Yes, he thirsts for this chalice of suffering and bitterness, of which he must drink if we are to be saved. And when he has drunk to the dregs, he can say *Consummatum est*, all is consummated. I have drunk to the bottom of the chalice ; now I have only to give up my life.

The holiness after which our Lord hungered and thirsted was the doing of his Father's will, and in particular that will which was his death and sacrifice, so that the injury inflicted upon God's holiness might be repaired, and that mankind too might become holy again. You see

our Lord suffering from that hunger and thirst after justice, that compelling need for holiness, for that active sanctification of our souls wherein he found the consummation of his work.

### III HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER JUSTICE—IN US

What have we to do to acquire this hunger and thirst after justice. In us too it must attain this state of a 'compelling' need. If our good will, our good desires are weak, intermittent, we shall only arrive at modest results, sufficient, perhaps, to be saved, to lead an honourable religious life, but not to have in ourselves a Christian life lived to its full extent, a full religious life, expanded to its greatest breadth and driven down to its deepest. The spirit of fortitude will come to help us, inspiring us with confidence in the communication of that powerful activity which is, as it were, a participation in his own appetite for holiness.

'Charity, the love of God, urges us' (Cor., 5.14), writes the Apostle. Charity in us, charity in us as a compelling need which will not let us be. We have this power in us, to love God above all things and to do his will without ceasing and full of zeal. The Holy Spirit will inspire such sentiment in us when, receiving from him the gift of his strength, we participate also in his hunger.

We often notice this hunger after holiness in the lives of the saints. We find its most striking expression in the life, both contemplative and active, of St Catherine of Siena. As a maid of tender years, we read, she made her way into all manner of society, to the scaffold to succour a criminal, to the palace of Avignon to counsel a Pope; and amid all her exterior preoccupations, in the depths of her soul she is engaged in the pursuit of sanctity to its limits. She knew fear, yes, and even scruples, bitter

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distress lest the least fault should elude her examination—a mere glance turned for a moment on a passing brother in the street. She had experienced a pressing need for a perfection without blemish.

This compelling need in ourselves must, too, be always recurring. Some souls experience an ardour which can set them on fire for a while, and then, when times change, circumstances and surroundings alter, they consider themselves justified in letting their fervour cool off. This is not the hunger of the Holy Ghost. Those who are inspired by this hunger lift themselves up anew, they persevere. 'In good deeds,' said St Paul, 'weary not' (2 Thess., 3.13). Dull weather within or fine, in conflict with this passion or the other, exterior influences trying or consoling, in the soul which lives by the strength of the Holy Spirit, hunger and thirst ever renew themselves; the soul remains constant, for it does not rely on its own strength, but on the communication of God's strength, from the Holy Spirit.

Let us examine our conscience. Our negligence, our slackness and inconsistency, which prevent us from doing good thoroughly and unremittingly, these are because our hunger after holiness is not enough. But the Holy Spirit can give us this, for his gift of fortitude, destined to produce it, is already in us. It will not come from ourselves; we have to set our sail, open up our heart, expose ourselves to the Holy Spirit's action; then we can receive the communication of his dominant and unfailing strength.

Finally, since it shares all the properties of natural hunger, the satisfaction of this need will bring us joy. When we have made an effort to follow the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have persevered in God's service or accomplished some exceptionally difficult task, we

experience an interior content. The soul has made an effort, a sacrifice, and it feels itself appeased ; for a while its hunger has been satisfied.

So it was that St Catherine, after an effort demanding more than usual sacrifice—when for example she made the supreme effort to overcome her natural revulsion and devoted herself to the care of a leprous woman of whose persecution she had herself been the object — she experienced her hunger after holiness appeased in a wonderful repast. She was filled with interior happiness. Our Lord appeared to assure her of his good pleasure, thus showing his approval of her state of spiritual appeasement. So we, too, when we feel that the day has been well spent in the performance of duty, are as it were nourished with the will of God, appeased, tranquil—this is the spiritual joy promised to those who labour at the accomplishment of God's will.

And in all this the Spirit is willing to aid us too ; if we but seek his help and place ourselves under his influence, he will give us this hunger and thirst after justice. By this means, and in so simple a manner, we shall resolve a host of problems and overcome a multitude of the temptations which come to us under the guise of our triple concupiscence. With regard to poverty, we saw how, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, that simple word ' a little ' could detach us from all things. Now to inspire in us hunger and thirst after sanctity he will endow us with a kind of special instinct, a touch, a divine sense, armed with which we shall go forward, always conscious how to behave ourselves in the face of the duties and various obstacles which lie ahead.

Let us, however, beware of illusions. The imagination of some people gives them a hunger for a fictitious sanctity, after their own desires and not at all of the Holy Spirit.

Such souls can, by their false sanctity, exercise a tyranny over others. True hunger for sanctity is never subject to such deviations, for the inspiration of the Holy Ghost can be contrary neither to prudence nor obedience. Never should we think that the Holy Spirit will give us a hunger after an individual idea of sanctity, for example, an intransigent love for this or the other observance or mortification, especially if it be contrary to authority, to our rule, or to prudence. Cut away these things, retain what is good. 'Try the spirits,' writes St Paul, 'to that which is good, hold fast' (1. Thess., 5.21). To be really under the influence of the Holy Spirit, that will take us far (and under obedience and prudence there is ample scope), very far, towards the summit of perfection, of holiness, of the accomplishment of God's will.

#### IV PRACTICE

Let us examine more closely what the Holy Spirit inspires in us by this hunger after sanctity.

##### 1. *Hunger and thirst for divine doctrine*

By means of this the true God is revealed, by this he is made known in order to be loved. This doctrine is to be found firstly in the teaching of the New Testament and the doctrine of the Church. The saints, too, under the guidance of the Spirit, have meditated on God's word, and have passed on to us their explanations, rich with the emotion of their own experience. This doctrine brings us to know God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—his divine life, the love with which the Father has sent us his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ with his two natures, his adorable heart, organ of the substantial love of God ; the actions of his life revealing in part his Father's holiness ; the drama of Redemption of which we are the cause ; the Holy

Spirit with his good gifts, his care of us, his influence ; the Church, the liturgy, the writings of doctors and saints, in particular the psalms : this is the food of contemplation and real charity, which, in the measure that it is instructed, can find the true God. If we have a few free moments, let us come to this food ; even when we are tired we can nourish ourselves on the memory of it. Meditate on the mysteries of the rosary, which contain the quintessence of revealed doctrine. This is the food which can sanctify us.

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2. *Hunger and thirst for the sacraments*

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These bring us a renewal of the source of grace. Hunger and thirst for penance ; this comes to us straight from the cross. Every time we approach this sacrament we stand before the Cross, and from its height it is our Lord who, by the priest's hand, imparts the food of a special grace of strength against sin.

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Hunger and thirst for the Mass, wherein we have the real presence of our Lord immolated : what food to nourish holiness in us. Hunger and thirst for the Mass, which concludes by our receiving into the tabernacle of our body that Bread, the victim of Calvary, burning with the Son of God's own acts of love. What increase of sanctifying grace this communicates to us. ' I am the bread of life,' our Lord has said. If we would lead a holy life, bringing us to God, let us hunger for this bread, it is our food, our fountain head, our hidden manna. To Blessed Raymond St Catherine said, ' I am hungry,' and he well understood her meaning, bringing her for food the Holy Eucharist. If our communions are sometimes lukewarm, or even a trial to us, this is due to the faintness of our habitual hunger. It must be a compelling need in us. What more could we desire, since in Holy Communion we have him whom the blessed possess, beholding

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him face to face and feeding on him. Our life the whole day long should be nourished by our reception of the Lord's body, and by the desire to receive him again on the morrow.

3. *Hunger and thirst for God's will*

We are set about on all sides by the will of God. It comes to us under the form of our rule, of the obediences we receive, of the inspirations of our conscience . . . but we do not know how to recognise it. We settle down to some business, agreeable or otherwise, to talk to someone, to accept contradiction or trial of our common life—but just these things are the will of God. If we hungered after justice like our Lord we should go to these occasions of trial and difficulty as to a delicious food which would bring us satisfaction. We can depend upon the Holy Spirit for his inspiration in every detail. In our Lord's hidden life he too encountered slights and vexations—in his journeys, his work, his relations with men ; but it was a food to him, God's will seen in everything, great and little.

When God allows trials and sufferings for us, it is his will. And suffering is painful. The natural impression which these messengers of the good God make on us is one of vexation, disgust ; we bemoan our lot, we even want to get out of it. A strong soul recognises God's will. St Teresa could not imagine life without suffering : to suffer or to die was her axiom.

To hunger after suffering is difficult—heroic ; not only not to evade it, but on the contrary to desire it, is a sure sign of the gift of fortitude. There are souls who attain this height ; they call their weakness God's mercies. They see in sufferings a closer association with the sufferings of our Saviour, and they thirst after them. This is above

our strength, but the Holy Spirit can inspire it in us too : should we not ask him ?

4. *Hunger and thirst for souls*

Yet another meat is set before us. First of all the souls of those among whom we live. These are souls God loves, to whom he wills good things. Like us they have their defects and insufficiencies, but God's pleasure is in them : he wills their sanctification because he sees their good before all. We must enter into this view and this will of God, repress all bad feeling and bitterness, and bring forth true acts of goodness and loving kindness, rendering them every service and help in this work of their sanctification.

The souls too of the afflicted need us. In them we must see their spirit, and God's will concerning them, the mysterious dwelling of Jesus Christ in the poor and the sick. Let us give ourselves ever more to this work, and by our unflinching devotion to the miseries of their bodies, deliver their souls to God. Let us sanctify the souls he sends, or to whom he sends us.

How many opportunities we have to feel and to satisfy this thirst for holiness, which we find in the gospel as a beatitude, and which springs from the action of the gift of fortitude.

We should give ourselves fully to the divine breath which will bring us strength and confidence and victorious action, and which will show itself in us by a hunger after holiness, a thirst for the divine will. Within the bounds of prudence, do not let us be afraid to satisfy this hunger to its limit ; the Holy Spirit is with us to lead us to truth, justice, holiness. And our work, if sometimes he should ask a consent which means sacrifice, will be rewarded, for in the gospel is written : ' blessed are they who hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill.'

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## CHAPTER V

### The Gift of Piety

*God hath sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying : Abba, Father. (Gal., 4.6.)*

**T**HANKS to the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, the ground of our soul has been swept clean. By the Spirit of Fear that profound desire of our religious life, to be free of our triple concupiscence, has been fulfilled. By the Spirit of Fortitude, inspiring in us a hunger and thirst after sanctity, we are strongly armed to tackle our daily tasks and the obstacles we meet in their accomplishment.

The Holy Spirit will lay his hand on us anew, to establish peace in us ; not however in our interior domain, with particular regard to our concupiscence or our personal duties, but with respect to our neighbour. He will set us in peace, and when we are at peace nothing will preoccupy us but to strike higher, to attain the very summit of our interior life with God.

#### I DEFINITION OF PIETY

This new touch of the Spirit is the gift of piety. It will produce its effect on our relations with our neighbour. Ordinarily, it is the virtue of justice which establishes us in peace, preserving harmony between our actions and the rights of our neighbour : it is by justice that we render our neighbour his due. Justice is not all : there is charity. But justice is the foundation of our social life and, transported into the supernatural order, the foundation of the

life of the Church and of the world. That is one of the reasons why we say of a saint that he is just : he owes to no man, he has paid all, he has done rightly by the rights of others and God's rights.

Among all the rights which may concern us, there is one which is indeed supreme : God's right. God is our Creator, without whom we would not exist. He preserves us in being, he is the master of our lives, our sovereign benefactor, his are the first rights. Therefore there is, in the virtue of justice, a principal part whereby we render as far as in us lies, justice to God ; this is religion. Nowadays people think they can be just without rendering justice to God. What a mistake ! The virtue of religion is primary justice.

Among the various aspects of this virtue of religion there is one with a particular and gracious character : it is that of piety. Piety is part of the virtue of religion by which we render justice to God in giving him devotion, prayer, sacrifice, fasting and abstinence, reverence, worship—the total of those duties by which we acknowledge him our sovereign Lord. Piety marks religion with an accent of tenderness because it addresses itself to the *Father* in God. It goes further than natural religion ordinarily will ; piety does not see the rights of the Master, of the Lord, but those of the Father ; it is religion with a heart. You do not pay your Father as you would pay anybody ; justice rendered to a Father is relieved of its qualities of coldness and personal indifference. When we do God the service we owe him—our duties as Christians by prayer, assistance at holy Mass, reception of the sacraments, as religious by the exercise of our vows, the observance of our rule—all is not done ! A child to its father is never under a rule, it feels its debt of honour and worship in its heart, our religion becomes generous. Piety is the heart of religion.



## II THE GIFT OF PIETY

It is of this heart of religion that the divine Spirit will take possession, and there the touch of his new inspiration will animate in our interior selves the spirit of piety.

## THE SPIRIT OF PIETY IN OUR LORD

To speak of the spirit of piety brings to our minds at once the thought of the Son, the beloved of the Father. What is really new, original, in the gospels, is this revelation of the divine paternity. Certainly there is some knowledge of this paternity in other religions, but the perfect and unique experience of all that can pass betwixt a son and his father is our Lord's. This is not indeed surprising, since he is the co-substantial Son of the Father. Tertullian has said that there is none such a mother as God. And we may say : there is none such a son as our Lord.

The spirit of piety appears in our Lord when at the age of twelve they find him in the temple : ' Do you not know that I must be about the things of my Father ? ' This was the programme of his whole life. He knew the position of Joseph and Mary : ' He was subject to them ' (Luke, 2.51), but where the things of his Father were concerned, he knew him only.

We can find innumerable expressions of the pious and filial heart of our Lord. St Matthew records this beautiful prayer which, from its intimate character, we might think he owed to St John : ' I give thee thanks, O Father, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them to little ones . . . Be it so, Father, since this finds favour in thy sight. My Father has entrusted everything into my hands . . . none knows the Father truly except the Son, and those to whom it is the Son's pleasure to reveal him . . . Come to me, all you that labour and are

burdened, I will give you rest . . . my yoke is sweet and my burden light' (Matt. 11, 25-30).

The generosity that is in it! *Ita, Pater*; Yes, Father! It reveals a touching attitude of the son as he turns to the father. And these words are a commentary on it: 'I always do the things that please him' (John, 8.29)—Yes Father, for it is pleasing to you! 'And this worship of our Lord towards his Father is revealed also in his sermon on the mount, which serves as an introduction to the gospel of his teaching. His Father's name recurs at every phrase. He publishes the new law, and its principal article is the divine fatherhood: 'Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Matt., 5.18). That Father, whose sun shines upon both the good man and the sinner, who causes it to rain on the wicked and the just. Do you concern yourself with prayer, would you learn how to fast or give alms? Let all be done for love of the Father, that is, by filial piety: 'Shut yourself up with the Father': no unnecessary talk: 'The Father knows your needs'; no hypocrisy: 'The Father who sees what is done in secret, will reward you' (Matt., 6. 6,8,18).

The Word is the splendour of the Father. He lives only in reflecting him; he receives of his substance and returns it to him, like an image of the perfection of his countenance. And in the humanity of our Lord these perfections are translated into his accents of filial devotion.

In his discourse after the Last Supper, our Lord said: 'Philip, he who sees me, sees the Father' (John, 14,9). He said too: In the things I do 'I am not alone, because the Father is with me' (John, 16, 32). And in his sacerdotal prayer his accents are yet more filial, full of trust, reverence and abandonment to his Father's will. Our Lord's relations with his Father are relations of intimacy, reverence and love; he does his Father's will

always : the Father is the horizon of his thought, and he can never be separated from him.

In the parable of the prodigal son, he describes his Father for us ; he shows us a heart full of pity, loving kindness, an infinite condescension. And last of all, he has bequeathed us as the testament of his filial heart the prayer which we recite at his bidding : ‘ Our Father, who art in heaven.’ He would not have us turn to anything in God other than what he sees himself, his fatherhood. This title of Father is proper to every petition of the *Pater noster*, so that we might repeat it at each : ‘ Father, thy kingdom come. Father, thy will be done. Father, give us our daily bread. Father, forgive us.’ It is the heart cry of our Lord, and he would set it in the hearts of his children. This is indeed a great revelation of the divine fatherhood.

#### THE SPIRIT OF PIETY IN US

But how are our hearts to be made like those of our Lord ? In this way : The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Word, the Spirit of our Lord. He said, when he promised us the Spirit : ‘ He shall not speak of himself, but what things he shall hear, he shall speak ; he shall receive of mine, and show it to you, and he will bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I have said ’ (John, 16, 26 : 16, 13-14). We shall receive of mine : of what then ? Surely of what is most intimate, that which above all is his, this sense of the paternity of God his Father, his *piety*. This it is that the Spirit receives, and imparts to us.

The spirit of piety derives from the gift our Lord made of it to us. Regenerated sons of God, the spirit of his Son is at our disposition, for he has sent it to us and it cries out from within us, as it cries in the depth of his own soul : ‘ Abba, Father.’ No doubt the reason why the apostle

passes on to us this familiar word of the Syro-Chaldaic language spoken by our Lord, was to retain the untranslatable quality it had in his own mind.

Such then is the gift of piety, whence it comes, in whom is its model and the work it does : it pronounces in the most intimate part of our souls the sweet name of our heavenly Father, with something of our Lord's own accent in the saying of it.

### III THE WORK OF THE GIFT OF PIETY

And now we come back to our ordinary duties—but our approach is from above, and we are armed with the simplicity of divine means. Our desire for poverty, we have said, has been set in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, when he engraved on them that least of words : ' a little? Fortitude, too, has entered in by a simple hunger after sanctity : I am hungry ! And by this word piety will be inspired in us : Abba : Father, formed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

The smallest coin, if it is of precious metal, can equal an ingot of baser metal ; one single diamond can surpass in value a thousand stones of inferior worth. With this simple word from the Holy Spirit, inspiring piety in us, with this name of Father, we have the equivalent, and more, of all religion. The virtue of religion is born wholly anew and in a higher state in him who, under the inspiration of the spirit of piety, thinks of God, and honours him as his Father.

By the help of our ordinary virtue of religion we apply ourselves to piety sincerely, but laboriously. We pack our days with pious exercises ; we fulfil our duties of worship at the proper times, and with regard to all the proper attitudes, and gestures and words. A meritorious way of doing things and indeed indispensable, it lays the very

foundation of our Christian life, but it is a painful way, strewn with a host of obstacles, not to mention distractions, fatigue, negligence, our abbreviated prayers and those we say too quickly . . . And yet—into all this goes our good will. If the Holy Spirit should give us something of that Son beloved of the Father, of that love, of that character which permeated all he did for his Father, if in our spirit he put the spirit of piety, the soul of his life, we should love interiorly all that we now can do but painfully, and it would become easy for us. Prayer would cost us nothing ; we should excel in it. And as for our long exercises, we should dwell in our Father's intimacy during them. And our many duties, our common office, the calls to prayer that cut up our life—we should be ready for all these things, our gifts offered in advance by truly filial hearts !

