

The Twenty-Ninth Chapter: HOW WE MUST CALL UPON AND BLESS THE LORD WHEN TROUBLE PRESSES

THE DISCIPLE

BLESSED be Your name forever, O Lord, Who have willed that this temptation and trouble come upon me. I cannot escape it, yet I must fly to You that You may help me and turn it to my good. Now I am troubled, Lord, and my heart is not at rest, for I am greatly afflicted by this present suffering.

Beloved Father, what shall I say? I am straitened in harsh ways. Save me from this hour to which, however, I am come that You may be glorified when I am deeply humbled and freed by You. May it please You, then, to deliver me, Lord, for what can I, poor wretch that I am, do or where can I go without You? Give me patience, Lord, even now. Help me, my God, and I will not be afraid however much I may be distressed.

But here, in the midst of these troubles, what shall I say? Your will be done, Lord. I have richly deserved to be troubled and distressed. But I must bear it. Would that I could do so patiently, until the storm passes and calm returns! Yet Your almighty hand can take this temptation from me, or lighten its attack so that I do not altogether sink beneath it, as You, my God, my Mercy, have very often done for me before. And the more difficult my plight, the easier for You is this change of the right hand of the Most High.

say little, however, about how poor he is in spirit, how patient and meek, how devout and spiritual. Nature looks to his outward appearance; grace turns to his inward being. The one often errs, the other trusts in God and is not deceived.

The Thirty-Second Chapter: SELF-DENIAL AND THE RENUNCIATION OF EVIL APPETITES

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, you can never be perfectly free unless you completely renounce self, for all who seek their own interest and who love themselves are bound in fetters. They are unsettled by covetousness and curiosity, always searching for ease and not for the things of Christ, often devising and framing that which will not last, for anything that is not of God will fail completely.

Hold to this short and perfect advice, therefore: give up your desires and you will find rest. Think upon it in your heart, and when you have put it into practice you will understand all things.

THE DISCIPLE

But this, Lord, is not the work of one day, nor is it mere child's play; indeed, in this brief sentence is included all the perfection of holy persons.

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

My child, you should not turn away or be downcast when you hear the way of the perfect. Rather you ought to be spurred on the more toward their sublime heights, or at least be moved to seek perfection.

I would this were the case with you -- that you had progressed to the point where you no longer loved self but simply awaited My bidding and his whom I have placed as father over you. Then you would please Me very much, and your whole life would pass in peace and joy. But you have yet many things which you must give up, and unless you resign them entirely to Me you will not obtain that which you ask.

"I counsel thee to buy of me gold, fire-tried, that thou mayest be made rich"^[36] -- rich in heavenly wisdom which treads underfoot all that is low. Put aside earthly wisdom, all human self-complacency.

I have said: exchange what is precious and valued among men for that which is considered contemptible. For true heavenly wisdom -- not to think highly of self and not to seek glory on earth -- does indeed seem mean and small and is well-nigh forgotten, as many men praise it with their mouths but shy far away from it in their lives. Yet this heavenly wisdom is a pearl of great price, which is hidden from many.

The Thirty-Third Chapter: RESTLESSNESS OF SOUL -- DIRECTING OUR FINAL INTENTION TOWARD GOD

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, do not trust in your present feeling, for it will soon give way to another. As long as you live you will be subject to changeableness in spite of yourself. You will become merry at one time and sad at another, now peaceful but again disturbed, at one moment devout and the next indevout, sometimes diligent while at other times lazy, now grave and again flippant.

But the man who is wise and whose spirit is well instructed stands superior to these changes. He pays no attention to what he feels in himself or from what quarter the wind of fickleness blows, so long as the whole intention of his mind is conducive to his proper and desired end. For thus he can stand undivided, unchanged, and unshaken, with the singleness of his intention directed unwaveringly toward Me, even in the midst of so many changing events. And the purer this singleness of intention is, with so much the more constancy does he pass through many storms.

But in many ways the eye of pure intention grows dim, because it is attracted to any delightful thing that it meets. Indeed, it is rare to find one who is entirely free from all taint of self-seeking. The Jews of old, for example, came to Bethany to Martha and Mary, not for Jesus' sake alone, but in order to see Lazarus.

The eye of your intention, therefore, must be cleansed so that it is single and right. It must be directed toward Me, despite all the objects which may interfere.

