



FÉNELON

Meditations
and
Devotions



Mowbrays

Fleur de Lys Series

MEDITATIONS AND DEVOTIONS OF FÉNELON

Selected and Translated by
ELIZABETH C. FENN

Interest in this Archbishop of Cambrai in the reign of Louis XIV has increased, but there have been few of his writings republished here in recent years. This translation is simple and direct, and the selection shows the practical spirituality of the writer, and the relevance of his thought to the modern reader. The material is arranged in four sections: Short Meditations on Various Subjects Taken from Holy Scripture, Morning and Evening Devotions, Affective [cf. touching] Thoughts for Seasons and Special Days, and Meditations for the Sick.

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MEDITATIONS AND DEVOTIONS

THE FLEUR DE LYS SERIES OF SPIRITUAL CLASSICS

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F L E U R D E L Y S S E R I E S

Meditations and Devotions

From the Writings of François Fénelon

SELECTED AND TRANSLATED BY
ELIZABETH C. FENN

REVISED AND ANNOTATED BY
STEPHEN PLUSTWIK

GREENSBOROUGH, VIC
STEPHEN PLUSTWIK
<https://stephenplustwik.com>
No 9979

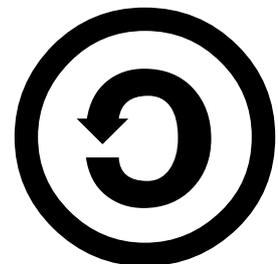
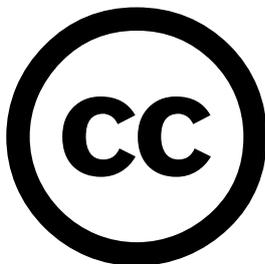
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REVISING EDITOR'S FOREWORD

FOR this new edition, the original Morehouse-Gorham and A. R. Mowbray volumes have been brought together, revised and annotated. Wherever possible, *additions* rather than *replacements* have been made in the text. This is to assist the reader's comprehension—with the insertion of more accessible language—while preserving Elizabeth C. Fenn's translation. Other archaic or irregular forms which could conceivably be deduced have been left as they are.

SP

August 2015
Greensborough, Vic

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TRANSLATING EDITOR'S FOREWORD

A CENTURY and more ago the spiritual writings of Fénelon were so popular [in America]* that an introduction to any work of his was hardly necessary. A small book published in New Bedford, Massachusetts, in 1802 began, 'The Character of the Archbishop of Cambray is so well known and established, that 'tis needless to say any thing of him. . . .' To-day such is not the case; although there has been a revival of interest in Fénelon in recent times, his character is not so generally known and only a portion of his writings have been republished.

François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon (1651–1715) lived in France during the great and glittering—and disastrous—reign of Louis XIV. His life was wholly devoted to God even while he lived at the notoriously frivolous [cf. shallow] and licentious [cf. sexually promiscuous] Court; and when given the choice of worldly power and popularity, or disgrace and banishment [cf. punishment of exile] in defence of his beliefs, he chose the latter rather than betray his loyalty to God. His life and character have continued to inspire and fascinate men through the succeeding centuries.

In our own time three memorable biographies have appeared: *Fénelon: His Friends and His Enemies, 1651–1715* by Ella Katharine Sanders (London: Longmans, Green, 1901); *Fénelon: A Study* by James Lewis May (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1938); and *François de Fénelon: Study of a Personality* by Katharine Day Little (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951).

In his youth, Fénelon greatly wished to be a missionary to Canada; his superiors, aware that his health was not robust,

* Parts of the 1952 American Foreword were omitted in the 1954 British edition; these parts have been restored in the present Foreword.

refused his request. And yet his actual presence in America hardly could have produced so great an effect as his writings did more than a hundred years later. [It is interesting to speculate [cf. theorize] upon the influence of this French aristocrat and Catholic priest on the Protestant and democratic citizens of a new Republic in the New World.]

[The Quakers and Episcopalians printed many small books of his spiritual works, and later his writings were extremely popular also among Unitarians. Many of these early translations, however, often obscured his teachings by omitting all references to the Sacraments and Catholic doctrine.]

[In a sermon delivered in Philadelphia in 1841, William Ellery Channing said,

The clear, strong utterance [cf. expression] of one gifted, inspired Christian flies through the earth. It touches kindred chords in another hemisphere. The word of such a man as Fénelon, for instance, finds its way into the souls of scattered millions.

An even more revealing indication of his influence is the following excerpt from a letter written by a young sea captain, Robert Bennet Forbes, to his wife in 1838. He was engaged in the China trade and while at sea he wrote, 'I read Fénelon night and morning and your letter once a day. . . .' The book he read, sailing on the clipper ship to China, contained some of the meditations printed in this volume.]

In the selections of which this book is comprised Fénelon delineates [cf. portrays] the sins of the spirit, not the senses; he penetrates to the source of temptation in order to stir the soul so that love for God may grow. The meditations and prayers probably were written when he was still in his thirties and while he was Superior to the *Nouvelles Catholiques*, a community for the instruction and guidance of young women interested in, or recently converted to, the Catholic Faith.

The *Affective Thoughts* may well have been written during his years at Versailles or perhaps shortly after his banishment to Cambrai; but this is only a surmise. Although one senses the background of the ambitious and artificial atmosphere of the Court, nevertheless the appeal of these communings [cf. conferences] is universal. They are in the great tradition of all the Christian mystics in their strivings to overcome self-love, and to become the loving and willing instruments of God.

This translation attempts to follow faithfully Fénelon's Catholic and mystic thought and to present it in a style natural to Fénelon yet not unnatural to the modern reader. To all who aided and encouraged me in this endeavour, the deepest gratitude is gladly given.

ECF

The Feast of Corpus Christi
June 1952
Boston, MA

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MEDITATIONS AND DEVOTIONS

SHORT MEDITATIONS ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS TAKEN FROM HOLY SCRIPTURE

Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.

—SAINT JOHN 6:68[69]

WE are not familiar enough with the Gospel; we are afraid of knowing it well. We ignore its teaching and skim its meaning. We carefully study the words of men and neglect those of God. One word of the Gospel is worth more than all the other books in the world together. It is the source of all truth. With what love, faith, and reverence ought we to listen to Jesus Christ. Let us say with Saint Peter, 'Lord, to whom shall we go?' One moment of meditation, of love, and of the presence of God will give us more understanding of truth than all the reasonings of men.

Take heed [cf. take care] therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness.—SAINT LUKE 11:35

IT is not surprising that our faults disfigure us in the eyes of God. But that our virtues even are often only imperfections—this should make us tremble! Often our courtesy is only a selfish worldly discretion; our modesty a superficial [cf. shallow] and hypocritical means of keeping within the bounds of good manners and winning praise; our zeal [cf. fervour] merely a matter of temperament [cf. nature and character] or

pride; our frankness [cf. outspokenness] only bluntness, and so on. Our sacrifices to God are frequently made with reluctance, yet with the appearance of being sincere. Let us fear lest [cf. in case] our light may change to darkness.

Woe [cf. bitter grief] unto the world because of offences!

—SAINT MATTHEW 18:7

GLADLY, Lord, I repeat these warning words of Jesus Christ, Thy Son and my Saviour. They are terrible [cf. terrifying] for the ever sinful world, but kind and consoling to those who love Thee and despise [cf. hate] the world. May I never again engage in worldly service against Thee! O false cruel world, you flatter in order to betray; you entice in order to ensnare. You laugh. You scorn [cf. hold in contempt] those who weep. You charm the senses with a foolish joy that turns to sorrow. But you will weep eternally, while the children of God will be consoled. O how I fear your kindness! How I scorn your contempt!

For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.—SAINT MARK 10:45

ANY one having authority over others must consider these words. It must be genuine service. If we would effectively serve those under us we must bear with their imperfections, correct them patiently, and gently lead them in the way of God. By being humble we can soften needed discipline. We should be all things to all men, never forgetting that we were created to serve them. We must never be discouraged. We must ask God to change their hearts since only He can do it. Examine your relations with those committed to your care and for whom you are responsible before God.

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.

—1 SAINT JOHN 2:15

How wise these words are. The world is that heedless [cf. unthinking] and corrupted multitude [cf. crowd] that Christ accuses in the Gospel. Every one criticizes the world and yet each carries it in his heart, for the world is made up of those people who love themselves and who love others without relation to God. We are the world, for we love ourselves and seek in others what comes from God alone. Let us admit that we do not have the Spirit of Christ. How shameful to say we renounce [cf. abandon] the world and yet to keep its values. Desire for power, love of prestige, self-indulgence, pursuit of pleasure, cowardice in Christian practices, neglect of the truths of the Gospel—here is the world. It lives in us; and we want to live in it, else why are we so desirous that it love us and so fearful lest it forget us?

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you.—SAINT JOHN 14:27

WHAT contentment there is in knowing that the world is worthless. We are not offering much to God in sacrificing this fantasy to Him. We are weak not to despise it as much as it deserves. We are to be pitied if we think we lose much in giving it up. Every Christian renounces it in his baptism. The Religious are only following their commitment with more precaution than others. To seek a haven is to flee the storm. The world promises peace, true, but it can never give it. It offers some fleeting [cf. brief] pleasures, but they cost more than they are worth. Only Jesus Christ can bring man peace. He bestows it with Himself. He subdues [cf. quietens] our passions, limits our desires, and consoles us with His love. He gives us joy even in pain: and so this joy can never be taken from us.

Woe unto the world because of offences!—SAINT MATTHEW 18:7

THE world, already condemned by God, dares to set itself up as a judge. We want to love God and yet we are afraid of displeasing the world, His irreconcilable enemy. O fickle [cf. disloyal] and false soul, do you not know that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? Woe to them that please that blind and corrupt judge.

What is the world? Is it an illusion? No, it is the group of worldly friends I see every day; they are considered decent respectable people and I am fond of them and they of me, but not under God. These are my most dangerous enemies. An outright enemy could kill my body. These would kill my soul. This is the world that I must shun [cf. avoid] if I would follow Jesus Christ.

And, behold [cf. take note], there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.—SAINT LUKE 13:30

MANY people in ordinary life will attain perfection, whereas many Religious, blessed with grace and called to taste the joys of the Spirit, will linger in a lukewarm and imperfect life. Many sinners, after having spent years in error and in ignorance of the Gospel, will, by the fervour of their penitence [cf. repentance], suddenly leave behind them those who have experienced the gifts of the Holy Spirit from their earliest youth. It will be wonderful for the last to win the crown also. But it will be sad for the first to become last, to see themselves behind those for whom they were formerly [cf. previously] the model and perhaps to lose their crowns because of the pleasures delaying them. I should like to see the devoutness of certain people living in the world—their selflessness and humility—without blushing to see how some of us who ought to be dedicated solely to God are lazy, vain [cf. self-admiring], and fond of temporal [cf. earthly] comforts. Let us run quickly for fear of being left behind.

The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

—GALATIANS 6:14

IT is not enough, according to the Apostle, that the world be crucified unto us. We must be crucified also unto the world. We may think we are far from the world, but we speak its language: we have its standards and shallowness. We desire ease, success, and popularity. We still have ideas of prestige. We react unpleasantly to the slightest humiliation [cf. humbling influence]. We wish, so we say, to forget the world; but in our secret hearts we do not want it to forget us. In vain [cf. without success] do we seek a middle ground between Christ and the world.

