

THE SERAPH

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Faith and Works

Bishop Giles, OFM

There is a conundrum that faces just about everyone that strives to advance in the spiritual life. On the one hand, we must profoundly understand that of ourselves we are incapable of any good. This instills in us the most profound humility and directs us to meekly plead to God as little children for all that we need. On the other hand, God helps those who help themselves. He demands that we do our part. "Faith without works is dead." Our Holy Mother the Church insists that we perform the corporal works of mercy. Therefore, we can do nothing, but we must do something.

Our works, by themselves, are of no value or merit, but they are still required of us by God. God requires them of us because they are necessary for us. God has no need of us or our labors. To advance in the spiritual life, we must understand the futility of our own works, yet continue to strive to make them better. The only human acts that are of any value are the works that God has performed when He took up our

humanity. He has offered us the opportunity to unite our labors with His. Only in the union of labors can we find merit that is worthwhile.

The devils are very clever to tempt us to one extreme or the other in these matters. On the one hand, they suggest to us that our works are useless and that we can do nothing without God first giving us the grace to do it. If we do not do something, then that is proof that God did not give us the grace to do it. After all, who could refuse God's grace? This is the extreme that Calvin apparently fell

into. In the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, those who are given God's grace do well and are saved. Those who are predestined to damnation are refused God's grace and therefore do nothing that is meritorious and are thus damned. In this, we see that all the blame is placed upon God rather than upon men. Hopefully, our readers, can see the blasphemy in this thinking and thus avoid this trap. As a consequence of this false

doctrine there is the thinking that if I am already damned then there is nothing that I can do about it, so I might as well go ahead and sin all I want. Concomitant with this is the flip side; If I am already saved, then there is nothing that I have to worry about, and so I can “sin on bravely” as God has already forgiven me – even before I do something wrong.

The devils, in a similar manner, suggest to some that everything depends upon their own labors. There is an over-emphasis upon personal labors to the point that there is left no room for grace. Filled with pride such souls end up like the Pharisee standing in the temple recounting his “good works” before God and esteeming himself above all others – the height of arrogance and pride.

The truth, as usual, is in the middle, between relying absolutely upon God and doing nothing ourselves; and disregarding grace and striving to do everything with our own endeavors. The saints suggest to us that we must pray as if everything depends upon God, and then labor as if everything depends upon us. In

this manner, we pray humbly and truly, and we put our best and greatest efforts forth in all our labors. When this is practiced, those in the world are often amazed with the humility of such hard workers. They give their all because they are laboring for the love of God, therefore, they do their best. They are convinced that they must give their best as they are working for God and Heaven. They are extremely humble and see, even their best labors as insufficient and search for ways to always do better.

We especially enjoy the analogy that St. Augustine presents to us of our spiritual progress being like the forging of a chain. A chain is forged one link at a time. God gives us the first link (grace); to which we must (not only accept but) cooperate with and unite our actions with His. Thus we forge the second link in our chain of spiritual advancement. Having cooperated with God in this first instance, it opens the way for God to give us a second grace (the second link from Him). If we cooperate with this new grace then we form the fourth link in the chain. The chain is thus formed with one link from God followed by another from

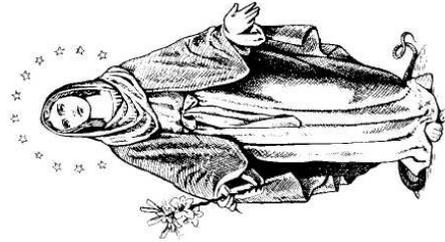
us with these steps repeated until we draw our last breath here on earth.

As with every chain, we know that it is only as strong as its weakest link. The weakest links throughout this chain, of necessity, are those links that we have forged in cooperating with God's grace. Often the process of forging this chain is interrupted when we fall into mortal sin and refuse to cooperate with God. Usually, the chain fails and we fall into mortal sin because we have allowed venial sin to enter in as we are forging our links. In the forming of these links and allowing small sins to slip in we create weak links that are easily broken. Venial sins set the stage for mortal ones.

God has demanded that we worship Him and Him alone, yet men often intermix superstition and the false worship of idolatry. The temptation is not always to deny God or turn away from Him, but very often, the temptation is to put the worship of God side by side with the worship of idols of various degrees. The avaricious man often does not deny God, he just places his love of money next to his love of God and sometimes even above

God. The same can be said of the sensual man, the drunkard, as well as every vice under the heavens. Every sin is a result of insufficient or inadequate love of God. Sin is the loving of something more than God – and thus, is essentially an act of idolatry.

We must guard against this temptation through humbly begging this grace from God in prayer, and dedicating all our labors to His honor and glory. What makes our labors good or bad, pleasing to God or displeasing are the motives that we have. If we labor for money, success, etc. our labors are tainted. We labor for the love of God, our labors are pure. It is in prayer that we put these intentions upon our works, so prayer is necessary before the work begins, as it progresses, and at the end of our labors. St. Paul would say: "Pray always." In addition to an eternal reward, if we labor for God, we also receive the other things that men labor for. In working for God we obtain what is necessary for our livelihood. We obtain worldly success and advantages – to the extent that God gives them and they are profitable for our salvation.



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The Family in 2017

Fr. Joseph Noonan, OFM

Part 3

The Catholic Solutions to Save the Family

It was noted about three months ago after reading Part 1 of this article, “We know what the problems are, what are the solutions?” The statement was quite understandable considering Catholics in general and families, in particular, are no doubt battle-weary from the war that has now taken place during the course of our lives. The human spirit desires peace (and quiet), but the Kingdom of Satan is the source of division, chaos, and revolution.

Parts 1 & 2 of this article described the more notable battles of the 20th and 21st centuries against the family. Contraception, abortion, modesty, and Freemasonry are but a few of the issues. There are, indeed, others which plague society and, therefore, the family. Today, pornography and the misuse of household income are the stated main causes of divorce (on the natural level). The destruction of the Catholic Faith and all of the problems

associated with it are the real causes of the families near destruction.

This quickly brings us to the essential questions on the family. What must parents do to raise their children as good, true Catholics and how do they avoid the problems of most parents, Catholic or not?

