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Contents

Free Will - A Two Edged Sword	1
Inviting Jesus into Our Homes	6
The Prince of Peace	11
The Liturgical Year with St. Francis of Assisi	15
St. Therese of Lisieux	21
The Gift of Oneself	23
Sister Agnes' Favorites	27
Franciscan Saints	28
The Greatest Treasure	31

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THE SERAPH

FREE WILL – A TWO-EDGED SWORD

Bishop Giles, OFM

Many are contaminated with the evils of Materialism and do not even realize it. In examining our consciences, we often only focus our attention upon what we have physically done or not done, and neglect to consider our interior thoughts and desires? Sin is not in the actions themselves, but rather in the intentions and desires. All the material things in this world are created by God and are good. It is our misuse of good things that is evil. The abuse of the material gifts of God has its roots in our intentions and desires – our free wills.

The act of procreation is good. What makes so many of these acts evil are the intentions and desires. When we deliberately seek to inhibit or destroy the fundamental purpose (reproduction) while seeking all the pleasure possible, we are making an act of rebellion against God. We, likewise, sin when we seek these pleasures outside of marriage in rebellion against the Will of God. The sin is in the will. The act is good when it is done in conformity to the Will of God. It is evil when in opposition to His Will. The

root of the sin is in our desires and intentions.

The sin of murder is evil, but few examine deeply enough into their thoughts and desires. Just because we do not physically kill someone, does not mean we are innocent.

Jesus tells us that in lusting in our hearts we are already guilty of adultery – no action is necessary. He also says that that in holding hatred in our hearts and minds against someone makes us guilty of murder – again, no action is necessary.

God accepts our desire for the deed. The intention in our wills is an essential element in examining our consciences, not only on these two points but on everything. God will hold us accountable for all our intentions and desires. The primal root of all that we say and do is found hidden in the desires of our hearts – our intentions – our free will.

This free will of ours is like a two-edged sword. It cuts in both directions. We can form evil intentions and merit punishment, or we can form good and holy intentions and

merit rewards. Our Catechism teaches us that when we fall into sin, we should immediately make a perfect act of contrition – resolving to confess our sin as soon as possible. Many saints have recommended the practice of frequent Spiritual Communions (forming the desire of receiving Jesus in the Holy Eucharist when we are unable to physically receive Him.) These and all good desires are pleasing to God and therefore are meritorious. If the sinner has made an act of perfect contrition and then dies before being able to receive the Sacrament of Penance – his sin is forgiven. God accepts his desire for the accomplishment of the act. God sends many graces to those who make Spiritual Communions even when they cannot physically receive Him.

Many souls have allowed themselves to be caught up in the controversy formally known as the “Boston Heresy.” It is informally known as the “Feenyite Heresy.” This error, like all errors, has a foundation in truth. The Church teaches that there is no salvation outside the Catholic Church. The Church is the means that God has established to invite all men to come to Him. The only entrance into the Kingdom of

Heaven is through the Catholic Church and the only entrance into the Catholic Church is through the Sacrament of Baptism. This is the teaching of the Catholic Church and this does not conflict with or deny the teaching of Jesus Christ that God accepts the desire for the deed. The belief that God can give grace in the absence of a physical Sacrament does not contradict any doctrine of the Church. Those who are baptized in their blood through martyrdom for Christ have always been held to have died well. Those who die while seeking baptism are, likewise, considered to have died well. St. Ambrose, St. Augustine and others have cited examples of catechumens who have died before receiving the physical sacrament of Baptism, and they proclaim that God has granted them the grace they so desired.

If God will condemn us for evil desires that are never brought to fruition, then it is only logical and just for us to believe that He will correspondingly reward us for good desires even if they are never brought to fruition.

We have heard adherents of the Boston Heresy argue that in accepting “Baptism of Desire” we are denying the

necessity of water baptism, which is heresy. They claim that if all we need to do is desire something then we do not need to seek it out and receive it. This argument would be very humorous if it were not so serious. To say that we desire something and then refuse to take any steps to acquire what we desire, cannot be said to be a true desire at all. If someone said they desired to go for a drive but never got up or moved from their chair, we would say they don't really want to go for a drive. This is not a true desire. We do not expect God to give grace for a lie. He is not going to be deceived.

However, in true desires, true intentions, true acts of our wills, God accepts and rewards or punishes the desire for the deed. In the *Confessions of St. Augustine*, he speaks of his infancy and says that he was a child so little but yet a sinner so great. The sins of his infancy were nothing out of the ordinary of most children. What led him to make this statement was a consideration of the intention. What is lacking in the sins of a child who is incapable of physically doing great evil is spiritually made up for in the intention and desires of his soul. The anger of an adult

often spills out in physical evils; the child is often incapable of causing these physical evils. However, God looks into the hearts and desires. A child is very capable of great anger and evil in his desires. This is what St. Augustine understood and wrote about.

All the material things are far beneath spiritual ones. We must prefer our souls over our bodies. In examining our consciences, we must understand that sins of thoughts and desires are just as evil, if not more evil, than the physical crimes they lead to. The willful thought or desire for evil is a great evil – even if we are unable to ever bring it into material fruition. The desire for good and holy things is a great good even when we cannot manifest them materially. The material manifestation of our will is secondary rather than primary. We are often guilty of sin before we ever lift a finger or open our mouths likewise; we are often given graces before ever physically doing anything.