See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently [cf. intensely].—1 SAINT PETER 1:22

OUR charity should be always mindful not to hurt our neighbour. Without this mindfulness, charity, which is fragile in this life, would soon disappear. A haughty [cf. arrogant] or cross word, a cold or scornful [cf. contemptuous] manner can harm the timid. We must be considerate of these creatures so dear to God, these precious members of Jesus Christ. If we lack gentleness, we lack charity; for we cannot love without being kind and gentle. A loving kindness must fill our spirits and our hearts. 'Feed My sheep.' Christ's words to Saint Peter are, in a sense, a call to us to love one another.

Learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.

—SAINT MATTHEW 11:29

ONLY the Son of God could teach us this divine lesson; He Who 'being in the form of God, made Himself of no reputation,' says Saint Paul, 'and took the form of a servant.' Did He not do this

for love of us? Did He not suffer for us? And does He not suffer still? 'He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth.' And we complain of the slightest wrong; we are vain [cf. self-admiring], irritable, and sensitive.

There is no true meekness without humility. When we are self-centred, we are often annoyed with others. If we are convinced that nothing is due [cf. owed to] us, then nothing disturbs us. If we consider our own faults, we shall be lenient [cf. merciful] towards those of others. Ponder these words of the Son of God: 'Learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.'

Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee.—SAINT JOHN 21:16

THOU knowest better than I how much I love Thee, Lord. Thou knowest it and I know it not, for nothing is more hidden from me than the depths of my own heart. I desire to love Thee; I fear that I do not love Thee enough. I beseech [cf. beg] Thee to grant me the fullness of pure love. Behold [cf. observe] my desire; Thou hast given it to me. Behold in Thy creature what Thou hast placed there. O God Who dost love me enough to inspire me to love Thee for ever, behold [cf. consider] not my sins. Behold Thy mercy and my love.

For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.—SAINT LUKE 14:11

SINCE we love greatness so much, let us seek it where it really is and where it will endure. The ambition to live eternally with the Son of God and to sit at His right hand is truly admirable. But what a childish ambition to be eager for worldly recognition—to strive for a reputation more ephemeral [cf. momentary] than smoke, the plaything of the wind! Should we take such pains to win people who only *say* they are our friends, and to keep up appearances?

Let us seek true greatness. It is only to be found by humbling ourselves. God confounds [cf. overthrows] the proud who foster envy, criticism, and slander. The humble, who are hidden and content to be forgotten and who shun being sought after by the world, are respected even in this life and an eternal glory will be their recompense [cf. reward] for their indifference to [cf. disregard for] temporal glory.

Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

—PHILIPPIANS 4:4–5

DISTRUST of our own desires and of our vanity [cf. self-admiration] must be the basis of our joy. We must found [cf. base] our joy on trust in God. We should hope to be as acceptable to Him as we are unacceptable to the world. The expectation of Jesus Christ should make us calm and steadfast [cf. firm]. We must be ready to receive Him [in order] to be joyful when He comes. He will be the Judge of the world and our Comforter. How blessed to be waiting for Christ in peace, while this generation doubts that He will come. They will tremble and fear when they see Him and we shall behold [cf. look at] Him with joy and confidence. An enviable state—may all aspire to it. Indifference [cf. lack of interest] and distractions hinder this confident and comforting condition.

He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him.—SAINT JOHN 6:56[57]

JESUS CHRIST is our whole life. He gives Himself to us in the Holy Eucharist that we may be united with Him in the earthly fellowship He has made. He feeds us that we may live in Him and have everlasting life. Why, then, living by Him, do we refuse to live for Him? What does the heavenly Bread, the divine Flesh,

become in us? Are His actions and attitudes manifested [cf. apparent] in our lives? We feed on Him, but do we follow Him? We are always seeking luxuries and diversions [cf. recreations, pastimes]. Restlessly we hurry from one thing to another. We murmur at the least cross and try to hide our faults without correcting them. And we are one flesh with Him!

I sleep, but my heart waketh.—THE SONG OF SOLOMON 5:2

WE sleep in peace in the bosom of God, surrendered to His care and aware of His tender mercy. We ask nothing more. Our whole being rests in Him. No more anxieties, no more desires, no more restlessness. We are in the bosom of God; it is He Who has placed us there with His own hands and Who carries us in His arms. We are like a little child in the arms of its mother. Let go; rest in Him. This confiding repose which banishes [cf. exiles] all earthly care is the true watchfulness of the heart. When we yield [cf. surrender] ourselves to God without depending upon anything other than Him our heart watches [cf. keeps vigil] while we sleep.

Teach us to pray.—SAINT LUKE 11:1

LORD, I know not what to ask of Thee. Thou only knowest what I need. Thou lovest me better than I know how to love myself. O Father, give to Thy child what he knows not how to ask. I dare not ask either crosses or consolations. I stand before Thee. I open my heart to Thee. Behold [cf. consider] my needs that I know not of; behold and do Thou according to Thy mercy. Smite [cf. strike] me or heal me, depress me or lift me up: I adore all Thy purposes [cf. intentions] without knowing them. I am silent. I offer myself to Thee. I yield [cf. submit] to Thee. I no longer have any desire but to do Thy will. Teach me to pray. Pray Thou Thyself in me.

Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee.—SAINT JOHN 21:16

SAINT PETER said that to our Lord—dare we say it? Do we love God if we never think of Him? Have we not friends we would rather talk to than to Him? Where do we tire more quickly than at the foot of the altar? What do we do to please our Master and to offer ourselves to Him as He desires? What do we do for His glory? What have we sacrificed to do His will? Do we prefer His will to our smallest interests and pleasures? Where is this love we think we have? Surely His kingdom is not for those who do not love Him. And if we loved Him, could we be indifferent to His kindness, inspiration, and grace? ‘Neither life, nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, shall be able to separate us from the love of Jesus Christ.’

The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.—PSALM 23[22]:1

ARE we not ashamed to wish for anything but God? We have the source of all good and still we think we are poor. Even in religion we seek temporal comforts and consolations, regarding our religion as a means of softening our troubles rather than as a way of renunciation [cf. abandonment] and sacrifice; hence all our discouragements. Let us begin to give ourselves to God. In serving Him, never try to bargain about what He will do for you. To suffer a little more or a little less in this short life is no great thing.

What can I lack when I have God? Yes, God Himself is the infinite and only good. The false blessings of the earth only serve to make men unhappy. Nothing is good but the God of my heart Whom I shall carry within me always. Let Him take from me pleasures, riches, honours, friends, health, even life—as

long as He does not rob my heart of Himself I shall always be rich. I shall lose nothing; I shall have all. The Lord has sought me in my wanderings. He has loved me when I did not love Him. He has gazed upon me tenderly in spite of my ungratefulness. I am in His hands. He leads me as He pleases. I feel my weakness and His strength; with such a Stay [cf. support] I shall not want.

God is the strength of my heart, and my portion [cf. heritage] for ever.—PSALM 73[72]:26

LORD, Thou art the God of the universe; all things obey Thy voice. Thou art the soul of all that lives. Thou art more my soul than the one Thou hast given my body: Thou art nearer to me than myself. All is Thine. Will not my heart be Thine, this heart that Thou hast made and quickened [cf. enlivened]? It is Thine, not mine.

O God, Thou art also mine for I love Thee. Thou art everything to me. I have no other good, O my eternal portion! I long not for earthly consolations, spiritual delights, or special knowledge. I desire only Thee and that Thou wilt lead me to Thee. It is for Thee and Thee alone that I hunger and thirst. I lose myself in Thee. Do with me what Thou wilt. I love Thee.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.—SAINT LUKE 2:14

WE shall find our peace in seeking the glory of God. But God's glory is not to be found in any thoughts or actions of men. God must be glorified by the surrender of our minds and spirits. We must not wish His glory other than He wishes it Himself. We must be willing instruments led by His will. Restrain all

eagerness, all impulsive emotion, all uneasiness disguised as zeal. Peace lies in good will. To have no restless desire or hesitation, to leave ourselves in the hands of God—this is to have good will and to be conformed to His will. Then we are as immovable as Mount Sion, we cannot be shaken. We desire only God and leave all to Him.

Learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.—SAINT MATTHEW 11:29

O LORD, I come to learn at Thy feet. Thou art here. Thou hast drawn me here by Thy grace. I listen to Thee and believe. Speak, for Thy servant heareth.

Lord, I worship Thee. My heart loves Thee and longs for Thee. I bow down joyfully before Thee. I come to receive Thee and renounce myself. Send Thy Holy Spirit, that it may become mine and I may be transformed. I yield to the Spirit of Love and Truth. May He enlighten me this day and teach me to be meek and humble in heart.

Lord Jesus, Thou dost give me this lesson in meekness and lowliness. Thou dost teach me to find rest for my soul and peace.

Ah, how deluded [cf. misled] I have been in seeking peace! I sought it in the fond [cf. foolish] imaginings of my pride. Pride is incompatible with peace. It always longs for what it has not and always wishes to appear what it is not. Pride is ever exalting itself, but God constantly thwarts [cf. frustrates] it, humbling it by envy and the opposition of others or by its own defects of which it cannot be wholly unaware. Pride can never know the peace of the children of God who are meek and humble in heart.

MORNING AND EVENING
DEVOTIONS

MORNING PRAYERS

PSALM 95[94]

O COME, let us sing unto the Lord : let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.

Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, and show ourselves glad in Him with psalms.

For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

In His hand are all the corners of the earth : and the strength of the hills is His also.

The sea is His, and He made it : and His hands prepared the dry land.

O come, let us worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker.

For He is the Lord our God; and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand.

To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation [at Mer'ibah], and as in the day of temptation [at Massah] in the wilderness:

When your fathers tempted me, proved [cf. tested] me, and saw my works.

Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their hearts, for they have not known my ways:

Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.

LORD, is it surprising that we do not enter into the peaceful rest of Thy children? We have sinned against all Thy righteousness and our sin is always before us. Faith has not been our light. Hope has not been our consolation. Love has not been our life. We have run after vanity [cf. emptiness] and untruth. Our words have been false and malicious. Our actions have been careless. We have lived as though there were no other life after this one. Each has loved only himself, instead of loving self for love of Thee. Our lukewarmness and ingratitude is an abuse of Thy patience and the Blood of Jesus Christ!

Let us examine our conscience and listen to God in the depths of our heart that we may know ourselves without flattery

I CONFESS to God Almighty[, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to all the angels and to all the saints]* that I have sinned by my fault, by my own fault, by my most grievous fault. And I pray to all the friends of God in heaven and earth to intercede [cf. plead] for me to obtain forgiveness for all my sins.

O GOD, I am ashamed. I detest [cf. loathe] all my sins for love of Thee and because they displease Thee. O Beauty, so everlasting and ever new, why do I begin so late to love Thee? I would rather die than offend Thee the rest of my life. Wash me in the Blood of the Lamb. Fortify my heart against all the temptations of this day. Let me walk in Thy presence. Let me act in dependence upon Thee.

OUR Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, In earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As

* The part of the 'Confiteor' referring to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the angels and saints had been included in the American edition but was omitted in the British one. These references have been restored in the present edition.

we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; But deliver us from evil: For Thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, For ever and ever. Amen.

[HAIL, Mary! Full of Grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the Fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.]*

I BELIEVE in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:

And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried, He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence [i.e., the right hand of God the Father] He shall come to judge the quick [cf. living] and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; The holy Catholic Church; The Communion of Saints; The Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body; And the Life everlasting. Amen.

LORD, having confounded [cf. defeated] us with the sight of our miseries, console us with the assurance of Thy mercies. Grant that we may begin to-day to correct ourselves, detach ourselves, and shun false blessings which are for us true evils. Help us to believe in Thy truth, to hope in Thy promises, and to live for Thy love. Give, and we shall receive Thee. Strengthen us in our weakness. This very day may be the last of our brief frail

* The 'Hail Mary,' included in the American edition, was omitted in the British. This prayer has been restored in the present edition.

life on earth. It will be a happy day if it advances us towards the one that shall have no end.