In answering this question, the first observation comes in the form of a question. *Who among today’s parents is brave and willing enough to do what is necessary to conduct family life as it should be?* Putting human frailty aside, parental responsibilities and duties today can be overwhelming if one is not spiritually armed to fight the battles. In addition, who among Catholic parents alone understands all of their duties? Most parents are woefully ignorant of too many of their duties, others simply don’t care.

Who among Catholic parents receives the Sacraments at least on a weekly basis? Are the children properly educated in the Faith from their earliest

years? Do parents establish an environment in the home that is becoming of True Roman Catholics, or is there little or no difference from the neighborhood pagans that live all around them? Is there proper discipline in the home? Are there controls on the television, internet, radio and printed media in the home? Are all of the children, both boys and girls, taught to be modest in their conduct and dress? As an extension of the prior question, do parents make it a point of emphasis to teach supernatural virtue to their children? Are parents vigilant concerning the friends of their children?

Further, there are two basic principles that parents must know and be willing to implement throughout married and family life. The first is, they are principally responsible for the eternal salvation of the souls of the family members. Do Catholic spouses consistently help each other with matters of Faith, and, therefore, assist and encourage one another in prayer? Do they openly help each other to become saints?

The second principle is, the parents are the first educators of the children. This makes them

responsible for the spiritual and academic education of the children. When Catholic parents send their children to school do they realize the teachers are substituting for them? Any assistance from clergy or religious uses the same principle. There have been an unknown number of parents throughout the world through the course of history who have been the sole educators of their children and did an admirable job. Having said this, it should be understood that the Church and society are able to greatly assist the parents.

More recently, the Church has greatly assisted families and parents by providing them with vital papal documents which explain Catholic parental responsibilities. If parents took the time to read them, even though they may need assistance in understanding them, they would have a better understanding of how to conduct themselves.

This first document is from Pope Pius XI's Encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri* on Christian Education:

7. It is therefore as important to make no mistake in education, as it is to make no mistake

in the pursuit of the last end, and the maximum of well-being with which the whole work of education is intimately and necessarily connected. In fact, since education consists essentially in preparing man for what he must be and for what he must do here below, in order to attain the sublime end for which he was created, it is clear that there can be no true education which is not wholly directed to man's last end, and that in the present order of Providence, since God has revealed Himself to us in the Person of His Only Begotten Son, Who alone is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life," there can be no ideally perfect education which is not Christian education.

8. From this, we see the supreme importance of Christian education, not merely for each individual, but for families and for the whole of human society, whose perfection comes from the perfection of the elements that compose it. From these same principles, the excellence, we may well call it the unsurpassed excellence, of the work of Christian education, becomes manifest and clear; for after all it aims at securing the Supreme Good, that is, God, for the souls of those who are being educated,

and the maximum of well-being possible here below for human society. And this it does as efficaciously as man is capable of doing it, namely by cooperating with God in the perfecting of individuals and of society, in as much as education makes upon the soul the first, the most powerful and lasting impression for life according to the well-known saying of the Wise Man, "A young man according to his way, even when he is old, he will not depart from it." With good reason, therefore, did St. John Chrysostom say, "What greater work is there than training the mind and forming the habits of the young?"

9. But nothing discloses to us the supernatural beauty and excellence of the work of Christian education better than the sublime expression of love of Our Blessed Lord, identifying Himself with children, "Whosoever shall receive one such child as this in my name, receiveth me."

10. Now in order that no mistake be made in this work of utmost importance, and in order to conduct it in the best manner possible with the help of God's grace, it is necessary

to have a clear and definite idea of Christian education in its essential aspects, viz., who has the mission to educate, who are the subjects to be educated, what are the necessary accompanying circumstances, what is the end and object proper to Christian education according to God's established order in the economy of His Divine Providence.

11. Education is essentially a social and not a mere individual activity. Now there are three necessary societies, distinct from one another and yet harmoniously combined by God, into which man is born: two, namely the family and civil society, belong to the natural order; the third, the Church, to the supernatural order.

12. In the first place comes the family, instituted directly by God for its peculiar purpose, the generation and formation of offspring; for this reason, it has priority of nature and therefore of rights over civil society. Nevertheless, the family is an imperfect society, since it has not in itself all the means for its own complete development; whereas civil society is a perfect society, having in itself all the means for its peculiar end,

which is the temporal well-being of the community; and so, in this respect, that is, in view of the common good, it has pre-eminence over the family, which finds its own suitable temporal perfection precisely in civil society.

13. The third society, into which man is born when through Baptism he reaches the divine life of grace, is the Church; a society of the supernatural order and of universal extent; a perfect society, because it has in itself all the means required for its own end, which is the eternal salvation of mankind; hence it is supreme in its own domain.

14. Consequently, education which is concerned with man as a whole, individually and socially, in the order of nature and in the order of grace, necessarily belongs to all these three societies, in due proportion, corresponding, according to the disposition of Divine Providence, to the co-ordination of their respecting ends.

Pope Pius XII spoke to a gathering of women of Catholic Action and their helpers from all the dioceses of Italy on the feast

of Christ the King, October 26, 1941. In this allocution he spoke directly to Mothers, instructing them in detail of how they must properly raise their children. The following is a short portion of this document:

**THE NEED OF SERIOUS
PREPARATION FOR THE
DIFFICULT WORK OF
EDUCATION**

It is a curious circumstance and, as Pope Pius XI remarked in his Encyclical, a lamentable one, that whereas no one would dream of suddenly becoming a mechanic or an engineer, a doctor or a lawyer, without any apprenticeship or preparation, yet every day there are numbers of young men and women who marry without having given an instant's thought to preparing themselves for the arduous work of educating their children which awaits them. And yet, if St Gregory the Great could speak of the government of souls as 'the art of arts', surely no art is more difficult and strenuous than that of fashioning the souls of children, for those souls are so very tender, so easily disfigured through some thoughtless influence or wrong advice, so difficult to guide aright and

so lightly led astray, more susceptible than wax to receive a disastrous and indelible impression through malignant influences or culpable neglect. Fortunate the child whose mother stands by its cradle like a guardian angel to inspire and lead it in the path of goodness! And so while we congratulate you upon what you have already achieved, we cannot but exhort you warmly and anew to develop those splendid organizations which are doing so much to provide for every rank and social class educators conscious of their high mission, in mind and bearing alert against evil and zealous to promote good. Such sentiments in a woman and a mother give her the right to that reverence and dignity which belong to a man's loyal helpmate; such a mother is like a pillar, for she is the central support of the home; she is like a beacon whose light gives an example to the parish and brings illumination to the pious associations of which she is a member.