The Thirty-Fourth Chapter: GOD IS SWEET ABOVE ALL THINGS AND IN ALL THINGS TO THOSE WHO LOVE HIM

THE DISCIPLE

BEHOLD, my God and my all! What more do I wish for; what greater happiness can I desire? O sweet and delicious word! But sweet only to him who loves it, and not to the world or the things that are in the world.

My God and my all! These words are enough for him who understands, and for him who loves it is a joy to repeat them often.

For when You are present, all things are delightful; when You are absent, all things become loathsome. It is You Who give a heart tranquillity, great peace and festive joy. It is You Who make us think well of all things, and praise You in all things. Without You nothing can give pleasure for very long, for if it is to be pleasing and tasteful, Your grace and the seasoning of Your wisdom must be in it. What is there that can displease him whose happiness is in You? And, on the contrary, what can satisfy him whose delight is not in You?

The wise men of the world, the men who lust for the flesh, are wanting in Your wisdom, because in the world is found the utmost vanity, and in the flesh is death. But they who follow You by disdaining worldly things and mortifying the flesh are known to be truly wise, for they are transported from vanity to truth, from flesh to spirit. By such as these God is relished, and whatever good is found in creatures they turn to praise of the Creator. But great -- yes, very great, indeed -- is the difference between delight in the Creator and in the creature, in eternity and in time, in Light uncreated and in the light that is reflected.

O Light eternal, surpassing all created brightness, flash forth the lightning from above and enlighten the inmost recesses of my heart. Cleanse, cheer, enlighten, and vivify my spirit with all its powers, that it may cleave to You in ecstasies of joy. Oh, when will that happy and wished-for hour come, that You may fill me with Your presence and become all in all to me? So long as this is not given me, my joy will not be complete.

The old man, alas, yet lives within me. He has not yet been entirely crucified; he is not yet entirely dead. He still lusts strongly against the spirit, and he will not leave the kingdom of my soul in peace.

But You, Who can command the power of the sea and calm the tumult of its waves, arise and help me. Scatter the nations that delight in war; crush them in Your sight. Show forth I beg, Your wonderful works and let Your right hand be glorified, because for me there is no other hope or refuge except in You, O Lord, my God.

The Thirty-Fifth Chapter: THERE IS NO SECURITY FROM TEMPTATION IN THIS LIFE

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, in this life you are never safe, and as long as you live the weapons of the spirit will ever be necessary to you. You dwell among enemies. You are subject to attack from the right and the left. If, therefore, you do not guard yourself from every quarter with the shield of patience, you will not remain long unscathed.

Moreover, if you do not steadily set your heart on Me, with a firm will to suffer everything for My sake, you will not be able to bear the heat of this battle or to win the crown of the blessed. You ought, therefore, to pass through all these things bravely and to oppose a strong hand to whatever stands in your way. For to him who triumphs heavenly bread is given, while for him who is too lazy to fight there remains much misery.

If you look for rest in this life, how will you attain to everlasting rest? Dispose yourself, then, not for much rest but for great patience. Seek true peace, not on earth but in heaven; not in men or in other creatures but in God alone. For love of God you should undergo all things cheerfully, all labours and sorrows, temptations and trials, anxieties, weaknesses, necessities, injuries, slanders,

rebukes, humiliations, confusions, corrections, and contempt. For these are helps to virtue. These are the trials of Christ's recruit. These form the heavenly crown. For a little brief labour I will give an everlasting crown, and for passing confusion, glory that is eternal.

Do you think that you will always have spiritual consolations as you desire? My saints did not always have them. Instead, they had many afflictions, temptations of various kinds, and great desolation. Yet they bore them all patiently. They placed their confidence in God rather than in themselves, knowing that the sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to come. And you -- do you wish to have at once that which others have scarcely obtained after many tears and great labours?

Wait for the Lord, act bravely, and have courage. Do not lose trust. Do not turn back but devote your body and soul constantly to God's glory. I will reward you most plentifully. I will be with you in every tribulation.

The Thirty-Sixth Chapter: THE VAIN JUDGMENTS OF MEN

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, trust firmly in the Lord, and do not fear the judgment of men when conscience tells you that you are upright and innocent. For it is good and blessed to suffer such things, and they will not weigh heavily on the humble heart that trusts in God rather than in itself. Many men say many things, and therefore little faith is to be put in them.