HOLY angels, to whom we are confided [cf. entrusted], lead us by the hand in the way of God that we hurt not our feet against a stone.

O LORD, give Thy love to the living and Thy peace to the dead.

EVENING PRAYERS

PSALM 134[133]

BEHOLD [cf. look] now, praise the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord;

Ye that by night stand in the house of the Lord, even in the courts of the house of our God.

Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and praise the Lord.

The Lord that made heaven and earth give thee blessing out of Sion.

— — —

LORD, open our eyes that we sleep not in death. Alas, has not this day been empty of good works? It could have earned us eternity and we have wasted it. Perhaps it is the last of a life all unworthy of mercy. O foolish one, perhaps this night Jesus Christ will suddenly come to require your soul—the image of Almighty God—all disfigured by sin. O Lord, may Thy love watch over us while we sleep and guard our hearts.

*Let us examine our conscience as if we were certain of
appearing before God at this moment*

I AM the prodigal son. I have wandered into a far country. I have lost all my inheritance. I have lived like the lowest animals and

I am starved and begging. But I know what I shall do—I shall return to my Father. I shall say to Him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and Thee. But art not Thou the Good Shepherd Who leaves all His flock to seek a single sheep lost in the wilderness? Hast Thou not taught me that all heaven rejoices over a single sinner who repents? Thou wilt not despise [cf. regard with contempt], then, a humble and contrite heart.’

I CONFESS to God Almighty[, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to all the angels and to all the saints] that I have sinned by my fault, by my own fault, by my most grievous fault. And I pray to all the friends of God in heaven and earth to intercede for me to obtain forgiveness for all my sins.

OUR Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, In earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; But deliver us from evil: For Thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, For ever and ever. Amen.

[HAIL, Mary! Full of Grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the Fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.]

I BELIEVE in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:

And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried, He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God

the Father Almighty; From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; The holy Catholic Church; The Communion of Saints; The Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body; And the Life everlasting. Amen.

LORD, keep our spirits while we wake and our bodies while we sleep, that we may watch with Christ and that we may sleep in peace. Have mercy on our weakness. Send Thy Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Light, to remove far from Thy children the shadows of darkness surrounding us. Grant that we may resist them, being courageous in the Faith. Give penitence to sinners, perseverance [cf. persistence] to the just, and peace to the dead.

MAY our evening prayer rise up to Thee, O Lord, and may Thy loving-kindness descend upon us.

AFFECTIVE THOUGHTS
FOR SEASONS AND SPECIAL DAYS

ADVENT

Now, O Lord, in recollection [cf. spiritual meditation] I shall worship the mysteries of Thy Son and await His birth within my heart. Come, Lord Jesus, Spirit of truth and love, taking human form in the womb of the Blessed Virgin.

I await Thee, Lord Jesus, as the prophets and patriarchs of old awaited Thee. Joyfully I repeat with them, 'O heavens, shed [cf. shine] thy light, and let thy showers descend upon the just; let the earth be opened that our Saviour may come forth [cf. emerge]!' Thou hast already come once. The righteous of old witnessed that which was desired by all nations; but Thine own received Thee not. 'And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended [cf. overcame] it not.'

Why dost Thou tarry [cf. delay]? Come, Lord, in judgement of the thankless world and thoughtless man. Thy kingdom come! When shall righteousness, peace, and truth from on high come to reign over us? Thy Father gavest Thee to all peoples. He gavest Thee all power in heaven and earth; and yet Thou art unknown, despised, offended, and betrayed. When shall the day of judgement of this cynical world and Thy day of triumph come? Rise up, rise up, O Lord, judge Thine own cause! Cast down the wicked; raise up Thy children. Justify Thyself before the face of all peoples. We seek Thy glory, not ours.

Lord, I love Thee for Thyself alone and not for myself. I suffer. It saddens me to see evil prevail [cf. succeed] and Thy Gospel assailed [cf. attacked]. It is painful to be a slave to trivialities in spite of myself [cf. contrary to my own

intentions]. How long, O Lord, wilt Thou leave Thine heritage afflicted? Come, Lord Jesus, shed the light of Thy countenance [cf. face] upon us. I renounce all that surrounds me here on earth. Its ruin is at hand.

The very sky shall fall. This sinful world shall be burned and renewed in a righteous fire. Even the stars shall disappear; their light will go out. The elements will be consumed in flame. The universe shall be overturned and the wicked will shudder at the sight. As for me, I shall cry lovingly and trustingly, 'Smite, Lord, glorify Thyself at the expense of all that hinders [cf. obstructs] Thy holiness. Smite me; spare nothing to purify me and make me worthy of Thee.' This foolish world is concerned only with the present fleeting moment. All this will perish, and yet we seek to possess it as though it were life everlasting. The heavens and earth will vanish away like smoke, but God's Word will eternally remain. O Truth, we know Thee not! Error is enthroned and fills the heart of man! All is false, all is vanity. Everything we see and touch, everything measured by time will end in nothingness. How is it that vain [cf. empty] illusion is accepted as real, and immutable [cf. unchanging] truth is dismissed as a dream? Lord, why dost Thou permit this delusion? The whole world is deep in a sleep of death. Awaken it by Thy light.

As for me, I desire only Thee. I await Thee. I regard the thunderbolt ready to leave Thy hand to crush the proud and avenge Thy patience. Far from fearing death, I look to it as the deliverance of Thy children. Yes, Lord, we die and death will suddenly break the spell. Thou wilt no longer be offended. We shall love Thee. And we shall love ourselves in Thee and for Thee. How I love Thy Advent! Already, according to Thy teaching, I walk before Thee with eyes uplifted. Transported by love, I haste [cf. hurry] to my Saviour. It is true that I am weak and wretched. I have everything to fear if Thou shouldst judge

me by the letter of Thy law, I admit. But the weaker I am the more I am convinced that life is a danger and death a blessing.

O Lord, free me from sin. Come and reign within me. Save me from myself and I shall be wholly Thine. What shall I do on this earth? What can I desire in this valley of shadows where evil seems to triumph and good is imperfect? Nothing but Thy will can keep me here. I love nothing that I behold [cf. see]. I do not want to love myself except in Thee and for Thee. I long for Thy coming!

SAINT THOMAS

LORD, open my eyes and enlarge my heart that I may understand and share in the gifts Thou hast given Thine Apostle, Thomas. O Holy Spirit that filled and guided him, inspire me and transform me into a new creature. O Father of wisdom and compassion, Thou workest what Thou wilt in men. They no longer seem mere men after Thou hast spoken to them. Who is this weak timid man? By the world's standards he is inferior and ignorant. Where is he going? What does he mean to do? He intends to change the face of far-distant nations, to conquer by truth alone peoples who have withstood the arms of would-be conquerors. He is setting out to discover a new world and to bring to it a new law. To undertake such things in this world is indeed to be dead to human prudence [cf. caution] and to be filled with the foolishness of the Cross!

Thus does God abolish all worldly wisdom in His perfect children; all self-reliance influenced by human standards which, in making a choice, hearkens [cf. listens] only to our own feeble and limited reason. He calls forth *that which is not* to confound [cf. overthrow] *that which is*. [Emphasis added for clarity.—Ed.] He chooses to select the most commonplace that

He may accomplish before the eyes of the astounded world what is seemingly impossible.

O God, Thou art jealous of the glory of Thy works. Thou dost desire to found them on naught [cf. nothing]. Thou hast dug down to nothingness for a foundation, as the wise dig down to strong rock when they erect their buildings. O Lord, go Thou deep within me and overthrow all that is opposed to Thee. Upset and destroy every human arrangement that I may be remade in Thy image, for there can be no new creature while any of the old remains. Then, after Thou hast overturned everything and reduced all to nothingness, I shall become all things in Thee because there will be nothing of myself remaining. In Thy hands I shall take whatever form suits Thy purpose. By the destruction of my own narrow being I shall enter into Thy divine immensity.

O who will understand? Where are the souls ready for mortification [cf. self-denial]? The least reservation keeps us bound. Whatever seems good and is held back is robbery in the sight of God, for everything belongs to Him and is due [cf. owed] to Him. The more pure the gifts, the more jealous He is that we do not possess them for ourselves. Only absolute self-oblation [cf. self-offering] can make us truly His instruments.

Fashion me, Lord, after Thine Apostle, Thomas. He was one of the lowly ones raised up by Thy grace. He was a nobody, without money, talent, reputation, or even virtue. In weakness itself Thou didst take pleasure in showing forth Thy strength. He carried Thy Name to the heart of the Orient, to people living in a region of the shadow of death who had not eyes to see the light. The world—that is, that part of the world which is callous and deceitful (even to the point of deceiving itself)—which rejects the truth distasteful to it and is charmed by the falsehood that flatters it, this world could not resist one who was nothing in himself and who, by his nothingness, was

everything in God. God speaks through His weak creature and the Word that made the world regenerates it.

O Lord, I hear Thy Word and with joy in the Holy Spirit I tremble at understanding it. Thou hast concealed it from the great and wise, they will never hear it; but Thou hast revealed it to the simple and lowly.

We must abase ourselves. While we are still something, we are nothing; even though what remains is hidden, even though it seems good, it resists what God wills and stops His almighty hand. Who heeds [cf. pays attention to] this truth? Where are the courageous souls who do indeed desire to be nothing and to give up everything? Where are these faithful souls? They are incredulous as Thomas was before his conversion. They want to see, to touch, to be assured in advance of the gifts of God. But 'blessed are they who believe without seeing' and who truly worship God by a total self-oblation and the sacrifice of all within themselves that is opposed to His designs [cf. intentions]. Herein lies the apostolic life transformed in Jesus Christ.

CHRISTMAS

I ADORE Thee, Infant Jesus, lying in the manger. Nothing means more to me than Thy Nativity. O that I may become as humble and childlike as Thee! O Eternal Wisdom, incarnate in a child, take away my vain [cf. self-admiring] and pretentious [cf. pompous] knowingness and make me a child with Thee.

Blessed are the poor in spirit whom Jesus has made like unto Himself in the manger, stripping them of their own proud reason!

Hush, ye worldly wise; I do not wish to be or to know anything. I long to believe and to experience all things in the light of God, to lose my own judgement that I may think and

decide according to His wisdom. You men who are wise in your own thoughts, prudent in planning, cautious in conversation—I have no confidence in you. Your pompousness makes me inarticulate. I am at ease only with the children of God.

Behold [cf. contemplate] the Word made flesh, the all-powerful promise of the Father—a helpless babe capable of making only childish cries! And I pride myself on being wise; satisfied that I have a superior mind, I doubt that the world's opinion of my capacities is sufficiently high! No; all that must change. I will be numbered among those happy children who lose all to win all: they no longer care for anything in the world for themselves, and they are indifferent when others scorn them or refuse to rely on their judgement.

Let the world take pride in greatness; let even those with high ideals and zealous [cf. fervent] in good works increase daily in discretion and decorum [cf. good taste] and other noteworthy virtues; as for me, my happiness will be in decreasing: self will diminish and disappear in lowliness as I quietly accept whatever disapproval and disdain God wills for me—the shame of Jesus crucified united with the helplessness of Jesus the little Child.