The above are two examples of Church documents and other materials which are still available today (2017). Married couples and those preparing for

marriage should take the time to begin to read these instructional and inspiring works.

This takes us back to the original question of Part 3. What are some solutions to the problems parents face today? Practicing the Catholic Faith as it was meant to be lived by those married is the first and most important solution. This again is a combination of the spiritual (prayer and Sacramental life) and academic (learning what the Church teaches) responsibilities of the Catholic. This involves the above suggestions to read those materials which are available. There are numerous moral issues involving the family today that parents should be especially vigilant in understanding the position of the Church.

Practically speaking, parents must make the time and have a strong, determined will to pray, study, and implement the correct decisions they make for their families. Although today's world is like the burglar who is attempting to illegally enter your home and steal something of value, the parents must be ever so watchful and stop these dangerous intrusions at the door.

If parents instructed their children in virtue at a young age and guided their young minds as they should, so much grief would be avoided as they grow into Catholic adults. Do not allow complacency to govern the home. Understand the vocation you are called to by God. Answer this call willingly, bravely and with great joy.



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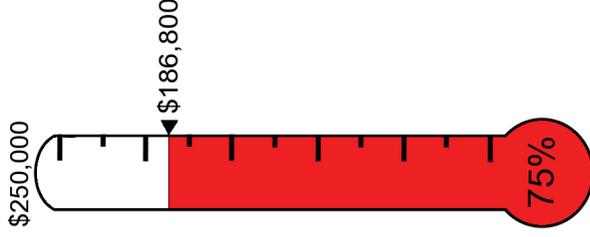
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+Bishop Giles OFM

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MARCH 2017



View of future Sanctuary (Dec 2016)

Caution in Reading

Bishop Giles, OFM

Our Holy Mother the Church presents to us the lives of the saints to be our inspiration and guides in the spiritual life while we are here on earth. These saints have reached the goal that is set out before every one of us – Heaven. When the Church completes the process of canonization for a particular person, we are bound to believe that this person is now in Heaven. This is a matter of Faith. The Church cannot make a mistake in this because She is guided and protected in this matter directly by the Holy Ghost.

When a person is declared a saint, the Church infallibly declares that this person has reached the eternal Beatific Vision. She does not say that this person was perfect or that this person was impeccable (never sinned). The saints in Heaven have reached this glory through their cooperation with the graces of God and have practiced virtue in their lives here on earth.

Too often, Catholics want to quote the saints as if everything they said and did was the dogmatic truth. The Church does not endorse this belief in any way. What the saints have said and done does deserve a lot of credence, but it in no way means that they were always correct. We find undeniable doctrine only in the teaching authority of the Church. When the Church endorses a particular teaching of a saint, then She approves that one teaching – basically saying that this saint got this right. It is not a canonization of everything the saint ever said or did.

The saints, very often even humbly acknowledged their own failings. St. Augustine wrote an entire volume of retractions where he corrected many things that he had written in the past. St. Francis of Assisi begged pardon from his own body for the wrongs and abuses that he inflicted upon it in his overzealousness for penance and mortification. History often shows us that saints living at the same time were often at odds with one another over doctrine, or practices. Yet, they were both declared saints by the Church. For example St. Paul and St.

Barnabas; St. Jerome and St. Augustine. The Church is not suggesting that two incompatible positions are both correct when She canonized them. She is simply stating that they both led holy and edifying lives and have at last obtained Heaven.

We can and should read and love what the saints have said and done, but we must not go so far as to think that everything that is written is the infallible dogmatic teaching that we are to believe. It is the person that is canonized, not every word or action of the person.

In a similar manner, we must not be too quick to dismiss everything that someone has said because he had fallen into error. Origen of Alexandria wrote many true things and is often quoted and used in references by the Church, even to this day, but he was anathematized by the Second Council of Constantinople. He is said to be one of the most influential writers in early Christian asceticism. We may also consider that Henry VIII was once awarded the title of “defender of the faith” by the pope for his writing, and then fell into schism and heresy. The work that he previously wrote

did not change from good to bad simply because the author did.

It is, therefore, necessary that we read with understanding caution. Those who write the lives of the saints cannot relate everything about a saint. Their purpose in writing is to inspire us more so than to entertain us. So we are often given a one-sided view that passes over defects and emphasizes the good. It is not lying, but it is often not the whole truth. Many tend to perceive that the saints were superhuman, or not really human. Of course, if the writers were to show us the weakness of their human nature and their defects, that would lessen the inspirational purpose of their writing. The truth obviously is somewhere in between these two extremes. The saints were truly human. They were conceived in sin – just as we were. They had faults, failings, and even various degrees of sin. Yet, in spite of this, with the grace of God, they overcame all this and practiced heroic virtue. We should not become disheartened when we find out that one of our favorite saints was not perfect. What we should take away, is that with God’s grace everything is possible. With the help of God’s

grace, we too, can become saints and enter into the blessedness of Heaven.

Likewise, even if an author is not canonized, this does not imply that the work is without any use or merit. “The Imitation of Christ” is a most powerful and useful work, yet Thomas à Kempis has not been canonized. There is also much profit that we can gain in reading and learning of the lives of many that are declared “venerable” or “blessed” as well as many other lesser known souls that have inspired or led others to Jesus Christ and the Church. We must not put on blinders and think that the saints were humanly “perfect.” Jesus has told us: “Only God is good.” So we can say that only God is perfect. The saints and the rest of us are called upon to strive towards this spiritual perfection, and we only reach this when we immerse ourselves in the life of Jesus Christ.