Likewise, it is impossible to satisfy all men. Although Paul tried to please all in the Lord, and became all things to all men, yet he made

little of their opinions. He laboured abundantly for the edification and salvation of others, as much as lay in him and as much as he could, but he could not escape being sometimes judged and despised by others. Therefore, he committed all to God Who knows all things, and defended himself by his patience and humility against the tongues of those who spoke unjustly or thought foolish things and lies, or made accusations against him. Sometimes, indeed, he did answer them, but only lest his silence scandalize the weak.

Who are you, then, that you should be afraid of mortal man? Today he is here, tomorrow he is not seen. Fear God and you will not be afraid of the terrors of men. What can anyone do to you by word or injury? He hurts himself rather than you, and no matter who he may be he cannot escape the judgment of God. Keep God before your eyes, therefore, and do not quarrel with peevish words.

If it seems, then, that you are worsted and that you suffer undeserved shame, do not repine over it and do not lessen your crown by impatience. Look instead to heaven, to Me, Who have power to deliver you from all disgrace and injury, and to render to everyone according to his works.

The Thirty-Seventh Chapter: PURE AND ENTIRE RESIGNATION OF SELF TO OBTAIN FREEDOM OF HEART

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, renounce self and you shall find Me. Give up your own self-will, your possessions, and you shall always gain. For once you resign yourself irrevocably, greater grace will be given you.

THE DISCIPLE

How often, Lord, shall I resign myself? And in what shall I forsake myself?

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

Always, at every hour, in small matters as well as great -- I except nothing. In all things I wish you to be stripped of self. How otherwise can you be mine or I yours unless you be despoiled of your own will both inwardly and outwardly? The sooner you do this the better it will be for you, and the more fully and sincerely you do it the more you will please Me and the greater gain you will merit.

Some there are who resign themselves, but with certain reservation; they do not trust fully in God and therefore they try to provide for themselves. Others, again, at first offer all, but afterward are assailed by temptation and return to what they have renounced, thereby making no progress in virtue. These will not reach the true liberty of a pure heart nor the grace of happy friendship with Me unless they first make a full resignation and a daily sacrifice of themselves. Without this no fruitful union lasts nor will last.

I have said to you very often, and now I say again: forsake yourself, renounce yourself and you shall enjoy great inward peace. Give all for all. Ask nothing, demand nothing in return. Trust purely and without hesitation in Me, and you shall possess Me. You will be free of heart and darkness will not overwhelm you.

Strive for this, pray for this, desire this -- to be stripped of all selfishness and naked to follow the naked Jesus, to die to self and live forever for Me. Then all vain imaginations, all wicked

disturbances and superfluous cares will vanish. Then also immoderate fear will leave you and inordinate love will die.

The Thirty-Eighth Chapter: THE RIGHT ORDERING OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS; RECOURSE TO GOD IN DANGERS

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, you must strive diligently to be inwardly free, to have mastery over yourself everywhere, in every external act and occupation, that all things be subject to you and not you to them, that you be the master and director of your actions, not a slave or a mere hired servant. You should be rather a free man and a true Hebrew, arising to the status and freedom of the children of God who stand above present things to contemplate those which are eternal; who look upon passing affairs with the left eye and upon those of heaven with the right; whom temporal things do not so attract that they cling to them, but who rather put these things to such proper service as is ordained and instituted by God, the great Workmaster, Who leaves nothing unordered in His creation.

If, likewise, in every happening you are not content simply with outward appearances, if you do not regard with carnal eyes things which you see and hear, but whatever be the affair, enter with Moses into the tabernacle to ask advice of the Lord, you will sometimes hear the divine answer and return instructed in many things present and to come. For Moses always had recourse to the tabernacle for the solution of doubts and questions, and fled to prayer for support in dangers and the evil deeds of men. So you also

should take refuge in the secret chamber of your heart, begging earnestly for divine aid.

For this reason, as we read, Joshua and the children of Israel were deceived by the Gibeonites because they did not first seek counsel of the Lord, but trusted too much in fair words and hence were deceived by false piety.