We must not become scrupulous in examining our thoughts and desires. Often the devil's temptations are confused with willful thoughts

and desires. An effective tool in combating so many sins of the intellect and will is to resist them as soon as we realize what they are. We should then make acts of love of God; humbly begging His help in truly loving Him and serving Him with our whole heart, mind, and soul. We should address Jesus in our prayers, expressing true sorrow for any offenses we may be guilty of. Then, we should move on in our thoughts so that we do not dwell upon the evil desires or thoughts and thus expose ourselves to further or greater temptations. In this way, we need not spend too much effort in discerning sin from temptation, which causes greater problems for a scrupulous conscience.

Gradually, with the grace of God, we will gain greater control over our hearts and minds. We will reduce the number of evil thoughts and desires as we increase the number of good thoughts and

desires. This will soon show forth in reducing the number of evil words and deeds and increase the number of good words and deeds. Then, we need not fear when Jesus will examine us and demand an account of every action, word, or thought.



Dear Friend,

May the blessings Jesus brings to us this Christmas Season be yours forevermore. The spiritual children of St. Francis of Assisi greet you this Holy Season with the abundant love shown us in the birth of Our Lord. St. Francis had a great burning love for Jesus in His holy Humanity. He sought to imitate Jesus as closely as possible and to honor Him and His life whenever the opportunity presented itself.

St. Francis recreated the Nativity Scene of Bethlehem to help keep alive the memory of Jesus' birth and God's love for us. We and many others continue this tradition in our churches and homes. It is our prayer that this image of the Birth of Jesus will warm your heart and soul as you recall the love that God has for you.

We easily see the beauty and the love of God in these representations, but we are also reminded of the sacrifice and humiliation of Jesus. "He came unto His own but His own received Him not." (*St. John 1:11*) And there was no room for Him in the Inn, so He was born in a stable. Jesus calls upon us to unite our sacrifices with His when He asks us to deny ourselves and take up our daily cross to follow Him. (*St. Luke 9:23*)

When we willingly deny ourselves for the love of Jesus, we find peace and joy in the depths of our souls. The sacrifices that we make for the love of God are of benefit to us as well as to others. What we freely give is meant to be used by those in need. The more we assist others the richer we become. We trade material wealth for spiritual riches. In the Peace Prayer of St. Francis this is expressed most beautifully: "*It is in giving that we receive...*"

We Franciscans are dependent upon the charity of others. We preach, pray, publish and offer the spiritual gifts of God to our fellow men. This leaves us little opportunity to pursue material gain. The winter season is financially burdensome for us with the increased expenses of heating and maintenance. It is for these reasons that we humbly beg any financial assistance that you may be able to offer for our support. Please remember that we are most grateful for all our benefactors and daily pray for them.

May the blessings Jesus brings to the world be yours this Christmas Season and always.

The Franciscans

INVITING JESUS INTO OUR HOMES

Bishop Giles, OFM

We recall the Gospel account of when the Holy Family could find no one to welcome them in the city of Bethlehem and were required to take shelter in a stable with the animals. It was here that the Son of God was born on Christmas Day.

In the life of every Catholic, we are called upon to bring the Gospel to life in our own lives. In our hearts and souls, we should have a place for God, so that we can say with St. Paul that Jesus lives within us. From deep within us Jesus inspires us to work with the Holy Ghost and renew the face of the earth – at least our little portion of this earth (our homes). Our homes may be humble and poor in material aspects, but there is no excuse for them to be spiritually poor. Even if our homes are as humble as an old stable, when God enters in it becomes Heaven here on earth.

In homes where children live or frequently visit, we should make sure to inspire them with the spirit of Advent and Christmas. These little souls

are most precious to Jesus and the best gift we can offer to Him on His Birthday is holy and innocent little souls sincerely loving Him. Of these is the Kingdom of Heaven made. We, too, must ever strive to become like these loving children.

The season of Advent is often impressed upon children as a burden or cross imposed upon us by the Church. It should not be this way. In our homes, we should develop the attitude and impress it upon our children that Advent is a time of preparing and getting ready to celebrate the Birth of Jesus. We are given four weeks to prepare. Preparing for a celebration or party is work, but it is fun work. Invite the children to help clean and decorate and especially help put up a Nativity Scene in our homes.

We can turn all our material sacrifices into spiritual gifts to present to Jesus for His Birthday. Giving up candy or making some other sacrifice for a few weeks is hard, but it is much easier when we think about being able to give these

sacrifices to God on Christmas day. This is the greatest gift that we can give Him – lovingly sacrificing for Him and in imitation of Him. He sacrificed for the love of us it is only fair that we make some sacrifices for the love of Him.

These precious gifts that we can offer Him do not require any money. We do not need to go shopping. Poor little children do not have to worry that they have nothing to give. The gift of small daily sacrifices is more pleasing to Jesus than the most precious diamonds and gold. Little children are really in the best position of giving to Jesus. Their innocence makes them nearer to the heart of God than most grownups. Let us help those children in our lives to offer these loving gifts to Jesus. They will be richly rewarded because it is more rewarding to give than it is to receive. The Peace Prayer of St. Francis says: *“It is in giving that we receive ...”*

We need to make Advent a happy and loving time of penance – not a long, dull, and burdensome one. Our sacrifices should be embraced willingly and lovingly

as precious gifts we can offer to Jesus. Perhaps it will help us to make a list of our daily sacrifices – even the smallest ones – then we can offer our list to Jesus on His Birthday. We can help the little ones with their lists of daily prayers, penances, or sacrifices. If this is done well, the generous hearts of children will soon be seeking ever greater sacrifices and penances to make and give. It would be wonderful if adults were forced to step into moderate overzealous little hearts so that they do not physically harm themselves for the love of God. Help them to be proud of their list. Perhaps write them neatly on special paper or help them to write them out, or even type them and print them out with a nice special font. This way they have something physical to place in the manger on Christmas Day.