We would rather die distressfully with Him than be bound in swaddling clothes with Him in the manger. We dread lowliness more than death, for death can be nobly and bravely endured; but to be treated like a child, to be deprived of self-respect, to return to childlike behaviour and yet to be keenly aware of the ridicule resulting from this action means unbearable anguish [cf. agony] for those souls whose courage and sagacity [cf. wisdom] would compensate for every other loss. Human wisdom, reason, courage, these the soul dying to self reluctantly relinquishes [cf. gives up]; all else has scarcely any hold on us or hardly belongs to us and slips lightly from our fingers; but our own wisdom is so flattering and forms such an

intimate part of the soul that to take it away is to flay [cf. skin] us alive.

Alas, I hear my reason questioning, 'Well! must one cease to be reasonable? Is it better to be a fool? Is not wisdom an attribute of God? And does not ours stem from His? Therefore ought not we to follow it?' But there is a vast difference between reasoning and being reasonable. We are never so reasonable as when we cease to reason so much. When we give ourselves up to God's perfect reason which our own, so feeble and foolish, cannot comprehend [cf. understand], we shall be delivered from arrogant knowingness, stunted and spoiled by sin; we shall be saved from our mistakes and follies. As we die to self in the Spirit of God, the true and perfect wisdom of the Word of God displaces our warped intelligence. We acquire good judgement without ever thinking about it, for we act foolishly only when we live according to our own spirit, following our opinions and inclinations: still thinking, speaking, and seeking in our own way.

Not by any effort of our reason can we rise above ourselves; only by the death of the ego we so cherish can we enter into that newness of life where, as Saint Paul says, Jesus Christ is our wisdom and righteousness. We go astray when we govern ourselves. To be safe from error we must let ourselves be led like little children. A child is utterly [cf. completely, absolutely] dependent; he has nothing of his own and he has nothing to hide. We must be simple and lowly, guided by the Spirit of God. After the rigid resistance of self-will has been dissolved, we are unhampered [cf. unobstructed] and ready to accept whatever comes. We are freed from dissimulation [cf. misrepresentation] and enabled to converse with candour [cf. openness], for Christ speaks through us. Then we shall not be wise, but God will be wise in us and for us.

O Infant Jesus, only little children can reign with Thee!

SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST

LORD, let me rest on Thy breast with Saint John and be strengthened in love by placing my heart on Thine. I want to be taught by Thy Love as Thy beloved disciple was. He said, and he knew by experience, 'His anointing teacheth you concerning all things.' The interior anointing of Thy Spirit teaches us silently. We love and we know all we need to know. We know by experience and we do not need to be told about it. Human explanations are an impediment [cf. obstruction] and distraction, for we have been illumined in our inmost being. We find all truth by learning that Love is the simple and universal Truth. Then before God, the creature, hollow pretender that he is, disappears and leaves no trace of his pretences.

Love is the divine Teacher of souls, but we do not want to listen to Him. We prefer to listen to learned lectures or our own rationality. The Master Who teaches without arguments and explanations is ignored. We are afraid to open our hearts to Him. We hold back because we fear that He may speak and ask too much of us. We are willing to hear Him on condition that we pay attention only when what He says coincides with our own opinions. Thus our wisdom would judge what it should be judged by!

O God of Love, Thou dost desire souls transported in Thee who are no more afraid of appearing foolish in the eyes of the world than Thine Apostles were. It is not enough to be filled with Thy divine Spirit, we must be immersed in it.

How much we could learn without studying and reasoning if only we would turn to the pure love that wants everything for God and leaves nothing to the creature but obedience. There is no other way to arrive at the truth of the kingdom of God. Love makes every decision and is never

wrong, for it attributes nothing to man and refers everything to God. It is a blazing fire that embraces and consumes and purifies all things, making a perfect holocaust of its victim. Then it is indeed necessary to know God, for nothing else is left; but we know Him very differently from those who consider God in impersonal and impassive [cf. emotionless] speculation. We love everything we behold [cf. see] and Love bestows upon us clear and penetrating insight. A moment of peace and silence shows us more wondrous things than all the marvellous discoveries of the scientists.

How many famous professors there are who discover a mere grain of truth and think they know all there is to know! They amass information on all the subjects pertaining [cf. relating] to man—anthropology, psychology, sociology, history, aesthetics, ethics, and the like. Yet how dissatisfied they would be with all their careful research if they *really* knew man! Is it worth while to concentrate exclusively on an earthworm? What can we learn from man or about man apart from God? God is the one infinite Truth that is wholly absorbing and enlightening. Life on earth being what it is, we must be educated; but to think we know something when actually we know nothing, to value education simply as a means of embellishing [cf. beautifying] the mind or learning a profession and to be satisfied with concentrating on man—this truly is folly and ignorance!

Lord, Thou art my Teacher. Thy heart is my book. I begin to understand the life Thou dost live in the bosom of Thy Father. At last I am learning what Love is, and it is beginning to operate in my life. I see now that I was created for Love, and I am beginning to be what God intended in creating me: I love.

Now I know all that we need to know and I do not want to know anything but God. From now on I shall be deaf to the

inquisitive and knowing world. On Christ's breast I am learning the love expressed in His crucifixion. All the accomplishments in the world are not to be compared with this!

THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST

LORD, I behold [cf. contemplate] Thee in the early days of Thy infancy, shedding the first drops of Thy blood destined for the costly sacrifice on the Cross for the salvation of the world. Thou hast come into the world to suffer. Thou hast taken the name Jesus which signifies Saviour. To save suffering sinners Thou dost join their ranks. This is the beginning of the mystery of sorrow and shame.

As the tiny Victim grows to manhood the expression of His Love will also grow. He delays His sacrifice only that it may be supreme. We cowardly humans tremble at the sight of our Saviour sorrowing and suffering. We are overwhelmed by the significance of the crucifixion. But there is no way to avoid the Cross; we must prepare our hearts for distress and pain.

Yes, Lord Jesus, I take up my cross, which at this time is failure and humiliation [cf. the state of being humbled], and follow Thee. It is right that I should be scorned. My humility is sincere only if I accept the scorn [cf. contempt] of others. How unjust it would be to expect our neighbours to be impressed with what we know to be unworthy. I submit, Lord, to all the shame Thou dost send me. I refuse none of it, for I entirely deserve it.

After all, what approval do I deserve? Does my sinful soul merit anything but the world's contempt? Can I ever be humiliated [cf. humbled] enough? I shall bear without complaint the humiliation which is my portion [cf. lot]. I ask for no more recognition, regard, or respect than God wills me to

have. All these attributes of success must be sacrificed to my Saviour Who was heaped with shame.

What is it within me that shrinks [cf. recoils] from being humiliated? Is it my pride? Ah, it is this very pride that makes me so unhappy and so unworthy of respect!

O Lord, the desire for humility is a far cry from the practice of it! I welcome the Cross from afar, but when it is near at hand I draw back. I have promised Thee to follow in Thy bloody footprints on the way to Calvary, but when pain or sadness come all my courage leaves me. (And yet how often I suffer inescapably through my own fault because of my sensitive feelings or envy and jealousy.) O God, I talk grandly of the Cross, but I want to know it in name only! I am afraid. I run away, for the very sight of it puts me in a panic.

What is the matter, O my soul? Why are you complaining? Why are you so discouraged? Why do you go from friend to friend seeking comfort?

Because God has humbled me and laid a cross upon me.

But did you not promise to love Him? Then why are you so troubled and anxious? Ought not a Christian to be joyful when he has what he has desired and is made to resemble Christ through suffering?

O Infant Jesus, do Thou give me Thy childlike acceptance of suffering. I may cry out; I may tremble; but let me never resist Thy crucifying hand. The more I am afraid to suffer, the more I need to do so.

THE EPIPHANY

LORD, I come to Thee and I shall remain with Thee. I am nothing; I find all in Thee. How poor am I and how rich art Thou; but what need have I of riches since Thou dost enrich me? I praise

Thee in my poverty. I am content to be nothing before Thee. Give me Thy Spirit to-day that I may contemplate Thy holy Son, Jesus, worshipped by the Wise Men. I adore Him with them.

The Magi, who were so wise, followed the star without reasoning about it. They put aside their prudence to follow a light greater than their own. They left their comforts and concerns. They ignored people's comments.

'What is the matter with them? They do not even know where they are going! What has happened to the sound judgement of these men who governed others? How credulous [cf. gullible] they are and how foolish! What rash and fanatical zeal!' So must the people have spoken who saw them depart.

But the Magi paid no attention to the opinions of others nor to their own common sense. They did not mind being called fools, nor even being unable to justify their action in their own eyes. They undertook a long and difficult journey without knowing what they would find. They saw an extraordinary star, true; but how many others, versed in astronomy, saw the same star without realizing there was anything supernatural about it! Only these men were enlightened and quickened in their hearts. The interior light of pure faith led them even more surely than the star.

Therefore it is not surprising that they willingly worshipped a babe in a manger. These great men became lowly. A little child! Is this what you have come to worship from the far countries of the Orient, O Wise Men? And I imagine their reply, 'The wisdom of God confounds [cf. defeats] our foolish wisdom. What seems worthless to man is often truly worthy in the eyes of God and it is right that we bow down and worship it.' O Wise Men, you have become as little children and found the true God in the child Jesus!

How can I attain the holy innocence and divine folly of the Wise Men? Put far from me the unholy and wicked wisdom of Herod and the people of the city of Jerusalem! They are satisfied with their own reason and good sense. They set themselves up to judge the counsels [cf. guidance] of God. They avoid what they cannot understand. I have had enough of worldly wisdom. I mistrust it and I shall no longer heed it. I intend to imitate the innocence of Jesus. Let the foolish world say what it will, let it be shocked even. I love the shame and folly of the Saviour. I am loyal to Christ and for Christ. Nothing shall stop me: neither regard for human respect, nor fear of being laughed at, nor the disapproval of the worldly wise, not even good men who are still all too humanly captivated [cf. held captive] by their own prudence. When I see the star I shall say, as Saint Paul said to the faithful who were still too attached to earthly blessings and their own judgement, 'You are wise in Christ; and we are fools for Christ's sake.'

A good intention, but how shall I accomplish it? Thou, Lord, hast inspired me with it, help me to perform it. Thou hast given me the desire, do Thou give me also the courage to carry it out. Henceforth I want no other light than that from on high, no other reason [cf. sensibleness] but that of sacrificing all my rationalizing.

O God, Eternal Truth, Supreme Intelligence, come and be the only intelligence that lights my way in the shadows of the Faith.

THE CONVERSION OF SAINT PAUL

LORD, I thank Thee for reminding me of Saul, the persecutor, whom Thou didst convert and who became the Apostle of the nations. Thou didst convert him for the glory of Thy grace.

Thou hast given this great proof of Thy grace and mercy as an assurance to all sinners.

O what punishment do I not deserve from Thy justice? I have forgotten Thee—Thou Who hast made me and to Whom I owe all that I am! And to my ingratitude I added hardness of heart and indifference to Thy promises, spurning [cf. rejecting] Thy grace and misusing Thy gifts. I have saddened Thy Holy Spirit by resisting His benign beckonings [cf. gentle invitations]. In my rebellious heart I said, 'No, I will not bear the yoke of the Lord!' When Thou didst seek me I fled, inventing excuses for separating myself from Thee. I avoided seeing and knowing certain truths clearly because I did not want to follow them. Crosses that were meant to detach me from life only irritated me. Virtue annoyed me for I knew that by such standards I was condemned. And so I scoffed at virtue and gloried in being ungrateful. I have walked in my own ways at the mercy of my passions, prejudices, and pride.

O Lord, what can I hope for after such unfaithfulness? I should utterly despair if it were not for remembering that Thou didst save Saul, the unbeliever and blasphemer who tormented Thy saints. He fell down a persecutor and rose up a man of God. O merciful Father, how good Thou art! The wickedness of men cannot affect Thy fatherly goodness. And so I know that Thou still hast grace for me and that Thou art patiently waiting for this miserable sinner who has defied Thee so many times.