Such, then, is the work in us of this spirit of piety. Impelled by this spirit a love of God will hasten us on, a love ever more victorious, sovereign and intimate. In this love we will find submission, response to the Spirit's touch, so that our hearts may be moulded and formed according to their model, our Lord, becoming the hearts of children, busy about the things of their Father. In this way our piety is renewed from within. Yet by virtue of our baptism, the gift of piety is already in us, with sanctifying grace. Times have been when, in prayer, we have made use of it ; at a moment of grace, submissive to a divine touch, we have gone apart to be with the Father in secret, and from time to time his fatherly regard has been enlightened and revealed to us. Our need, then, is a greater docility, a greater response. In such measure as we worship in spirit and in truth we shall become less content with our formula, a purely legal execution of our duty. Just as with our Lord, in the heart of our prayers we,

too, may feel this sense of Fatherhood, and then we shall respond truly to our vocation and become real religious souls.

The virtue of religion is, after the theological virtues, our principal virtue ; it effects in practice the inspirations of the theological virtues. Its exercise is the divine praise, but nothing in our life can escape its spirit, all that we do is for God's glory. It is in the centre of our mind ; keep in it this consciousness of God's Fatherhood, of his goodness and benevolence revealed to us by our Lord.

Let us cultivate a special devotion to the Holy Spirit who breathes into us this knowledge of the divine Fatherhood ; let us become less active, but more passive, loving to receive from our Lord that which is his, stable in our docility, and so our hearts will be transformed by the deepest sentiments of filial devotion, which will enable us to hasten with a new and joyful spirit to the duties of our religious life.

#### IV ITS SCOPE

##### THE SPIRIT OF PIETY AND OUR HUMAN FAMILY

Piety does not only simplify the work of the virtue of religion. It simplifies too our relations with others. If we are truly conscious of the divine fatherhood we shall hold others as our brethren, beloved children of the same heavenly Father.

' In piety, fraternal charity ' writes the apostle (2 Peter, 1.7). We understand our human brotherhood in the universal fatherhood of God to all his children, and then into our dealings with others we shall bring that same sweetness and tenderness as belong to our relations with the Father. Justice all alone is too cold. ' Take your due and off with you,' justice cries ; yes, it is just, but it is

hard. But she can soften and show a heart when her words are directed to the children of a common Father. Piety will mellow our social relations. Piety will establish peace from end to end ; peace with God and among men, peace in abundance.

Henceforth disengaged from every care in our relations with others' rights, just as with our personal concupiscences, peace will be ours, and we shall become free to take our flight to God, as the *Imitation* says, to occupy ourselves with holy things, to rise to the summits of contemplation.

#### THE EXTENSION OF THE DIVINE FATHERHOOD

A special participation in the spirit of piety is granted to all who share in the divine Fatherhood. ' I bow my knee to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named' (Eph. 3.15). St Paul conceives an extension of the divine Fatherhood in heaven and in the world, wherever the name of Father can be pronounced.

In heaven : To be sure we do not say ' Our Father ' to the Holy Spirit or to our Lord. Yet there is a sense in which they are Father, since with the Father they are one only God, creator and doer of all good. In this there is an extension of Fatherhood even in heaven. It extends moreover to certain saints ; in the very first place, to our Lady. We speak rather of her motherhood, which is universal, but she shares beyond all in the divine Fatherhood, and claims our filial piety. We call her ' Mother of Mercy, Mother of Divine Grace.' The Patriarch, St Joseph, patron of the universal church, St Dominic, father of our order, have a paternity which shares in the divine Fatherhood. The gift of piety will inspire a filial devotion to us towards those in heaven in whom the divine Fatherhood is vested. Wherever the radiance of this Fatherhood

shines a like sentiment should inflame the worship we tender.

On earth : There is a participation of the divine Fatherhood in the Church, and particularly in him we call our holy father ; in Latin—*p a p a* ; our great, tender, beloved father. There is too a filial devotion to the Church, which the spirit of piety will inspire in us. There is no piety in those who fail to see in the Church a mother and a father in its head, to whom they owe a filial love. And yet recently there have been those even among the devout who, because they did not find the Pope paternal enough, broke into complaint and recrimination. Pious Christians, with a filial devotion to the Pope, do not make such blunders ; they accept his authority, and all that comes from him they accept as from a father who reflects the likeness of their Father in heaven.

In their degree also our religious superiors and all ecclesiastical authorities share in the divine Fatherhood. Our holy rule tells us—obey your superiors as fathers ; obey them as mothers. The thought of this special characteristic must dominate the justice we exercise, by respect and obedience, towards our superiors. Our obedience should not be just so much, but a filial, pious and devoted obedience.

There is one thing more, not a person this time, to which the divine Fatherhood extends : Holy Scripture. It comes to us with the authority of the rule of our faith, especially the New Testament, and indeed it nourishes us as a father. In the scriptures we are touched by a paternal goodness. God the father has put something of himself into it. We should therefore have the greatest love and respect for the Bible, not so much by exterior marks, such as kissing the page before and after reading it, as by a filial docility to follow its guidance. They commit a great sin



who seek to interpret it as a human document, giving it their own meanings, and striving to deprive it of every claim to our respect. We should receive the words of Holy Scripture as if we heard in them the very voice of our Father, accepting, giving our interior consent with a filial love ; take them to ourselves to construct therewith a dwelling of knowledge, love and labour in the service of God.

## CHAPTER VI

### The Beatitude of Gentleness or Meekness

*'Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the earth' (Matt. 5.4.)*

THE action of the gift of piety expresses itself by breathing forth meekness. We are going to see what the connexion is between the gift of piety and the beatitude of meekness. It is in our relations with men that meekness finds its place. We can be, we must be, meek first of all inwardly, but this virtue is then poured out upon others.

#### I JUSTICE, PIETY AND MEEKNESS

How are our relations with our neighbour regulated? First of all by the virtue of justice which places itself between the owing and the possessing, which equalizes debits and credits, and thus makes peace. When we have received that which was due to us, we are at peace with our debtor. Man, born for society, needs justice, which allows him to hold relations, among business men for instance, by mutual exchanges. This virtue is extremely useful for setting connexions at rights, and we can prove that connexions can be excellent between men who practise it. Nevertheless, this virtue possesses a quality, not of injustice, but of rigidity in so far as it does not take persons into account; it considers only what is due on one side or the other, it equalizes things. Also, those who have been paid take no further notice, it is a matter of something agreed upon. With these conditions social relations do not go very far, and we see divided classes, although each one receives his due, because behind the relations of justice

there are no personal relations. If at one time we found old servants attached to families, it was because there used to be more charity and consequently more attention to persons.

The gift of piety will give from on high a help to aid poor justice which, from the viewpoint of peace, is so limited and powerless. Piety makes us realize in God, the Father. But it is not difficult to see that this Father is a common Father : not our Father individually, but the Father of us all. Our Lord wished us when we pray, not to say *My*, though he spoke of himself as the only son, but *our* Father, all together : the Our Father is essentially a collective prayer. He who understands this paternity considers mankind as a large family in which the members are bound together by a fast tie, that of the first degree of kinship : children of a common Father, they are not cousins, but brothers. That is indeed correct, and that is why the Church uses this word *proximus* (in Latin), for we cannot be more proximate.

Now it is plain that our relations will become more tender if we see a brother in the one who has business with us, whom we meet round about. A gentleness, an intimacy will extend over all human relationships : we see how gentleness reigns radically, despite little brotherly arguments, among the brethren of the same family, united under the authority of father and mother. The natural radiance of the piety which we have for the Father spreads to the children. Mankind is thus animated by the gentleness of man to man. And thus is manifested the solution of the social question. When we have understood, grasped thoroughly, and tasted the Divine Paternity and the common sonship in the Father, violent conflicts will disappear among nations as among the different classes of society.

Do we not see among the early Christians this feeling of brotherhood : ‘ They had but one heart and one soul ; the astonished pagans said, “ See how they love one another ” And God has preserved in the religious orders as it were a hearth where this divine flame burns, which no longer exists in the world : they represent at rock-bottom what the early Christian society was.

It is in the lively spirit of the heavenly Fatherhood that we discover love for the brotherhood. A Corsican boatman, having seen some poor foreign sailors driven from the shore, expressed his just indignation : ‘ Is it right to starve men who need food ? Are they not the body of Christ like ourselves ? ’ This man unwittingly was translating St Paul’s words, ‘ The different nations form but one body in God.’ When we say ‘ Confreres,’ St Paul says ‘ Concorporals,’ different bodies in one single body.

Mankind forms a family over which falls the watchful eye of the heavenly Father. The love of the Father extends to all men. ‘ He makes the sun to shine alike on good and bad.’ From the supernatural standpoint, he has the mind to save all—although in spite of this there are some who escape him. He gives them the means of salvation ; he wishes to make them his favourite children, sharing his nature, taking part in his own life. All mankind is one single family, as it might be one single human ‘ paste or dough.’ Among all the members gentleness must reign. This will be first of all in the heart, the everyday habits of mind of everyone—anger, indignation, violent passions—being restrained. Then in behaviour, by marks of kindness one to another.

Thus does piety give us the sense of the divine Fatherhood, and at the extremity of the inspired gift of piety is found meekness. The connexion is clear.

II MEEKNESS, THE ACTION OF THE GIFT OF PIETY  
IN OUR LORD

This spirit of meekness we find in its fulness in our Lord. No one has attained such a degree of piety ; no one has been more of a son ; but let us see how his piety, his deep consciousness of the divine Fatherhood becomes infinite meekness. ' Learn of me for I am meek,' he says. If there is a commandment which is his own, it is charity : ' Love one another.' His personal lesson, his example, is meekness : learn from my example, from my person, from me, from what I say, from what I do. It is enough to gaze on him to obtain this impression of meekness : it is his own personal lesson. Without a doubt our Lord was just ; zeal for his Father consumed him, and when he took up a whip in the temple he was doing the work of justice. But apart from these relations with such wicked men as were the Pharisees and Scribes, with the rest of men we see him possessed of an infinite meekness. If he could say : ' who will accuse me of sin ? ' he can equally say : ' Learn of me for I am meek,' before those who knew him best ; they will not be able to gainsay him. From the moment of his entry into public life, at his first appearance in the synagogue of Nazareth, he said these words : ' The spirit of God is upon me . . . wherefore he has sent me to heal the wounded of heart, to give sight to the blind, to ransom the captives.' It is because the spirit of God is upon him, that he has this meekness. St Matthew, describing this meekness, applies to him these words of Isaiah, ' Behold my son . . . his voice shall not be heard . . . he will not cry out . . . he will not quench the smoking flax . . . he will not break the bruised reed.'

St Paul, while still one of the impious, felt this same meekness of Christ face to face, and he thought that he had thus been treated in order to be a model for what the

patience of God would be in the formation of the future elect. His chief adjuration was, 'I beseech you, by the meekness of Christ.' Christ gives an impression of meekness. He is a manifestation of meekness. Not only is his life in accord with that which he was himself, but he wishes to make people meek. 'I send you,' he says, 'as lambs in the midst of wolves.' He himself had thus been hailed by John the Baptist: 'Behold the Lamb of God.' He sends his apostles forth without arms, without equipment, to conquer the world with meekness. And in fact, if they are brave in asserting the truth, when it is a question of their own persons, the disciples allow themselves, like St Stephen, to be led to death 'with meekness.' 'Lord,' he cried, 'impute not this sin unto them.' We fancy that we hear the echo from the Cross, 'Father, forgive them.' That is why our Lord cannot feel anger at his apostles. John and James wish to call down fire from heaven upon the towns guilty of not having welcomed them. He laughs at them and calls them from then on, 'sons of thunder.'

In the gospel we find, then, the mark of meekness everywhere. Our Lord, even in his divinity, in his human soul, saw the Father face to face. He had moreover in him the inspiration of the Holy Ghost who gave to his human soul the sense of Fatherhood. It is therefore with a truly meek intention that he accomplished this mission of reconciliation between children and their Father. He saw in us brethren, children of the Father, and it is with this most gentle disposition that he dedicated himself to their salvation.

### III THE PRACTICE OF MEEKNESS

The meekness of our Lord is a pattern which we must imitate. Very often however we find in devout people a real misunderstanding of this gospel-meekness. In some

religious we meet a severity, a bitterness, a zeal perhaps but a bitter one, an indignation . . . quite the opposite of the spirit of meekness. And these people are 'devout,' they would not miss a single prayer; but their piety is transformed into poison; it is not a true piety. True piety must become tender at the thought of the Fatherhood of God; then it must pour out upon others some of its tenderness. If it is not gentle, it is because it does not go right to the heart of religion. Religion is not a collection of practices, it does not stop at things: it is dominated by the thought of the Father who is in heaven. True piety expresses itself by a certain gentleness, compassion, goodness towards others; it demands tender dispositions and thoughts, a thoroughly gentle interior life, in a self-possession which represses indignation, impatience, anger.

If we are faithful to the spirit of piety which urges us on to meekness, we shall reform our inner lives by possessing ourselves so as to repress the urges of nature: 'Meekness makes men who are masters of themselves,' says St Thomas.

We should not follow instincts, or thoughts which cross the mind, representing to ourselves our neighbour in an unpleasing light. We must know how to suppress a first movement of antipathy, of animosity, of violence, indignation, anger, impatience . . . movements produced in those who have passions—and all men have them. Let us put order in our inner lives, causing meekness and gentleness to reign there—meekness being the application of this gift of piety with which we are furnished. Those people who, though quite religious, have kept quite a collection of natural or wicked thoughts which stir them up against their neighbour, have within them a furnace of unbrotherliness, and that is why, despite their practices of devotion, they betray the bad under-current which still runs under

this covering of piety. Our piety must first of all set right the inner soul. Our Lord says that the outer does not matter much, 'it is from within that bad thoughts and sentiments come/ and so forth. We shall not be gentle towards others without this peaceful possession of ourselves.

The gift of piety, breathing forth within us meekness, has, then, as its first effect to destroy these bad furnaces of sourness and bitterness and to put in their place gentle thoughts, full of kindness towards all, so that from a good furnace will come a good radiance.

When the Holy Spirit has sweetly accomplished this inner peace-making he urges us to be gentle, face to face with others, outwardly, by our appearance, our approach, our demeanour, our words, suiting our inner life.

St Paul's programme was 'to conquer evil by good.' The scaling-ladder of meekness is, in reality, the grapple with evil. We triumph over evil by our meekness, being <sup>4</sup> as lambs among wolves.' St Peter said, 'Be ye subject to every creature.' If we do not address others as if we were masters wishing to command, if we put in our speech a certain tone of respect, of submission, we shall dispose our neighbour to take up the same attitude.

Listen once more to another point: 'Think of yourselves, one and the other, as mutual superiors.' Then we shall have considerateness, deference, friendship. When we address ourselves to the so-called lower classes, we are tempted to keep them at a distance, to talk to them rather condescendingly, and we do not succeed in gaining their fellowship. We must drill into ourselves this truth that we are all members of a common family: the Holy Spirit will inspire this assurance and the perfect meekness with which we should approach all our brethren as children of our heavenly Father.

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‘Bear ye one another’s burdens.’ We are fellow-workers, each with his own burden, for some, interior or exterior suffering ; for others, difficult work. Let us know how to enter within the souls of others and bear their hardships. Let us do this for those to whom our apostolate extends. Let us do it within our family circle. It is there above all that we meet brothers and sisters. Let us have this spirit of brotherhood, which there should be, open and official. Face to face with this first of neighbours, let us practise this spirit of gentleness which comes to us from the inspiration of the gift of piety, since we are going to meet a common father who desires that our good should be everybody’s, in a common bond of love.

If we do these things, we shall possess the earth. It is the great ambition : to have influence, to rule consciences, to enjoy the approbation of men, to possess their hearts. The great means is meekness. The apostles knew no other, and they succeeded in a most efficient way, the Holy Spirit being their driving-force. Meekness inspired by piety is all-powerful. If we wish to possess the little earth of our community, or this other earth which is the domain of our apostolate, or gain the good opinion of our township, let us employ meekness, it is the efficacious means. It will give us not only the earth we live on, but the other which we long for above. Piety with the meekness it engenders is useful for everything : it promises the goods of the present life, the earth, and of the future, heaven.

Those who have restrained their inner passions by the meekness which emanates from the spirit of piety, having a reverence for the heavenly Fatherhood and living in brotherhood, spreading meekness around them, shall already have now the world of souls, and later the world of the living.

## CHAPTER VU

### The Gift of Counsel

*'Speak Lord, for thy servant  
heareth.'* (1. Kings 3.10.)

**T**HIS is what the boy Samuel, upon the advice of the high Priest Eli, replied to the Lord when he called him, and from that moment he in his turn became a great prophet. This sentence brings us to our subject: the gift of counsel.

The gift of counsel comes to us under the form of a word from God. It makes us hear it inwardly; it does not instruct us from without, as by the word of the Church, but within.

#### I THE PLACE OF COUNSEL IN THE SPIRITUAL ORGANISM

Before saying that the Holy Spirit inspires through his counsel, it is good to set the gift of counsel in its surroundings.

We should note that the gifts are granted as an assistance for our virtues when these fail. Although these virtues are supernatural, yet they are our own and we are variable and we use them as we wish in our actions; and so they share in the weakness of our nature. And yet the virtues are great perfections in comparison with nature itself. Faith is a great perfection for our intellect which it raises into a sphere far superior to the strength of our soul. Hope and charity are great perfections for the will: they draw it towards the eternal good things and give it feelings of

friendship with God. Prudence also has an important part to play, for it can seize upon the intentions of charity and transform them into practical realizations, putting the will under the control of justice, ruling the passions by temperance and strength.

Prudence comes in between the inspirations of the love of God which it arranges in order, and the active powers which it sets in motion. It is the virtue of governing, the hub of the supernatural moral life : it changes the aims of love into detailed acts, and love proves itself in deeds.

For the gifts the plan is the same : the gift of fear perfects the virtue of temperance ; the gift of strength perfects the virtue of strength ; the gift of piety perfects the virtue of justice. By raising it higher, the gift of counsel will perfect the virtue of prudence. And higher still, the gifts of knowledge and understanding will assist the virtue of faith, the supreme gift of wisdom will assist the divine virtue of charity.

Since the gift of counsel perfects the faculty of practical governing, it is found seated at the centre of the Holy Spirit's working in us. Higher, there is contemplation ; lower, the practical everyday life ; in between counsel throws the light of contemplation on to practical dictates, like prudence, but in its own way which is a superior one. It has the part of direction to play over the other lesser gifts : strength, piety, justice—as prudence has over the virtue of religion, justice, strength, temperance.

## II THE INTERVENTIONS OF THE SPIRIT OF COUNSEL

Here one could object—How can counsel be an inspiration ? Nothing resembles an inspiration less than prudence, which is concerned with knowing what side to take, and which weighs everything in order to choose the best. Counsels are the longest and most involved things

imaginable. Nothing resembles an inspiration less than a counsel.

This is true of counsels one gives, but not of those one receives ; if they come to us from a competent person, they come already mature, acceptable there and then. Now the counsels which come to us through the Spirit of the Father and the Son are the fruit of the counsel of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit gives us them all ready-made. He inspires us with them inwardly and places them in our heart.

Do Counsels exist ?

We have experience of them. Joan of Arc knew that well when she replied to her judges : ' You have taken your counsel, and I have taken mine.' She spoke, it is true, of her voices, but her voices were voices of God ; she opposed the counsels of heaven to those of men. Counsels of heaven are never failing to any Christian soul.