We should strive after the example of St. Francis of Assisi, to seek and find God all around us. We are not speaking of a false interpretation of St. Francis that so many seem to glean from his life. St. Francis did not

believe that trees, flowers, birds, etc. were gods. He did perceive God’s presence and His work in all of His creation. Even in the greatest of sinners, there is an element of goodness. They, as well as ourselves, have been made in the image and likeness of God, and have been created by Him, and for Him, and to be united with Him eternally in Heaven. Even if they fail to reach this goal and end up in Hell, their very existence and being is something good.

We don’t have to put on blinders to hide the evil and sin all around us, in order to perceive and enjoy the beauty and goodness of God. Nor, should we put on blinders and perceive only sin and evil all around us. This world contains both. We should know and understand this so that we do not end up falling into despair and hopelessness at the sight of so much evil around us, nor end up becoming presumptuous and oblivious to the evil – or striving to perceive evil and sin as somehow good and holy.

Life, as well as good books, is filled with spiritual lessons for us all. What we need is the vision and discernment to see and understand these things.

Obviously, what is paramount in mercy, goodness, etc. Not that this is God's grace. When we live the evil is good or is made good; in the grace of God, this world, but rather, God draws good from and this life, become open books even the greatest evils. Where for us to read and uncover the sin abounds, grace abounds various attributes of God. Even even more. With the light of in the various faults, failings, God's grace, we can all see and and sins of our fellow men (and understand. This will take us ourselves), we can find many a long way in following Jesus reflections upon God's patience, Christ and the saints into the eternal blessedness of Heaven.



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A Chance to Live

Monsignor John P. Carroll-Abbing

II

FLASHBACK

(Continued)

Particularly touching to me was the dark-skinned boy from Somaliland. We called him Mohammed.

He was gravely ill, the only African boy among all the other patients. His dark face cutting the white pillow, his eyes wide open, he followed every move of those about him. Nothing we could do in the way of care was of any use and he grew steadily worse. The end was not far off. He knew only a few words of Italian, insufficient for any request, for any conversation, and he went on suffering, silent and lonely.

“Wounded as he is, he must be going through the tortures of the damned, but he has a strong will and he does not complain,” the doctors said of him.

Thinking him a Catholic, a good nurse gave him a rosary, but on seeing the cross he turned away in aversion. He was a Mohammedan.

Whenever I visited him, I had a feeling of embarrassment. I did not

know what to say to him. I could not speak a word of his language, he little of mine. I tried to convey to him that I understood what he was undergoing.

One night the doctor called me to tell me the end was not far off. I hurried to him.

As I watched the man’s agony, I wished for some means by which I could give him a measure of comfort. His strength was ebbing fast. His eyes were closed and I thought him asleep. His breathing became irregular.

Suddenly, eyes still closed, he drew one hand from under the sheet and made a blind gesture, as if seeking something. I gave him my hand. He clasped it tightly to his breast and covered it with his other hand. I could feel his heart beating, still strong, but gradually it slowed. He had lost consciousness. A few moments later he died.

As I have said before, sadness was not the all-invading force in the hospital. Life varied, taking color from the different personalities who dwelled there. Some of the boys

had almost unconsciously taken upon themselves the task of lifting the morale of their companions. They laughed uproariously as they played tricks on one another. This happened frequently, especially in the officers' quarters. The traditional jokers were there as they are in every college dormitory or soldiers' barracks.

One evening an officer who was fully recovered was given permission to leave the hospital for a few hours prior to his being discharged. In his absence his colleagues in the ward took a white marble bust of Pope Leo XIII from its niche in the corridor and placed in the officer's bed, the head snug on the pillow, the bedclothes bundled under the sheet.

The officer returned about ten o'clock. The ward was quiet and in almost complete darkness. Only the blue night light glowed. Every man in the room was wide-awake and waiting.

On tiptoes not to disturb his friends, the officer enters, walks over to his cot, and sits down to slip off his boots. His hand goes to the pillow to pull down the sheet. Stiffing a cry, he stares down for a moment then dashes down the aisle and out into the corridor.

A few moments later the barefoot boy returns with someone in tow. It is one of the Sisters, a small fussy bundle of nerves who simply cannot understand how such a thing could have happened in so well-organized a place.

She bends over the pillow.

“Dear God, help! He is dead!”

Her high-strung voice rings out in the silent ward. A roar of laughter and a flood of light as one of the men surreptitiously turns the switch. Even the little nun who hurries away red with confusion is not wholly displeased at the success of the prank.

At times it was apparent that the gaiety was feigned. You felt that laughter hid tears and you thought of the wrong note of a violin spoiling an otherwise perfect passage. However, the deep joy in spiritual things, revived and fostered in the friendly atmosphere, grew stronger day by day and men who had suffered turned to their God in the battle for life.

A number of our patients tore away completely from the patterns of their former lives. Confined within those walls, immersed in a sea of pain, they were forced to seek out the true meaning of life. They

soon came to realize that beyond a purely material existence there is a higher life, a more sublime one as revealed by faith. Many, the greater number, bowed submissively to the fact that suffering accepted in the name of God and for love of Him and of our fellow man is one of the greatest builders of character in man.

An admirable example of this I found in Ottone, a young soldier. His clinical card showed not only the progress of his malady, but also gave detailed information of his early years. It was not difficult to see that he had led a highly disorganized existence.

His glance was sullen, the toughness of his character revealed by the sharp bitter replies he gave anyone who questioned him. Never a word of gratitude for the nurse who took care of him. For the men assisting him he reserved his most cynical remarks, for the doctor doing his utmost to relieve his pain nothing but complaints, for the chaplain a frozen indifference. No one liked him, as he did not spare even his own buddies.

He had been brought to the hospital on a questioned prognosis. In a few days the signs of an unconquerable disease manifested themselves and

the dissolution of his body began, slow and inexorable. The rotting flesh fell piece by piece, his arms, his legs showed as mere bones.

Ottone sat on the edge of his bed, day and night, night and day, thinking. Two basins under his feet filled slowly with blood, bits of skin and muscle. Unable to lie down, he tried to rest propped up with pillows.

The tortures he had to undergo never ended and I visited him often. Nurses and doctors gave him their most assiduous care, but the bitterness, the harshness in his character persisted, intensified by the thought of what life might have been for him. Among so many other great sufferers, his attitude stood out as unique.