Thou art not yet weary of waiting for me. Thou dost hesitate to punish this creature of clay made by Thy hands. Thy patience reassures my reluctance. But shall I continue to be sinful because Thou art good? Because Thou dost love me so much, do I think that I need not love Thee? No, Lord, Thy loving-kindness quickens me; not another instant can I disregard Thee Who renderest [cf. givest] me good for evil. I

make no resistance; may all that delays my sacrifice be destroyed. No longer do I repeat the *to-morrow* of a hesitant soul who continually avoids conversion; it must be *to-day*. The rest of my life is not long enough to repent of so many wasted years. Like Saint Paul, I ask, 'Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do?'

And Thou dost reply, 'Love Me. *Love and do what you will*. For if you truly love, you will do only what pure love dictates to souls detached from self. You will love Me. You will invite My love. You will no longer have any will but Mine. This is the way My kingdom comes and I am worshipped in spirit and in truth. You will offer to Me the pleasures of the flesh and the pride of your mind. The whole world will be nothing to you. You will no longer wish to be anything, and at last I shall be all things in you. This is what I would have you do.'

'But how shall I do it, Lord? This work is beyond man.' And Thou dost answer within my heart, 'O you of little faith, look at Paul and do not doubt. He will tell you, "I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me." He who thirsted after vengeance as the enemy of Christians thirsts after the love of Jesus Christ. Christ lives triumphant in His Apostle dead to all things. God has done this. The same hand will make you what you ought to be.'

THE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE

TO-DAY Jesus is offered in the temple. The rule laid down for the children of men is followed by the Son of God. O divine Child, allow me to be presented with Thee. Let me be as Thou art in the pure hands of Mary and Joseph. Let me be a child and even a victim like Thee. Thy ransom is the same as that of the children of the poor. The price of Jesus is two doves. O immortal

King, soon Thou wilt not have a place to lay Thy head. Thou dost enrich the world with Thy poverty; already Thou dost appear in the temple as a son of the poor.

Blessed are they who make themselves poor with Thee.
Blessed are they who have nothing and desire nothing.
Blessed are they who lose all possessiveness in Thee and
at the foot of Thy Cross;
Who no longer possess their own hearts,
Who have no will of their own,
Who are no longer their own.

This is rich and blessed poverty, a treasure unknown to the worldly. This emptiness is more than all the world's splendour.

Infant Jesus, I long to strip myself of everything and give it all to Thee, especially my heart—even to my smallest wish and least wilfulness.

It is difficult to understand but it is true none the less that we are separated from God until we throw off self and become lost in Him. The *I* of human nature which has always ruled must be for ever abolished.

Lord, teach me detachment so that I shall not turn again to self-love and eager longings. Then I shall be able to say, 'Lift me up or cast me down. Let me be remembered or forgotten, praised or blamed.'

What will it matter whether I am trusted or suspected unjustly? whether I am at peace or disturbed? It will no longer be any concern of mine. I shall think less about myself and what happens to me than about Him Who does all these things according to His pleasure. His will will be done and that is enough. If any *I* remains to complain, my sacrifice will be imperfect.

Self-renunciation means that the natural man must be gradually but relentlessly annihilated, and our human nature

rises in revolt at the thought. Old attitudes and habits do not die easily. They revive again and again. 'The treatment I receive is unjust,' murmurs self, or, 'this accusation is false and unfair. My friend is unfaithful and ungrateful. I am overcome by the loss of my worldly goods. The absence of all sensible solace [cf. felt consolation] is too bitter. This test that God puts me to is too severe. The good people from whom I expected help are curt [cf. rudely brief] and indifferent. God Himself seems to have rejected me and withdrawn from me.'

Well, weak and cringing soul, soul of little faith, do you not will what God wills? Are you His or your own? If you are still your own, you have reason to pity yourself and to cherish the things pleasing to you. But if you desire to belong to God Who would save you, why do you still listen to yourself? What is there left to say in favour of the unhappy *I* you have renounced utterly and for ever? Let every support be taken from him, so much the better. This is the substance of true sacrifice; the rest is merely shadow. This is the only way the victim can be truly offered and God worthily adored.

O Jesus, with Whom I offer myself, give me the courage to renounce self utterly. Thou wert ransomed for two doves, but this did not save Thee from the sacrifice of the Cross. Thy presentation in the temple was the beginning and the first-fruits of Thy offering on Calvary. And so all the outward offerings I make Thee cannot ransom me. I must give myself completely, even to dying on the cross. To lose ease, fame, money, even life is nothing; we must lose ourselves in Thee.

We must become strangers to self and have no other interest but God's to Whom we belong.



LENT

HERE we are, Lord, at the season of fasting and abstinence [cf. self-denial]. But it means nothing to abstain from [cf. deny ourselves] the food that nourishes the body if we do not also abstain from everything that feeds self-love. Give me, O Lord, the same inward chastity, purity of heart, detachment from every creature, and temperance [cf. moderation] mentioned by Thine Apostle. Then I shall make use of everything solely through need, as the temperate take food simply for nourishment. O blessed fast whereby the soul deprives the senses of everything superfluous [cf. unnecessary]. O holy abstinence wherein the soul, filled with the will of God, no longer feeds upon self-will. It has, like Christ, another meat by which it is fed. Give me, Lord, this bread, greater than any substance, which will appease [cf. satisfy] my heart's hunger for ever. The bread that extinguishes every selfish desire. The true manna that takes the place of all things.

O God, may my fellow beings keep silent for me and may I be silent for them during this holy season. May my soul be fed in silence by forgoing [cf. refraining from] all needless discussion. May I live by Thee alone and by the Cross of Thy Son, Jesus Christ.

But should I worry constantly about breaking this inward fast by any outward comforts given me? No. God does not wish us to be anxious and uneasy. His Spirit is a Spirit of love and liberty, not a spirit of fear and bondage [cf. slavery]. I shall simply renounce whatever is not in God's order for me—everything that is too distracting or that my [spiritual] director thinks I ought to give up; and, finally, everything that God takes from me by the events of His providence. I shall bear all these privations [cf. restrictions] peacefully, and I shall add one more—in all ordinary and necessary conversations, I shall cut

short whatever He shows me inwardly to be only a form of self-expression. When I feel called upon to make some outward sacrifice, I shall do it gaily [cf. cheerfully] for I know that a heart loving God must be generous. I shall act confidently, like a child playing in its mother's arms. I shall rejoice before the Lord. I shall endeavour to make others rejoice. I shall open my heart without fear in the company of the children of God.

I long for candour, innocence, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Remove far from me, Lord, the sad and fearful circumspection [cf. caution] that continually studies self and constantly weighs every atom of fear about breaking this inward fast. It is an injustice to Thee not to behave simply; rigid severity is unworthy of Thee. Thou desirest that we love Thee above all; but when we love Thee, Thou dost enable us to act freely and Thou seest clearly what stems from our love.

I shall give up any will which is not Thine. But I shall fast lovingly in the freedom and fullness of my heart. Woe to the worried narrow soul who is afraid of everything and because of his fear has not time generously to love and follow the Lord.

How complete is the fast made without anxiety! Nothing remains in the heart but the Well-Beloved and often even He is hidden and withdrawn. We are truly fasting when we feel our utter [cf. complete, absolute] poverty and when everything but the spark of life is taken from us. Who understands how to make this fast of pure faith? Where is the soul courageous enough to undertake it? It means absolute privation and obedience. It requires a willingness to cast off self and to follow God without reservation.

Lord, this is the fast of those who truly worship Thee. By detachment we become worthy of Thee. Empty my faltering famished [cf. wavering starving] soul; do with it according to Thy good pleasure. I am silent. I worship Thee, repeating again

and again in my heart, 'Not my will, but Thine be done.' I desire only Thee, O Lord.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

THIS day, centuries ago, Christ gave Himself completely to His Apostles. To His Apostles? Yes, but no less to us than to them. And ever since then this precious Gift has been offered and will be offered every day until the end of time, for the Blessed Sacrament is the pledge of the mercy and love of our heavenly Father. As our bodies must be fed with earthly bread, so our souls must be fed with the heavenly Bread that nourishes the children of God.

We perceive only a bit of bread and yet we receive all the blessings of Divinity in the life-giving flesh of our Saviour. Is it possible that the Divine Wisdom which created the universe can be concealed in this material form? Yes, Wisdom Incarnate is present in the Holy Eucharist. Infinite Love and Wisdom Incarnate are offered to duly [cf. suitably] grateful human beings incapable of appreciating this wondrous Gift. For where are they who are strengthened by pure truth, who live for God alone that He may live in them and transform them? He feeds us with the Bread of heaven that we may have no other wisdom but His, no other will but His which must be willed in us. Divine Wisdom must be infused in us as it is incarnate in the Blessed Sacrament. Outwardly we must be simple and weak; inwardly we must be dead to self and reborn in the Divine.

Until now I have not been nourished by my Saviour. I have concentrated on religious ritual and the impressive virtues pertaining to outward actions. I have worked to control my temper and increase my zeal and I have tried to be more courteous so there would be no apparent imperfections. But this is all on the surface; what of the inner effect of the Holy

Sacrament? I have not even sought it. I have thought only of modifying my behaviour without making any interior change. My mouth has tasted the Bread of heaven but my heart has not fed upon the true substance. Adoration in spirit and in truth, implying the submission of my will so that God may reign within me, is practically unknown to me.

I follow Thee, Lord, but in my own way and according to the dictates of my own mind. I love Thee for my good rather than Thy glory. I want to glorify Thee, but without fully surrendering to Thy purpose. I want to live for Thee but within myself, for I am afraid to die to self. Sometimes I imagine that I am ready for great acts of self-denial, and then Thou dost ask some small thing of me and I am upset and discouraged.

O God of Love, may my wretched unworthiness never repel Thee! Thou hast the power to hide the glory of Thy mystery within Thy miserable creature. Thou canst make a sacrament of me, although it will exercise the faith of others as well as my own. Weak as I am I give myself to Thee. I can do nothing, but Thou canst do all things. Aware of Thine almightiness, I am not afraid of my weakness. Word of God, be within this frail creature as Thou art within this Bread. Speak within my soul. Silence everything that is not Thee. Silence my soul that it may listen to Thee. Feed me with the Bread of life. Other fare [cf. food] encourages me to live for myself, confident of my own strength and engrossed in superficial affairs.

May my soul die the death of the righteous, the spiritual death which must precede [cf. come before] physical death. This interior death separates the soul from the self that is acquisitive and possessive. It checks [cf. curbs] all shallow ardour [cf. passion] and destroys all self-interest. Love is a mysterious paradox: the same heavenly Bread causes us to die and to live. It withdraws the soul from self and brings it peace.

Everything is taken away and we are given all things in God in Whom all things are pure. This is my love and my life. I shall feed upon the divine Bread daily and I shall fear nothing but being deprived of this spiritual fare.

GOOD FRIDAY

THE mystery of Christ's Passion is incomprehensible to men. It was 'unto Jews a stumbling-block, and unto Gentiles foolishness.' The Jews were zealous for the glory of their religion; they could not accept the shame of Christ. The Gentiles, steeped in [cf. filled with] philosophy, were wise and their minds rejected the crucifix: to preach of God on the Cross was to upset human logic. Nevertheless, this Cross, proclaimed throughout the world, prevailed over the proud zeal of the Jews and the haughty wisdom of the Gentiles. Christ's Passion confounds [cf. overthrows] the wisdom of the worldly wise who confuse religion with superstition and recognize virtue only in such acts as are obviously motivated by lofty sentiment. It disconcerts [cf. unsettles] the proud pious people who refuse to see anything in religion that does not conform to their own limited concepts.