The Thirty-Ninth Chapter: A MAN SHOULD NOT BE UNDULY SOLICITOUS ABOUT HIS AFFAIRS

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, always commit your cause to Me. I will dispose of it rightly in good time. Await My ordering of it and it will be to your advantage.

THE DISCIPLE

Lord, I willingly commit all things to You, for my anxiety can profit me little. But I would that I were not so concerned about the future, and instead offered myself without hesitation to Your good pleasure.

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

My child, it often happens that a man seeks ardently after something he desires and then when he has attained it he begins to think that it is not at all desirable; for affections do not remain fixed on the same thing, but rather flit from one to another. It is no very small matter, therefore, for a man to forsake himself even in things that are very small.

A man's true progress consists in denying himself, and the man who has denied himself is truly free and secure. The old enemy, however, setting himself against all good, never ceases to tempt them, but day and night plots dangerous snares to cast the unwary into the net of deceit. "Watch ye and pray," says the Lord, "that ye enter not into temptation."^[37]

The Fortieth Chapter: MAN HAS NO GOOD IN HIMSELF AND CAN GLORY IN NOTHING

THE DISCIPLE

LORD, what is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You visit him? What has man deserved that You should give him Your grace? What cause have I, Lord, to complain if You desert me, or what objection can I have if You do not do what I ask? This I may think and say in all truth: "Lord, I am nothing, of myself I have nothing that is good; I am lacking in all things, and I am ever tending toward nothing. And unless I have Your help and am inwardly strengthened by You, I become quite lukewarm and lax."

But You, Lord, are always the same. You remain forever, always good, just, and holy; doing all things rightly, justly, and holily, disposing them wisely. I, however, who am more ready to go backward than forward, do not remain always in one state, for I change with the seasons. Yet my condition quickly improves when it pleases You and when You reach forth Your helping hand. For You alone, without human aid, can help me and strengthen me so greatly that my heart shall no more change but be converted and rest solely in You. Hence, if I knew well how to cast aside all earthly

consolation, either to attain devotion or because of the necessity which, in the absence of human solace, compels me to seek You alone, then I could deservedly hope for Your grace and rejoice in the gift of new consolation.

Thanks be to You from Whom all things come, whenever it is well with me. In Your sight I am vanity and nothingness, a weak, unstable man. In what, therefore, can I glory, and how can I wish to be highly regarded? Is it because I am nothing? This, too, is utterly vain. Indeed, the greatest vanity is the evil plague of empty self-glory, because it draws one away from true glory and robs one of heavenly grace. For when a man is pleased with himself he displeases You, when he pants after human praise he is deprived of true virtue. But it is true glory and holy exultation to glory in You and not in self, to rejoice in Your name rather than in one's own virtue, and not to delight in any creature except for Your sake.

Let Your name, not mine, be praised. Let Your work, not mine, be magnified. Let Your holy name be blessed, but let no human praise be given to me. You are my glory. You are the joy of my heart. In You I will glory and rejoice all the day, and for myself I will glory in nothing but my infirmities.

Let the Jews seek the glory that comes from another. I will seek that which comes from God alone. All human glory, all temporal honour, all worldly position is truly vanity and foolishness compared to Your everlasting glory. O my Truth, my Mercy, my God, O Blessed Trinity, to You alone be praise and honour, power and glory, throughout all the endless ages of ages.

The Forty-First Chapter: CONTEMPT FOR ALL EARTHLY HONOUR

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, do not take it to heart if you see others honoured and advanced, while you yourself are despised and humbled. Lift up your heart to Me in heaven and the contempt of men on earth will not grieve you.

THE DISCIPLE

Lord, we are blinded and quickly misled by vanity. If I examine myself rightly, no injury has ever been done me by any creature; hence I have nothing for which to make just complaint to You. But I have sinned often and gravely against You; therefore is every creature in arms against me. Confusion and contempt should in justice come upon me, but to You due praise, honour, and glory. And unless I prepare myself to be willingly despised and forsaken by every creature, to be considered absolutely nothing, I cannot have interior peace and strength, nor can I be enlightened spiritually or completely united with You.

The Forty-Second Chapter: PEACE IS NOT TO BE PLACED IN MEN

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, if you place your peace in any creature because of your own feeling or for the sake of his company, you will be unsettled and entangled. But if you have recourse to the ever-living and abiding Truth, you will not grieve if a friend should die or forsake you. Your love for your friend should be grounded in Me, and for My sake you should love whoever seems to be good and is very

dear to you in this life. Without Me friendship has no strength and cannot endure. Love which I do not bind is neither true nor pure.