We too often underestimate the sacrifices that children can make. We, also, often underestimate the joy they will receive in making these sacrifices when they are truly motivated with love.

Many of our children have more material things than they know what to do with.

Some of the more mature ones might appreciate sacrificing getting some of these presents on Christmas Day so that they could have the money to donate or to buy a gift for someone less fortunate. The discussing, planning, and perhaps shopping and donating will bring more happiness to them, and the adults helping them than just adding another box to unwrap and set aside on Christmas morning.

We should strive to help our children experience the joy of giving. Maybe in the process, we could learn a thing or two, also. We can make the sacrifice of our playtime to clean and decorate for Jesus' Birthday. We can sacrifice our candies and treats to give to someone else for the love of Jesus. We can make a sacrifice of our pain when others do not understand us or take advantage of us. We can sacrifice our favorite entertainment and perhaps spend the time saying a few more prayers. We can offer up our sicknesses or physical pains. The list we can make is only limited by our imaginations. Children have great imaginations if we will patiently allow them and direct them.

We should also, strive to impart upon them the grace to lovingly and humbly receive gifts as well as give them. What we receive may not always be what we want, but the love with which it is given is much more important than the thing given. God often gives us crosses and we should receive these well because He loves us and wants to help us become better so we can go to Heaven with Him. The physical present is merely a symbol of the gift of love. Love is the true gift that is given and received.

Advent is the happy time of giving. May we whole heartily embrace this and help our children to do so, also. Then, on Christmas Day we will have the most valuable offering to give to God. This Christmas will be the best ever when we and those we love (especially the little ones) have the joy of experiencing the grace of lovingly giving of ourselves to God and each other.



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THE PRINCE OF PEACE

Father Joseph Noonan, OFM

One of the rightful titles of Our Lord is that of the Prince of Peace. This title is a clear indication that it is only through Our Lord that individually, one is able to find true supernatural peace. Secondly, the world will only have peace when it recognizes Our Lord's rightful place in society.

It is a common belief that the world is at peace when nations are not at war with each other. On one level this is true. On another, it requires a true conversion of hearts and souls before peace is able to reign from pole to pole.

The world today would have you believe that political or governmental decisions are the only way to have peace. It is true that God uses men as His instruments, but the thoughts of men may also be those of Our Lord's. How often has He guided the machinations of governments through the work of its leaders? This, of course, is unknown, but it may safely be said that it does occur, perhaps more in the past when Catholic men were

more willing to pray and have a greater sense of true justice.

To speak of the Prince of Peace necessarily means one recognizes the connection to the Kingship of Christ. In both titles, one understands not just royalty but Divine Royalty. Our Lord's Divine Royalty is a part of who He is. This cannot be separated from Him, for as having taken part in the creation of Heaven and Earth, Our Lord by Divine Right is King, therefore, a prince.

Christ's Kingship reigns throughout the world, including all races, cultures, languages, and nations. It is an unfortunate fact that most fail to understand this. They believe Our Lord is King only over Catholics.

In today's world, the thought of royalty has been greatly diminished through the efforts of the Freemasons and the Jewish Nation. The Freemasons, in particular, are responsible for the destruction of the Catholic monarchies in Europe and elsewhere. By striking at the monarchy, one strikes at the King and Prince.

It has become quite clear in recent years that the enemies of Our Lord have a better understanding of the Divine Royalty than do Catholics. This ignorance has made it possible for the Church's enemies to more easily undermine Christ's Kingdom on this earth. It must be understood by all, especially Catholics, the real struggle all face in this life on earth is one of building up and maintaining the Kingdom of Christ, the Mystical Body of Christ.

St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, reminds us that "our wrestling is not with flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places." (Chap. 6, Verses 10-13) One should not be fooled. There are men and women who knowingly do the work of Satan. They are his agents on this earth. They wish to destroy the Church, the Catholic Faith and as many souls as possible. They create as much chaos and anarchy as possible, working to overthrow all legitimate governments throughout the world and replace them with godless men and women who

work to overthrow the Christian Order in society. This has been taking place for some time and continues at the present time. The unaware masses generally do not understand what is really taking place. They believe the differences between men are merely political, and in their mind, superficial. In some cases, there may be an element of truth in these ideas, but ultimately the goal is usually the same even among different political parties. Our Lord's enemies have had control of the major elements of society and government for many years.

True warriors of Christ understand this and arm themselves with grace and virtue. The battle that is being fought is a spiritual war, not a political one, nor is it one of mere economics.

In the same manner, in which the Crusaders attempted to reconquer the Holy Land, must Catholics rekindle within hearts and souls the desire to recapture the Faith and fight to overcome the enemies of Holy Mother Church. Some souls may be required to give their life for Christ but this is precisely the price one may pay when

fighting for the salvation of souls.

There is certainly a connection between the True Faith being practiced in the world and peace reigning on earth. This is truly a real-life example of cause and effect. The more Holy Masses being celebrated (*NOT* the New Mass), the more clergy are blessed by God. The more the Sacraments are administered and received, the more the laity is blessed with abundant graces. There is a supernatural effect that necessarily will take place in society. If clergy and laity make use of these graces there is a greater probability of peace in the world.