To make matters worse for him, a further examination one day revealed the fact that he had also contracted tuberculosis. For the safety of the other patients, he had to be removed to a sanatorium on the outskirts of the capital. It was sad to think that the new surroundings would probably add to his sense of loss, of abandonment.

I made up my mind to visit him in his new quarters. Although the sanatorium was at a considerable distance from our hospital, I was

able to make several trips there. Later I visited him every day.

How it happened I could not at first explain to myself, but I began to notice signs of a change in the boy. Not in his physical condition — that was beyond human endeavor — but in his outlook upon life.

In the succeeding months he gradually lost most of his cruelty. His replies were more controlled, he expressed less hatred for everything and everyone. I noticed that as his life slowly ebbed, he was acquiring a greater serenity, a vivid touch of grace. The natural goodness in him was rising to the surface.

Another operation was attempted and I watched its progress. He bore it calmly and with courage. To relieve his suffering, both his legs were amputated.

I sat at his bedside after the ordeal. I saw the relaxed lines of his face, his hands, thin, waxy, almost diaphanous. As I had entered his room, I had felt the new atmosphere of the place.

Ottone was now well liked. Not only that. The influence of his indomitable spirit in the face of his sufferings was beginning to be felt throughout the ward. He had made

his peace with his God. Prayer and the sacraments had become necessary for him and he was offering his sufferings in expiation for the salvation of the world. What had wrought the miracle was so simple and yet so limitless.

I saw the head nurse after leaving him one day. It had become a habit with me to stop at her office for the cup of coffee she graciously offered me whenever I came to the hospital. She was a fine, strong character, capable and good. On that particular day I noticed that something was wrong. I had not long to wait for an explanation.

“Father, I can’t stand it,” she suddenly burst out.

“What’s wrong?”

“That poor Ottone in that room ... the torture he’s been undergoing ... it isn’t fair. Why does a God who is supposed to be merciful allow it? My faith is beginning to waver, Father. ...”

A wave of happiness surged up in me. At last someone had given definite expression to the great “Why?” of the moment. To the why asked by the wounded of Albania, to the why whispered by Adrian and his mother, to the why sobbed out by Battista who had guessed

the news of his little son's death.

Ottone's relaxed face came back to me, the smile he had turned to me as I left his room.

"Sister," I answered, and I smiled as I spoke, "if I had any doubts myself, this case alone out of many others would be sufficient to dissipate them, to confirm my faith. You and I have seen this boy as he was when he first entered these doors, you have read his story on the clinical record, you have experienced the bitterness, the hate with which his whole being was charged. And now? Tell me, what is it that has brought about this change in him, if not the bending of his head to God? He has simply accepted the means God saw fit to give him for his own redemption..."

A day came when I visited Ottone for the last time. I was leaving on the following day for Portugal and Ireland.

"Ottone," I said to him, "I must bid you good-bye now, but I shall return soon. What do you want me to bring you from my country?"

He took my hand in his thin white one and smiled, gazing at me fixedly for a long time. Although he was much younger than I, I saw in his look both a deep wisdom and

a quality akin to the blessing of a father. In that small hospital room there was joy as well as pain.

"When you return, Father, I shall not be here," he said very low.

A moment of suspense, an instant that stretched into eternity and he added, even lower:

"When I am in paradise, I shall remember the Irish priest who came to see me..."

I clasped his hand, rose and closed the door softly as I walked out. I never saw him again.

On the plane which was taking me to Rome, I opened a small book an officer had handed to me as I left. I had seen many of my patients reading it lately.

"There is no conquest without suffering ... no rising without suffering ... no reward without suffering. I ponder on the suffering in the world of to-day ... it has a hundred faces, a hundred expressions, but springing forth from all this sorrow, all this pain, a great flame is rising toward the Almighty, a fire of burning hope that Love may come again. Love in sorrow, Love for sorrow." (Nino Salmaneschi)

(To be continued)

Sister Agnes' Favorites

Prayer to St. Joseph in any Great Necessity

*O most faithful guardian of Jesus and spouse of Mary,
thou seest the anguish of my heart.*

I am disturbed and perplexed.

Obtain for me the light of the

*Holy Ghost and all the help I need to
enable me at all times and in all things
to fulfill the adorable will of God.*

I choose thee this day,

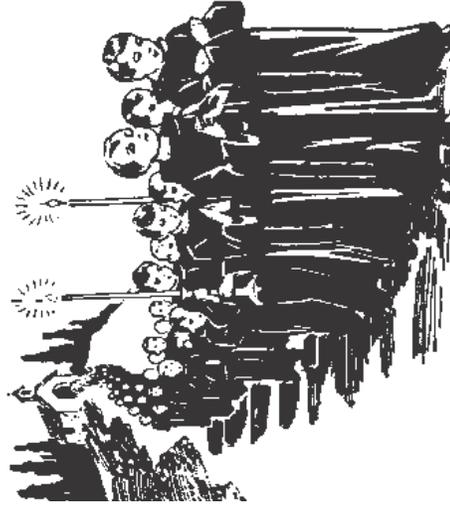
*in the presence of Jesus and Mary,
as my angel of good counsel,
to direct me in all my necessities.*

Guide me, I entreat thee,

*by the many bitter dolours which rent thy tender heart
during the course of thy mortal pilgrimage.*

Amen.

Note: Every good Catholic should foster devotion to the good St. Joseph, and now more than ever, since he has been declared the patron and protector of the whole Church. No mortal man had ever such honor conferred upon him as that which was conferred on St. Joseph. This great saint, who took such care of the infant Jesus and of His Blessed Mother Mary, will take most especial care of us, in all our necessities, temporal and spiritual, if we only ask him. Fathers of families, and those who have charge of others, should pray in a particular manner to St. Joseph.



Franciscan Saints

MARCH 6

ST. COLETA

Virgin, Second Order

For centuries the little town of Corbie in France was famous for a Benedictine convent there in which several saints had lived as well as many men renowned for their learning. Usually several hundred religious dwelt there at one time. They were divided into three groups, who took turns in solemnly chanting the Divine Office before the Blessed Sacrament, so that day and night the “perpetual praise of God” resounded there — that was the name applied to this way of imitating the heavenly choirs, as established by devout princes in many a convent of the Middle Ages.