You ought, therefore, to be so dead to such human affections as to wish as far as lies within you to be without the fellowship of men. Man draws nearer to God in proportion as he withdraws farther from all earthly comfort. And he ascends higher to God as he descends lower into himself and grows more vile in his own eyes. He who attributes any good to himself hinders God's grace from coming into his heart, for the grace of the Holy Spirit seeks always the humble heart.

If you knew how to annihilate yourself completely and empty yourself of all created love, then I should overflow in you with great grace. When you look to creatures, the sight of the Creator is taken from you. Learn, therefore, to conquer yourself in all things for the sake of your Maker. Then will you be able to attain to divine knowledge. But anything, no matter how small, that is loved and regarded inordinately keeps you back from the highest good and corrupts the soul.

The Forty-Third Chapter: BEWARE VAIN AND WORLDLY KNOWLEDGE

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, do not let the fine-sounding and subtle words of men deceive you. For the kingdom of heaven consists not in talk but in virtue. Attend, rather, to My words which enkindle the heart and enlighten the mind, which excite contrition and abound in manifold consolations. Never read them for the purpose of appearing more

learned or more wise. Apply yourself to mortifying your vices, for this will benefit you more than your understanding of many difficult questions.

Though you shall have read and learned many things, it will always be necessary for you to return to this one principle: I am He who teaches man knowledge, and to the little ones I give a clearer understanding than can be taught by man. He to whom I speak will soon be wise and his soul will profit. But woe to those who inquire of men about many curious things, and care very little about the way they serve Me.

The time will come when Christ, the Teacher of teachers, the Lord of angels, will appear to hear the lessons of all -- that is, to examine the conscience of everyone. Then He will search Jerusalem with lamps and the hidden things of darkness will be brought to light and the arguings of men's tongues be silenced.

I am He Who in one moment so enlightens the humble mind that it comprehends more of eternal truth than could be learned by ten years in the schools. I teach without noise of words or clash of opinions, without ambition for honour or confusion of argument.

I am He Who teaches man to despise earthly possessions and to loathe present things, to ask after the eternal, to hunger for heaven, to fly honours and to bear with scandals, to place all hope in Me, to desire nothing apart from Me, and to love Me ardently above all things. For a certain man by loving Me intimately learned divine truths and spoke wonders. He profited more by leaving all things than by studying subtle questions.

To some I speak of common things, to others of special matters. To some I appear with sweetness in signs and figures, and to others I appear in great light and reveal mysteries. The voice of books is but a single voice, yet it does not teach all men alike, because I within them am the Teacher and the Truth, the Examiner of hearts, the Understander of thoughts, the Promoter of acts, distributing to each as I see fit.

The Forty-Fourth Chapter: DO NOT BE CONCERNED ABOUT OUTWARD THINGS

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, there are many matters of which it is well for you to be ignorant, and to consider yourself as one who is dead upon the earth and to whom the whole world is crucified. There are many things, too, which it is well to pass by with a deaf ear, thinking, instead, of what is more to your peace. It is more profitable to turn away from things which displease you and to leave to every man his own opinion than to take part in quarrelsome talk. If you stand well with God and look to His judgment, you will more easily bear being worsted.

THE DISCIPLE

To what have we come, Lord? Behold, we bewail a temporal loss. We labour and fret for a small gain, while loss of the soul is forgotten and scarcely ever returns to mind. That which is of little or no value claims our attention, whereas that which is of highest necessity is neglected -- all because man gives himself wholly to

outward things. And unless he withdraws himself quickly, he willingly lies immersed in externals.

The Forty-Fifth Chapter: ALL MEN ARE NOT TO BE BELIEVED, FOR IT IS EASY TO ERR IN SPEECH

THE DISCIPLE

GRANT me help in my needs, O Lord, for the aid of man is useless. How often have I failed to find faithfulness in places where I thought I possessed it! And how many times I have found it where I least expected it! Vain, therefore, is hope in men, but the salvation of the just is in You, O God. Blessed be Your name, O Lord my God, in everything that befalls us.