One is reminded that true peace can only come from Our Lord. He is the source of true peace as He is the source of all that is good. Peace and good compliment each other. If peace exists in the hearts of men, good will be the effect of it. It is not possible for good to be the effect of war and chaos.

This is a simple lesson taught from the Holy Scriptures. Only good fruit will come from a good tree. It is not possible to get good fruit from a bad tree. God is not the source of all of the division and chaos in the

world today. These things cannot come from Him. Only unity and peace come from Our Lord.

If one understands these simple principles he will be able to understand the source of today's societal (spiritual) problems. Speaking plainly, Satan and man's fallen nature are the causes of the problems in the world today. Contrary to the opinions of most people, politicians who exclude Divine Law, Natural Law and Moral Law are not able to properly and correctly solve man's problems.

The only true way in which to have peace in the world is for nations and people of all backgrounds to recognize the Kingship of Christ and in turn the Prince of Peace. Governments must dedicate their work to the Blessed Trinity and Our Blessed Mother. All laws contrary to Divine, Natural and Moral Law must be eliminated. Only those laws which correspond to the aforesaid laws are to be recognized. This is the foundation for peace in the world. All who desire this peace must pray and act with their entire being.

Let the church bells someday
be heard throughout the world
indicating the presence of
God and peace in the hearts
of all men.



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THE LITURGICAL YEAR WITH ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Father Anthony Lentz, OFM

Introduction

In his encyclical letter *Mediator Dei*, the topic of which is the Sacred Liturgy, His Holiness Pope Pius XII explains the principle reason why we celebrate the Liturgical Year. His Holiness teaches: “Throughout the entire year, the Mass and the Divine Office center especially around the person of Jesus: this arrangement is so suitably disposed that Our Savior dominates the scene in the mysteries of His humiliation, of His redemption and triumph.” (page 53)

Our Lord is at the center of the Liturgical Year! It is the story of the Redemption, and Our Lord is the protagonist. Our Holy Mother the Church wants to inspire her children, so she tells the story of Jesus Christ. She hopes that by reflecting and meditating on these events we will become close to Him. The nature of our participation is explained further by his Holiness: “While the Sacred Liturgy calls to mind the mysteries of Jesus Christ, it strives to

DECEMBER 2019

make all believers take their part in them so that the divine Head of the Mystical Body may live in all the members with the fullness of His holiness. Let the souls of Christians be like altars on each one of which a different phase of the Sacrifice, offered by the High Priest, comes to life again, as it were: pains and tears which wipe away and expiate sin; supplication to God which pierces heaven; dedication and even immolation of oneself made promptly, generously and earnestly; and finally that intimate union by which we commit ourselves and all we have to God, in whom we find our rest: ‘the perfection of religion is to imitate whom you adore.’” (page 54)

Our Holy Father St. Francis of Assisi loved celebrating the liturgical year. It was not to him merely the celebration of feasts, but rather, and more importantly, a plan for salvation. Since he is known as the “Mirror of Christ,” we can learn much about how to celebrate the year by comparing the parallels of his life with each season.

The plan for this year-long series of articles is to examine these parallels in depth. There is so much that we can learn from him! So, our celebration will not be a superficial one, but rather teach us lessons that will be a boon to our spiritual growth towards salvation.

Let us begin.

ADVENT

“In the period of Advent, for instance, the Church arouses in us the consciousness of the sins we have had the misfortune to commit, and urges us, by restraining our desires and practicing voluntary mortification of the body, to recollect ourselves in meditation, and experience a longing desire to return to God Who alone can free us by His grace from the stain of sin and from its evil consequences.” (Mediator Dei, page 54)

Advent is the beginning of the Church’s calendar year. It is customary when beginning a new year to form a resolution towards the betterment of oneself. Here Pope Pius XII gives the description of a *supernatural resolution*. The only obstacles are the world, the flesh, and the devil. This resolution begins with desiring to do God’s Holy

Will in all things and carrying it out when it is made known.

We are all familiar with the Advent hymn *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*. It is the quintessential hymn for the season. In it, we beseech Our Lord to “ransom captive, Israel.” Let us imagine that Christ the King enters into His enemy’s domain (enemy being the *devil* and *sin*, and the devil’s domain is the *world*) in which we are prisoners (the prison is *original sin* and this *fallen world*). He pays the price of our ransom (His Passion and Death) and we are made subjects of His Kingdom (Heaven). Now that we are “free” we can proceed to do as we wish, the primary effect of free will. As we begin to leave, Our Lord reminds us that while He paid the ransom of our redemption, we must now cooperate with His grace and repay Him towards our salvation. So this is more than simply a ransom, it is an exchange a *quid pro quo*, as it were. We have to give something back to Christ! We must give Him ourselves – our free-will. This begins with a complete and total mastery of oneself.

When God leads a soul towards Himself, He seldom

does it in an instantaneous act. God takes the soul on a journey, or rather, a road – a narrow road – towards salvation! The season of Advent is a time to seriously reflect upon this truth. Here the Church commemorates, with a four-week penitential observance, the four thousand years that mankind waited for the Redeemer. He has come and He fulfilled His mission! He redeemed fallen man by His Passion and Death upon the Cross. His holy obedience to the Father and His endless love for us was more pleasing than sin was displeasing. He gave all of Himself, and now we must do so in return.

We must be docile to the stirrings of grace, practice prayer, practice patience, and seek to overcome our predominant fault or imperfection. These things help us to not only know God's Will but to live it! Remember all that we gain and suffer in life is no mere coincidence, it is all part of God's plan for salvation.

Let us learn from St. Francis!