The gift of counsel is absolutely indispensable in the spiritual life if we are to persevere. We have to guide our spiritual life : it is not enough for that to have a strong nature, built for temperance and justice. We must have a directing faculty for the whole thing : conditions of life change, plans are altered, our own personal life does not remain the same, we vary with the age, we change, we advance, we fall back. We have to adapt these powers of strength, justice, temperance, to a material essentially malleable, difficult to mould in the art-pattern of saints. By ourselves we shall not know how to succeed.

Moreover, we are short-sighted, we do not see far within ourselves, and we possess a tool well-fitted to cover up our eyes—self love, which hides from us the ways of prudence. Life, people and things, turn endlessly around us. We do not see well, or if we do see well we have not the firmness necessary to impose on ourselves our own

judgment. Sometimes we squint, if the right course seems too hard ; in order to take care of our attachments, our habits we use stratagem against the inspirations of the love of God. Such is often our psychology in the ruling of ourselves.

The virtue of prudence, though supernatural, places itself within this poor psychology : becoming ours, it belongs to us to employ it, keeping to ourselves the initiative. It is indeed a supernatural perfection, but we still have passions, secret aims, we do not act with frankness, with perseverance. Yet when we have once conceived the intention of the love of God, we must change it into something practical to be immediately done : such is the demand of perfect virtue.

Whence comes the obstacle to this perfection ?

Our Lord said, ' The light of the body is the eye ; if your eye is whole, the whole body will be full of light ' ; if your eye is unwell, if vice disfigures it, the whole body will be in darkness. Our body is our activity ; our eye is the light of conscience. If our eye is not clean, how shall we be able to follow the guidance of charity ; yes, if it is yes ; no, if it is no ? That is the weak side.

It is in order to help out this weakness that the Holy Spirit intervenes. For there is another more comforting aspect : we do not spend our whole life in manoeuvring ; there are frank decisions, or else we should not be fit to bear the name ' Christian.' When the Holy Spirit sees the just soul struggling, he gives it good advice : persuasive counsels, which are effective in making it realise God's will, so insistent are they. They come to look for us for the most ordinary deeds, for the material of the gifts is not grown forcibly . . . We are under the influence of some passion, annoyance, for example ; a voice says to us : contain yourself, be quiet, master yourself. We wonder

what to say to so-and-so ; we reflect, light comes : this is what you should say, this is what you should not : we have received advice from on high. We are tempted to go too fast ; something restrains us, makes us think twice, makes us pray before acting : counsel keeps us from rushing headlong. If we are, on the contrary, given to negligence, he rouses us. In the most serious circumstances, we have trials, apprehensions, a vicissitude of fortune, we are troubled ; we peacefully recollect ourselves and there is the divine answer, ' Why are you troubled ? Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' Or again, ' Cast thy care upon the Lord, he will nourish thee.' All at once, at the moment when we were perhaps going to take a desperate course, we are illuminated, consoled, and we can continue our way. Now the Spirit suggests, urges ; now he reproveth, rebukes ; that is remorse. Now he makes judgments ; he declares within us what is good, what is evil.

### III COUNSEL AND CONSCIENCE

But surely this is the philosopher's conscience which speaks, you will say, this is not the Holy Spirit !

What is conscience ? It is the dictate of right reason, which is a participation in the light of God. Now, this voice of conscience strongly resembles the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. Our reason is right when it is under the influence of God's reason, when it speaks at its dictation. But in a person made divine through grace, who possesses something of the essence of God, who is under the constant influence of the Holy Spirit, of Christ's grace, there is more : there is inspiration properly so-called. All that, however, conscience and inspiration, are part of the same whole. In the concrete it is the same God who illumines our conscience and who gives us inspirations. For the

true dictates of conscience, when a person is submissive to the suzerainty of the gifts, are in reality inspirations of the Holy Spirit, or rather, the inspirations of the gift of counsel express themselves by the luminous dictates of conscience. In short, philosophy alone cannot explain all the supernatural psychology of conscience. In the divinized man there is a compénétration of the natural and the supernatural life. Theology takes into consideration this complete reality, and in the instigations of conscience which force themselves on us, it discerns this supernatural clement : inspiration.

Has not our Lord assured us that the Holy Spirit would be our great conscience ? ' I shall send you the Holy Spirit, he will receive of mine, he will tell you all I have said to you.' He will bring it all back to you at the moment of need, in the form of an intangible, invisible persuasion, in the form of a counsel.

#### IV PRACTICE

It remains for us to see how the gift of counsel can suggest to us, in certain cases, such or such a word of our Lord, which suffices for the needs of our whole Christian life. Let us glance at our lives.

We find ourselves at fault, for example, by falling short in fraternal charity. We have done wrong, we can see it ; but in view of the hostility which still rankles, we cannot smooth ourselves down and arrive at the state of peace necessary to receive our Lord. Suddenly we hear in our deepest self this word : ' If, when thou dost present thy gift at the altar, thou rememberest thy brother hath aught against thee, leave thy gift at the altar and go first to be reconciled with thy brother ; then come and offer thy gift.' We hesitated, we had not the courage : here we are set free. Through the spirit of counsel the enlightening

impulse has reached us. We follow the commandment of the gospel, and reconciled, we go to communion.

This soul is tempted by the demon of vain glory, who often slips inside good works. Pride, says St Vincent Ferrer, prides itself even on backslidings ; after falling and then making an act of humility, this is what we tend to think : How humble I have been ! The lawful satisfaction of a good work thus changes into self-love. One is swept along and the good is contaminated. One does not suspect it perhaps. And it is then that one remembers this saying : ' Let your light so shine before men that seeing it they may give glory to your Father who is in heaven.' And so we understand that we must have but one aim, that the light must not shine for our own glory, that we must not draw vanity out of our good works. Or again, in the same sort of thing, it is another saying that the Spirit suggests : ' Let not your left hand know what your right hand does.' ' Pray to the Lord in secret, with the door closed, without anyone knowing. If you fast, anoint your face, so that no-one sees you to fast . . .' Our Lord esteemed obscurity in good works and humility so much. And what of myself ? Carrying on over the ground of self-love, I was about to lose the fruit of my action !

On account of blunders or faults, we must be ready to receive reproofs. In place of simply acknowledging our wrongs, we look for explanations, we wish to get even with ourselves, to excuse ourselves, not to accuse ourselves. But there echoes at the bottom of our heart the voice of our Lord, ' Let your speech be Yes, Yes, when it is yes ; No when it is no.' And we regain self-control : I shall say what is the truth. Now we are freed from our duplicities and our pharisaisms.

Another time the tempted man says to himself : This man whom I see has many faults, he is a blunderer and will

not acknowledge it. He does annoy me ... I cannot live with him ; what a burden ...' And suddenly he hears : ' Take care that, when you observe the speck in your brother's eye, you do not overlook the beam in your own.' He understands and says : ' This man is like me : he has his faults, I have mine, we are fellow-sufferers.'

Amid the trials of ill-health or despondency, when inward and outward crises make one feel the burden of life, one cries out, ' Lord what have I done against thee ? I cannot endure this.' But at once the saying of the gospel makes itself heard : ' If anyone come after me, let him renounce himself, let him take up his cross daily and follow me.' And then one replies, ' I wanted to follow thee Lord, I have that thing thou didst promise me : my cross to carry ... to renounce myself. I understand and I accept it.' Or again : ' Come after me, you who are heavy-laden ... Take up your burden, which is mine ... it is light.' For I have carried it and you are carrying it with me. Our Lord thus shines into us the light of his own cross. He gives understanding of the mystery of the cross. He says to us as he said to St Peter fleeing from martyrdom : ' I am going back to Rome to be crucified anew.' Well then, let us go back to Rome, and let us take up our cross again.

We should have to quote the whole gospel. The Holy Spirit makes the light of our conscience twice as bright by his inspirations. Now in a soft manner : a whisper, a murmur, but persuasive and insistent. At other times, a hard reproof, when we do not listen and are obstinate. He works in such a way that we are illumined in all circumstances. The gospel teaches in a general way. The Holy Spirit makes the gospel counsels come to life before us at the right moment, in face of difficulties. ' He will tell you, said our Lord, all I have said unto you.'



The work of the gift of counsel is a reality. Let us bear it in mind. By sanctifying grace we have the gift of counsel, we have the capacity of being worked on by its inspirations ; being convinced that we are under its influence let us make use of it ; let us make a practice of having recourse to its light, and when the need makes itself felt, it will help us as long as we need it.

V *Mater Boni Consilii*

The Most Holy Virgin is mediatrix, universal mediatrix in the order of grace. Now she is hailed specially by the Church as mediatrix of the graces which we are discussing. Leo XIII added to her litany this invocation : *Mother of Good Counsel* which used to be an invocation dear to the Order of St Benedict.

The Blessed Virgin certainly has the right and the power to give us her counsels directly : but her influence also exerts itself to obtain for us the counsels of the Holy Ghost : she is able to pray to the Holy Ghost and act upon him, so that he gives us his inspiration whenever we need.

What is there for us to do ?

Let us set our gift in motion, let us place ourselves under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit ; let us also place ourselves under the protection of the Holy Virgin : she will remind us that we should have recourse to the Holy Spirit, she will herself ask him to come and help us. The perfect gift will then be doubly guaranteed : on our part, since we offer our sail to the blowing of the Holy Spirit who will give us his gifts : on the part of the Blessed Virgin, who, over and above her own gifts, will know how to launch our good will by praying the Holy Spirit that he may give us his gifts when we need them.

## CHAPTER VIII

## The Attitude of the Merciful

*'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.'* (Matt., 5.7.)

## I MERCY THE PROPER EFFECT OF THE GIFT OF COUNSEL

Mercy is, according to St Augustine and St Thomas, the proper effect of the gift of counsel. Doubtless the gift of counsel has a wider sway than that of mercy. We can receive from the Holy Spirit counsels for everything, witness the diversity we find in the gospel. Counsel is a directive gift, and it directs all the moral virtues, humility, chastity, justice, piety, religion . . . the counsels of the Holy Spirit extend to all orders of things. Why do we connect mercy specially with this gift ?

In every virtue, as in every work in general, there is a point where the excellence of this virtue shows itself, where it attains its culmination. St Thomas says that fortitude does not give its fulness except in martyrdom ; he therefore concludes that martyrdom is the proper act of fortitude, although nonetheless there is an act of fortitude in resisting a lesser pain. Similarly, mercy is the proper effect of the gift of counsel, for it is there that it gives its fulness.

## II IN WHAT MERCY CONSISTS

First of all, let us look at it by contrast. Mercy is not just fraternal charity, which extends its effect to all, namely, the effect of kindliness. Charity is universal, it does good without respecting persons ; we can do good to our superiors or to a rich man. They are not so many

'men of misery.' We distinguish already, then, mercy and charity.

Mercy is by no means almsgiving. Almsgiving is an act of mercy : a merciful man directs his activity in giving alms. We know that there are seven kinds of corporal mercy and seven kinds of spiritual mercy. But corporal almsgiving, which has the body as its end, easily goes further, as far as the soul, which is spiritual.

Nor is Mercy ordinary kindness which is something more general.

Mercy is a feeling of pity which is inspired within us by charity, and which bends us towards those in misery, or towards him who is destitute, either from a temporal or spiritual viewpoint. There is no mercy without 'men of misery.' It is the man of misery who awakens the feeling of mercy, which must be regulated by prudence and adopted by charity, so that the love of God be its motive-force. Mercy is a special degree of fraternal charity ; in it our love of our brethren gives to the full ; to be merciful we must love our neighbour more than just by being good and charitable.

Mercy has for its object every kind of misery, physical, moral or intellectual ; it sets itself to remedy this misery to fill in the void opened by this misery. To remedy a great misery, it is necessary to be rich, powerful, superior. An act of kindness for a good-natured person is a charity, but one that is not hard. When we find ourselves confronted with a depth of sorrow to be comforted, when we wish to go to the help of someone to drag him out of misery, it is a special and excelling act of charity, which presupposes that we possess a storehouse of treasures, of kindness and something that enables us to be of real help in great need.

For this reason, in the very words of St Thomas, mercy

is the most proper act, the most special act of God. For indeed God is the supreme being *par excellence*, nothing is lacking in him. When he looks towards his poor creature, he is drawn to come to his assistance, because he is rich and good : misery attracts the gift of the divine bounty. To God all is miserable, even the angels—though we must except the angels who see his face and the saints in glory, for they are now satisfied. All have need of God. God has to communicate being to everything and support everything in its needs. It behoves him who created this good world to bend towards it in a regard of love, which is one of pure mercy. All our kindnesses do not attain the nobleness of this love, which, lacking nothing, leans towards that which needs everything, to give it everything.

And so we see that mercy differs from meekness. Meekness makes us restrain in ourselves those feelings of unpleasantness, annoyance, wickedness, irritation, so that only those actions proceed from us that are gentle and good for our neighbour, whoever he be. It first of all inspires us to put ourselves right, to polish up our habits and to pacify our passions, afterwards to greet others with gentleness and to win their hearts. It is a rule universal in its application. Mercy, on the other hand, is a charity which designs to succour only the miserable; and just as meekness does not always presuppose misery which is indispensable to mercy, mercy in its turn does not always demand the interior correction<sup>1</sup> with which gentleness cannot do without.

### III THE LINK BETWEEN MERCY AND THE GIFT OF COUNSEL

How does the Holy Spirit, in sending us his counsel,

<sup>1</sup> The word ' correction ' is taken here in a special sense and signifies this state which inspires us with meekness, ' correcting ' our harshness.

make us merciful ? Why is mercy the proper effect of the gift of counsel ? It is now easy to understand.

The gift is concerned with the reality of our misery.

The gift of counsel, as it perfects prudence which is the faculty of our personal self-ruling, must have the primary quality of prudence which is to make us see things as they are, to make us see true, but radically. The prudent man sees true, he is then also called a judicious man. He sees the right mean, the right side to take. He sees true in himself ; his nature, his character, his passions, in order to contain them ; his qualities, in order to employ them. He sees truth in others, in all those who have any dealings with him.<sup>1</sup>

The gift of counsel should then have the result of making us see true in ourselves and others.

What is seeing true ?

To see true, is above all to recognize the misery of everything. The great truth is that we are a collection of miserable creatures, ourselves not excluded. We possess nothing truly good, truly strong : our nature is limited and without the mercy of the good God we shall not do anything except in an extremely mediocre way. Moreover this nature is fallen. God made it powerful and right, by its original justice. Man, who held in himself the future of humanity, despite the gifts given him, sinned ; he separated himself from God. Our Lord, it is true, by his sacrifice has repaired the fault, but many still do not cleave fast to him and remain in their misery ; and among Christians themselves there remains that evil inclination, due to the wounds inflicted by sin. Jesus Christ, in

<sup>1</sup> Note that to see true is not the only quality of prudence—the strength of will for execution is also necessary : the prudent man should rule.

reconciling us, rendered us once more *fit to live* the divine life ; but if the fault has been repaired in the higher part of our soul, if fortified by grace and charity the soul can mark out a road to happiness, nevertheless there remains a burning furnace ; the passions are contained but they are still alive, their heat inflames us towards evil : spiritual pride, concupiscence of the flesh, anger . . . four wounds have been left to us, that we might have more merits for gaining heaven.

Those who have not been reborn by baptism are in a yet more miserable state, and Christians who have not kept their grace have something of this state of appalling wretchedness.

As for those who do their best to keep themselves *in charity*, even they have their lot of sadness.

We say, then, and it is true ; humanity is a collection of wretches, ourselves the chiefest. God sees it, and he pours his goodness on all. Our Lord says : ' He makes the rain to fall upon good and bad, he makes the sun to shine upon just and unjust,' in things spiritual and temporal. He sees the misery of everybody, and that is why his kindnesses are so superabundant : without that the world could not keep its balance. The wisdom, the prudence of God shines in his mercy.

The God of the gospel, incarnate wisdom, is a living manifestation of the divine mercy ; this quality shines in our Lord's person. We have there a proof of his divinity : it is a strong apologetic argument : if our Lord were not God, who could have suggested to the evangelists who were setting out to describe an incarnate God, to make him merciful, to hit the nail right on the head in giving him precisely this fundamental attribute of divinity ? But it is precisely because he was God, that our Lord put into action this divine mercy in such a natural way : being God

he was infinitely merciful, to the highest degree. It is here that his wonderful wisdom, his prudence was manifest.

The most touching trait which the gospel gives us of the mercy of God in our Lord is perhaps that of the adulterous woman. Some Pharisees, having surprised this woman, led her before the Master and told him that the law of Moses ordered her to be stoned. They asked his opinion. 'He among you that is without sin, let him throw the first stone,' said the Saviour to these hypocrites, who soon put themselves at a distance, one after the other. Then, finding himself alone with the unfortunate woman : 'No-one hath condemned thee,' he said to her, 'nor do I. Go in peace and sin no more.'

Here we have set out before us the short view of man and the clear vision of our Lord who is God : these men are without pity, they are glad to have caught this woman, they want to apply the law to her. They do not see that, fundamentally, they are more wretched than she ; her fault is serious, but it is less than theirs. They have spiritual pride, hypocrisy in religious matters, a complete lack of charity ; whitened without 'like sepulchres,' they keep the externals of the law, 'they strain at gnats' and think themselves pure. Have they any idea, these sepulchres, that they are full of corruption ? Passion has blinded their vision. Man does not know what man is. Madmen !

Our Lord himself 'knew what was in man.' He saw there a deep wretchedness, physical and moral, powerlessness to will good, the ability to will evil. In the face of this ocean of poverty and misery, what is this woman ? A particular case of the universal law. Her fault is serious, but Jesus is not surprised by it, there are greater faults among these Pharisees who wish to stone her. He sees further, he sees the depth of misery which lurks in every

human heart, every human will, every human life. He sees it clearly, nothing is hid from him, and in his human nature he is fully helped by the spirit of counsel. Then he loses interest in this harsh human justice : he shows this by writing on the ground. Why ? We do not know. He wrote once only, and it was on the sand. The accusers appreciate their own ridiculous position, and, doubtless seeing the faults that they hid in their hearts, they go away, And then, it is the word of mercy : all the mercy of our Lord, his love of sinners is in this word.

He would go by preference to the sinners. He lodged at the house of a Zachaeus, a publican, of a class of sinners. Also he was reproached for living in the company of loose women. For a God to make himself a reputation like that is indeed an extraordinary mercy.

The merciful man sees true ; in consequence he is essentially prudent. He possesses all the elements for true judgments, he is able to declare the truth, to point out the line of conduct to take. Mercy, then, will be the precious pearl among all the acts which the gift of counsel inspires. If we wish to see true, to be prudent, let us be merciful. We shall see what manner of men we are, we shall also know the men who are around us. As mercy makes us get right inside everyone's misery, we shall the better seize upon the splendour of the good that God has left there, and which we must recognize, even in those who are bad, wicked, vicious.

When the servants asked the master of the field if they ought to pluck up the cockle sown by the enemy : he said, ' No, let the corn and the cockle grow until harvest ; then they shall be separated.' Our Lord has compassion because of this splendour of the good which he discovers in the most perverse wills. On the cross, in front of that crowd who had crucified their king, in front of the cruel

pharisees, he says : ' Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.' In every evil there is always a bedrock of good upon which to rest ; in every soul, a secret energy, whereby to raise itself up to eternal life.