We are weak and unstable, quickly deceived and changed. Who is the man that is able to guard himself with such caution and care as not sometimes to fall into deception or perplexity? He who confides in You, O Lord, and seeks You with a simple heart does not fall so easily. And if some trouble should come upon him, no matter how entangled in it he may be, he will be more quickly delivered and comforted by You. For You will not forsake him who trusts in You to the very end.

Rare is the friend who remains faithful through all his friend's distress. But You, Lord, and You alone, are entirely faithful in all things; other than You, there is none so faithful.

Oh, how wise is that holy soul^[38] who said: "My mind is firmly settled and founded in Christ." If that were true of me, human fear would not so easily cause me anxiety, nor would the darts of words disturb. But who can foresee all things and provide against all evils?

And if things foreseen have often hurt, can those which are unlooked for do otherwise than wound us gravely? Why, indeed, have I not provided better for my wretched self? Why, too, have I so easily kept faith in others? We are but men, however, nothing more than weak men, although we are thought by many to be, and are called, angels.

In whom shall I put my faith, Lord? In whom but You? You are the truth which does not deceive and cannot be deceived. Every man, on the other hand, is a liar, weak, unstable, and likely to err, especially in words, so that one ought not to be too quick to believe even that which seems, on the face of it, to sound true. How wise was Your warning to beware of men; that a man's enemies are those of his own household; that we should not believe if anyone says: "Behold he is here, or behold he is there."

I have been taught to my own cost, and I hope it has given me greater caution, not greater folly. "Beware," they say, "beware and keep to yourself what I tell you!" Then while I keep silent, believing that the matter is secret, he who asks me to be silent cannot remain silent himself, but immediately betrays both me and himself, and goes his way. From tales of this kind and from such careless men protect me, O Lord, lest I fall into their hands and into their ways. Put in my mouth words that are true and steadfast and keep far from me the crafty tongue, because what I am not willing to suffer I ought by all means to shun.

Oh, how good and how peaceful it is to be silent about others, not to believe without discrimination all that is said, not easily to report it further, to reveal oneself to few, always to seek You as the discerners of hearts, and not to be blown away by every wind of

words, but to wish that all things, within and beyond us, be done according to the pleasure of Thy will.

How conducive it is for the keeping of heavenly grace to fly the gaze of men, not to seek abroad things which seem to cause admiration, but to follow with utmost diligence those which give fervour and amendment of life! How many have been harmed by having their virtue known and praised too hastily! And how truly profitable it has been when grace remained hidden during this frail life, which is all temptation and warfare!

The Forty-Sixth Chapter: TRUST IN GOD AGAINST SLANDER

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, stand firm and trust in Me. For what are words but words? They fly through the air but hurt not a stone. If you are guilty, consider how you would gladly amend. If you are not conscious of any fault, think that you wish to bear this for the sake of God. It is little enough for you occasionally to endure words, since you are not yet strong enough to bear hard blows.

And why do such small matters pierce you to the heart, unless because you are still carnal and pay more heed to men than you ought? You do not wish to be reprov'd for your faults and you seek shelter in excuses because you are afraid of being despised. But look into yourself more thoroughly and you will learn that the world is still alive in you, in a vain desire to please men. For when you shrink from being abased and confounded for your failings, it is plain indeed that you are not truly humble or truly dead to the world, and that the world is not crucified in you.

Listen to My word, and you will not value ten thousand words of men. Behold, if every malicious thing that could possibly be invented were uttered against you, what harm could it do if you ignored it all and gave it no more thought than you would a blade of grass? Could it so much as pluck one hair from your head?

He who does not keep his heart within him, and who does not have God before his eyes is easily moved by a word of disparagement. He who trusts in Me, on the other hand, and who has no desire to stand by his own judgment, will be free from the fear of men. For I am the judge and discerner of all secrets. I know how all things happen. I know who causes injury and who suffers it. From Me that word proceeded, and with My permission it happened, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed. I shall judge the guilty and the innocent; but I have wished beforehand to try them both by secret judgment.

The testimony of man is often deceiving, but My judgment is true -- it will stand and not be overthrown. It is hidden from many and made known to but a few. Yet it is never mistaken and cannot be mistaken even though it does not seem right in the eyes of the unwise.