Many historians of the saint say that his conversion towards God was perfected while he was praying in the dilapidated church of San

Damiano. It was here that Our Lord spoke to him, through the Byzantine style crucifix, and said: "*Francis, do you not see that my house has fallen, rebuild it.*" This was the fulfillment of a promise, that God made to Francis just a few short years prior. The events that prepared Francis are related in St. Bonaventure's book *The Life of St. Francis.*

Francis was a natural leader, generous, chaste, and devout. He possessed all the qualities that would make him a great knight, and such was his ambition. He held knighthood in such high esteem that while he was yet recovering from a grave illness, he gave his fine garments to a poorly clad knight. It was on that following night, that Francis had a dream. Here is the story as related by St. Bonaventure:

"The Divine Mercy showed him a fair and great palace, together with military accouterments adorned with the sign of the Cross of Christ, thus setting forth unto him that the mercy he had shown unto the poor soldier for the love of the King Most High was to be recompensed by this peerless reward. Accordingly, when he inquired whose were these things, answer was

made him by a divine declaration that they all were his own and his soldiers.”

Scripture says that the carnal man does not understand the spiritual man! It is also true that those who are inexperienced in the art of discernment can easily misconstrue the meaning of God’s messages. This is what happened to Francis and this also happens to ourselves more often than we realize. An example is when someone follows their “heart” in making an important life decision. Should I take this job? Should I move to this other place? Should I marry this person? Should I enter into religious life? Francis followed his heart in this matter too, but where was his heart fixed? The events of the next morning tell us that his heart was still in and for the world.

Then, waking at early morn, — since he had not yet practiced his mind in examining the divine mysteries, and knew not how to pass through the appearance of things seen unto the beholding of the truth of things unseen, — he accounted this strange vision a token of great good fortune. Wherefore he purposed, being

as yet ignorant of the divine counsel, to betake himself into Apulia, unto a certain munificent Count, hoping in his service to win glory in arms, as the vision shewn unto him had betokened.

Can you see the mistake that Francis made here? He acted rashly and impulsively, and did not give himself over to prayer! This is what we all should do when faced with an important life decision – pray. This is the first, and correct, way of finding out God’s will. After prayer, our faithfulness in the “little things,” or our responsibilities, will prepare us for the big things! Thirdly, our faithfulness must be practiced with patience because the answer to this important question may not come as quickly as we want it. We have to submit ourselves to God’s schedule. Fortunately for Francis, his misunderstanding was swiftly corrected.

With but little delay, he set forth on his journey and had gone as far as the neighboring city; there he heard the Lord speaking unto him by night as with the voice of a friend, and saying: “Francis, who can do better for thee, the lord or the servant, the rich man or the poor?” And when Francis had made reply that alike the lord

and the rich man could do the best, the Voice answered forthwith: "Why, then, dost thou leave the Lord for the servant, the rich God for a poor mortal?" And Francis said: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" And the Lord said unto him: "Return unto thy country, for the vision that thou hast seen betokened that which shall be spiritually wrought, and is to be fulfilled in thee not by mortal counsel, but by divine." So, when it was morning, he returned in haste toward Assisi, confident and rejoicing, awaiting the will of the Lord."

Here is where the promise was made by God: Francis would be told, in time, what he must do. Fortunately, Francis responded correctly:

"Thenceforward he withdrew him from the stir of public business, devoutly praying the heavenly mercy that it would deign to show him that which he ought to do. And so by the constant practice of prayer the flame of heavenly yearning was mightily kindled within him, and for the love of his heavenly fatherland he now contemned all earthly things as naught; for he felt that he had found the hid treasure and, like a wise merchantman, meditated

selling all that he had to buy the pearl that he had found. But he knew not yet how to compass this, except that it was whispered unto his spirit that spiritual merchandise hath its beginning in the contempt of the world and that the warfare of Christ is to be begun by victory over self."

His prayer and patience now prepared him for his next test:

"Now on a day while he was riding over the plain that lieth beneath the city of Assisi, he met a certain leper, and this unforeseen meeting filled him with loathing. But when he recalled the purpose of perfection that he had even then conceived in mind and remembered that it behooved him first of all to conquer self, if he were fain to become the soldier of Christ, he leapt from his horse and ran to embrace him. When the leper stretched forth his hand as though to receive an alms, he kissed it, and then put money therein. Then forthwith mounting his horse, he looked round him on all sides, and the plain was spread before him unbroken, and no trace of that leper might he see. Then, filled with wonder and joy, he began devoutly to chant praises unto the Lord, purposing from this to rise

ever unto greater heights.”

Pax et Bonum!

Now, what is stopping you from imitating St. Francis? What vice or fault is keeping you from a total surrender to God, from being His friend, and from making this “new year’s resolution”? We have the example of St. Francis’ predominant fault, and not only did he conquer it but doing so filled him with joy. Examine your conscience and ask yourself, “what is my predominant fault?” What worldly thing is keeping me from God? Is it talking about worldly things too much? Or dissipation of the mind (day-dreaming)? Is it an over-attachment to friends and family? Is it a career? Is it an obsession with a sport? Or is it some other trivial matter? Whatever it is, if it keeps you from loving God then you should be rid of it.