Let us try to see as Christ did. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to make us penetrate into the misery of everyone else, and our own. Then we shall no more be roused by Pharisaical indignation which creeps into the short-sighted who have not received the gift of counsel. No longer will it be scorn for others, these disdainful and cruel mannerisms with which we sometimes treat miserable poor people, not seeing the evil from which they are suffering, and which is the cause of their repelling ugliness. Even if someone says unkind things to us, even if someone wishes us harm, we understand that this comes from a hidden sore from which the person suffers, and that we must have compassion for these unfortunate ones.

The Holy Spirit having given us this true view, let us allow ourselves to be directed by it in our works of mercy.

#### IV PRUDENCE AND MERCY

The gift of counsel brings to perfection in a divine manner, as we have seen, the work of prudence. Now what does prudence counsel us ? Without any doubt to take the best means of saving ourselves. The gift of counsel must lay quite open in an altogether divine fashion, this best means, which is precisely mercy.

There is no precept more inculcated in the gospel than that ' In what measure you shall measure out to others, it shall be measured unto you.' We are thus warned that mercy is the only way of obtaining mercy. The supreme prudence is to be merciful ! We see then the narrow link between mercy and the gift of counsel which brings prudence to perfection.



In a scene in the gospel, our Lord shows us what will be the attitude of his Father towards those who do not show mercy. A king asked his servant about money he owed him. The latter had no means of paying, and the master ordered him at first to be sold. The unhappy man asked for mercy and the master forgave him all the debt. (It is the picture of the wretched creatures we used to be before God with original sin and our own sins, and he has forgiven us all.) And then the forgiven servant found his fellow who was also his debtor, and he began to throttle him. In his turn this fellow-servant asked mercy, but the creditor did not choose to hear and delivered his debtor over to justice. Witnesses saw this and reported to the king who pronounced a stern judgment: I forgave you your debt, you should have done the same for your brother. And he punished him as he deserved. 'Thus,' adds our Lord, 'shall it be done to you, if you do not forgive your injuries from the bottom of your heart.'

It is the law. Mercy will be shown us, if we have shown mercy. It follows then that really thoughtful people, prudent people, must show mercy and take to the letter the petition of the *Pater*: 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.' In the measure and proportion that injuries and miseries come, the prudent will make provisions of mercy to obtain for themselves the Father's mercy. It is a motive of self-interest, but our Lord pertinently decided to put it before us, that we might become more watchful.

Prudence counsels us mercy, and the practice of mercy will make us yet more prudent. We shall receive the backwash of any mercies we may have shown. If we show mercy, God will give us a deepened grace of counsel. Thus from mercy to prudence and from prudence to mercy, this will become an endless circle which will burst out

into a great power of self control and merits without number.

#### V MERCY AND SALVATION

In order to be saved, we must not only obtain mercy, but also 'seek the kingdom of God and his justice', extend this kingdom, make the charity of Christ reign in men's hearts. The gift of counsel must teach us the best means of succeeding in this, and again it is *par excellence* mercy, a new link between the gift of counsel and this virtue.

Great statesmen believe that the way to govern is to know how to use force opportunely. For us our great resource is to get within this universal misery in the world and to try, by countless good deeds, to fill up this chasm. Those who are merciful attain, even in supernatural things, results which violence cannot. To have sympathetic words, to be good, good again and always good, is the means of reigning over hearts. It is the most penetrating political strategy. If it is necessary to exclude violence, we must not for all that neglect authority: brotherly correction is counted among the works of mercy. But ordinarily it is by gentleness, the good things proceeding from a sympathetic heart open to the miseries of others, that we shall have entry into other people's hearts. St Thomas says, 'The gift of counsel directs very specially in works of mercy.' It gives sympathy which opens the heart and, when the heart is gained, all the rest comes. Through mercy the apostle of the Saviour leads sinners to the confessional, to communion, to a serious Christian life, to the sovereign dignity of the religious life in all its fulness. Let us have the sympathetic approach, not considering faults, although we see them: let us first set at rights bodily miseries, then we shall enter into inward pains; let us be compassionate: we shall reign

over hearts, we shall raise up souls. And thus by saving others, we ourselves shall certainly be saved. God will account us good and faithful servants.

To be merciful is, then, to be fundamentally wise and prudent. Is it surprising if the gift *of* counsel leads us by preference to mercy ?

The counsel of the Holy<sup>l</sup> Spirit knows the means of ruling. In the first place, we must be sons of the Holy Spirit, we must dwell under the influence of the gift of counsel. Let us be in familiar converse with him. He will communicate more *to* us of the spirit of mercy, and will direct us in its exercise, make us seize the means of being good. Thus we shall be prudently guided in the way of salvation, sure of receiving mercy one day.

Let us address ourselves to the Holy<sup>l</sup> Spirit whenever we have need of being merciful, in order to see true for our own interest, for that of others ; let us turn our sail and place it under the action of his breath, and let us not begin or continue any work of mercy without having recourse constantly to his good counsel.

## CHAPTER IX

### The Gift of Knowledge

*'The invisible things of God are seen through the things that are created, namely, his eternal power and divinity'* (Rom. 1.20.)

#### I THE TRANSITION FROM PRACTICAL GIFTS TO INTELLECTUAL GIFTS

We have completed the moral section of our study. With the gift of counsel we have placed the key-stone to our moral life through the gifts : fear, piety, fortitude, counsel make up a kind of general rule of the Holy Spirit which must bring peace to our interior world. Thus protected, the highest powers of our soul, our intelligence with our faith, our will with hope and charity, will be able, in short, to develop peacefully in the love of God.

We must now make for the fountain-head from which come the inspirations of the Holy Spirit ; in raising ourselves to the very principle of our divine life, we shall reinforce its energies, we shall enter into a more intimate relationship with our God by faith and charity. The divine Spirit will assist our faith through knowledge and understanding ; he will assist our charity through wisdom.

We are going to penetrate, then, into the kingdom of God, into a spiritual world ruled by our direct contact with him. Under the aegis of the practical gifts, we were concerned with our contacts with men and with ourselves ; we were seeking to attain all the perfection which God wishes to put there by the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Now we are *going* to contemplate the height to which *faith* and charity must attain by the impulse of the same Spirit.

It is in our relations with God that the practical moral virtues find their guiding principle. In this moral order if we are looking for the best way of performing an act, it is in order to give more room in our life to the love of God. We first *of all* establish the demands of the love of God, and then we determine our obligations, ruling ourselves by these demands. Such is, *so to say, the game of* our Christian *life* upon the grounds of the moral virtues, in our contacts with men and with ourselves. Our theological life has another rhythm. Through the whole movement of faith and charity we ascend towards the intimate life of God. Through the action of these virtues we imitate the very life of God, we perform the acts reserved to God : to know himself as he is and to love himself in the measure of his knowledge. By the mercy of God who gives us to share in his nature and power, we are trying to live our divine life, as children seeking to imitate their father ; such is the role of faith, hope and charity.

## II THE NATURE OF FAITH

Faith is a virtue which makes us assent to the truths about God contained in revelation, particularly in our Lord's revelation. Being convinced by faith that God is such as this revelation teaches, we enter into relation with the true God by an act allied to the glorious act which God makes

<sup>1</sup> The domain of the moral virtues itself must be ruled by divine love : charity is the perfect form of all the virtues ; but the inpourings or influences of charity act quite differently here than in the higher domain of the theological virtues, and it is this that we are going to show by the study of the gifts of knowledge, understanding and wisdom.

when he contemplates himself, and which the angels and the blessed make with him in heaven. There are not two true Gods, the one in heaven and the one in the gospel : it is with the true God in heaven that we are on terms of acquaintance, when we believe the gospel. What a precious thing is this light, shining upon what one day will make our happiness ! Already we have the substance of what we hope for, it is put at our level by faith. Thanks to faith, we rely upon the very testimony of God, who is truth. St Thomas sings in the *Adoro te* : ‘I believe whatever the son of God said.’

Faith, because it is a perfection *of our* human nature (we cannot believe against our reason), calls in certain arguments to help us believe. This is apologetics, but faith does not depend on apologetics. Philosophy and apologetics have to convince us that, in making an act of faith we are doing something reasonable, that is all. After that we must believe, believe in an absolute way because the object of our faith has been revealed. As the motive of our faith, we have the testimony of God : God has said it, and God, by his grace, gives testimony within that it is so, as St John affirms : ‘He who believeth has the testimony of God in himself.’ A baptized child, when he attains the age of discretion, believes naturally, as if he were in the full light. The inner testimony of God turns our heart and mind to believe. This testimony is the true motive of faith.

On the other hand, as our faith is a virtue of the present life during which we are going towards heaven, it retains a certain obscurity ; it is like a small light which guides us in a dark place : we have not yet reached the land of the light, we look at it from afar. This obscurity leaves us dissatisfied from the intellectual point of view : we would like to see clearly : it is painful for us to obey faith

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endlessly by repeated acts of the will, instead of having clear light ; it would be so good to see. But because we are upon the road, in a time when we must merit arriving at the end, we ought not to see. It follows that in our faith there is, not doubt—we firmly give our adherence—but as it were an ebb and flow : we experience a movement of oscillation, our thought is not fixed by the sight of the object. St Thomas says *Cogitatio* : there is a certain agitation, a going and coming of thought. This explains why, in prayer, we are so subject to distraction, to the ‘ misses ’ of our mind ; we should not attribute them to negligence alone, but to the fact that we are not fixed, our contemplation has nothing of fixed and permanent regard in it. If we were able, as the angels, to see the divine essence, it would be quite different. But the object of our contemplation has something disconcerting for an intelligence made for seeing, which seeks to see, and does not see. Then, in its nature, faith connotes a certain obscurity. We must give it up as a *bad job* ; we cannot with its light alone see God : in heaven we shall receive the light *of glory for* this happy vision ; upon earth we are held down by the ties of our body.

### III THE NECESSITY OF THE GIFTS OF KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Faith presents two other difficulties which understanding and knowledge overcome.

The first difficulty arises from the fact that faith, a supernatural light, is rooted in our human reason. It perfects it, but it receives from *it its limitations*. *Our* reason was not made for the infinite ; it has to acquire its knowledge *by means of the* senses to which it is tied ; *the senses* inform it about material, visible things out of which it must abstract its most spiritual *thoughts*.

Sensible things and the evidences of our reason, concerning visible and understandable things, attract our mind and can direct its gaze and absorb it. Creatures attract our understanding, and beyond our understanding, our heart which, seeing them to be fine and good, cleaves to them. And so much is lost for charity. The role of poor faith, which speaks of invisible things, then becomes quite difficult. It is the gift of knowledge which must supply the remedy for this imperfection.

The second difficulty comes from revelation, from dogmas. The human form in which they are expressed prevents them from entirely satisfying us. As far as possible Holy Scripture raises our ideas so that we may grasp, with our human conceptions, the divine. But we penetrate its language incompletely, we do not get down to the foundations. It is hard to comprehend the meaning of a parable. It is harder to enter into a mystery, that of the Incarnation for instance, despite the explanations which theology gives. We remain in wonder, we see that it would be sweet to understand, we cannot sound the depths of the mystery hidden beneath the crust of the letter. Our faith is arrested by ideas in human form which cannot express the divine reality. Hence the necessity of a gift which introduces us into the heart of the mystery, and it is the gift of understanding.

#### IV THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE

That which makes the gift of knowledge necessary, is the obsession which the most sincere believer experiences concerning creatures which are the natural object of his understanding. We see the things of this world and we do not see God ; we are drawn towards earth and tempted to abandon divine contemplation.

Creatures take up our thoughts to such an extent, in fact,



that we allow ourselves to be deluded by their false knowledge. Some think creatures can be explained without God. They have the false knowledge of creatures. Others think that man was born good, that evil does not exist in him originally, that therefore there is no need to seek to purify his heart, and that all nature being equally good, one can give oneself up to its attractions with perfect freedom, and enjoy them as much as possible. Others see nothing but evil ; they think that if there were a God he would not permit these terrible calamities : war, pestilence, famine, poverty, sickness, pains of all sorts. Others admit God, but think that such and such a thing escapes his providence, liberty for example, and the whole order which depends on it. Thus do they wish to withdraw man and society from the divine control.

The fascination which nature causes is due above all to its power of seduction : she possesses partial good and through that she attracts our eyes to herself. We have the desire of happiness. Creatures say to us : We are this happiness. And we are tempted to give them our entire consent and to forget God. Do we entirely escape from this materialism ? Do not the goods of this world hold too large a place within us ? We are in full sight of them, we attach too much importance to them, and we abandon the thought of God, or at least it becomes blurred and distant. Our faith is so often troubled in its movements towards God, in spite of the strength of the divine testimony, by the haunting memory of creatures. It is very true, visible things do attract us : they enslave our understanding and our heart.

The Holy Spirit, seeing our faith surrounded by these obsessions, has desired to set us free : he does so by the inspiration of the gift of knowledge. Such is the *raison d'être* of this gift, which must make us conceive a right

idea of creatures so that they be not an obstacle, but an assistance ; so that they do not trouble our faith, but become its help.

#### V THE TWO ASPECTS OF THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE

The Holy Spirit, by a primary inspiration of the gift of knowledge, will make us understand in the depths of our supernaturalized heart, the emptiness, insufficiency, vanity of creatures ; he will make us try them, sample nothingness with delight. This certainly is not the sum total of contemplation, it is merely the first stage. In this light it becomes clear to us that the things which were holding us back are nothing. Great conversions are effected by this intense feeling of the vanity of the goods of this world. St Augustine was muddling along in the love of earth ; he returned by the path of a desire for happiness which God put into him. He saw the little satisfaction which we find in this valley of tears : everything here is of such short duration, the joys of sin are so bitter. Such then is this first effect of the gift of knowledge : it makes us realise the nothingness of creatures ; it teaches us through the events of life, by our losses and bereavements ; it is a friend who betrays us, a fortune which crumbles, a loved one who dies, and we see what man is. St Augustine loses his very dear friend Alypius and his disappointment leads him back to God. He sang the praises of these disappointments : his *Confessions* are full of them ; to them he owed his happiness.

When a man knows that he should not linger at all with creatures which deceive us bitterly, he knows with the great knowledge of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord thus prepared St Catherine of Siena for sanctity, saying to her, ' You are she who is not.'

The first fruit of this knowledge with which the Holy

Spirit inspires us is, then, to know the shortness, the smallness, the nothingness of earthly things, their powerlessness to content our hearts eager for true happiness. When we have this knowledge, we are freed from the hold of perishable goods and we can throw ourselves on God.

Creatures are nothing. At least they are nothing in themselves. They possess, however, what they have received, they exist, they have beauty, goodness and value. The world has a reflection which comes from another direction. And it is the sense of this beauty, the true significance of this *reflection* that the gift of knowledge must teach us. Such is the other fruit of its inspiration.

We must examine *further* what creatures tell us. 'The heavens declare the *glory of God*' according to the psalm. In the splendour of a starry night, faced with this world of marvels, gazing at the stars, we come to think that one of them which will soon rise as it does every morning, comes near enough to us to warm and enlighten us. Then we muse that there is the work of an intelligence which makes no mistake and which hides within its designs a peerless goodness. The world then becomes transparent, it is betraying God, the divine intelligence and goodness.

If we penetrate into the life of men and notice their generous actions, we are seeing the reflection of a higher moral beauty. And if these men are truly religious, they present to us as it were a transparent vision of God.

It is the same with the history of humanity : providence directs all things to their ends, sets up the just man, punishes the wicked, supports the weak. This wonderful behaviour escapes the eye of many, but St Augustine was transported with wonder by reason of it. The counsel of God revealed this wisdom to him by the events of history. Looking at our own life, how it has been directed, the

point we have reached, we are led to say : ' O Lord, it is by thy right hand I have been guided.'

There is another fruit of knowledge : it makes us see through the medium of created things—nature, happenings, people—the invisible things they disclose, the footprints of God, his omnipotence and his divinity.

#### VI THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE IN OUR LORD

Our Lord possessed this knowledge pre-eminently, even as he possessed all the gifts ; he knew the pettiness of things, he understood the voice which arises from nature to proclaim the Creator.

Having depicted that man who had an abundant harvest and wishes to enlarge his barns, then give himself a time of ease, he added: 'Unhappy man, this very night they require thy soul of thee . . . and all that, to whom will it belong ?' Elsewhere, speaking of the end of the world, he tells us that it will come as a thief, he shows us the cities of pleasure, Sodom and Gomorrha, reduced to nothingness . . . He has the vision of the poverty of human things, of the nothingness of the world.

He also sees God transparently in creatures. In the Sermon on the Mount he mentions the little birds who neither sow nor reap . . . the lilies of the fields who do not spin, and he ascends from this spectacle to the heavenly Father, whose goodness towards all creatures flames out to his eyes.

When God grants us thus to see the world, everything conspires together in the sense of faith. As St Francis of Assisi, who perhaps most resembled our Lord, even in his body, finds in water or in fire, magnificent things ; he stops before the birds, dazzled as before stars, and he sees in the whole of nature the features of the heavenly Father. This vision is a gift which God makes to holy persons ;

they take everything as an occasion for raising themselves to God ; nature instead of being to them an obstacle, becomes a help ; humanity with its fascinations, is to them a motive for praising the Lord. Again it is the effect of the gift of knowledge.

The Spirit of Knowledge inspires in us, then, a new vision of creatures. He makes us see their nothingness, their powerlessness to satisfy our wants, showing us their contingency, their dependence on God : they are nothing in themselves. He shows us in their perfection something of God's perfection. Looking at them thus, we are at the same time preserved from their snares and led through them to the Lord. It is seeing things the other way round from human reason, for which the visible alone counts. We see two things only : a nothingness which could not turn our heart from God, and a being which invokes God in our mind.

This knowledge is at the true source of contemplation : it is already a contemplation, not the highest kind, but the lowest, a contemplation none the less because while remaining on the plane of created things, by a communication of the Spirit of God reflected there, we rise to look for the face of God. Our faith, by the gift of knowledge, is endowed with a sort of vertical movement, as Dionysius says, which from creatures leads us on to the Creator.

Among the graces of prayer St Teresa distinguishes that which she calls the first supernatural prayer : recollection. Not that good meditation, or ' the simple prayer of faith ' of which Bossuet speaks, is not supernatural, but in the so-called prayer of recollection we do not any longer direct our thoughts, as God works in us by his own action. St Teresa then teaches that the soul, having been brought out from the interior castle, has wandered abroad, over the flowers, in the meadows . . . then it has been taken with an

inexplicable 'disgust,' it has heard the most gentle whisper of the Master *of the* castle and, returning, it has been transported 'upon the wings of this disgust into the castle. The saint has quite simply described the effect of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit corresponding to the gift of knowledge. The Holy Spirit, with whom we should have the most intimate relations, detaches us from creatures, makes us hear his call of invitation, and through recollection, places us in the first stage of the supernatural states of prayer. We are transported within, we are going to be *able to enter more* into the knowledge and intimacy of *God, to share in the higher states of prayer which include the highest degree of union with God possible on earth,* and these are the source *par excellence of this gift of knowledge which* introduces us into this garden: *which* separates us from creatures and makes us ascend towards God showing us the reflexion of his beauty and his goodness through all things.