In this little town of Corbie, Coleta was born on January 13, 1381, of exemplary working people. She was a child of grace, an answer to her mother’s

incessant prayers, for the latter was already sixty years old then and had been childless up to that time.

The little girl took great pleasure in prayer, in compassion for the poor, and in rigorous mortification, making of her soul and of her tender body a sacrifice to God. Up to her fourteenth year she remained unusually small in stature; this was a great grief for her father. Coleta begged God to console her father in the matter, and then she began to grow very rapidly to normal height. On the other hand, she asked God to deprive her of the rare beauty she possessed, which she believed might be the occasion of danger to herself and others; that request, too, was granted, and Coleta developed features

of a severe cast which inspired great respect.

When both her parents had died, Coleta, at the age of twenty-two obtained the permission of the Church authorities to shut herself up in a small abode directly adjoining the church; from a small window in it she could see the Blessed Sacrament. There she expected to spend the remainder of her life as an anchoress. She had embraced the rule of the Third Order of St. Francis, in accordance with which she endeavored to live in perfect poverty, severe mortification, and constant prayer in order to become daily more and more like the Seraphic Father. She received many consolations from heaven, but on the other hand she also experienced severe temptations and even corporal abuse from the spirits of darkness.

Almighty God had destined Coleta for something extraordinary. He excited in her the desire to reintroduce the strict observance of the rule of St. Clare, which many convents of Poor Clares then observed in a modified form. The humble virgin recoiled at the thought, which

she tried to persuade herself was an illusion of the proud spirit of darkness. But the inspiration returned again and again, and when she continued to resist it, she was struck dumb and later on blind, until she finally resigned herself to the will of God, like Saul before Damascus. "Lord," she sobbed in her heart, "what wilt Thou have me do? I am ready to do anything Thou desirest of me." At once her speech and her sight were restored. The Lord sent her a special director under whose guidance she was to perform extraordinary things. And so, after spending four years in her anchorage, and with the authority and the blessing of the pope, she established one convent of Poor Clares after another, so that the number reached seventeen during her lifetime. After her death similar foundations were established in countries other than France, in which the primitive rule of St. Clare began to flourish anew.

St. Coleta endured untold hardships in fulfilling the task assigned to her, but heaven supported her even in visible ways; numerous miracles, including the raising to life of several dead persons, occurred

in answer to her prayers and in confirmation of her work. So, the great foundress remained ever humble, regarding everything as the work of God, who often chooses the lowliest of people as His instruments.

On this foundation of humility, she endeavored to foster in her convents the spirit of prayer and simplicity of heart. She placed great value on the recitation of the Divine Office in choir, undoubtedly in remembrance of the practice existing in her native town, and infused this esteem into her fellow sisters. She was also filled with zeal for the salvation of souls, and once in a vision she saw souls falling into hell more swiftly than the snowflakes in a winter's storm.

After laboring for forty years, she was to receive her eternal reward. She died in her convent at Ghent on March 6, 1447. At the moment of her departure from this world, she appeared to several sisters in different convents. Pope Urban VIII beatified her, and Pope Pius VII solemnly canonized her in 1807.



ON CORPORAL BEAUTY

1. The Holy Spirit says: "For many have perished by the beauty of a woman" (Eccclus. 9:9). St. Coleta reflected on this truth, and fearing nothing more than to give anyone occasion to sin, she asked God as did also St. Lidwina to deprive her of her corporal beauty: God heard her prayer by means of a miracle. How different is the example of the young women who not only prefer to be beautiful to plain-looking, but endeavor in every possible way to enhance their imaginary beauty and to make themselves more attractive. Such persons lay snares for souls and draw down upon themselves sin and misery. A Christian young woman will not act in that way; whoever does do it, does not deserve the name Christian any more. Moreover, it is not the Christian fashion to make little girls conscious of their beauty; it is in this way that we nourish that evil propensity for personal admiration. — Have you need to reproach yourself on these points?

2. Consider that we should place little stock in personal beauty. "Favor is deceitful, and beauty is

vain,” says the Wise Man (Prov. 31:30). How little, oftentimes, does interior merit conform with the external beauty, and how soon the latter disappears! Hence Thomas á Kempis (1:7) admonishes: “Boast not thyself of thy stature or beauty of body, which, with a little sickness, is spoiled and disfigured; but glory in God, who giveth all things and desireth to give Himself above all things.” “The woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised” (Prov. 31:30). — Have you perhaps also paid much attention to corporal perfections?

3. Consider, that if you possess personal beauty, it should urge you to achieve beauty of soul through purity of heart, sincerity, modesty, piety, genuine love of God and neighbor; otherwise your beautiful body will be but the fair peel of a rotten apple. On the other hand, even if you

are not now possessed of bodily beauty, you can possess it later if you now beautify your soul; for then even your body will be beautiful in the resurrection and throughout eternity. For “one is the glory of the celestial, and another of the terrestrial” (1 Cor. 15:40). The one is a gift of nature, the other is the result of the virtue which a person has acquired on earth. Impelled by virtuous motives, St. Coleta asked almighty God to deprive her of bodily beauty, and so the beauty of her glorified body will be the greater on the last day.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

O Lord Jesus Christ, who didst overwhelm St. Coleta with heavenly gifts, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may zealously imitate her virtues here on earth and deserve to share with her the eternal joys of heaven. Who livest and reignest forever and ever. Amen.

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MARCH 2017

THE PRUDENT CHRISTIAN

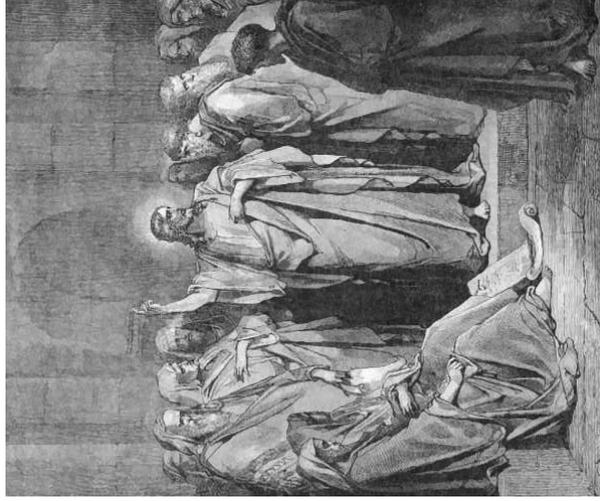
OR,

CONSIDERATIONS ON
THE IMPORTANCE, AND
HAPPINESS, OF ATTENDING
TO THE CARE OF OUR
SALVATION.