By doing this you will become God’s faithful servant and friend. You will experience a peace of conscience and a joy of heart, just like St. Francis did. You will say within yourself, “*Rejoice, Rejoice, O Israel!*” “*Israel*” is your soul and into your soul shall come, “*Emmanuel.*”

ST. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX

An Autobiography

CHAPTER TWO A CATHOLIC HOUSEHOLD

What a glorious day! It was Almighty God's feast and the day of rest. First of all, the whole family went to High Mass, and I remember that before the sermon we had to leave our places, which were a good way from the pulpit, and find seats in the nave.¹ This was not always easy, though everyone was ready to offer a chair to little Thérèse and her Father. My good uncle was always delighted to see us draw near; he called me his "sunbeam," and used to say that the picture of the venerable old man leading his little daughter by the hand was one that moved him deeply.

For my part, I was too engrossed in listening to the preacher to trouble about the attention I attracted. A sermon on the Passion of Our Blessed Lord was the first I thoroughly understood, and I was profoundly touched. I was then five and a half, and from that time

¹*St. Thérèse heard Mass on Sundays in the little chapel of St. Joseph of Cupertino, to the right of the High Altar. A large statue of her was placed there in 1923*

(Rev. Thomas N. Taylor, Editor)

I understood and appreciated all the instructions. If St. Teresa were mentioned, Papa would bend down and whisper: "Listen attentively, little Queen, he is speaking of your holy patroness." I really did listen attentively, though I must own that I often looked at Papa more than at the preacher, I read so many things in his noble face. Sometimes his eyes were filled with tears which he strove in vain to keep back; and, as he listened to the eternal truths, he seemed no longer of this world, it was as though his soul had soared to a higher sphere. Alas! his journey was far from its close: long years of suffering lay between him and the hour when his eyes would open upon the beauties of Heaven, and when Our Divine Lord's hand would wipe away the bitter tears of His faithful servant.

But to return to our Sundays. These happy days, which passed all too quickly, had also their touch of melancholy. My joy lasted till Compline, but after that a feeling of sadness took possession of me. I thought of the morrow when the daily round of work and lessons would begin again, and feeling like an exile on this earth, I longed for the repose of Heaven, the never-ending Sabbath of our true Home. Every Sunday, aunt invited us in turns to spend the evening with her, and I was always glad when

my turn came. It was a pleasure to listen to my uncle's conversation, which when serious interested me greatly, and he little knew that I paid such attention. But my pleasure was not unmixed with fear when, taking me on his knee, he would sing "Blue Beard" in a deep loud voice.

At about eight o'clock Papa would come to bring me home, and I remember how on the way I looked up at the stars with untold delight. Orion's belt, like a cluster of diamonds hung in the deep vault overhead, had a wonderful fascination for me, because I saw in it a likeness to the letter "T." "Look, Papa!" I would cry, "*my name is written in Heaven!*" Then, no longer wishing to see this dull earth, I would ask him to lead me on, while with head thrown back I gazed unweariedly at the starry skies.

There is much I could tell you about our winter evenings at home. After a game of draughts, you or Marie used to read aloud from the Liturgical Year,¹ and then a few pages from some other instructive and interesting book. During this time, I always sat on Papa's knee. When the reading was over, he would rock me gently, my head pillowed on his breast, and would sing in his beautiful voice some soothing melody as if to lull me to sleep.

At length we went upstairs for night prayers. Once again, my place was beside our beloved Father, and I had but to look at him to learn how the Saints pray.

Then you put me to bed, dear little Mother, and I invariably asked you: "Have I been good today? Is God pleased with me? Will the Angels watch over me?" "Yes," was the unfailing reply—were it not, I should have spent the night in tears. You and Marie then kissed me, and little Thérèse was left alone in the dark.

¹By the illustrious Dom Guéranger, Abbot of Solesmes. This book, like the *Imitation of Christ*, had a considerable influence upon her spiritual life. There exists an English edition in fifteen volumes, published by Burns Oates and Washbourne, Ltd.

(Rev. Thomas N. Taylor, Editor)

To Be Continued.....



THE GIFT OF ONESELF

*From the French of
THE REVEREND JOSEPH
SCHRYVERS, C.S.S.R.*

*Translated by a Religious of Carmel,
Bettendorf, Iowa*

PART TWO

The Practice of Abandonment

CHAPTER TWO

*The Practice of Self-Abandonment in
Various Occupations*



ARTICLE 2

GOD HIMSELF DIRECTS THE SIMPLE SOUL IN THE WAYS OF PRAYER

When, in prayer, the soul presents herself before God, she ought to sink into the depths of awe before His Sovereign Majesty, then, daringly, resolutely, cast herself into His Arms, and love Him. The act of love, surrendering the soul to God, is the essence of prayer; it is what the Master requires of each one.

The soul gives her attention to making this act gently, simply, without effort or fatigue of the mind. Then she keeps herself, as best she can, under this divine influence, listening to God, remaining quietly in His
DECEMBER 2019

sight, sometimes repeating her act more explicitly, murmuring it with her lips, if she wills, or keeping it in the depths of her heart. To each distraction, wandering of the mind, or temptation, she responds by a new gift of herself to God, by a new act of love.

This is the share which God asks the soul to take in the work of prayer. If, as often happens, He demands more of her, He will tell her, He will make her understand. He has a thousand ways of speaking to her and communicating Himself to her; and all are efficacious. The soul need only be recollected, surrender herself, listen, be docile, and not substitute her initiative for His.

God has appointed for each soul her manner of making mental prayer. It is for Him to regulate the ceremonial of the interviews carried on with Him. He is not tied to any method. He does not let Himself be held by any fixed rule.

He is the Master. He holds all souls in. His Hands, rules them, directs them, forms them as He wills. He adapts Himself to the nature, inclinations, and aptitudes of each. However, sometimes He sets aside all the laws of nature, acts in opposition to all expectations, deranges all plans.