The true worship of Christ crucified involves being crucified with Him; losing logic in the foolishness of the Cross, enduring disgrace and being willing, if God so wills, to be the laughing-stock of the wise. We say this readily enough with our lips but not in our hearts. We make excuses, we tremble and draw back as soon as it appears that we must be heaped with shame and forsaken [cf. abandoned] with the Man of Sorrows.

O God, we love Thee that we may receive comfort. We do not love Thee enough to follow Thee even to death on the Cross. We all run away. We abandon Thee. We disown Thee. We deny Thee. As long as we find it to our advantage to follow Thee, we

eagerly pledge our loyalty and boast of it, as Saint Peter did; but a mere question from a servant can reverse everything.

We tend to make religion conform to the limitations of our own minds. When it exceeds our feeble reason it becomes disturbing. But religion must be in practice what it is in principle; that is, it should lead us far beyond our human intelligence and deliver us to the fate of the Saviour crucified. It would be so easy to be a Christian provided we could be wise, masterful, courageous, and superior in all our doings! But to be a Christian by being humble and weak and scorned and laughed at by others, this we cannot begin to comprehend without shrinking from it. Therefore we are only half Christian. We not only give in to our feckless [cf. worthless] reasonings, but we take pride in upholding our own ideas. It demeans religion, we say, to make lowliness of spirit a principal precept. We ought to show how mighty it is. Ah, but we shall not be true Christians unless we are humble, docile [cf. submissive], and detached from self.

We would prefer a saviour who would make us perfect by assuring us of our excellence and who reinforced all the most flattering opinions of our own intelligence. Instead, God has given us a Saviour Who upsets our values and leads us naked to an infamous Cross with Him. O Jesus, there the world abandons Thee! We need not carry things so far, we say; that would exaggerate Christian verities [cf. truths] and make them distasteful. Well, do we not expect the worldly to be repelled when even some 'good' people are? Of course the mystery of the Cross seems unreasonable to prudent Gentiles when it upsets pious Jews.

O Saviour, let who will [do so,] sip Thy bitter cup; as for me, I want to drain it to the lees [cf. dregs]. I am ready to suffer shame, sorrow, ridicule, and insult from men and inwardly to

feel the trial of what may seem to be an abandonment by my heavenly Father. In spite of my shrinking human nature I shall say as Thou hast taught me, 'Father, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done.' These truths are too strong for those who would only half know them and can follow Thee only in the consolations of Thabor. As for me, I should be denying the reality of Thy love if I should draw back.

Come, let us go to Christ. Let us go to Calvary. My soul is sad even unto death; but what does it matter so long as I die pierced with the same nails and on the same Cross as my Saviour!

EASTER EVEN

TO-DAY I think of Jesus between the death He suffered and His resurrected life. His Resurrection will be as actual as His death. For Him, death was simply a transition from earthly to eternal life. O my Saviour, I adore Thee! I worship Thee in the tomb and I enter there with Thee. I no longer wish to be noticed by the world nor to be conscious of myself. I sink into the shadows and the dust. No longer am I numbered among the living. I am dead and the life which is being prepared in me will be hidden with Jesus Christ in God.

This state of being is so contrary to our customary conceptions that even few men of good will aspire to it. But what, then, is the meaning of the *Baptism* whereby, the Apostle assures us, 'We were buried therefore with Him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life'? What is this death that Christian character must bring to pass in us? Where is the sepulchre [cf. tomb]? It is in our hearts.

Alas, I have always wanted to impress others; I am eager for their approval. I long to be loved. I crave popularity. I make an idol of friendship and esteem [cf. respect] by striving to occupy my neighbour's thoughts and to possess his heart. To steal the incense burning on God's altars would be nothing compared to the sacrilegious [cf. blasphemous] theft committed by one who tries to appropriate [cf. seize] what belongs to God.

O God, when shall I cease wanting to be loved? When shall I cease to be eager for approval? To Thee alone belong all love and glory. I ought to love no one and nothing except in Thee and for Thee and with Thy pure love. I ought not to love myself except through charity as I would another, and so I ought to be ashamed of longing to be loved. But my supersensitiveness is not satisfied with being loved through charity; it is hurt at having only what is given it for Thy sake. Lord, punish my rebellious pride. I am for Thee against myself. I side with Thy glory and justice against my vanity [cf. self-admiration].

O self-idolater [cf. self-worshipper], how could you, apart from God, deserve any tenderness or attachment? How much charity is needed to bear with such unreasonableness—to want others to feel for us what God forbids us to feel for ourselves! Is this the way God wishes the love that He implants in His creatures to be used? Has He not made us capable of loving Him so that finally we shall cease to seek satisfaction in each other and turn to the true end of pure love?

No, Lord, I no longer desire to be loved. It is almost unnecessary for any one to bear with me through love of Thee. The more sensitive and demanding I am about the love of others, the more unworthy I am of their love and the more I need to be deprived of it. Likewise with the approval of others—Lord, do Thou give it or take it away according to Thy

purposes. May I become completely indifferent to my reputation which has been dearer than life to me. If Thou findest anything to Thy glory in it, well and good, but let it be as nothing to me. If any voluntary sensitiveness or any secret longing remains in me, I am not dead with Jesus Christ and cannot enter into His resurrected life.

Only after the false and corrupted life of the old man has been buried can we enter into newness of life. All must die: joy, solace, ease, friendships, and popularity. All will be returned to us a hundredfold, but first all must be sacrificed. When we have lost everything within us, we shall regain all in God. What we possessed impurely in the old man will be given back to us in purity in the new man—as base [cf. alloyed] metal does not lose its true substance by being refined of dross [cf. impurities]. Then the same spirit now bewailing and beseeching within us will love more perfectly. Our hearts will become tender and generous. We shall no longer love like faulty creatures with hearts constricted within narrow limits: infinite love will love in us. Our love will bear the character of God Himself.

Let us think only of following Christ in His agony and death to His tomb, to be buried there in the shadows of faith and to give ourselves up to the pangs of death. Let us not think of ourselves as being of this world. Let us forget the world and ourselves.

Lord Jesus, Thou didst die to help me to die. Take my life. Let no hesitation paralyse my heart. I make no limits to my sacrifice.



ASCENSION DAY

TO-DAY in my thoughts I join the disciples and accompany Christ to Bethany. There before my eyes He ascends into heaven. I worship Him. I cannot take my eyes from Him. Lovingly I watch Him depart and in my heart I hear the last words to come from His sacred lips as He left the earth. O Saviour, Thou art with me. Thou speakest to me always, I know the truth of Thy promise, 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.'

Thou art with us on this visible altar, bidding all Thy children to eat the Bread descended from heaven. Thou art also within us on the invisible altar of the sanctuary of the soul, the dwelling-place of true adoration. Here the pure in heart are truly offered to Thee. Here all our selfish desires are destroyed and all our reversionisms [cf. acts of returning] to self and the preferences of self-love are renounced. Here we taste the true Bread of life. We are nourished by the essence of eternal Truth. The Word made flesh is given to us as our interior word—to be our language, knowledge, life, and being.

If we have known God through the senses, we no longer know Him the same way. Pure faith and pure love, nurtured in us by divine Truth, make us finally one with Him. Thus the kingdom of God comes to us in this earthly life. Thus the will of God is done on earth as it is in heaven.

While it pleases God to keep me in this place of exile, I shall not seek heaven afar off and I shall find it on earth. I no longer know or desire any heaven but God, and God is with me in this valley of shadows. I bear Him in my heart and glorify Him there. He lives in me. It is not I who live, but He lives triumphantly in His creature and causes me to live in Him. O blessed and eternal

Sion where Christ reigns with all the saints, what glorious things are told of thee! I adore the reign of glory that shall have no end. To Thee alone, O Lord, belong all honour, glory, might, and majesty, world without end!

Lord Jesus, far from being downcast because Thou art not visible to us on earth, I rejoice at Thy triumph and glory. Here below I join my voice to those of all the blessed company [cf. group] who sing the song of the victorious Lamb. I am overjoyed to suffer in this exile that Thou mayest be glorified. Thine actual presence would be an indescribable fragrance; but not for myself do I seek Thee, but for Thee. If I considered my interests, what could compensate for lacking Thee in this earthly existence? What could console me for wounding Thee by all my faults? What could reassure me at the thought of the constant risk I run of losing Thee for ever? What could possibly soften my troubles and satisfy me in this life? But I love Thy will more than my security.

I live because Thou dost wish it. This life, which after all is only death, shall last as long as Thou dost will it. Thou knowest, O God of my heart, that my one desire is to keep Thy commandments. I am in this place of pilgrimage because Thou hast put me here. I love Thee more than my happiness and glory. It is better to obey Thee than to enjoy Thee. It is better to suffer for Thy purpose than to taste Thy delights and see the light of Thy countenance. In depriving me of Thee, deprive me of all else. Strip me of everything, leave my soul nothing of itself.

What joy will be as pure as that of seeing Jesus? If the visible presence of the Saviour had to be taken away, if God deprived the Apostles of such a holy consolation, with what

indignation [cf. resentment] will He destroy in us the many idols hidden in a life of our own? Consequently, should anything remain in us that we dare to refuse to Him?

O God, if in my human frailty I should waver, heed it not. Strip me of everything. When all else has been taken away, Thou alone wilt remain within my soul.

WHITSUNDAY

LORD, Thou didst begin to perfect Thine Apostles by taking away what seemed essential to them—the actual presence of Thy Son, Jesus Christ. Thou dost destroy all to establish all. Everything is taken away that all may be returned a hundredfold. This is Thy method. Thou art pleased to overturn human logic.

Then, having withdrawn the presence of Christ, Thou didst send Thy Holy Ghost. It is possible for privation to operate more powerfully than possession; yet cowardly souls cannot see this. Blessed are they who lack everything, even the conscious perception and experience of God Himself. Blessed are they from whom Jesus is hidden and withdrawn. The Holy Ghost, the Comforter, will come to them. He will soothe their sorrows and dry their tears. Woe to them who have their joy on earth; whose affection and protection are separate from God. The right spirit, promised to all those who ask it, is not sent to them. The Comforter comes to souls who belong neither to the world nor to themselves.

Ah, Lord, where is this spirit that ought to be my life? It should be the soul of my soul, but where is it? I do not feel it. I cannot discover it. I am conscious only of physical inertia [cf. lethargy] and spiritual dullness. My weak will is divided

between Thee and a thousand pointless pleasures. Where is Thy Spirit? Will it come to create in me a new heart like unto Thine? O God, at last I understand—it is in an impoverished soul that Thy Holy Spirit deigns [cf. sees fit] to dwell, provided the soul is opened to it without measure. Awareness of the absence of the Saviour and all His gifts attracts the Holy Ghost.

Come, Holy Ghost, Thou canst find nothing more barren and stricken [cf. afflicted] than my heart. Come and bring it peace.

Eternal Truth teaches us the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: the Father, Creator, Who creates in us all that He wills, making us children like unto Him; the Son, the Word of God, Who becomes the voice and secret language of the soul silent to all else save God; and, lastly, the Holy Ghost, Who abides [cf. lives] with us, loving the Father and the Son in us.

The Holy Spirit fills the soul with light. Those truths taught by Christ while He was on earth are implanted in the depths of our being. We are strengthened and inspired. We are made one with Truth; no longer is it something outside ourselves: we become the truth and are inwardly aware of it as the soul is aware of itself.