BY THE REV. J. FLETCHER, D.D.

“Give me understanding, and I
shall live.” — PSALM cxix.

1834.



CONSIDERATION X.

ON THE LAST SENTIMENTS, AND DEATH OF THE JUST.

There is no spectacle under the sun more consoling in the eyes of religion than the death of the virtuous Christian, — precisely as there is none more distressing than that of the unrepenting sinner. How striking, even in their last illness, is the contrast between the two! Consigned to his hard bed of sorrows, the sinner has nothing to give him comfort. The past awakens regret; the present, pain; the future, horror. Whereas, in

regard of the virtuous Christian, the reverse directly is the fact. The past awakens gratitude; the present, hope; the future, joy. The death of the just is the triumph of religion. It is glorious in the eyes of God Himself: — “*Precious,*” says the Psalmist, “*in the sight of God is the death of his saints.*”

In fact, it is the victory of the valiant soldier, after the toils of an arduous warfare: — it is the entry of the wearied mariner into port, after the storms of a dangerous voyage: — it is the liberation of the captive, after the miseries of a tedious confinement: it is the return home of a beloved child to the

bosom of his family, after a long absence in a land of exile. Such as these are the circumstances, and such the consolations, which attend the death of the virtuous Christian. Oh, who is there amongst us, that does not here say to himself: "May my soul, too, die the death of the just, and may my last end be like unto theirs?" — Let us, then, just view the situation, and consider the feelings of the virtuous man on the bed of sickness, — during the last stage of his mortal course.

I. One of the great sources of consolation to the virtuous Christian, under the pressure of his illness, is this, — that he is not taken by surprise, — that he is not, like the dying sinner, beginning now only to feel for his sins, when he can sin no longer; undertaking the task of his conversion, when his reason is enfeebled; and his body sinking to decay; — seeking, at length, after heaven, when just placed on the very borders of hell. He has not now, for the first time, to begin to seek for pardon; or to endeavor to propitiate a long-neglected God. These are difficulties, unfelt, and unknown to him. He had, long since, anticipated his

present situation; and seriously prepared himself against it. The thought of death was familiar to him. It entered into the whole order of his conduct. Aware of the shortness, and uncertainty, of life; and that the bridegroom might call upon him, at any hour, — he, therefore, kept his lamp always trimmed, and ready, for the great occasion. And hence, therefore, that courage, and composure, which now support him under his present trials.

It is true, indeed, that, let a man be ever so virtuous, still he may, — and sometimes does, — experience certain uneasy feelings on the bed of death. There is something awful in the idea of the grave; — something, from which the instincts of our nature shrink back with trepidation; — whilst, at the same time, there is something more awful still in the reflection on the severity of God's judgments, and the uncertainty of our future doom: — for, "*man knows not, whether he be worthy of love, or hatred.*" Accordingly, such as these are the apprehensions, which do sometimes agitate the feelings even of the most virtuous Christian. However, these are only clouds, which, almost

instantly, melt away. For, soon, amid the unpleasing sensations, comes in the remembrance of the divine mercies; the recollection of the Savior's atonements; and the bright prospects of heavenly bliss. And as, therefore, he does not experience any serious reproaches of conscience; as he had long wept over his past offences; and led, perhaps for many years, a life of piety and virtue, — so his fears are at once soothed into calmness, and his apprehensions replaced by the confidences of hope.

II. The circumstances, we have remarked, which awaken bitterness in the breast of the dying sinner, and which render his bed a bed of iron, are the retrospect upon the past, and the prospect into the future, — the sad remembrance of the vices, and inutilities, of the years gone by; and the still more alarming view of the miseries, which appear ready to avenge them. Such is the situation of the expiring sinner. Now, with the virtuous man the contrary is the case. It is precisely the retrospect upon the past, and the prospect into the future, that give him consolation; and that smooth the couch, upon which he peacefully reposes. He now

reflects with joy upon that happy prudence, which induced him "to choose the better part;" and to devote himself seriously to the service of his God. He feels now all the advantages of virtue; and the wisdom of having despised the empty satisfactions of a worldly life, which, — as everything is now slipping out of his hands, — would have left behind them only anguish, and regret. These are objects, of which he now forms a proper estimate. — In like manner, he considers with satisfaction the little sacrifices, which, from time to time, he has made to God; — his resignation under certain trials; — his occasional mortifications, and penances; — his resistance to temptations; — and the victories, which, assisted by the power of grace, he has gained over his passions, and the world. He dwells with delight on the remembrance of those happy hours, which he has spent at the foot of the altar, in the embraces of his Savior in our holy sacrifice; and in the consoling meditation upon his mercies. He recalls to his recollection the many instances, which he has received, of the divine favor; the blessings, with which he has been

distinguished; and the snares, and difficulties, from which he has providentially been delivered. Full of gratitude, and love, he traces in all this the expression of God's friendship towards him; and the assured pledges of his future happiness. Not even does the view of his former disloyalties any way distress him painfully: because these he has fervently regretted; humbly laid them down at the feet of his Savior in the tribunal of penance; and heard pronounced over them those consoling words: "*Go thy ways in peace; thy sins are forgiven thee.*" Whence, looking back upon the past, so far from desponding, he feels only confidence, and satisfaction.