His action is mysterious, rarely perceived, often incomprehensible, always very good. But sometimes He permits it to be seen, Himself aiding in its discovery. He even commands that it be described and presented to the admiration and respect of all. Thus Saints, both men and women, have left a faint description of the action of God in their regard; but these cases are rare. God reserves for our contemplation in Heaven the marvels worked in souls. It would be rash to try to know and understand them here upon earth. Each docile soul perceives in herself the action of God, well enough to follow it, but not well enough to penetrate the mystery.

Sometimes, God invites the soul to reflection. He pours into the mind a certain light upon one of the great truths, and induces the soul to examine it more carefully. It may be a mystery of religion: The Eucharist, the Passion, the Childhood of the Man-God; it may be a special characteristic, a particular aspect of the life and character of Jesus; it may be a certain attribute of God: His immense Bounty, His Power, His Omnipresence, His Sovereign Perfection; it may be one of the last things, an eternal principle; or again, it may be the all-powerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin, or the Communion of Saints. It may be a certain virtue: love of God, conformity to the Divine Will. The soul obeys, looks, and reflects.

If she feels an attraction for meditation, she discovers new points of view, wider horizons, striking coincidences, wonderful harmonies. This is a sign that God invites her to dwell longer upon reflection. He wishes to establish in the soul profound and rational convictions, which He wishes to strengthen, later on, by sudden lights and intuitions.

At another time, God causes the soul to have only distaste for reflections. The soul is

incapable of putting two ideas together. Truths presented in the clearest and soundest manner leave the reason indifferent. Reflection brings unconquerable boredom. On the contrary, the heart is loving. Affections are multiplied and ardent. They bubble up from the heart as waters gush from a copious spring. Hardly is the soul in the presence of Jesus before the Divine Current is established. There are acts of love, tender exclamations, glowing conversations, ardent emotions, bitter regrets for the past. Often the feelings overflow and burst into floods of tears.

God is guiding this soul. It is He Who inspires these burning accents. The soul should obey and follow the divine attraction. This abundance of affection and of pious feeling often characterizes the springtime of the spiritual life. The mounting sap overflows and pours itself out. The autumn will be calmer and richer in virtue. But the soul accepts the gift of God. She knows that there is a time for the tree to blossom and another time for it to bear fruit. She does not wish to anticipate. It is the Gardener's place to decide what is best for her.

Sometimes the affections

suggest nothing to the soul. The colloquies of a heart all on fire have no attraction for her. Moreover, reflection appears to her to be a wearying and fruitless exercise. On the contrary, she loves to bury herself in solitude and to remain there, silent, near to God. Emotion, a profound yet calm emotion, often envelops her. She is so happy to be near God, although she hardly speaks to Him! The Presence of this Immense Being enfolds her and keeps her profoundly respectful; but His stupendous Goodness, above all, transports her; and she casts herself into the Bosom of God as into a fathomless abyss.

All this takes place simply, in the depths of the soul, rather by interior impulse than by explicit words. The soul retains the impression of this meeting with God; afterwards her actions are, as it were, impregnated with a divine perfume. She would wish to have this sweet and silent union last forever. But God has other purposes. To these moments, these loving embraces, succeed epochs of Cold indifference. The soul thinks that she is repulsed by God. She groans and languishes. Then the sun rises, the air is warmer, the heart fills with the divine sap. Heaven seems to re-open; and again

God shows His serene
Countenance.

Thus, through a thousand
changes, a thousand trans-
formations, He leads her to the
summit, where new horizons
open before her and invite her
to hasten her course.

But, O Jesus, to what purpose
is it to describe all this? Each
docile soul is a world of
marvels. Each follows a way
that is indeed her own, which
Thou alone knowest, which
Thou alone hast traced. For my
part, I desire only to be docile,
to listen respectfully to Thy
sweet Voice, and to follow
Thee through all the changes,
all the transformations Thou
dost cause in my soul. My
way, my method shall be to
love Thee in all things and at
all times, to abandon myself to
Thy guidance and unceasingly
to ask Thee for more love.

O Mary! Consecrated Bride!
Mystic Dove! Teach me to
dwell in the “cleft of the rock,”
and to delight my Divine
Bridegroom by the ardor of
my desires and the tenderness
of my love.

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Sister Agnes' Favorites

Where Wrong Things Come Right

Author Unknown

Come out, out into the night,
To where in a manger
Lies the Baby Stranger
'Neath the stars, mid the snowdrifts white.

"So dark!—very dark and dim!"—
Nay! He is the Light,
Outside is the night,
It is noonday in there with Him.

"So cold!—very cold and chill!"—
Nay! stoop thee low
To where His Heart doth glow,
Warm thyself there at will.

"So poor!—very poor and mean!"—
Nay! The small Hands hold
Better things than gold:
He is King and His Mother Queen.

"So drear!—very drear and sad!"—
Nay! That Baby's Kiss
Is unforgotten bliss;
Sweeter thou hast never had.

Go out, out into the night!
Bravely be His guest,
Lift Him to thy breast,
And thy wrong thing shall all come right.





FRANCISCAN SAINTS

DECEMBER 26TH

Servant of God Jane of Silva

Virgin, Third Order

About the year 1617, the servant of God Jane of Silva lived at Olmedo in Castile, Spain. In her youth she was quite vain of her beauty. Her passionate love of fine dress and the desire to be attractive were already leading her down the road to destruction, when our Lord in His mercy vouchsafed to enlighten her with a ray of His grace, causing her to perceive the danger in which her soul was enmeshed.