The Spirit of love teaches the soul without words; without sound or sign everything is illumined. Nothing is demanded, and yet the soul is trained in silence for any sacrifice. After experiencing holy Love we are dissatisfied with any other and we learn to distrust and forget ourselves. What utter joy is ours then without our having sought it! Love becomes the fountain of life flowing through our hearts.

O my Love Who art my God, love and glorify Thyself within me! My joy and my life are all in Thee. Thou art my All!

THE FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI

I WORSHIP Jesus Christ in the most Holy Sacrament where all the blessings of His love are hidden. The octave is too short to celebrate so many mysteries. I behold His love and goodness and mercy. Ah, Lord, what is Thy purpose? Why conceal Thy glorious Majesty? And yet, why expose it to the ingratitude of unfeeling souls and the irreverence of most men? Thou dost love us and seek us. Thou givest Thyself to us. In what manner dost Thou give us this gift? Thou dost bestow it in the form of bread, our most familiar food. The Bread of heaven, the flesh of my Saviour and my life, stirs the hunger of my soul; no other food could satisfy me.

The Word—wisdom, promise, and truth—is hidden within the sacred flesh concealed in common bread. O invisible God, I long to be hidden with Thee, living in Thy divine life! Beneath all my wretchedness, weakness, and unworthiness I want to conceal Christ. I long to become a sacrament of His love: all that would be visible would be the clumsy covering, the weak and imperfect creature, but the true God of glory would be within.

O God of love, when wilt Thou come? When shall I love Thee? When wilt Thou be the only sustenance [cf. nourishment] of my heart? The outward bread, this weak creature, will be broken and exposed to all sorts of accidents; but Jesus Christ, immortal and immutable, will be within, unbroken and unchanged. Living by Him, I shall live for Him and He alone will live in me.

The divine Word will speak and my soul will silently listen. The Word that made the world will bring understanding to His creature and will enact [cf. put into practice] whatever He wishes to express through me. He will create a new creature as He created the universe. Be still, my soul, do not heed

anything else, do not listen to yourself in the silence which is destroying your consciousness of self. Let the Word made flesh speak. What wonders He will utter [cf. express]! What a vast difference there is between the Son of God Who is Truth itself and the creature who casually mentions some truth that is, as it were, borrowed from God! He is what He proclaims. He is the essence of Truth. He does not express it as we do; He does not make it pass through our minds in separate, successive thoughts [cf. one thought after another]. He bestows it entire [cf. puts it whole] in the depths of our beings. He incorporates the Truth in us and us in it: we become the Truth of God. Not through our reasoning power and knowledge do we become the Truth but simply through love. We no longer need to argue and to be convinced in detail. Love instils all Truth in us. In a moment of perception we are struck by the nothingness of the creature and the almightiness of God. Then all is settled and everything else is swept aside. Nothing is left to the mind; we perceive one Truth and all else disappears.

We are no longer bound to the world. We recognize self-love for the blighting [cf. destructive] thing it is. And we bear with ourselves patiently as Jesus bore with Judas. Outwardly everything seems the same as before, but inwardly nothing external has any meaning. Nothing outward is our affair. Our concern is doing the will of God in the present moment and willing His will on earth as it is in heaven.

O Jesus, this is the true devotion Thou dost seek. How easy it is to worship Thee by ritual and praise, but how few souls offer Thee this inward devotion. So often our religion is superficial. We want to possess Thy Truth, but we do not want to be possessed by it. We would like to participate in Thy sacrifice, but never to be sacrificed with Thee. And yet we can never be one with Thee unless we lose ourselves in Thee.

O hidden God, Thou art unknown among men. O Love, we do not know what it is to love. Teach me to love, for that will be to teach me all truths in one.

SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

MY Saviour, I want to follow Thee lovingly to the very dust of the tomb as Saint Mary Magdalene did. Thou didst cast out from her seven devils. It is good to see that the saints Thou didst save from the depths of sin are the ones who seek Thee most courageously and devotedly. All Thy disciples fled; only the Magdalene, she who had been a prey to so many demons, wept over Thy tomb. She was inconsolable at not finding Thy Body. She inquired of every one she met. Overcome by grief, she did not think of what she was saying; she did not know what words she spoke. When love speaks it does not consult cold reason.

I hasten, O Lord, to Thy tomb with Mary Magdalene. I go down into the dust. I sink down into the shadows and terror of the tomb. I no longer find, O my Saviour, any sign of Thy presence or any trace of Thy gifts. The Lord is gone! All is lost. There is no Lord, no Love, no Light! Jesus is taken away. O sorrow, temptation, and despair—to lose even my love! Jesus Who was hidden and shrouded within my heart is no longer here. Where is He? What has become of Him? I cry out, but there is no reply. Nothing remains of my love but the distress of having lost it. Where is He? Give Him to me, take away everything else; I shall bear Him away.

Forlorn [cf. sad and abandoned] soul, you do not know what you are saying. But you are fortunate because you love, even though you do not realize that it is love that causes you to speak.

O divine Love, Thou hast a special tenderness for those who realize their utter [cf. complete, absolute] dependence upon Thee and their desperate plight [cf. unfortunate condition or state] when they lack Thee. Thou desirest souls who undertake everything in Thee and promise nothing in themselves; who never say *I can* or *I cannot*. They can do all things in Thee. They can do nothing without Thee. They who perfectly love Thee do not depend on their own strength. They are prepared for anything and they possess nothing.

THE ASSUMPTION OF OUR LADY

O LORD, I come to Thee to-day with Mary, the Mother of Thy Son. Give me a heart and thoughts like unto the heart and thoughts of Mary. Jesus, here is Thy Mother who leaves the earth to dwell with Thee for ever. My heart rises to heaven with her to love Thee. O Holy Ghost Who came upon the Virgin, come upon me and purify me!

After the crucifixion, what did Mary do during the rest of her life on earth? Saint Luke tells us that she continued steadfast [cf. unwavering] in prayer with the other women. Outwardly her life was much the same as others. We find no accounts of prophecy, preaching, visions, or miracles; nothing but a simple ordinary life. We know without a doubt that Mary, the Mother of God, was perfect; and so we learn that perfection does not depend on extraordinary or impressive actions. Her life was entirely interior: she *persevered in prayer*. This was her vocation. She prayed with the other women. How pure and how divine must have been her prayers. And these treasures were hidden in the recollection and simplicity apparent in her life.

The Blessed Virgin is the perfect example of adoration in spirit and in truth. Yet we persist in seeking it where it is not to

be found—in solemn undertakings and austere [cf. strict] behaviour. These have their place, and God requires them when it pleases Him; but the true practice of pure love does not depend on such things. To love silently, to desire God alone, to cling to no one and nothing, not even His gifts to appropriate [cf. take] them to ourselves: this is the practice of pure love. We suffer all things in a spirit of love; in abandonment to God and in interior privation, we endure the many evils of this life as Mary lived in sorrowful separation from her Son. If we truly love we do not count the cost of what we do or suffer. We do not consider ourselves capable or incapable of anything. We let ourselves be led like little children or as Mary let herself be given to John by her Son. Then we no longer have anything of our own and we are not our own. We live and die with a quiet heart. Rather, we have no heart or will of our own, but simply let God will and love immeasurably within us.

This is the pure, simple, and perfect adoration worthy of our Father. But do we try to adore Him? We are always afraid of going too far and losing ourselves by giving ourselves to God. Naked faith is not sufficient for timid selfish souls. They need to see and possess tangible gifts. They prefer to lean upon some one or the strength of their own intelligence. The senses and rebellious reason object to going forward without knowing where. We would serve God in our own way, managing our own affairs and in a soft and easy life. We want nothing, we say. Ah, but do we not wish for the real satisfactions of life—the pleasures of friendship, the success of what we believe right, and the approval of others?

O God of truth, enlighten our fearful, grasping souls with the radiance of Thy grace. Show us that we actually want everything although we think we want nothing. Lead us unrelentingly [cf. continually] from sacrifice to sacrifice. We

shall discover at each sacrifice we make that there was not one to which we did not cling too closely. What agony when God takes us at our word and deprives us of what we have offered Him so many times! We speak so glibly [cf. fluently] of renunciation without understanding what it involves . . . we serve Him with our lips but not in our lives. O my soul, I no longer trust you. I put my trust in God Who will separate me from myself.

O Mary, Mother of Jesus, I long to live and die, like thee, in pure love.

SAINT AUGUSTINE

WHAT is the compelling fact that is made clear to us in the life of Saint Augustine? It is this: the mercy of God can deliver us from the utmost degradation. The dissolute [cf. depraved] and the desolate [cf. wretched] have been ineffably [cf. inexpressibly] comforted by the hope exemplified in Saint Augustine's experience. God delights in saving those who were lost; in making straight that which was crooked. He gathers again unto His fatherly bosom all those who were far from Him and a prey to their passions. The witness [cf. testimony] of Saint Augustine teaches us, in our own dark distress, to hope and never to despair, for the well of divine mercy never runs dry for contrite hearts. We are encouraged to endure and overcome our most depressing failings.

See what the love of God has accomplished in Saint Augustine's heart! This saint once loved selfishly and sensuously, but God drew his love back to its true centre: to immortal truth and beauty. His love, so long enslaved by his sensuality and intellectual pride, at last was changed to perfect love. It became the humble love that denies self that it may truly love.

Thereafter Saint Augustine no longer cared for himself. He loved God supremely. He ceased to consider his own mind as his ultimate authority and used his brilliant intellect to contemplate the highest truths. How did this affect this young man who could reason so subtly and expertly—who could swiftly analyse the most complex problems? What happened to his conceit [cf. pride] and self-assurance? His whole manner was changed into one of childlike simplicity. He trusted in God; he lived by faith. Humbly he accepted love as his only light. The balm of love taught him all truth and he no longer weighed and analysed everything in his own intelligence. In the love of God Who is our only good, he learned to know himself as he really was. ‘Who am I?’ he asked himself, and then replied, ‘Nothing but a voice that cries, “God is all and there is nothing but Him!”’

The greatest intellect is that which has been absorbed in the universal and eternal intellect. Perfect love sees all things from the divine point of view; this interior insight abides in the inmost recesses [cf. secret places] of the heart.

Nothing can compare with knowing Christ. How can I come to know Him? Lord, teach me to love and I shall understand all scripture. Every page illustrates that the soul who loves knows all that Thou desirest to be known. Let me learn with my heart, not with my mind. Undeceive me about my foolish intelligence, my selfish prudence, and all my worldly ambitions unworthy of a soul who loves Thee. May I, like Saint Augustine, die to all things that are not Thee!

ALL SAINTS' DAY

TO-DAY the Church honours the Communion of Saints. I love the saints and I join with them in praising Him Who made them saints, saying, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of Thy glory: Glory be to Thee, O Lord most High.’

I behold the saints of all the ages with their many temperaments and their manifold [cf. many and various] testings and trials. There are really no times, no temperaments, and no circumstances that preclude [cf. prevent] saintliness. All the saints had the same outward difficulties and struggles we have, and they had to combat the same inner reluctance, sensitiveness, and natural rebelliousness. Strong habits had to be broken, and they were continually atoning for relapses. They had to beware of self-deception. Plausible pretexts [cf. reasonable excuses] for following their own inclinations had to be resolutely [cf. decisively] rejected. They were constantly cultivating firmness to overcome slackness. They had friends to fear and enemies to love. Pride had to be undermined daily and control of their tempers required continual practice. Above all, self-love had to be relentlessly rooted out from the very centre of their hearts.