## CHAPTER X

### The Beatitude of Tears

*Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. (Matt. 5.5.)*

#### I blessed tears

THE tears which are the gift of the Holy Spirit are not the tears of those who unhappily mourn simply their misery. We rightly think that those who mourn in this life will receive a recompense from God ; but again if they are to merit it, their tears must be meritorious. There is no diploma of comfort attached to tears in themselves. There can be tears of chagrin, of suffering, despair, of ruffled self-love. These tears, with purely natural motives, do not carry any reward. It is true that, if we bear our pains faithfully for God's sake, they are of value in his sight ; but these ' faithful ' meritorious tears are not the same as those produced by the activity of the gift of knowledge.

The knowledge which the Holy Spirit breathes within us, to us who love God, is the knowledge of the littleness, the insufficiency, the corruption of creatures. It is first of all a movement of repulsion ; then this movement turns itself logically towards God. This second knowledge which makes us see the Creator through the creature, is the true knowledge of creatures, lifting our eyes perpetually to God. (Dionysius calls vertical prayer that which we connect with the gift of knowledge, because showing us the image of God in the creature, it makes us raise our glance in a straight line towards him. He names that

prayer spiral which we connect with understanding, and that prayer circular which we attribute to wisdom.)

When they have thoroughly grasped the insufficiency of creatures, in so far as they represent to us deceptive good, certain men are urged to taste under the action of the Holy Spirit this littleness and this waywardness of the creature which turns us from God—to taste also the relations between creatures and God, and by this path, to ascend ' from visible things to invisible things,' as St Paul says.

## II THE BEATITUDE OF TEARS AND THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE

The primary activity of this knowledge, then, is to make us experience the insufficiency of creatures, the harm they do us by their enchantments.

There are those who weep at this sight. Such first of all are the tears of converts. By a movement of the Holy Spirit, seeing what worthless things have captivated them and how they have been deceived in seeking their happiness in them, they are sorry for their error and mourn their wanderings. If they return from holding false theories, they experience bitterness with regard to these ideas, these godless morals, these low doctrines of sensualism to which they have intellectually adhered : it can be seen in their writings, it is for them a source of tears. Père Gratry, recounting his conversion, records that when, as a schoolboy, he saw the crumbling of all which made up his happiness, he cried out with a torrent of tears : ' O God, O God ! ' But besides the intellectuals, there are all those who have allowed themselves to be captivated in their hearts, who have wallowed in the mud. What cries ! What tears at the thought of the shame into which they have fallen, the years they have lost, and also of God whom



they have offended, for it is God who inspires them. Here we can cite the tears of Magdalen, which however, flowed from mixed motives. She saw Christ resplendent with the moral beauty which he drew from the source of the Holy Trinity ; she, being so wretched, wept. St Peter, who had yielded to fear, who had chosen to safeguard his life sooner than proclaim his Master, wept bitterly at the thought that he had preferred himself to his Lord. All sinners who are converted shed such tears.

We also, even though we have not so fallen, when we see that we have clung to futilities, that we are tempted to cling to them still, we experience a feeling of sadness which can go as far as tears.

Such is the knowledge of the vanity of false goods with which the Holy Spirit inspires us. We must remain under this influence, we must try not dry up this source of tears, but encourage it, for it brings salvation, and keeps us away from evil. We may weep, not material tears, but tears from the heart over our infidelities, our futilities, the time we have lost. There we have pure tears. They can form part of our time of prayer : they can introduce us to prayer, as the beginning of the supernatural prayer of recollection : ' tears ' belong to this phase.

There are yet other tears. We weep when we see clearly the shortness of life. It is on the occasion of some misfortune which has removed the bright facade with which the divine reality veiled itself, and which has shown us its nothingness ; *it is* on the occasion of some bereavement : we ponder over this little life about to end, we muse on death, *we* experience a deep feeling of the nothing that we are, we come down to the end of all things, and a feeling of melancholy, of great sadness comes upon us. So that is what life is, we say ; this person to whom we pay honour had all the charms of youth, future and beauty ;

all passes into dust, and tomorrow it will be our turn. What am I? What is man, then? It is God who inspires these tears. Converts experience it: these tears have led them back to God. Fervent Christians experience it also. In this vision of nothingness and this melancholy which it inspires, they find a motive for turning away from creatures and of soaring towards God. The tears of the bereaved, the tears of the unhappy; they are one more effect of the knowledge which the Holy Spirit inspires within us.

Another source of tears springs up at the sight of the mad life of the world. People who love God, considering this universal pursuit of emptiness, experience an infinite compassion. This feeling was in the heart of our Lord when he saw the crowds led by the Pharisees. He had pity on them as sheep without a shepherd: 'I have compassion on the multitude.' One feels a tear glisten in this word. In another circumstance, being on the Mount of Olives, gazing on Jerusalem, he wept over her: 'O Jerusalem, whom I have loved . . . I wished to gather thy little ones as a hen gathers her chickens . . . there shall not be left one stone of thee upon another.' He experienced this feeling before the impiety, the ingratitude of his country.

Then we have the tears of apostles, converters of men. The desire to do good gives them more understanding of the misery of poor men. St Dominic often used to weep: his features, otherwise pleasing, were stamped with sadness. Looking at a town, he would think of the sinners who dwelt there, of those who took created goods as the true goods. His companion, Bertrand de Garigue, often wept over his own sins. St Dominic said to him one day: 'That is enough, now weep for the sins of others.' He thought nothing so fruitful as these tears inspired by the

sight of the evil which wounds the spirit ; they are the sign that one has experienced this evil in its depths, that one possesses an ardent charity eager to draw sinners from the mire.

Again, there are the tears caused by the sufferings God sends us. Physical or moral sufferings, which sometimes last a long time, which do not *let us go*. *Sickness* which renders us incapable of the good we would perform, the wrongdoing of those we love, especially when they transgress the divine law and we are powerless to put them right. There again is a communication of the gift of knowledge. Through the pain of our sufferings we feel the littleness of our being, we see how little *we* count and that God has no need of us. The sufferings of those who surround us show how they are poor like ourselves, how they depend on God. We weep, and these tears make us turn towards God, so as to draw from him consolation. We are powerless ; he alone will be able to drag us and those we love from our human misery.

When we enter on our prayer, we should not fear to enter with our personal experiences. The principal subject of prayer is God ; that is why we take up a book which speaks to us of God, we scan the gospels to hear his word there and to discover his perfections ; but also ourselves, our misery, our littleness, the misery of others, form excellent subjects for meditation. These thoughts are a beginning. Through them we can enter into prayer, and the tears which they will make us shed will be turned into joy. Tears of salvation, which are able to bring us nearer to God, because they flow from a heart which feels to the point of pain, the wretchedness of creatures.

That is a primary and an essential aspect of this knowledge, which directs the purgative way, this phase of prayer in which we purify ourselves by a feeling of pain,

by understanding what that unhappy attachment to creatures really is.

The Holy Spirit inspires us with another feeling towards creatures, and this is the second aspect of the gift of knowledge : he makes the face of God appear in them. At the sight of the benefits which we have obtained within us and about us, we cannot doubt that God hides himself behind the veil of things to which he gives their splendour.

And there he takes us captive. But if we feel the influence of God, we cannot see him ; we are drawn by him, but cannot reach him. This is a new cause of pain. We seek God in the night of the senses, we seek his steps like the spouse of the Canticle sighing for her Beloved. We weep with anguish : Where is my God ; let me see him. There is another kind of prayer characterised by tears, which are no longer tears of repentance but tears of desire and anguish. We see him, but partially ; we feel him but cannot overtake him. The blessed Virgin, when she finds our Lord in the Temple, reproaches him thus : \* What hast thou done ? Thy father and I have sought thee, weeping.' The spouse seeks God as the mother seeks her son, weeping.

These tears of the quest for God, in creatures powerless to give him up although they betray him, yet come from the gift of knowledge. It makes us get to know God sufficiently to make us attached to him, but without revealing him. It is the first night of the soul. The night of the senses belongs to this quest. The spouse seeks God in the night. She has understood that God is behind this transparent veil, but she remains confined as it were in a circle by the horizon of created things ; she is in the night. The Holy Spirit has inspired her will so that she does not attach herself to the world ; her senses are without employment ; she sees creatures, but she wishes to experience

only God ; she forces her senses to remain in the night. It is a painful situation, to have senses and no longer to use them. Lying creatures, she says, tell me where is the God I seek ? And she weeps.

### III THE GIFT OF TEARS AND CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

These things are elevated, but they are not, for all that, absent from our lives. There are moments when we have understood and have tasted this knowledge. Creatures made us see God enough to make us wish for him, not enough to give him to us. We were faced with images unable to calm our desires. Thus the Israelites saw the Messiah only by means of types ; the paschal lamb, the rock—which signified Christ, from whom came the living water of grace. The Messiah was for them a great hope, but there was a veil between them and him. Creatures, similarly, reveal God to us, and hide him from us. This quest leads us to an excellent prayer, ' in this vale of tears ' : a painful quest, relieved by the hope that the veil will be rent and we shall possess God.

Tears are connected, then, with this double knowledge : first the ephemeral existence, the vanity, the corruption of creatures ; secondly, the way they can lead us to God.

We see these two knowledges open out in the soul of St Augustine. Already converted, but still a catechumen, he is seated in an obscure corner of Milan cathedral and he hears the solemn melodies of St Ambrose. He looks over his hidden life; he sees the wretchedness in which he has lived, the people running after false gods, and also the creatures which drew him towards God : his holy mother, in whom he discerns as it were an image of the divinity, St Ambrose, who represents to him the sanctity of God. And he begins to weep freely : ' It was good for me and so were those tears,' he tells us. Prayer of recollection :

led by the Holy Spirit, he began his new life by recollecting himself in tears ; tears shed over the pettiness of the things of earth, over the unhappiness he had given himself over to them ; tears of recognition of the benefits of God who has shown himself through them to his soul and drawn him towards himself. There we grasp the power of the grace which the Holy Spirit gives us, inspiring us with the true knowledge of creatures, which shows us their great emptiness and their relative sense ; and by this light we are freed from them and so led to the Creator.

## CHAPTER XI

### The Gift of Understanding

*' Lord give me understanding !*

(Ps. 118, 144.)

THE gift of understanding is very different from the gift of knowledge. These two gifts correspond to two different difficulties in our faith.

Our faith, which is a conviction concerning divine things supernaturally planted in us, is rooted in a reason which has creatures as its natural object, which can raise itself as far as God, but always in terms of creatures. So reason will name God, Creator, Providence ; creatures are at the bottom of these affirmations ; reason must proceed from the visible to the invisible. Hence the necessity of a perfect mode of this faith which turns it away from the seduction of creatures and helps it to find in them a path to God. It is the gift of knowledge which assures such a perfect mode.

These difficulties are not the only ones. Divine things are inexpressible. God is ineffable ; the Incarnation and the Redemption infinitely surpass our thought, the Trinity even more. Of Christ we cannot think without wonder so much does the mystery of the Incarnate Word overwhelm us. The vision of God in the direction of the world, in the direction of souls, in permitting evil, in the predestination of the elect, all this is difficult for faith. And to raise ourselves to this knowledge we have at our disposal only poor human language. How are we to express the inexpressible ? The consequence is that God, while revealing himself, has to clothe himself with the

human concept as with a cloud. When we conceive the terms in which the faith is contained, we remain on the surface of the mystery, especially if use has lessened the sense, or if, not being familiar with them, we take them in a crude sense. Hence the necessity of a new gift which makes us penetrate the outer crust of revelation to get at the pith. Such is the gift of understanding.

#### I WHAT IT IS

Understanding is the sense of the divine, perceived no longer in creatures, as with knowledge, but in revelation and in the doctrine of the Church, which are as it were the radiance of God. The Holy Spirit, from whom nothing is hid, 'who searcheth the deep things of God,' communicates to those who are one spirit with him by love a share in his understanding of divine things, in his power of penetration, not in making a new revelation, but in making those things already revealed appear in a truly new light.

A hundred times we have passed a word of the Gospel without seeing its whole significance, as for example: 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son.' We believed it, however, with a complete faith, but without penetrating it. Then, one day, it became the subject of our meditation and suddenly it dawned upon us in a new light: 'God . . . and we have paused, we were penetrating to a new and infinite grandeur and beauty. God loves . . . That word love with reference to God, how fine it seemed to us. He loves what? The world, this world so small, so poor, so sinful. And he loves so much, that he has given—yes, given—his only Son, in whom the Father is well-pleased, of whom he has said: 'this is my beloved Son,' whom the Father begot from all eternity, who lives in intimacy of thought and love with the Father and the Spirit. What unfathomable



love! God lives in love. He loves his Son fully and he has given him ' . . . even to the death of the cross ' to this world . . . Why ? Because he loved this world, and so we return to this mysterious and living love. The sentence shines out in a new light. That is the work of the gift of understanding. He searcheth the depths, surpassing the knowledge *of* inquiring faith, which is firmly fixed, but stops at the surface, withheld by the greatness of things. It is always faith, but enlightened by the understanding of the Holy Spirit. A hidden virtue from this divine understanding passes into our faith through this gift.

This manifestation of the *gift* of understanding is not merely an increase of ordinary knowledge, it is an understanding by the heart, which feels more than it sees, which comes from our spirit moved by the Holy Spirit. We experience with the eyes of our heart. It is under the form of a taste for divine things that we enter further into an understanding of the mysteries of our faith. ' Taste and see.' Tasting and seeing make one whole, it is a seeing impregnated with love. We taste, we sample things we used to know, but with the penetration and understanding given us by the Spirit of love. Thus we enter into the interior of the mysteries. This gift was necessary to remedy the coldness, the inattention, the shallowness of our faith which finds itself completed by the radiance of the Holy Spirit.

## II THE MANIFESTATION OF THE GIFT OF UNDERSTANDING

This gift of understanding appears thus in a brilliant manner at certain moments in the life of our Lord, when he was teaching his apostles. In the gospel we see Jesus in perpetual conflict with the lack of understanding of his

disciples. Yet they believed in their Master ; they had left all for him ; they experienced feelings of devotion towards him : but how little they advanced in knowledge of the divine mysteries ! They believed in a temporal Messiah and kept their illusions to the end. The mother of the sons of Zebedee saw in the kingdom of Jesus merely a good place for her sons, who themselves thought likewise. And the Saviour replied ; ‘ You know not what you ask.’ He had just shown them in a parable the kingdom of God, and his disciples still said to him : ‘ Explain to us, O Lord.’ ‘ Are you still without understanding ? ’ the Master asked. Right at the end, after the institution of the Eucharist, they again asked : ‘ Show us the Father.’ And Jesus replied : ‘ How, Philip, have I been with you so long, and you have not understood that he who sees me sees also my Father ? ’ But a little later his disciples said to him : ‘ Now dost thou speak openly, and no longer to us in parables.’ Doubtless they had received an illumination of the gift of understanding. Similarly, Peter, when our Lord asked : ‘ Will you also go away ? ’ replied : ‘ To whom shall we go ? Thou hast the words of eternal life. We know thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ But, the Saviour added, he did not say that of himself ; the Father had inspired him. Again it was an illumination of the Holy Spirit. But this gift obtained its complete effect in the souls of the apostles after Pentecost : we see them then as it were drunk with understanding of the Scriptures and of the divine mysteries which they preached with enthusiasm.

We also, like the apostles, make the divinity and the kingdom of God something material. The unpretentious words with which the gospel reveals it to us are surrounded with symbolism, and we remain on the surface, or we take occasion to conceive strange ideas on the kingdom of God,

on the Christian life or religious life. We religious may not have understood this text, which not everyone is bound to understand: 'Let him who would come after me renounce himself.' The most priceless truths escape us in their real meaning.

There are degrees in the understanding of divine things. Let us try to penetrate under the outer crust, under the appearance of the mysteries, signs and symbols which hide from us the presence of God and his omnipotence, if we wish to possess, with a more perfect understanding, a more profound love. For we love in the measure in which we know; the will *follows the* understanding. If we penetrate these mysteries of love, *we* shall reach God beyond the veils with which he hides himself. The charity which is directed by faith which sees with the eyes of the heart is more fervent, more constant. A most fervent attention to the divine sense of the scriptures should also prepare us for the gift of understanding.

We see how St Thomas arrived at this understanding by his prayer. Let us consider the *Adoro te* for example. *How* are we to get to the heart of the Eucharistic mystery? This mystery is veiled; the glance is arrested before appearances, the understanding stupefied. If only we could penetrate within the Eucharist, in our communions, or when we are before the tabernacle. Let us try to understand how St Thomas used to pass from faith to understanding. 'Prostrate before thee, *I* adore thee, O God, truly hidden beneath these species; my heart submits entirely to thee because on beholding thee it is reduced to nothingness.' My heart fails, that is the attitude of the believer: I look at the tabernacle and say: *It is too much for my* strength, this saying is hard.

<sup>4</sup> Sight, touch and taste all fail here, hearing alone confirms my faith: I believe all the Son of God has said;

nothing is truer than the word of Truth himself.' These are the causes of my failing : my sight, through which I enter into relation with everything, my taste, my touch, deceive me. But you have spoken, I believe your word is true. You have said, ' This is my body.' It is your body. I do not see anything there, but Truth himself has said it ; I believe. Then the saint goes on to penetrate further into this mystery.

' On the cross, divinity alone was hid : here humanity and divinity are equally hid ; yet still believing and confessing the one and the other, I ask you, Lord, what the penitent thief asked.' Again, it is faith asserting itself in the face of difficulties.

' I do not see your wounds as Thomas saw them ; but I acknowledge you as my God : make my faith to believe more and more, make me hope in you alone, love you alone.' Up to now it is the believer who speaks all the time : it is firm faith, but showing itself as bare faith.

Suddenly St Thomas addresses the host : ' O memorial of the Lord's death, living bread giving life to man ; grant my soul to live by you alone, and to find in you always its joy and delight.' It is the direct address, no longer the effort to believe. Contemplating the memorial of the Lord's death, he is within the heart of the sacrament, at the centre of the mystery. But he still sees the appearances, the bread.

' O Pelican full of tenderness, who nourishes your children with your blood, Lord Jesus, purify me of all stain through your blood, through that blood of which one drop alone can blot out all the sins of the world.' St Thomas penetrates still further, he sees Jesus shedding his blood on the cross, he sees this blood of which one drop alone can save the entire world. This is no longer bare faith : it is faith entering into the interior of the mystery ; a faith clothed with intelligence.

' O Jesus whom I now see veiled, fulfil the burning desire of my soul : that my eyes one day piercing this veil which hides you, may *rejoice in the full view of your glory.*' O Lord, what I thirst for, is to see you. From this desire of seeing *Jesus and the* revealing of his *face*, there is but one step. This penetrating faith is very near the gate of heaven : it is enough to lower the *veil*, and Jesus will appear.

By understanding, by penetrating *faith*, by this taste for the divine, by this affective vision, we advance to the furthest limits which can be known of the mystery ; if they were passed we should be in the full vision.

The gift of understanding *shines also in the life and spirituality of* St Catherine of Siena. When he speaks to her, our Lord does so as a Master who would put before his disciples brief truths but quite evident ones : ' I am who am. Recognise thy Creator. Walk in my presence.' Short words, no reasons, revealing words : they are understood through intuitions ; the sense is perceived at once, we enter into it as it were by a leap of the mind. It is the mark of her genius : she is intuitive. In these formulae there are kinds of axioms of spiritual doctrine analogous to those of philosophy : the whole is greater than the part ; that which is must be. And yet their difference from the first principles of reason is that intuition here is veiled ; we do not see openly, but we *experience in a dark manner* ; we are sure of these divine ineffable things as it were through a feeling which points but does not make us see : we adhere by a taste rather than by the pure consent of naked faith.