Filled with wholesome fear, she now began to make amends for her worldliness and sensuality with a saintly and penitential life. She laid aside her finery and donned the penitential garb of the Third Order of St. Francis. Instead of the precious jewels of her former years, she now wore about her neck and arms little penitential chains set with iron points. She chastised her body daily with severe lashes of the discipline,

so that the blood often flowed from the welts. At times she would carry about on her shoulders a wooden cross set with sharp nails, which inflicted wounds at every move she made.

Every day she rose at three o'clock to pray, continuing her prayer until noon. At five in the afternoon she again composed herself to meditation and prayer until nine o'clock in the evening. She fasted on bread and water for the greater part of the year. Every day she fed a poor person, and on feasts of our Lady she refreshed several needy persons with food and drink.

Thus, in performing works of penance and mercy she found again the way to heaven, which she had quite lost with her life of vanity and luxury in dress.

ON LUXURY IN DRESS

THE SERAPH

1.) Consider the rigorous penance the servant of God practiced after the grace of God enlightened her, in atonement for her one-time luxury in dress. Evidently the passion for finery must be a great evil. And it really is that. Those who are concerned about fine dress, make their heart a prey to vanity and the fatal desire to attract others. They give all their attention to externals and neglect their interior life. They expose themselves to the danger of evil and unclean desires on their own part, and often excite similar unholy thoughts in so many whose gaze they attract. What harm to immortal souls! Can people who are guilty of such things as that ever sufficiently bewail and atone the wrong they have done? — Have you reason to reproach yourself on this score?

2.) Consider the style our clothes should have. In the design of God, they should serve the twofold purpose of covering the body decently and of protecting it against the inclemencies of the weather. Christian apparel may never be immodest in cut and design; no fashion can ever be an excuse for that. It should be neither showy and prideful,

nor yet slovenly and dirty. All that would offend against Christian propriety. Christian people will dress in keeping with their place in society, yet so that they will prefer what is the more moderate to what inclines to excess among their kind. In as far as clothing is to protect us against the inclemencies of the weather, it must not cater to effeminacy and flatter sensuality while making due concessions to health and comfort. Christ Our Lord praised St. John the Baptist because he was not clothed in soft garments. — If Our Lord examined your wardrobe, would He approve every article in it?

3.) Consider how you can counteract the love of luxury in dress. If such love arises in your heart, think of the swaddling clothes in which our Savior lay in the crib, and think of Mary as she lived and waited on Our Lord. Who can picture her in luxurious attire? If you are tempted to follow a questionable modern fashion for fear of being laughed at, think of Christ standing before Herod in the white robe of derision and ask yourself whether you would rather resemble Him or the lascivious Herodias. Then, too, direct your thoughts to

higher things. Instead of this bother to adorn your perishable body, which will soon return to dust, strive rather to beautify your immortal soul, according to the words of the Apostle: "Put ye on as the elect of God, holy and beloved, the bowels of mercy, benignity, humility, modesty, and patience" (*Col. 3:12*). — May the grace of God incline our hearts and the hearts of all Christians toward such ideals.



PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

*Be favorable, O Lord, to our supplications, and receiving the prayers and offerings of Thy people, turn the hearts of us all to Thee, that being delivered from the greed of earthly pleasures, we may pass on to heavenly desires.
Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.*



THE GREATEST TREASURE

Reverend L. Chiavarino



CHAPTER XI

HOLY MASS SHORTENS OUR PURGATORY

We cannot conceive of anything more desirable after having received the grace of a happy death than being permitted to enter Heaven immediately, or, at least, to be detained in Purgatory, the place of expiation, for as short a time as possible. All the greatest Saints are in agreement that there is no surer way to obtain this precious favor from Almighty God than by assisting at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It was for this reason that the great servant of God, Saint John of Avila, on being asked what he most desired when he had come to the end

of life, replied: "Masses! Masses! Masses!"

However, in regard to the matter of having Masses said for our welfare while we are still living, and the Masses which will be said for us after our death, St. Anselm tells us that those which we hear or have said during life are more profitable than those said for us after death.

A story is told by St. Leonard of a rich merchant who died without having made any provision in his will for Masses to be said for the repose of his soul. It was a cause of great wonder that a man so wealthy, who was known to have been good and charitable, should have been so thoughtless, even

cruel, with regard to himself. But sometime after the funeral, a book was found in which he had recorded the fact that over a period of years he had had more than two thousand Masses offered for himself. At the end of this book were written the words: "Let him who desires help, help himself in life instead of placing his trust in those who are left behind."

In concluding his narration of this story, St. Leonard exclaims: "Masses! Masses!" And he goes on to remind us that only by means of the Mass can we nourish the hope of being received into Heaven immediately after death, without having to pass through the cleansing flames of Purgatory. Let us bear always in our heart this beautiful thought. A vivid realization of its truth will bring home to us the virtue and efficacy of the Mass; it will make us understand how

great a treasure it is, and it will prevent us from falling into the error of those who say: "What does one Mass more or less matter? Sunday Mass is enough... Mass doesn't feed us."

We may profitably renew our resolution to hear Mass as frequently as possible. And it would be well, too, were we to imitate this fine example, by having as many Masses celebrated for us while we are living, as we would wish to have said for us after we are dead. In this way we shall not be at the mercy of those who remain behind. There is much truth in the proverb which says: "A candle placed before us gives more light than ten candles placed behind us."

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