



WHAT WE SHOULD ASK FOR AT MEDITATION AND THE FIDELITY WITH WHICH WE SHOULD PERSEVERE

26 October 1884.

...When we go to prayer, it is for the purpose of acquiring or increasing the love of God in our lives. Whether or not you feel love, it is the most necessary virtue, the beginning of the law: "You will love the Lord your God with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind," (Deut. 6: 5). To love God perfectly, to love God as we ought to, is not possible for us by ourselves. It is an effect of God's graces which, poured into our hearts, makes us capable of loving God; but we have to work to develop this grace by prayer.

When we go to prayer, what we ask for is the love of God, that God live in us, that God give us grace and the strength to do what God wants of us. What God wants is that we imitate Our Lord Jesus Christ. Note well that, if in the pursuit of virtue, we seek only our own perfection, we would not be doing much, we wouldn't really be doing anything at all. If we imagine the impossible: "I have the consolation of being able to say that I am poor, virtuous, regular;" we would only arrive at the perfection of the Pharisee who did not go to his house justified. You recall that he said in the temple: "I am not like the rest of men: I fast, I give the tithe of my goods to the poor; I am not like the Publican that I see over there," (Luke 18: 11-12). At the same time, the Publican struck his breast, and he alone returned to his house justified. That Pharisee, so pleased with himself, did not come to ask ardently and pressingly for the love of God. Yet this is the first law for the Jews as for Christians. He could have asked for it with ardor, praying insistently: "My God, make me love you with all my heart, with all my strength, with all my mind and will; let all that you have put in me give me love as great and strong as I am capable of, a generous love that you alone can give." Instead of that, he was looking at himself; admiring himself.

All proportion guarded, I well know that there are people who do the same, who are satisfied if they think they have some little virtues, who despair if they don't see themselves clothed in virtue. I don't know if they feel this way out of love for God alone and not a little out of self-love. They say under their breath: "I am fervent; people see how I observe the

Rule that I have not failed in any point, that I know how to keep silence when I am corrected for something. I am mortified; I deny myself such and such things.” It’s not for that that we go to prayer: we have to go humbly, begging and asking God for the perfect and limitless love which already exists in us, but which is not yet developed as it should be. What God wants to find most in you is love, that you love God a little more each day. Each one of you has worth before God in proportion to her love. It is not what you do but the love with which you do what you do, as the *Imitation of Christ* says. Thus, in proportion to your love of God and of your charity for your neighbor, you have value before God.

The second thing that I want to tell you is that the love of God that you ask in prayer is so precious and is so necessary for your soul that you should not consider the suffering you shall have to endure to gain it. You mustn’t stop to see if you are consoled or not, if you are bored or not bored: you have to look at the goal; you have to seek the aim [of your life]. You should have one desire, be in a hurry for one thing so that you don’t consider the road you have to travel, the sufferings, the difficulty you may bear, as long as you increase this rich treasure of God’s love. Saint Augustine says: "The beggar insists when he asks for bread; you should ask Jesus when you go to prayer, for the bread of your soul: that God come to you, that God make his dwelling in you. Have the same ardor and spirit of supplication."

If you don’t have any feeling of love, you all have the feeling of what you need. There is not one who does not feel her poverty, that Jesus is not living enough in her, that she needs the bread for her soul which is truth and love. If you feel what is lacking to you, you will go to prayer with ardor and desire. You will endure boredom, distaste, and the absence of consolation, because you see the goal you want to attain.

Recently, we have been reading the life St Francis and of how he got out of certain temptations in his life. He recalled the farmer who wanted to plant wheat in the earth where there were only weeds and thistles. He began by pulling up the trees; he got himself very tired and did not harvest anything right away. He pulled out brambles and stuck his fingers, had a lot of trouble and still didn’t harvest anything. A first time of work, a second time of work, [then] he fertilized the earth for it was in horrible shape. Finally, after several years of hard work, he harvested good wheat and stored it in the barn. He was very happy and didn’t think at all about his hard times. The farmer is a good image of the spiritual life where we have to tear up a lot of things, prick our fingers, take a lot of trouble. But there is a goal: obtain the

love of God, have Jesus live in us; have him see us as a living member of his Mystical Body. And, when this precious grain is stored in the barns of our heavenly Father, we consider our pain as nothing.

We never see Saints that say on their deathbed: "What work that cost me! So many mortifications, so many hours of penance, so much effort, so many temptations overcome!" On the contrary, like St. Peter of Alcantara: "Happy the penance that merited so many graces!" Others say like Saint Jeanne de Chantal: "At this moment, the merits seem so few and the faults so many!"

When they had to appear before God, their pain counted for nothing, the temptations overcome, the work on their souls were forgotten; they were concerned to know whether they had more or less of this grain, that is, more or less of unlimited love, perfect submission, the correspondence [to grace] that God had asked of them. And when, at that supreme hour, they were found conformed to Jesus Christ, they experienced great joy going to the One they had always loved. This is what we should look for from our prayer. St. Teresa says: "When you set out to make an hour of prayer every day, if you look for consolation, you are soon caught; but, if you want to keep Our Lord company with generosity, follow him to the Garden of Olives, in the sufferings of his Passion and show him the fidelity of a sincere love, you are on the right way and can persevere."

Ask then for love; ask for this heavenly and supreme gift which consists in knowing and loving Jesus Christ. Ask him to impress himself on you, to live in you, to give you the bread that is eternal life. You will reply: "But I receive it in Holy Communion." Yes, but understand that he comes even more to you if he finds in you his own sentiments. Saint Francis de Sales says that sometimes one person gains more in a single Communion than others do in many. It is because Our Lord, finding in you the dispositions which prepare for divine union, can take hold of you and change you entirely into himself. At prayer, you ask for these dispositions, you prepare yourself; you do the [necessary] work.

I come back to the image of the farmer who takes so much trouble. He doesn't entrust the grain to the earth until he has pulled out the trees and the brambles, worked and enriched the earth. If, after having pulled out the first tree, he had immediately sown some wheat, this grain would not have sprouted. The earth could not give its fruit until all had been well prepared. This grain is an image of Our Lord; he is the heavenly wheat which comes down into the furrow. Even when the earth is hardly prepared, he gives himself, he comes down.

But he cannot produce the thirty, the sixty, and the hundredfold there as he does in the saints. All must be sufficiently prepared by effort; work and prayer so that the heavenly wheat may come with joy, sprout and bring forth fruit.

This explanation does not follow exactly what I said above but it seems to me that it is necessary so that you form for yourselves correct ideas about meditation. This is what you go to [prayer] to do: beg God to give you his Love and to conform your being in everything to our Lord. You go to work, to suffer the feelings of abandon when they come, and to follow Our Lord faithfully like the Holy Women when they were on earth. It is again St. Francis de Sales who speaks: "When the Holy Women followed Jesus Christ to Calvary, do not think that everything was clear, and that in the midst of Jesus' sufferings and the tears of his mother, there was a place of great consolation?" No, but it was the place par excellence of redemption and sanctification. And St. Teresa says that we have to follow Jesus Christ along the way of the Cross from the Gethsemane to Calvary, and thus prepare ourselves for what he wants to give us of his Passion.