### III THE EFFECTS OF THE GIFT OF UNDERSTANDING

We can imagine what peace such a penetration gives to faith. When the Holy Spirit sends forth his lights, which

bring in their train the certitude, sense and taste of divine things, we are made at peace, assured, calmed ; this is *quiet*. Faith is not yet established in the beatific vision, but God sends forth a ray of his light, and there is nothing like the gift of understanding to calm the understanding.

Before, our prayer was flustered ; by reading something, a saying, a word, calm descends ; we are made at peace for several days. Such a saying of the gospel suddenly lights up : ‘If thou knewest the gift of God,’ or again, ‘He must increase, I must decrease.’ We knew it, but now we are penetrated by it and our actions vibrate with it. These penetrating intuitions can be granted to us concerning almost all our Lord’s words, his attitudes, his actions, his states. In so far as the sacraments are concerned, we are touched by the presence of our Lord in the Eucharist, in the forgiveness of penance, or even in extreme unction ; we find there the hidden manna, the vigour, the strength we need.

When we are habitually under the impress of the gift of understanding, we have reached that which the mystics called the prayer of quiet, the prayer of tasting divine things, as St Teresa says. Calm and tranquil, the soul tastes, penetrates, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures, the teaching of the Church, the divine bounty of the sacraments.

This penetration has its steps marked out in advance. God makes clear in revelation what he has done to us, particularly in the Scriptures. In creatures we said that he is reflected as it were in a mirror : we receive only a reflected ray, and that is why we say that from creation we ascend to God vertically. In revealing to us God, his Son sends us as it were a divine ray of his Spirit who comes to find out our faith directly in order to enliven it.

Now, the objects of revelation are not all disposed upon the same plan. There are some which lead on to others. For example, in the gospel certain parables represent God to us in a form nearer to earth ; as the Father of a family, his kingdom like a banquet. There we do not see God, his attributes, his love, so clearly as in the sermon on the mount where the perfections of the Father are directly manifested to us. St John recounts words or characteristics in which our Lord reveals himself or manifests his Father clearly : ' My Father and I are one ' ; ' He who sees me, sees my Father.' There we touch on the mystery of the Divinity and of the Trinity. If we meditate carefully on the discourse after the Last Supper, which is a revelation of the Trinity with its most sublime part, the priestly prayer, we shall see that St John is, of the four evangelists, the one who has best revealed to us the secret of the divine mystery, the one who has made us penetrate deepest into the interior of the faith.

We should follow this way of light which he marks out for us, beginning with the sayings which are more within our reach, that we may rise to the higher ones which hold the mysteries of divinity. Leaving the plain of parables, we should rise, with the help of this gradual enlightenment, to the supreme revelation. Thus it was that St Dionysius described prayer as a spiral lifting itself up to the higher degrees as it arrives nearer to God.

Such is prayer according to the gift of understanding in St Thomas, as also that of the taste for divine things in St Teresa. It is a more and more penetrating road. Let us cling to these lessons of the Master. Let us live them through faith under the rulings of a heart that is supernaturalised. In a more clear-cut way, we shall be governed by the Spirit who will communicate to us, in an experimental and affective manner, something of himself,

*and if we are docile, we* shall reach unto the deep things of God.

Let us make use of our gift of understanding to put ourselves under the inspiration of the light of our hearts ; our faith will no longer be searching, agitated, it will be established, content, happy, even when resting under the shadows along the road—because already a small ray of the glory which is in store for us will gleam through on our faith.



## CHAPTER XII

### The Beatitude of Pure Hearts

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (Matt. 5.8.)*

THE beatitude of pure hearts is linked, by the masters whose *teaching we* are following, to the gift of understanding. This link is not at first sight apparent. To grasp it we must understand the special sense denoted here by the words *pure heart*.

#### I OUR HEART

It can *be* taken in two ways. First of all, a pure heart, which possesses the virtue of purity, is that which has no violent *affections or* disorderly passions, and accordingly one which is better prepared to receive the divine truth. 'The wicked man did not wish to understand, for fear of being obliged to do good,' says Scripture. It is certain that unhealthy *affections have* their reaction on the understanding. We judge according to the dispositions of our hearts, and carnal man not being attached to the things of God, because he has made a god for himself out of his pleasures, cannot very well judge of them. This first sense is true. But it is not strictly speaking the gift of understanding which remedies this defect of purity; according to St Thomas, this task belongs to the 'affective' gifts working in the appetitive part of the soul, and chiefly to the gift of fear.

What then is the purity which St Augustine and St Thomas mean here? The word 'heart' has two meanings. Firstly it denotes affections, a propensity towards lovable

things. But it denotes too the root of our being : as when we say the core, the heart of the question. It is in this sense that we must take it in our text : the root of the human soul, the depths of its mind, '*mens*,' spirit, and especially that intellect which should control everything in man, even his will. It is seemingly a paradox, but in reality the intellect is the heart of man, that is to say, it is the deepest thing in him. It is in the intellect, then, that we must seek this happy purity of heart, a purity which, moreover, causes purity of the will and affections.

The human intellect may not be pure ; it can be encumbered, obscured, either by sense-images or by *error*. According to the Doctors of the Church, that which produces in us the action of the spirit of understanding is a deliverance from the phantoms of the imagination which we confuse with the object of our faith, with which we surround the Person of our God, and from the errors which might turn us away from true doctrine in theory and in practice.

## II THE PURIFYING LIGHT

This work of purification can be seen in some of the gospel stories. Jesus appeared to his disciples on the Lake of Genesareth ; at first they took him for a spirit. Jesus then said to them, ' It is I.' And Peter, moved in his heart, uttered this timid word, ' Lord, *if it* is thou, command me to come to thee walking on the water.' He affirms nothing, but already his first illusion has gone ; in this cry there is more understanding than in the first exclamation, ' It is a spirit.' Later on Jesus will show himself on the edge of the same lake, and at once John will say, ' It is the Lord.' This is the work of the gift of understanding. We see here a gradual progression of the gift ; It is a spirit... If it is thou ... It is indeed the exact description of the action of the Holy Spirit. By him we are relieved

of our wandering, confused, false, ideas about divine things ; with a pure heart we see them as they are, in so far as they can be seen.

As the opposing vice to understanding, we have blindness of spirit. That was the state of soul of the Pharisees : ' They have a hard intelligence,' St Stephen said of them, men with their spirit choked up with pride, blind and leaders of the blind, because they see only themselves, their excellence, their mastery over the people. Our Lord spread abroad his teaching, worked his miracles, and the more he asserted himself, the less they wished to see. With a willing and irreparable blindness which makes a god of our ego, can such hearts become pure ? We have in the Scriptures examples of such conversions. God, in his mercy and omnipotence has completely changed such states of soul. There is St Paul, a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee, breathing forth nothing but persecution ; and suddenly he will cry : ' Lord, what wilt thou have me do ? ' It is a miracle, but one which shows us in all its splendour the power of the gift of understanding, and this happy purity of heart taking the place of blindness.

As opposed to the abrupt action of the light working miraculously, we have the gradual conversion of the good will which seeks to be taught and to throw off its blindness. Of this we also find examples in the gospel.

There is the edifying bearing of the excellent Pharisee Nicodemus. He was struck by the doctrine of the Master, to the point of seeking instruction. He is not very brave, he goes to find the Saviour at night. His mode of address has a slight resemblance, in the first place, to the captious style of the Pharisees : ' Master, we know that thou art a teacher sent from God, for none could do the miracles thou dost, unless God were with him.' And yet he seeks to throw off the blindness of his race. The Lord sets

about enlightening him, purifying his mind of the crude ideas which are blinding him. ' Unless you be born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus does not understand this saying ; he sees things only in their crudest sense : ' How can a man already old be born ? Can he enter the womb of his mother again and be born again ? ' Our Lord begins to unfold the mystery to him. ' Unless a man be born again of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.' Thus he explains how one can be born of the Spirit : ' The Spirit bloweth where he listeth, and we hear his voice, but know not whence he cometh nor where he goeth. That is how you shall be when you are born of the Spirit.' Nicodemus understands less and less. ' How can this be ? ' Our Lord gives him further explanations and adds that wonderful saying : ' God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, so that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' The gospel does not say what was the result of this meeting, but we do know that Nicodemus, with Joseph of Arimathaea did not consent to the Saviour's death and that the Church in her martyrology reckons him among the saints.

In the following chapter of the same gospel, we have a similar example of lack of understanding, accompanied by a shade of malice and of pretended bashfulness, with the Samaritan woman. The Lord is there, seated on the edge of the well, and he says simply : ' Give me to drink.' The woman replies : ' How dost thou, a Jew, ask to drink of me who am a Samaritan ? ' Jesus insists, ' If thou knewest the gift of God and who he is that asks of thee to drink, thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would give thee living water.'

She does not desire to understand : ' Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep ; whence hast

thou this living water ?' It is her blindness of spirit which does not understand, and up to a point, does not want to understand. 'Art thou greater than our father Jacob who gave us this well ?' Jesus replies, affirming his public mission, and unfolds the mystery of grace to her : 'Whoever drinketh of this water that I shall give him shall never thirst, and the water that I shall give him will become within him a *fountain* springing forth unto everlasting life.' Then she, no doubt in jest, retorts, 'Lord, give me of this water, so that I have no more thirst and do not come here to draw any more.' 'Go,' Jesus says to her, 'Call thy husband and bring him here.' 'I have no husband.' 'Thou hast said well,' continues Jesus, 'thou hast had five husbands ; in saying that thou sayest well.' 'Lord, I see that thou art a prophet.' And suddenly she asks this question, 'Tell me, our fathers adored upon this mountain and you, you say that it is at Jerusalem that we should adore. Which is right ?' 'Woman, believe me,' replies the Master, 'the hour cometh when it will be neither on this mountain, nor at Jerusalem that you will adore the Father. You adore him whom you know not ; we adore him whom we know, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and is already come, when the true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth. Such adorers the Father seeketh. God is a spirit, and they that adore him must adore him in spirit and in truth.' The woman understands ; 'I know that the Messiah cometh, and when he shall come, he will teach us all things.' She waited only for the next word : 'I am he that speaketh with thee.' She left her pitcher and went to look for her friends : '*Come*, she said to them, see a man who told me all manner of things that I have done. It is the Messiah.' At long last she has her understanding purified from her error, but what a

wonderful patience on the part of the Saviour, to lead this heart into the fulness of light !

This charming story continues today. We must not think that these things do not happen. They occur again and again by the life of grace in Christians who seek to fathom the divine mystery. A ceaseless work of purification is being accomplished in the Church, a continual ascent is being made towards God's pure light.

Our minds are rather like distorting mirrors. Our intellect is nonetheless made for truth, but it bears the wound of ignorance ; it has the tendency to deform objects, especially when it goes beyond the realms familiar to it, and emerges into the spiritual world and so into the supernatural world. Thither we transfer our imaginations and our twist of mind, which result from personal ideas and crude passions. Distortions inevitably follow, and if, moreover, we add some bad will, these distortions can be considerable. The history of theology shows this, above all, in the case of the heretics.

### III THE NECESSARY WORK OF PURIFICATION

Among modern heresies we observe two which bear on the very question of our supernatural life : Jansenism and Quietism. These errors allow us to establish this point of doctrine yet more precisely.

The Jansenists were indeed right in the first place in reacting against the seductions threatening morals, disorders at court, scandals among the great. But they created for themselves a terrible concept of God. They saw in him only the Judge, restricting as much as possible, the salvation which he had come to bring to men. These excesses fitted in with their temperament ; but they also proceeded from the fact that, while wishing to reform morals, they attached themselves to it as to their own

private task, seeking therein their own glory. Thus they caused in France the ravages which lasted till the middle of the last century, oppressing or *frightening* consciences and closing heaven. They had manifest error in their minds, they had no understanding of the teaching of the Church. Happily this heresy is dead, but its impression still lingers in certain minds. Even in religious life we find an oppressive severity and scrupulosity. This excessive rigour does harm : it is opposed to truth and charity. Others raise themselves up as censors and judges ; superiors themselves, with the best of intentions, incessantly show us a severe God, when before all he is the merciful God.

Quietism is the opposite. Here we lose ourselves in pure love, where there is no longer any sin. Loving God with a completely disinterested love, we renounce all hope, even of heaven, that would be impurity. We are in a state of abandonment, liquified : it is the entire repose in God guaranteed against any return upon itself. These heretics see in God only goodness, gentleness, mercy. They have not learnt those things in the Scriptures. Our Lord indeed has a *merciful* heart, but he also said, ' Watch, for you know not the hour when the Master will come.' And he shows us the foolish virgins outside the gate of paradise.

These gross errors can influence us in a practical way, without our intellect adhering to them in point of doctrine. There are among Christians, and even among religious of both sexes, broadminded people tempted to rest entirely in the Lord, in a false quietude. One can encounter among novices, for example, this affectation which is rather like transferring into the supernatural life that feeling which they can no longer experience from creatures. They take their root in a state of sentimental love and look to God sensually for a bosom companion ; they would

experience in this divine friendship the enjoyments which they would have found in the world in a too human manner, and transferring their need for affection, they repose softly in the sweet familiarity of Jesus present in the tabernacle. They forget their stern duties of state, and do not trouble themselves much about the demands of the Rule, about the unmistakable obligations which true love imposes.

These are serious errors, these phantoms of the imagination of which we must purge our intellect, for they deprive us of that deep, sharp knowledge of God's teaching which alone is living and true. Such blindness would be troublesome to charity, since true faith is never found without true charity. At the same time it would be troublesome to morals, for it leads men to commit sins which do not exist, to live in a state of trouble or even in despair, or indeed, by an opposite excess to commit faults of which they are unconscious, to neglect their real duty.

There are other examples. Protestants have sought to spiritualise everything ; wishing to strip themselves of all idolatry, they no longer have anything which satisfies the heart. Their conventions, especially the old-fashioned ones, are dispiriting in their coldness ; their God is austere, their gospel is dry ; rigidly they inculcate in their children moral principles deprived of love ; have they any heart ? There we do not see the worshippers in spirit and in truth which the Father desires.

And among ourselves there are many Christians who stagnate in their thoroughly material devotions. We all know these pious people who cannot come across a confraternity, a scapular or a cord, cannot hear of a pilgrimage, without their desires being roused to the point of impatience. It is their way of understanding religion. Certainly the Church blesses medals, approves confraternities ; she sanctifies things which are then no

fetishes, she knows the human heart has need of the support of concrete things and needs to make everything material. Our Lord himself, in his parables, as it were, materialises his teaching and in his sacraments in some way materialises his grace. The Church, then, approves of these external helps to piety, but they are not the basis of religion. They should be allowed to the weak, to children, as a help to lead them to a more inward worship. But the preferences of the Church should be noted—the place assigned to the Trinity, with the *Gloria which ends each psalm*, with the twenty-five Sundays consecrated to the Trinity ; the place assigned to the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Redemption ; a matter of the inner meaning of mysteries, despite the fact that she consents to erect cribs, calvaries or statues, in order to satisfy the needs of human nature composed of body and soul.

If our religion were to immerse itself entirely in the materialism of signs and symbols, this would be the reverse of understanding. We must rest content with these devotions. We see that we may be deceived, still in the same terrain, by spiritual phantoms.

There are other phantoms. St Peter did not understand the mystery of the Cross, and when our Lord spoke of his passion St Peter sought to dissuade him from it. The Saviour was obliged to say to him : ‘ Get thee behind me, Satan ; thou dost not understand the things of the kingdom of God.’ St Peter has his imitators. The words of Scripture reveal to us the sorrowful way of the Cross. There are those who do not hear these words, they wish to replace them by other precepts in which nature is given room. We see religious whose ideas are not in harmony with the mystery of the Passion. This mistake comes from the repulsion we have for suffering ; it is one of the fruits of wordly thoughts and examples.



## IV A PURE HEART

To be freed from the error of our heart, we must be docile towards the Spirit of understanding which urges us to steep ourselves thoroughly in the haven of true charity, to love God above all things, to turn to the utter giving of self in order to rise to an understanding of the truths of the faith. In coming forth from this haven of love, of union with God, we shall not go forth alone ; the Spirit of Love will follow and will grant a deep understanding, an experimental one, of the truths of faith. He will show how merciful the Lord is, and also how just. He will make the appeal of the Cross, clearly explaining that saying, ' You must deny yourself and carry your cross.' He will show us a Saviour who is not only human, but who has the majesty of God, for if we say, ' Heart of Jesus of infinite goodness,' we also say, ' Heart of Jesus of infinite majesty.'

Thus, guided by a deep understanding, we shall proceed on the road to salvation, no longer in fear, but in confidence and love. When the Spirit is there, charity is made resplendent, man is made perfect. When the Spirit is lacking, the man is subject to errors. The Spirit not only grants knowledge, he is a guide for action, for what is known is loved, and loved as it is known. Those who see by the Spirit of love, are free.

Faith, a firm faith without shadows, is a fruit of the understanding. And there is nothing more precious than this faith set free, for making us equal to our duties, and to the difficulties which we encounter in accomplishing them. We are thus enlightened concerning our duty, given in the Scriptures, in the gospel, as in the Rule, and our souls cannot stay their flight any longer.

To attain this summit, we must pass through the trials of the night of the soul. Nothing is harder than renouncing a cherished idea, a fond and intimate image, a point of

view to which we have attached our personality and our pride. It is an effect of understanding to detach ourselves from our own ideas in order to penetrate into God's word in all its forms, such as it really is, and not what we think or wish it to be. When this purging takes place, it seems to snatch away the natural understanding, the habits of mind, a depth of being, a part of the person himself, all that goes to make up that most mysterious region of the heart : our thought. When the Holy Spirit effects purifications in our intellect, he makes us feel that what used to be the light of our eyes is no longer so : he removes even the things that seem to take us towards God : these images, these imperfect ideas which were unconnected with faith, but in the nature of an impure alloy. It is with this state that we connect the nights of the soul. Our soul, humbled, plunged into darkness, must give up its chosen ideas, occasions of faults, and its pursuit of images, in order to cleave to pure, simple truth. The Holy Spirit, to give us his pure teaching, withdraws us then from our own ideas about doctrine, piety, or obedience, ideas which often proceed from a store of self-love, of temperament, or passions. At this time we feel that the light is being taken from our eyes. But those who have the courage to make this renunciation possess a pure heart, their mind is freed from false images, from the errors of self-love. They are gazing upon the true God, they are rising to the heights of faith through a more penetrating vision. They adore the Lord in spirit, already now experiencing and tasting him, and in this taste of God they obtain a more penetrating knowledge of him. This is the prelude to the *lumen gloriae* and the vision of God. Moreover, the gift of understanding is not absent from this vision. *It gives* a more profound penetration, and a more intimate one, into the mysteries of God contemplated in the

divine Essence. In heaven the Holy Spirit will continue to purify this beatified understanding, no longer from error or images, but from ignorance, *a nescientia*. He helps to make the blessed enter further into God's Essence, in the Word who is the reward and the glory of the elect.

## CHAPTER XIII

### The Gift of Wisdom

*O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God.*

(Rom. 11.33.)