How heartening it is to know that there are saints who were once as weak as I who am so self-centred and fearful. Some struggled all their days against strong temptations. Some had to live lives of prosperous ease extremely dangerous to the spiritual life. Others were at one time engaged in dubious worldly business. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is shed everywhere to show God's power and to take away any possible excuse for not serving Him. No entrenched habit, no temperament however tempestuous [cf. volatile] or timid, no crippling disability, no worldly success can excuse us from practising the Gospel. The witness of the saints settles it: grace takes various forms according to varying needs. It acts as surely upon humble kings as solitary penitents. Anything is easy if we do not resist God's grace.

I hear our Lord saying that God can change the very stones into children of Abraham. Lord Jesus, accomplish this saying in

me, hard and unfeeling stone that I am! Many hard blows will be required to shape me, I am so rebellious, disobedient, and incapable of any good thing. O Lord, take this stone and glorify Thyself with it. Soften my heart and quicken it with Thy Spirit. Make it receptive to Thine everlasting truths. Make me a child of Abraham following in the footsteps of his faith.

Shall I say, like the foolish world, that indeed I want to be saved, but I do not presume [cf. venture] to be a saint? Who can hope for salvation without sanctity? No impurity can enter into the kingdom of heaven. No matter how small it is, it must be eradicated. All must be purified in the fire of divine righteousness either in this life or the life to come. Any one who does not aim at complete renunciation of self and a pure love devoted wholly to God will remain imperfect.

O just God Who will judge all our imperfect righteousness, instil Thy righteousness within me to renew me!

ALL SOULS' DAY

O GOD, this day Thy Church commemorates the dead. We do not need to be reminded of death; on all sides the human race is dying before our eyes. A new world is growing up on the ruins of the one into which we were born and this new world, already ageing, is beginning to disappear. We die a little each day. Man is like the grass of the fields. 'In the morning it is green, and groweth up; but in the evening it is cut down, dried up, and withered.' The past is but a dream. The present escapes us in the twinkling of an eye if we try to hold it. The future is not ours, perhaps it never will be. And if it should be, what do we expect from it? The future is coming and draws near, it is here and already it is no more; it has fallen into the past where all is buried and forgotten.

Lord, there is only Thee. Thou alone art the true life; all else is a pretence [cf. make-believe] of life, a fleeting shadow. I rejoice in the fact that I am nothing; to Thee alone belongs all being. Thou art the life everlasting. How blind are they who think they are living and yet are merely dying!

Am I afraid of death? No, for the children of God it is the threshold of life. It takes away our vanities and sins and ushers us into immortality. When will kind death reunite me with Him I love? When will it come to give me the bridegroom's kiss? When will the bonds of my slavery be broken? Then I shall behold [cf. gaze upon] eternal Love and Truth that lighten endless day, and I shall know the peace of the kingdom of God where God Himself is all in all! O heavenly country, O lovely Sion, where my happy heart will lose itself in God! He who does not desire Thee, what shall he desire?

My God and my Love, I long for Thy glory and not my happiness. I prefer Thy will to my blessedness. For love of Thee I am content to remain far from Thee in this place of exile as long as Thou dost wish it. Thou knowest that it is not because I care for this earth or this body of clay, but as a total sacrifice of self to Thy will. Help me to die to all things before I die: dispel [cf. scatter] all selfish desire, uproot self-will, destroy all self-interest. Then I shall be dead and Thou wilt live within me. Then I shall no longer be my sinful self.

This is the spiritual death which must precede natural death. A death divine and transfigured in Christ so that our life is hidden with Him in the bosom of our heavenly Father. After this we are equally ready to die or to live. This death brings the kingdom of heaven on earth; it is the seed of new life.

Then, O Lord, I shall be in the world without being of it.



MEDITATIONS FOR THE SICK

I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because Thou didst it.

—PSALM 39[38]:9[10]

SHOULD I complain when my Lord strikes me since He does so for love and in order to cure me? Smite me, Lord; I submit. Thy heaviest blows are light because they contain so many blessings. If Thou hadst not struck my body, my soul might not have ceased mortally wounding itself. It was sadly injured. Thou didst see that and didst take pity upon it. Thou hast laid low this sinful body; Thou hast overturned my ambitious projects. Thou hast given back to me the desire for Thine everlasting Truth which I had lost long ago. Blessed be the Lord for ever. I kiss the hand that bruises me. I worship the arm that strikes me.

Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weak.—PSALM 6:2[3]

O MY God, I have no right to call upon Thy mercy other than my misery. Behold [cf. consider] my need and be merciful unto me. I *feel* my need, Lord. Blessed is this feeling if this awareness makes me wary [cf. cautious] of myself! Thou hast wounded my flesh to purify it. Thou hast bruised my body in order to heal my soul. Thou hast forced me from harmful pleasures by beneficent pain [cf. pain which does good]. The weakness of my flesh afflicts me—I who had no thought for the weakness of my spirit. I was a prey to vain [cf. empty] ambition and fierce desires. I was ill and I did not know it. My sickness was so great that I did not feel it. I was like some one who mistakes feverish energy for the vigour of good health. O blessed illness that opens my eyes and changes my heart!

For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.—PHILIPPIANS 1:29

PAIN is a gift that is rarely understood. It is no less valuable than the faith given by the Holy Spirit. What a blessed sign of mercy when God causes us to suffer to save us! But can it be a grudging and impatient suffering? No. He who suffers unwillingly finds in his troubles only a beginning of eternal anguish. He who submits to suffering finds that it becomes an infinite blessing.

I desire, O Lord, to suffer lovingly and peacefully. It is not enough to believe in Thy holy truths, we must live by them. They sentence us to sorrow, but they reveal in it the reward. O Lord, quicken my failing faith. Let the faith and patience of Thy saints shine within me. If any impatience escapes me, at least let me be humbled by it instantly and let me make amends for it by my pain.

Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.—SAINT MATTHEW 11:28

THESE are the comfortable words of Jesus Christ, Who dost take upon Himself all the burdens, wearinesses, and sorrows of men. O my Saviour, Thou art willing to carry all my burdens. Thou dost bid me to give them over to Thee. All that I suffer will find relief in Thee. I join my cross to Thine; do Thou carry it for me. I am fainting, as Thou wert when another was made to carry Thy Cross. I walk behind Thee, Lord, towards Calvary, to be crucified there. I want to die in Thy arms if Thou dost wish it; but the weight of my cross is crushing me. I cannot endure; be Thou my fortitude. I implore [cf. beg] Thee by Thy promise. I come to Thee. I can do no more. But that is enough to win Thy compassion and Thy help.

O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me.—ISAIAH 38:14

THOU seest, Lord, the pain that crushes me. My nature cries out. What shall I reply? The world would flatter and amuse me. Why must I reject it? What shall I do, Lord? I have not the strength to suffer in silence. Undertake for me: by Thine Almighty Word, drive off the deceitful worldliness that once beguiled [cf. tricked] me. I am oppressed by the trials with which Thou hast overwhelmed me and my eager longings that will not die. I suffer. Haste Thou to help me.

The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.—JOB 1:21

LORD, Thou didst cause Thy servant Job to say this in the depths of his misfortunes. How kind Thou art to put these words again into the mouth and heart of a sinner like me. Thou gavest me health and I forgot Thee. Thou takest it away and I return unto Thee. What infinite compassion—God, in order to give me Himself, takes away His gifts which I allowed to come between me and Him! Lord, take away everything that is not Thee that I may have only Thee. All is Thine. Thou art the Lord. Dispose of everything: comforts, success, health. Take all the things that possess me in Thy stead [cf. instead of Thee] that I may be truly Thine.

Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth.—1 SAMUEL [1 KINGS] 3:9

I AM silent, Lord, in my affliction. I am silent. In the stillness of a contrite [cf. repentant] and humble heart, I listen to Thee. Lord, behold [cf. observe] my wounds; Thou hast made them. Thou hast smitten [cf. struck] me. I am silent. I suffer. I worship silently. Yet Thou hearest my sighs and the lamentations [cf. weeping] of my heart are [is] not hidden from Thee. Let me not listen to myself. I long to hear Thy voice and to follow Thee.

Father, save me from this hour.—SAINT JOHN 12:27

LORD, although Thou hast threatened and smitten me, Thou art my Father. Thou wilt always be my Father. Save me from this terrible hour, from my anguish and depression. Let me rest on Thy breast and die in Thine arms. Deliver me either by lessening my pain or increasing my endurance. Cut to the quick [cf. deeply, to the living flesh]; but be merciful, have pity on my feebleness. If Thou desirest not to free me from pain, then free me from myself: from self-pity, sensitivity, and irritability.

We have sinned, we have done wickedly.—DANIEL 9:15

LORD, I have sinned against Thy laws. Pride, indolence [cf. laziness], and self-indulgence nullified the effect of the holiness of my religion. I even sinned against Thy Holy Spirit by casually ignoring the Blood shed for me. I rejected the infinite loving-kindness instilled in my heart. I have sinned, Lord. I have exhausted all vices, but I have not exhausted Thy mercy. Instead, Thy mercy overcomes my misery; it rises like a flood over a dam. In return for evil, Thou renderest me good. Thou givest me Thyself. Shall such a sinner, filled with Thy heavenly grace, refuse to carry his cross with Thy Son Who is Holiness and Righteousness?

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.
—SAINT JOHN 12:32

THOU didst promise, Lord, that when Thou wert lifted up on the Cross Thou wouldst draw all men unto Thee. Nations have come to worship the Man of Sorrows; even many Jews have recognized the Saviour Who was crucified. This was Thy promise accomplished before the whole world. And still from

the Cross Thy love draws souls to Thee. O suffering Christ, save me! Draw me out of myself and my deceptive desires that I may suffer with Thee on the Cross. There I shall belong to Thee, know Thee, love Thee, and be nourished by Thy truth. Without the Cross, religion has no reality. Bind me to Thee that I may become one of the members of Christ crucified.

My strength hath failed me.—PSALM 38[37]:10[11]

MY strength fails; I feel only weakness, irritation, and depression. I am tempted to complain and to despair. What has become of the courage I was so proud of and that gave me so much self-confidence? In addition to my pain, I have to bear the shame of my fretful [cf. distressed] feebleness. Lord, destroy my pride; leave it no resource. How happy I shall be if Thou canst teach me by these terrible trials that I am nothing, that I can do nothing, and that Thou art all!

Woe unto the world because of offences!—SAINT MATTHEW 18:7

THE world says woe to them that suffer. But faith replies from the depths of the heart, woe to the world which does not suffer! It strews the earth with fatal snares [cf. scatters fatal snares over the earth] to capture souls. My soul was lost a long time. O my Lord, how good Thou art to keep me by illness far from temptations. Strengthen me through pain that Thou mayest perfect me in detachment before exposing me again to the offences of Thine enemies. May ill health teach me to see that all worldly pleasures are tainted [cf. corrupted]. Some pity me in my illness. O my friends, do not pity one whom God loves and whom He wounds for love. Some time ago I was to be pitied, when a false prosperity poisoned my heart and I was far from God.

Whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

—ROMANS 14:8

O GOD, what does it matter whether we live or die? This life is nothing, it is even dangerous if we love it too much. Death destroys only the body. It delivers the soul from the disease of the body and its own pride. From the snares of Satan, the soul departs for the kingdom of life everlasting. I ask neither for health nor life. I offer my days as a sacrifice. Thou hast counted them. I ask no delay. What I do ask is to die rather than to live as I have lived—to die patiently and lovingly, if that be Thy wish. O Lord, Who dost hold in Thy hands the keys of the tomb—to open or to close it—give me not life if I ought to be taken from it. Living or dying, I no longer desire anything but to be Thine.



Credit: *Portrait of François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon (1651–1715) (oil on canvas), French School (19th century) / Saint-Sulpice, Paris, France / Bridgeman Images*

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