III. But, whilst thus the retrospect upon the past affords him comfort, let us think, how much more consoling still are his prospects into the future. Here, his confidence is heightened into joy, and his hope into rapture. Here, like the pious Suarez, he is disposed to exclaim: "*I had never thought before, that it is so delightful a thing to die.*" In reality, he considers himself as just arrived at the gates of heaven; and looking forward into that blissful region, he calls

out with the Psalmist: "*I shall go into the house of the Lord.*" He seems, in the delightful visions of his imagination, to see the bright portals already opening to receive him; and the God of mercies holding out in His hand the crown, that is destined to reward his fidelity. He anticipates the pleasure, with which, soon, he shall join the society of the elect; meet again his once beloved friends, and associates; and, united with them, sing, forever, in their happy quires, the praises of his God. But, above all, he is ravished into ecstasy to think, that he is going to behold this immortal Being, face to face, in all the splendors of His glory; and to behold Him; and to love Him, the whole length of an endless eternity.

With feelings such as these in his heart, and with these exalted ideas in his mind, he cannot be supposed to be otherwise than happy. In reality, to conceive, that he is going to God's eternal City, there to live, and to reign, for ever; — there to converse with the celestial spirits, and to drink joy from the brimful torrent of pure delights; — no longer any dangers to alarm him; no fears to distress; no passions to annoy

him, — not even so much as a cloud ever to overshadow the serenity of his pleasures; — with these sensations, living in his heart, can he be otherwise than pleased, that the bands of his mortality, which have hitherto held him captive, are now going to be broken asunder? — Well, and such are the feelings of the virtuous Christian on the bed of death. It was under their impulse, that, but a few years past, we heard a pious Princess, in the agonies of death, call out, just like the holy Suarez: “*Never could I have believed, that it is so sweet a thing to die.*”

IV. By death, the just man sees himself separated from the world, and from all those scenes, and objects, which had been hitherto familiar to him. But this, to him, is no great subject of regret. It is true, that, living in the world, he had, with cheerfulness, enjoyed its innocent pleasures; had cherished the society of his friends; and observed all the ordinary, — if harmless, — forms of social life. But, then, along with all this, he was not fondly attached to the world: he never suffered it so to engage his affections, as to make him forget, that he had not here a permanent dwelling-place. He used it, as

if he used it not. He considered it, as a scene of dangers, and temptations; — a perfidious region, beset with illusions, and deceit. And hence, as he dwelt in it without any great relish, so he leaves it without regret. — In relation to his earthly goods, — his riches, and his property, — he had possessed these too, as if he possessed them not, — employing them liberally, indeed, according to the circumstances of his rank, and station, — expending them in those uses, for which Providence had placed them in his hands; and, above all, depositing them, by deeds of charity, in the tabernacles of his God, — rendering them the support of the poor, and the consolation of the distressed. — As for the titles, or honors, which he may have possessed, — the loss of these is to him a matter of mere indifference. His mind had been long too great, and noble, to attach any real esteem to such trifles. Or if he did esteem them, it was only for the purpose of commanding a higher degree of respect, in order to be enabled to expand a still wider circle, either of beneficence, or of good example. The only titles, and honors, which he now esteems,

are those, which are appended to his character as a Christian; and to the happiness of being the child of God, and the heir of heaven. — If, indeed, there be anything, that does now give pain to his sensibility, it is the circumstance of leaving behind him a beloved, and perhaps yet tender, family; or the relatives, and friends of his bosom. This, no doubt, is an affecting sacrifice: because to these he was fervently attached. However, even this is a sacrifice, which he makes with resignation; — considering it as the will of God; and reflecting, that the separation will be but short; — full of hope, that, soon, he shall again be united to these dear objects of his love, in bands still stronger than those, which had linked him to them, until now. Hence, casting upon them a last fond look of affection; exhorting them to the assiduous cultivation of virtue; and calling down upon them every blessing, — he calmly consigns them to the hands, and protection, of their Eternal Father. — Oh, what dignity does religion impart to the virtuous Christian! Contemplating the triumphant spectacle, we cannot but be sensible, how delightful a thing it is to have lived in the fear of

God, and to die in His friendship.

V. But, see now the minister of God approaches. — Holding in his hands the sacred emblem of salvation, he announces to the expiring hero, in the tender accents of religious piety, that his last hour is come; and that his heavenly Father is now going to call him to Himself. At these glad tidings, all his best feelings are revived; and his heart exults anew. He listens with complacency to the last eloquent exhortations of the Church: “*Go forth, Christian soul. Depart from a world, in which thou hast, hitherto, been a captive: — go; be united to the assembly of the elect, which awaits thy coming. God has had compassion upon thy tears; and He now opens to thee the gates of His eternal City.*” — And oh, with what consolation does he hear, and obey, the delightful summons! Lifting up his dying eyes, whilst his heart is filled with gratitude, he, like the holy Simeon, gently breathes out the words: — “*Now dost thou dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word, in peace; because mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.*” Thus, calm, and happy, — anticipating future joys, and exulting in the glad prospects before him, — he

shuts his eyes to the world, and gently resigns his soul into the hands of his God; — whilst the angels, that had surrounded his couch, conduct him in triumph to the eternal throne, there to hear that joyful sentence, "*Well done, thou good, and faithful servant: because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many. Enter into the joy of thy Lord.*"

Wherefore, let us consider well: and, seeing that the benefits of virtue are so great, — thus smoothing the bed of sickness, and rendering death itself a source of comfort, — let us, hence, endeavor to make these blessings ours. Let us cautiously avoid sin: for, it is sin alone, that makes death frightful, and uneasy. Let us despise the world: for, when placed by the side of the honors, and delights of heaven, — its most shining advantages, — its scepters, and its crowns; its palaces, and its pomps; its riches, and its pleasures, — dwindle away into empty trifles, and unmeaning nothings. — Let us bear, too, with fortitude the few crosses, which Providence, in its wisdom, may think proper sometimes to send us: for, these are only momentary. The captive, however great and distressing

might chance to be his sufferings for a day, would neither sigh, nor complain, if he were assured, that, tomorrow, he should not only obtain his liberty, but even be exalted to a throne. — In short, born for heaven, let us do nothing, but what is fitted to prepare us for it, — nothing, but what is worthy of our glorious destiny. Let us live virtuously; and we shall die in peace. Our death will be but the beginning of our real happiness. It will be death, only in name. It will be the discharge from our chains; the release from our captivity; the end of all our troubles. It will be our departure to God, in order to exult, and eternally reign with Him, in the splendors of His glory.



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