#### i starting point

**B**EFORE advancing into that highest region accessible on earth to our intellect guided directly by the Holy Spirit, before speaking of the gift of Wisdom which grants a definite entry into the depths of God himself, let us put ourselves into the state of mind in which the inspiration of the gifts of knowledge and understanding have established us. It is faith, *fides*, but no longer the simple virtue of faith, it is faith made perfect by a special fruit of the gift of understanding which we call also by the name of faith. The habitual exercise of this gift of light leads the virtue of faith on to its final, happy perfection. This perfection is a fruit sweet to the palate which helps us to enjoy the divine certitude. This fruit, then, is faith *par excellence*, firm faith, illumined, and no longer having that wavering movement of the beginning, a faith which moves towards its object with a readiness full of light. *The* obscurity of faith under the action of God is crossed by bars of light, and to this extent night is a real enlightening, with many *delights holding* sway there. For by this faith the soul has been fixed on God beyond creatures in the revelation where he shows his brightness. This faith is an ocean of delight for charity. Led by a faith which no longer searches, but whose night is full of the light of the gifts of knowledge and understanding, charity feels at ease. The saints in whom these gifts are developing are in the prayer

of recollection and of quiet. We are no more tormented by creatures ; through this knowledge we see our pettiness and our sins, and we turn away from them.

Beyond ourselves we see God and mount upwards towards him. Under this new impulse faith has become joyous and clear ; it is freed from the burden of creatures. By the gift of understanding it throws itself out into the world of divine revelation, disembarrassed of those troublesome hovering images, in order to gaze on God who is a Spirit ; and, freed from the errors of self-love, it penetrates the meaning of the mysteries of religion to their depths, by an affection of the heart which is itself a light, a divine taste, into which the light of the Holy Spirit comes.

This illumination of the night *of* faith does not come to pass, we have said, without painful wrenches. We must renounce cherished habits, the very light of our eyes. That is the night of the senses, condemned to remain silent, despite their liveliness. The *night of the* soul, condemned to reason no more despite its reasonableness. Despite these wrenches, the light of the Holy Spirit does appear. Thus, the wind drives away the clouds, and the sun is seen. It is in the midst of the sufferings of the soul that the entry of the divine light is made. The soul is happy to feel itself in contact with its true God ; happy in its charity, leaning upon the grace of Christ and enlightened by the gifts of knowledge and understanding, the soul is drawn to believe firmly and with a perfect certainty.

## II THE NECESSITY OF THE GIFT OF WISDOM

Is this the final term of our contemplative life, of our life of love upon earth ? No. In spite of these lights, charity still needs something. St Paul gives us the reason : ' Charity never faileth.' Faith and hope will vanish at our entry into heaven, but charity, which has its seat in our

immortality, will not disappear. It is necessary that faith give place to vision, hope to possession ; charity is as real in the absence of the object loved as in its possession. It is the same person *with* the same love who loves God on earth and will love him in heaven. One thing only is changed : here charity is guided by the light of faith ; in heaven it is guided by clear vision. This is a considerable difference from the point of view of the knowledge of God, but it is the same charity : in heaven an exalted, consummate charity ; here below, charity in movement on account of the faith which guides it towards its distant goal.

Why then does the Christian heart suffer upon earth ? The reason for this suffering of which we were speaking is plain. Even now, charity is already made for heaven, proportioned to heaven, proportioned to God seen *face to face*, in all his ravishing beauty. It has infinite sources of strength which it cannot put into action here on earth, even with the aid of the gifts of knowledge and understanding. The terms in which we think of God are terms of creatures, limited, finite. Now the charity of earth would see the infinite God as he is infinite, and yet it knows him in such an imperfect way. ' Oh the depths of the riches of the wisdom of God.'

Our charity desires, then, that God be shown to it face to face. Faith, a fruit of the gift of understanding, however secure it be, cannot thus show him. From this fact there is in charity a breadth of love which is not satisfied.

It is for that reason moreover that charity upon earth is a love of God above all else. If we examine all the creatures which we love, we find that God surpasses them, and that nothing can be compared with him. There is in this, however, something purely negative : it is not the love of a visible infinite, seen in the depths of its attractiveness. Consequently charity remains unsatiated, so long as it

simply follows faith, even though enlightened by the gifts which give it strength, removing obstacles and placing its object in the full light. What then shall charity do, imprisoned by faith? He who loves God, tormented by this disproportion between finite light which guides him and the infinite instinct of his love, will return to his own heart to find there a movement of love which is free from this restraint, this straight-jacket of faith. If only it were possible to find on earth a light causing us to experience the divine, no longer in a negative way, but positively!

Even in charity, in the virtue of charity, we shall not be able to find this light; charity is love, it is not light, it is meant to follow faith. But beyond charity there is its Creator. 'The love of God is spread abroad in our heart by the Holy Spirit, which is given to us.' The Holy Spirit dwells within us, and the terrain of his influence is charity which is something of himself, which represents him to the heart of man. He watches over it, surrounds it with his care, and moves it ceaselessly. He is going to find means of furnishing this earthly charity with a light which, in one sense, will surpass that of faith.

The Holy Spirit sees God face to face, deeply. God does not possess for him that inaccessible height, depth, greatness which ravished the heart of St Paul. He is in the height. He is God. As he dwells within us, he gives to us by his impulses or inspirations something of this face-to-face vision which is our happiness; and we possess a gift for receiving this impulse: the gift of Wisdom.

### III THE OBJECT AND ACTIVITY OF WISDOM

The inspiration of wisdom is nothing less than a movement of the Holy Spirit, through which he communicates to us, by way of the heart, as it were, an experience of the heavenly vision.

We remain in the sphere of faith: it is faith which determines the object of our love. But the Holy Spirit pours *or infuses, in* an affective, experimental way, into us a knowledge of this object of faith, which makes us penetrate, not with the eyes of flesh, nor with those of the mind, but with the 'enlightened eyes of the heart,' God's infinity, that 'above all' *which is the very* law of charity. This is a dim foretaste of the divine immensity. The soul, under the impression of this inspiration buries and plunges *itself in* an intense realisation of the *all-ness* of God. In a manner it experiences God physically. It is certainly soaring above *all that* faith, even helped by the gift of understanding, reveals to it in precise terms. With this realisation, it prostrates in a posture of adoration before the divine boundlessness. Though believing them it gives up using the terms of faith, or remaining in its concepts, it loses itself in an intense *feeling of the divine* transcendence. We do not see, but this feeling of the heart, this experience equals vision because it is a sharing in the vision of the Holy Spirit who gives testimony in the depths of our soul, that what we feel is the truth.

When in prayer we have put a supreme truth in the object of our faith, for example, 'I am who am,' or again, 'God is Love,' and the gift of understanding opens to us its deep meaning. We penetrate more all the time, repeating: God *is*; I am nothing, a mere nothingness. God is; he is eternally; he is who is. All at once, going beyond that thought, we feel the need of humiliating ourselves in an expression of adoration before him whose greatness is thus revealed to us. The thought of Scripture disappears from the first plane of knowledge, where it is, as it were, within reach of explicit faith; the concepts there expressed also disappear, and the intellect as from a springboard leaps up and then down before God's being.



There is no more than adoration, an *amen* ; a movement of losing oneself in God. For the time being, one puts aside all definite concepts, even those which have brought one to this state. There, then, is the action of the gift of wisdom : the divine Spirit leads us to make an act of the intellect towards God, which is worthy of the being of God, of his transcendence. It is not an act of the intellect which thinks positively, but of the intellect which puts aside thinking and conceiving. In heaven we shall think and see in the light of glory : here on earth we are in the grasp of faith ; we escape from it prostrating ourselves in adoration. It is the only attitude of the mind adequate to the altitude of God. We say nothing, we think nothing, but our intellectual attitude proclaims, ' O the depth of the divine riches ! '

That is as far as the spirit of wisdom can lead us. It lasts for an instant. It is a fleeting stealing of our heart, a flight of the spirit, a swift soaring. We fall again very soon on to the earth of faith. Then we begin again. As St Francis of Sales says, we land on the soil of faith, we revive ourselves with some good thought, we gain strength to take off once more.

It is an act which cannot last because it takes on the nature of the state of the elect ; it puts us in the attitude proper to those who see, and upon earth we cannot endure for long such states, for they are angelic states. Nevertheless, thank God, they do exist. We have put it to the proof that it is necessary to go beyond all creatures, all created concepts of God ; we have felt this kind of ' going out from everything.' It is not ecstasy, which is an extraordinary state, but it is a complete going-out from creatures. We see nothing, the hour of the face-to-face has not yet struck. We grasp, however, that God surpasses absolutely every creature, feel ourselves very little before him, we are

penetrated by the majesty of his attributes, we have an intense realisation of his infinity, and we prostrate ourselves in adoration.

It is the most sublime act, the one most akin to the vision of the elect. It is attained by renouncing the proper resources of the human intellect, and the perfections by which it is enriched, by a complete despoiling of itself to become a being who prostrates itself in adoration before the Divine Being.

But with what pain must we purchase such a light of the Holy Spirit ! It must needs be, in short, that our mind is interiorly dislocated, that it opens wide to the point of stretching *itself out, in order to make* contact with the Infinite as he is himself. That is a terrible moment ; the mystics call it the great desolation *of the great* darkness. That which gave the light to our eyes, none of that is with us any more. We must give up the natural movements of our mind when faced with facts ; we must, as it were, annihilate the act of the mind taking pleasure in what it sees. It is painful, but this pain engenders a great joy. This entire docility, going to the limit of renouncing even the forces of the mind, renders to God the only homage worthy of his majesty.

#### IV THE HAPPY EFFECTS OF THE GIFT OF WISDOM

When the mind thus prostrates itself, charity rejoices. This movement is, as it were, infinite ; we do not know how far the soul can go in abasing itself in adoration : the abyss is fathomless. And thus charity ascends to higher stages all the time, without measure : it is at ease : it has found the light adequate to the loftiness of its inner instinct. The mind is enlarged to the dimensions of God's infinity which it touches, to which it bears witness, since *it humiliates itself; love has* found in him a measure for

its lofty aspirations : it is love at its highest earthly degree, although not consummated. Now we are adorers 'in spirit and in truth.'

Charity, I say, has found an 'indication' concerning God at the height of its instinct. The mind of the believer, animated by wisdom, speaks to its own heart, of its Beloved as he really is. Charity rejoices. That which it asked in vain of explicit faith, it has found when wisdom was communicated to the intellect. It can live these minutes of enjoyment, which the charity of the saints proves, when the intellect ravished in God prostrates itself before the infinite majesty. These are the most delightful moments which are granted love to experience upon earth.

When this prayer is made with reference to our Lord or the Eucharist, or to any similar subject, it would not be able to abstract from creatures. Our Lord is a man ; however, inasmuch as he is God, taking into account the finite nature to which the divinity is joined, wisdom helps us to see in him an unheard of sublimity by a penetration of experimental knowledge which we did not possess before. Thus, through these words of the *Gloria* : *Tu solus sanctus, tu solus Dominus, tu solus altissimus*, a movement carries me towards that which makes Christ so holy and so much the Lord and the Most-High, and it is possible for me, in following this movement, to go beyond it, so to speak, and to rest before the Saviour in an attitude in which I adore his majesty. This is a kind of prayer in which wisdom instructs us ineffably about the divinity of Jesus, not about his humanity which, taken apart, is not the direct object of wisdom. No one has a love for our Lord at the height of his goodness, *if he does not* prostrate before his divinity and adore—'O Godhead his, devoutly I adore thee, *Adoro te, latens Deitas.*'

But there is a terrain of choice, a predestined object of

wisdom, namely the Trinity. The Trinity is everywhere. But in the devout soul, it is there in an especial manner. It is there as if more attentive to its work of love, richer in gifts, giving both nature and grace. Moreover, the soul receives it into itself as a friend who has his dwelling and abode in this heart. Such is the favourite meditation-matter of the saints. The divine Trinity is at the root of their soul ; there it remains as in its home, being made welcome by the soul able to hold and possess it.

V THE PRAYER OF UNION

So the saints thought of God substantially present within them. So we enter into ourselves by the mediation of faith, enlightened by faith and supernatural charity. Knowledge removes the obstacles ; understanding, by one word, reveals to us what he is ; but it is above all by the inspiration of wisdom that we contact God, that we *get so far*, so to speak, as to touch him. Faith cannot make us do this ; it is inevitably surrounded by the images of which it makes use ; it shows itself to us through words, human images and representations ; if the being of things were in an understandable fashion within the reach of the senses or sense-judgment, we should have no need of images. When we approach God with faith, we take it for granted that he is distant. But if a movement of the soul be caused by the *gift of wisdom*, without precise images, the obstacle is removed : we then prostrate ourselves before the God who dwells in the innermost recesses of our soul. When the God who is there as in a *temple* a contact is made ; no image or representation separates it *from* its object ; only *in the indivisibility of the soul there is* an adoring soul and the infinite God, substantially present, the object of immediate experience and of contact. This is the last word *concerning* union and the

prayer of union. St Teresa came out of this prayer with the certitude that she had gone to God, present within her. It is only wisdom which can thus apply our mind to the substance of God in the interior of our soul, but it can lead us to that point.

We may willingly believe that these things take place for some of the more favoured saints, a St Catherine, a St Teresa. But with our state *of* grace, we possess all the gifts, wisdom included, and the capacity to experience these things. They are within the power of ordinary grace, and destined to develop the virtualities of this grace.

The states of prayer are not an extraordinary way, such as ecstasy, ravishing, rapture, as well as the graces *gratis datae*. Those of us who seek the perfection of the love of God, may we not have experienced, without knowing it, this state of prayer or of union? At certain moments, have we not experienced this kind of annihilation of ourselves before God, present in our interior soul. Perhaps on the occasion of a Communion? Then the presence of our Lord is close. This proximity has set our soul in motion; we have been led further towards the divinity present within us. God was there, and not seeking to understand more, we prostrate ourselves in a close sense of his immediate presence, and by the attitude of our mind and the power of our charity, we have made contact with this God.

These things do happen, but it is with difficulty that we perceive their value, their dignity and their normal existence in our life; we do not attach much importance to them. We say truly, 'This is a grace, an event in my spiritual life.' But why not wish to renew this experience? We add, 'It must be God who puts us in this state.' He will do so, but we must prepare ourselves for such a great favour.

If our life is spent in the practice of the infused moral virtues, with the gifts which help it, it will find itself thus set at peace. If we are in the presence of creatures as if we did not wish *for them*, considering only what they tell us of God, if *we* have entered through understanding upon the knowledge of divine things, we are at the door of the prayer of union, all we have to do now is to go through it, and since we have in the gift of wisdom the capacity to be stamped by this wondrous inspiration, it is not rash to hope that sometimes it will breathe upon us. The error would be to seek a spiritual greed, to 'attach ourselves to God's changing expressions' as St Augustine says, more than to God himself, and to make it a pleasure.

This again would be to lay claim to the higher things when we do not practise the ordinary commandments of God and his counsels of perfection. But *if the Holy Spirit* himself has purged us, raised us up, made us mount to the summits, why do we not render to God this supreme homage of prostrating ourselves before his being with our mind and heart, if the *Holy Spirit* gives us the power? Do not fear to anticipate his favours; this is neither imagination nor ambition. God's mercy has afforded us the means: *they form* part of the perfect normal Christian life.

## CHAPTER XIV

### Blessed Are The Peacemakers

*Blessed are the peacemakers : for  
they shall be called the children  
of God.* (Matt. 5.9.)

**T**HE peacemakers are those, who, having found peace in their own hearts, now spread it amongst those around. Theologians connect with this beatitude the gift of wisdom. The wise, according to the Holy Spirit, are the peacemakers.

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GIFT OF WISDOM

The wise man, according to the Holy Spirit, has the capacity of entering into profound adoration before God's greatness—without words and without thought. He not only adores, but relishes experimentally God's being, and this as far as it is possible, for the supreme God dwells within his very heart. That is the state of his soul. When he contemplates this God, so great and so near and in whom is all goodness, his charity in all its fullness dwells on this earth, not in the senses which may perhaps be undergoing great trials, but by will, by a sublime impetus of love. He is happy, because he possesses the infinite Good, his perfect goodness, and because he knows that he possesses it.

It is, undoubtedly, this contemplation that Dionysius calls circular. In vertical contemplation the soul, by a quick movement, rose from the plane of the creature to God, so high above us. In spiral contemplation, by

successive illuminations, it went from clarity to clarity, from *faith to faith, de fide in fidem*. Now only one thing becomes apparent—the greatness of God. We advance no more. We stand face to face with the divine All, holding ourselves before him, not advancing, not retiring, though turning as in a circle, ending in its eternal centre.

The gift of wisdom, therefore, gives us this experience, this sense of the grandeur of God and of his presence ; and it is this that nourishes charity. Except for the full vision and its permanence, we shall not have more than this in heaven.

But we still have life's work before us, with its difficulties. And, as our Lord and *the* apostles had to come down from Thabor after the Transfiguration, we also after our highest contemplations, must fall back into ordinary *life and* deal with the world. Christ, on descending from Thabor, found a poor man possessed whom he delivered. There are the two aspects of life.

The gift of wisdom corresponds to this. It does not only effect the raising of our contemplation to a very high degree, but it is also a practical gift to assist us in a masterly fashion in ordinary life. According to St Augustine and St Thomas, wisdom not only applies itself to the contemplation of God, but also to the consulting of him for practical directions. Now what can the soul, having experienced the *all* of God, desire ? It desires that God should be *all in all things* (*1 Cor.*, 14, 28). And so there emerges the supreme law of this union : when the soul returns to practical life it brings with it from the vision of the *all* of God this impulse of the Holy Spirit : that God may be all in all things. And to what will the soul then apply itself ? It will, after this vision, endeavour to order all things and to put them in their right places—beginning with its own thoughts, affections and wishes.



One will now judge all from this point of view, all that the gifts of understanding and of knowledge have already cleared up. But this order will now become more exact as light has become more abundant. Those creatures obstructing faith have been put in their place.

Then the influence of the gift of wisdom will make itself felt in our counsels. Prudence, now aided, will see more clearly and more definitely. The soul, coming from that union with the divine, will need absolute moral truth. Perfect justice becomes necessary and, above all, prudence dictates decisions in perfect accord with the exigences of God the All.

On a lower plane, wisdom will exercise her influence as to justice and mildness, religion and piety and, under violence attacks, will counter-attack and suffer. Still further down, wisdom will aid fear in those struggles against the three concupiscences. Penetrated by the All of God, we shall be provided with clearer light and greater energy to bring order into this lower world. In our dealings with the world, dealings of justice and connected with the apostolate, we shall be encouraged by this need to order all in the sight of the All of God. We shall become very apostolic : and shall redouble our efforts when seeing another escaping from the subjection due to God, and in forgetting self. Material care and proofs of charity will become abundant in order to express some of the feelings due to the All of God who must reign over us.

The glory of God is the sole end of him who has been taken up to the mount of Wisdom, finding himself face to face with all the height of the divine perfections : the glory of God, the love of God spread abroad everywhere.

The result is that all is in order both within and without. One sees everything, one's feelings, affections, actions and

all that surround one in the state of justified beings belonging to God's 'all,' who have no worth or price save in the measure in which they reflect this infinite. And so, within us the complete tranquillity of order reigns.

Order cannot reign where things are not in their place. If things are badly placed, they create a disturbance *till they find* their equilibrium and their centre. But when all is ordered, as in a house where everything corresponds to the idea of a wise architect, all is firm and at peace. And so the edifice of our life is regulated by the demands of the 'all' of God; its order is stable, nothing grates, nothing protests, and if anything would complain in us, it would have only to contemplate the 'all' of God to forget this sadness.

Tranquil order, that is peace. The man, then, who has everything regulated, everything put in order in his charity, in his actions, possesses peace. But as it is in order that a glowing furnace sends forth its heat, the interior person, for whom God is all, who has forced himself to regulate all in this direction and has found peace for himself, makes peace to *radiate* around him; he appears as a messenger *of peace for* others. Thus there are those who radiate peace: they are the peacemakers.

## II THE PEACEMAKING KING

There is a peacemaker who can be called the incarnation of peace. He is 'the peacemaking King,' our Lord. What peace there is in him. Even when consumed with zeal, even in his encounters with the Pharisees, he does not lose his interior peace. In the whole *of his life, in his dealings with the poor, everything in him radiated peace, because his Father was* always with him: he lived in perfect union with God. By his very being, in the first place, in his divinity and in his humanity, by the glorious

vision and the gift of wisdom that he possessed pre-eminently, and by which he experienced God's All, he had one desire in his heart : to possess and radiate this peace. He calmed storms on the sea ; he soothed the troubles of his disciples. Only those who did not wish to be calmed did not know his peace. Since he had to die, it was necessary that there should be wicked men to crucify him.

Let us put ourselves before this exemplar. He is God ; but he has a human nature. He is our example. He possesses divine perfections : he has perfections also, belonging to his humanity alone. His wisdom is the wisdom of a God ; it is also the supreme degree of human wisdom. He is the incarnation of peace. He possesses it and spreads it around. What a vision of peace the gospel brings ! That is the impression that it gives. In the Master's footsteps, we desire to go to the source where he drew this peace—wisdom. He had the continual and immediate experience of God's presence in himself and of God's All. It is by this peace that flowed from him, more than by his miracles and his revelations, that he gave testimony that he was the Son of God. God is the great peacemaker. ' He causes the sun to shine upon good and bad, and the rain to fall upon the just and upon the unjust.' He is patient, long-suffering, kind : the Son of God reflects these perfections. He is the peacemaking King. It is by this sign that we recognise him, more even than by the attribute of his mercy, already so characteristic of his divinity.

If, then, we have entered into the spirit of wisdom to find God, if we have come forth with the feeling that God is all, and have ordered everything according to this principle, we shall be hailed as children of God. We are but adopted children, but with the only Son, we have this feature of resemblance, this family likeness of being

peacemaking. Nothing makes us think more of God and of the Son of God than a peacemaking spirit, made peaceful through God's peace. Nothing bears a greater resemblance to the inner life of Jesus, than the inner life of such a peacemaker : and this inner life becomes known outwardly. Of the first Christians it was said : See how they love one another. Of the peacemakers it will be said : They are the children *of God*.

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We have made a meditation upon the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and the seven beatitudes. Let us survey the point we have reached. The Holy Spirit has 'disposed steps in my heart,' says the Scripture. We began on a low step. Already, through fear, we felt that we were at the beginning and that, at the other extreme, to this first gift there corresponds the gift of wisdom. Already it was carrying us towards its splendours, for the 'filial fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.'

We were carried upwards by fortitude which made us apt for our positive duties of attack and endurance. We attained to piety with the sublime accents of religion and through meekness which is a beginning of peace, we attained the key-stone of practical life : counsel.

Then we were raised to contemplation.

Knowledge made us enter into God, drawing us from creatures by the sight of their poverty and showing us in them the divine transparency.

Understanding made us penetrate the divine ray of the Scriptures and of the teaching of the Church, and took us *all* the way to the true God.

Gradually we were approaching God, as it were, by concentric circles. With wisdom the gradient ceased ; we had arrived at the summit. Wisdom is the definitive

key-stone of the supernatural order. Having reached this summit by the continual succeeding helps of the Holy Spirit, we possess by wisdom him who is the explanation of all, and now we can spread far and wide the benefits of this divine union, by the order that we were building up in ourselves and around us.

The great Wise One, who is Almighty God, has arranged all things in a wonderful way : he has disposed marvellously the organs of our spiritual life : grace, the virtues and the gifts, so that we may be able thus to rise in a perfect way towards him, then to return so much the better. If God has worked marvels in nature, he has done so above all in the supernatural order, and in particular the marvel that there should be saints. Let us then turn again to him to give thanks and to promise to do all that is in us to live with this vision ever before us and to put into practice the directions, thoughts, desires, lights which he has planted in us through these means.

## CHAPTER XV

### Spiritual Progress

*The way of the just is as a resplendent light which grows and increases unto the perfect day.*

#### I THE LAW OF PROGRESS

WE have seen this wonderful organism of the gifts and virtues which the Holy Spirit creates in the just man. Now the interior man is incorporated into Christ his head. From Christ there comes to him light, life, movement. True head of the just, the Saviour ceaselessly stimulates him through his grace and through his sacraments which are a kind of extension of his body, the instruments of his miracles during his life. In the first rank of these graces we find the teaching of the Church, the liturgy, the doctrine and examples of the saints. The whole life of the Church is a source of life to those who are within the Church, and all those mysterious Christian influences come from Christ living in heaven. From his glorious being he sends us the Holy Spirit who is given in Person, and who is as the heart of our spiritual life of which Christ is the principle. We are under the continual influence of these two divine Persons, who act upon us, so long as we remain in a state of grace.

Sanctifying grace is like a grafting charged with divine life, fixed into the wild stock of our nature, to make all its sap perfect, to divinise its energy and make it produce magnificent fruit. Christ, in infusing grace into the soul, has provided it with organs. They are the theological virtues : faith, which puts us into relation with the true

God ; hope which makes us seek our good in him ; charity which secures this good, through the affection of the heart, and aspires to enjoy his presence in perfect union.

Under the inspiration of these virtues, prudence governs the particular virtues implanted in our potencies to submit them to God : justice which renders to each his due ; fortitude and temperance which govern the violent passions and the concupiscences of the flesh.

As a new help, the Holy Spirit intervenes with his personal initiative. He watches over our failings, stimulates us ceaselessly, to keep up our spirits as we advance towards perfection. He works these results by his gifts which are within us in a state of ready attendance, impressionable potencies, and which he actuates by his inspirations, personally by his individual initiative, if we are attentive and faithful to follow his impulse.

Nothing is so fine, strong and noble, nothing is so powerful, as the just man. Nothing is to prevent him from marching forward towards eternal life, and already he holds its substance in his grasp in the darkness of faith : faith, the substance of things we hope for.

What is the law of this eternal life, begun here below with the energies put at our disposal, under the influence of our two Masters, and also of the Father who sends them ?

It is a law of progress. We have to tend towards perfection. There is our life : life must be for us as a light which begins with dawn, becomes stronger, increases, progresses further and arrives at the perfect day. Ever-increasing light : a road over which we advance. 'The road of the children of God is like a growing light.'

## II HOW DO WE PROGRESS IN GRACE AND CHARITY ?

In what does this progress consist ? How do we, being in good training, advance towards eternal life ?

In the order of nature, moral progress, like progress in art or anything else, become a fixed habit by the repetition of acts. To perform acts with attention, little by little, engenders habits, as if their strength created a powerhouse of self-production. It is by repeated acts, then, that we progress in our habits, that we reach the point of producing easily and naturally, things which before seemed to us difficult and inaccessible.

It is impossible to obtain this increase in the supernatural order by the simple repetition of acts, by the mere application of our will. The supernatural comes from God. By taking thought we could not increase our stature one cubit, and neither can we, by our own efforts alone, increase our supernatural life. At all these steps, just as at the beginning, grace is a gift; it is a participation in the nature of God who is outside our grasp. God then has to give grace and its increase, one by one. That ought to make us very humble: if we do good, we must say with St Paul, 'By the grace of God I am what I am.'

Is there then nothing to do but to sit back and wait? There is room, on the contrary, for being active. If the cultured man, the artist, progresses by his own efforts, the Christian progresses by his merits: we can *merit*. To merit is to place before God a certain right to receive this increase of supernatural life. We cannot alone by our own strength, launch the movement towards perfection, but we can merit this increase of divine life. To the man who makes his talents bear fruit, the Master gives greater riches as a reward.

There are two kinds of merit: merit of fittingness (*de congruo*) and merit of strict justice (*de condigno*).

An honest man who does not know the law of God but who lives in accordance with reason, does such a man merit, in strict justice, good in the supernatural order?



No. He cannot place before God any strict right to receive grace. He is not on the level of the divine life. But it is fitting that he should be rewarded. It is fitting, I say, that since the man is doing what he can, God should also do what he can. This man, not possessing the divine life, cannot merit in all the rigour of justice a divine recompense, but he does merit the mercies of the Lord. Such is the merit of sinners. It attains its effect through good works ; in a sense these works are not compelling as far as God is concerned, but they dispose him, if we can so put it, to give his merciful grace. It is not the sinner who disposes himself to salvation, only an intervention from on high can bring him back into the way of grace. But the man who does what he can, infallibly draws down upon himself the infinite goodness of God, always ready to diffuse *itself*. Such is the merit of fittingness.

But for those in a state of grace, it is different. They have a store of divinity which is a sharing in the divine nature. The Christian sanctified by grace is a child of God ; this carries with it a supernatural perfection, an effect of the very life of God ; he is on the right level to receive a higher share in the divine life. This is the merit of strict justice, which makes him worthy to receive an increase of charity ; the merit of the man who, having received talents, has made them bear fruit and has the right to receive his reward.

For each effort, for each action performed in a state of grace and for the love of God, there is a recompense. There is the means and the whole secret of spiritual progress. In making divine acts, we obtain in strict justice a divine recompense which cannot be anything but an increase of the eternal life begun in us.

That which makes up this merit is not the act taken in itself, on its purely material side, nor the difficulty, nor

the pain that it costs ; it is that store of grace, that elevation, that supernatural destination of our works for the divine recompense. That is what makes us worthy of God's *glory, and not effort. We* wrongly imagine that sacrifice, difficulty, are the cause of greater merit. The reason for greater merit is greater charity. To accomplish an insignificant action, and there are many in the Christian *life, with* great love is of greater merit than to take on a difficult enterprise with little charity. That which makes the merit of our actions, says St Augustine, is what God puts into them ; ' When thou dost crown our merits, O Lord, thou dost crown thy gifts.'

### III THE OBJECT OF MERIT

What do we thus merit in justice ?

By each of our actions, in this state of sanctity, we merit eternal life. A single act of charity, should we not be right in saying that simply the time taken to make a sigh of love towards God merits eternal *life ?* Throughout the whole of an existence, each act so made merits eternal *life.*

This is our first progress in the life of grace ; all these acts made in a state of justice, by means of the virtues and the gifts, pile up on one another ; they form ' treasures which moth cannot corrupt.' And so we make *for* ourselves purses filled with priceless gems, each one of which can purchase the gift of immortality.

There is, then, in the piling up of good actions, as it were, an increasing weight of merits for eternal life. St Paul has said that a moment's tribulation suffered for charity, lays up an everlasting weight of glory. What then if these weights accumulate ?

This thought should give us confidence when we are confronted by our venial sins which thus find themselves counterbalanced by our acts of love.

*B u t* he who can do more, can do less. If God gives away heaven for each of our meritorious acts, how much more will he not give an increase of eternal life in our present state.

So by each of our good acts, we merit an increase of grace and a growth of charity. St Paul says, ' I shall show you a more excellent way—charity.' Charity is like a road which moves itself, and makes us move along too.

#### IV HOW CHARITY GROWS

How can grace and charity grow, and with them the everlasting life which they begin ? This increase cannot take place in the object ; the object of charity cannot become larger within us : it is God himself. A single degree of grace is already face to face with eternal life and gives us the right to possess it entirely. We shall not have eternal life more or less. How are we then to understand this progress ?

Grace, charity and the virtues which flow from it, are like graftings inserted in our nature. They can be what they are, more or less deeply ; they can submit to themselves the natural energies of the soul, and raise them to the divine ideal.

In nature, graftings take well or badly, and between the two extremes how many grades there are ! If the grafting takes well, it draws to itself all the sap of the parent stock which now begins to bear fruit perfectly well. If it does not take so well, the parent-stock throws out offshoots which, if they are strong, absorb all the sap and the grafting dies ; if they are feeble, they do no good to the grafted tree, and yet they do not suck it dry.

This image helps us to follow the work of grace in ourselves. It is by establishing their root in our wild

nature that grace and charity make progress. If we submit to them entirely nothing will escape and all actions will be performed by virtue of grace, and take on its quality. The grafting in this case has taken in a sovran fashion. There are indeed certain little actions which escape this divine force, proceeding from self-love : venial sins, imperfections, which do not hinder the divine flowering of the virtues. Nonetheless, it is taking something away from the love of God. However, only mortal sin can absorb all the vitality in favour of sinful nature and can arrest this life of grace and of love.

If this is so, each time we make an act through charity, with the virtues and the gifts, we merit a further ingrafting of grace, our nature is more fully mastered. The vitality of our inborn energies pass more abundantly into our supernatural life, and by the continual production of such acts, nature is finally completely submitted to the divine influence ; no fibre is left in us, as St Francis of Sales said, that does not vibrate for God. The divine grafting thus draws to itself all this strength before putting them forth into life where they will bear fruit.

#### V THE ROLE OF THE ORDINARY ACTS OF CHARITY IN THIS GROWTH---THE MOST INTENSE OF ACTS

At times we make feeble acts of charity and this by routine. We have no lively sense of God, and through drowsiness, our love is not strong. These acts, made carelessly, are made without vigour. Virtues are not ignored but their impulses are neutralised by the instigation of nature : their acts could be more perfect and more fervent considering the grace that we possess. Will these acts, good but relaxed, diminish our spiritual treasure ? No, nothing is lost. Our acts do not always merit for us by virtue of actual charity towards God, but all that is

done justly is done for the love of God. We do not renounce this love, and we have made the intention to do all for it alone. The moment one of our acts is not sinful, it savours of virtue ; it possesses a divine merit. What does it merit ? How are grace and charity added to by so small an act ? It does not give us an appreciable and actual increase, but rather disposes us to receive it. It does not give a further degree of charity, but a disposition which is new, a preparation for such a growth. It does not bring with it a falling off, but rather a growth of this mysterious potency of life, which accumulates in our hearts and prepares a perfect blossoming, an appreciable increase of love. These acts build up treasures of strength deep within the powers of the soul, and the supernatural organism is thus supported and enriched. For those who love God in truth nothing is lost, even of that which is but slackly done, if it is an act of virtue. In a state of grace, all that is not sin brings us nearer to God or disposes us to a closer union.

Following these little acts often repeated, it will happen one day in a moment when we must prove a greater love to God, pardon an injury, take care of someone who is sick, fulfil some duty that is difficult and requires a special effort, we shall spontaneously be found fully accomplishing our duty. We shall be able to burst into an intense act of charity which we shall have prepared long before, and we shall be found worthy to receive a higher state of grace. Often this increase of charity will fulfil itself in communion ; for surely the Eucharist is the sacrament that nourishes divine life in us. Material nourishment leads to the ingrowth of blood and flesh ; communion contributes to the growth of the spirit. This will be a communion in which we shall have given ourselves completely, letting ourselves be truly absorbed by Christ whom we receive,

and we shall obtain permanently, by virtue of previous meritorious acts, a further degree of love ; acquired for ever, so long as we do not slide backwards.

#### VI VENIAL SIN DOES NOT DIMINISH CHARITY

But these feeble acts are not the only ones to register, for there is sin. We have the formidable power of arresting the mysterious passage of human vitality into the divine grafting. We can thus lose supernatural life through mortal sin. As to venial sin, we know that it does not destroy grace, but can it diminish it ? No venial sin can make us lose that degree of charity which we have reached through our merits. Venial sin affects the means of perfection which are not necessarily connected with charity. It concerns certain prayers, matters of observance, acts of charity, a multitude of things not indispensable to supernatural life and which can, therefore, be omitted without our losing the love of God, or which can be done without destroying it. By carelessness in prayer or by impatience we do not lose our state of grace.

This is a wise teaching. Charity looks upon God as our end. Sin is concerned with the means. If the means were essentially bound up with charity and in such a way as to make this the object of a command, one could not go against the means without also going against the end. We cannot say that we love God if we do not accomplish his will. The object of these little failings is not so bound up with charity ; it is not absolutely incompatible with the divine end of love. Undoubtedly we cannot say that we love God through venial sin, but we do not even then cease to love him habitually above all things. It would not be just, if for a fault in a small matter, we were to be punished by the loss of a treasure acquired by a host of acts, or perhaps by one heroic act : this would be out of proportion.

God does not repent of his gifts. If we do not offend him mortally we retain his grace, or that degree of grace which we had reached by our merits and by the mercy of our Lord.

Venial sin, however, is not without its offence. It produces deplorable dispositions. They are like small offshoots sprouting at the base of a seedling and diminishing the vigour of its *graft*. If the offshoots multiply they will exhaust the tree and if a stronger one appears it is the end of the whole graft's life. Venial sin disposes us to mortal sin; it diminishes the supernatural activity of virtuous habits and is a danger to the life of grace.

#### VII UNLIMITED DEVELOPMENT

How far does the development of divine life progress on this earth? There are no limits. It is not infinite, but is unlimited. To begin with, there are no limits within charity itself, for it is an emanation of the love that God has for himself, and for us. Our charity is a small but precise image of the love of the Holy Spirit. Its aspirations are infinite. They are directed towards God himself, who is infinite.

Nor are there limits as to the capacity of our soul. Our heart is not like a vessel with fixed sides to it, for it can widen without measure and charity can grow unceasingly with its acts, the power to love. The loving man is possessed with the idea of the infinite and seeks the perfect good, the living God. Each growth in grace, instead of filling up the infinite capacity of our soul, widens it. We see certain saints, like St Dominic, St Teresa and St Catherine, continually growing in love, and always becoming more ready to love still more. The more we quench our thirst at this source, the more we shall thirst. Contrary to earthly food, the more assimilated to us this

spiritual *food* becomes, the more we absorb of it and the more we desire it.

Nor is there any limit given to the power behind love. Charity, the virtues and gifts, unceasingly keep us under the influence of the Holy Spirit whose strength is infinite. The more he moves us, the more he can move us. From this angle the growth of our divine life is still without measure.

We have said that this growth comes about by merit. Perpetual growth, 'a light that increases unto a perfect day.' And we have passed from darkness into light. We are marching towards this perfect day enrapturing the elect in its happiness with the glory of the living God.

That is our life. Do not let us be satisfied with just inscribing perfection on our life. Let us move towards it. We must never stop. God has given us such resources to reach this summit. Divinely equipped to realise this development, to attain the plenitude of Christ, let us have nothing more at heart.

Life has but one meaning for us : to grow in the love of God ; to grow more, to hope more in order to love more. St Thomas said, ' Make me, O my God, always to believe more in thee, that I may hope better in thee, that I may love thee more ardently.' That is the deeper meaning, the definite meaning of life. Happy are we to know it. Now we must walk on this way of God. We know the means of achieving progress. We possess the resources required on the march. Let us then make progress and advance towards our Lord, the object of our love. May our life grow as the rising dawn ' until we have reached the perfect day.'