To Me, therefore, you ought to come in every decision, not depending on your own judgment. For the just man will not be disturbed, no matter what may befall him from God. Even if an unjust charge be made against him he will not be much troubled. Neither will he exult vainly if through others he is justly acquitted. He considers that it is I Who search the hearts and inmost thoughts of men, that I do not judge according to the face of things or human

appearances. For what the judgment of men considers praiseworthy is often worthy of blame in My sight.

THE DISCIPLE

O Lord God, just Judge, strong and patient, You Who know the weakness and depravity of men, be my strength and all my confidence, for my own conscience is not sufficient for me. You know what I do not know, and, therefore, I ought to humble myself whenever I am accused and bear it meekly. Forgive me, then, in Your mercy for my every failure in this regard, and give me once more the grace of greater endurance. Better to me is Your abundant mercy in obtaining pardon than the justice which I imagine in defending the secrets of my conscience. And though I am not conscious to myself of any fault, yet I cannot thereby justify myself, because without Your mercy no man living will be justified in Your sight.

The Forty-Seventh Chapter: EVERY TRIAL MUST BE BORNE FOR THE SAKE OF ETERNAL LIFE

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, do not let the labours which you have taken up for My sake break you, and do not let troubles, from whatever source, cast you down; but in everything let My promise strengthen and console you. I am able to reward you beyond all means and measure.

You will not labour here long, nor will you always be oppressed by sorrows. Wait a little while and you will see a speedy end of evils. The hour will come when all labour and trouble shall be no more. All that passes away with time is trivial.

What you do, do well. Work faithfully in My vineyard. I will be your reward. Write, read, sing, mourn, keep silence, pray, and bear hardships like a man. Eternal life is worth all these and greater battles. Peace will come on a day which is known to the Lord, and then there shall be no day or night as at present but perpetual light, infinite brightness, lasting peace, and safe repose. Then you will not say: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" nor will you cry: "Woe is me, because my sojourn is prolonged." For then death will be banished, and there will be health unailing. There will be no anxiety then, but blessed joy and sweet, noble companionship.

If you could see the everlasting crowns of the saints in heaven, and the great glory wherein they now rejoice -- they who were once considered contemptible in this world and, as it were, unworthy of life itself -- you would certainly humble yourself at once to the very earth, and seek to be subject to all rather than to command even one. Nor would you desire the pleasant days of this life, but rather be glad to suffer for God, considering it your greatest gain to be counted as nothing among men.

Oh, if these things appealed to you and penetrated deeply into your heart, how could you dare to complain even once? Ought not all trials be borne for the sake of everlasting life? In truth, the loss or gain of God's kingdom is no small matter.

Lift up your countenance to heaven, then. Behold Me, and with Me all My saints. They had great trials in this life, but now they rejoice. They are consoled. Now they are safe and at rest. And they shall abide with Me for all eternity in the kingdom of My Father.

The Forty-Eighth Chapter: THE DAY OF ETERNITY AND THE DISTRESSES OF THIS LIFE

THE DISCIPLE

O MOST happy mansion of the city above! O most bright day of eternity, which night does not darken, but which the highest truth ever enlightens! O day, ever joyful and ever secure, which never changes its state to the opposite! Oh, that this day shine forth, that all these temporal things come to an end! It envelops the saints all resplendent with heavenly brightness, but it appears far off as through a glass to us wanderers on the earth. The citizens of heaven know how joyful that day is, but the exiled sons of Eve mourn that this one is bitter and tedious.

The days of this life are short and evil, full of grief and distress. Here man is defiled by many sins, ensnared in many passions, enslaved by many fears, and burdened with many cares. He is distracted by many curiosities and entangled in many vanities, surrounded by many errors and worn by many labours, oppressed by temptations, weakened by pleasures, and tortured by want.

Oh, when will these evils end? When shall I be freed from the miserable slavery of vice? When, Lord, shall I think of You alone? When shall I fully rejoice in You? When shall I be without hindrance, in true liberty, free from every grievance of mind and body? When will there be solid peace, undisturbed and secure, inward peace and outward peace, peace secured on every side? O good Jesus, when shall I stand to gaze upon You? When shall I contemplate the glory of Your kingdom? When will You be all in all to me? Oh, when shall I

be with You in that kingdom of Yours, which You have prepared for Your beloved from all eternity?

I am left poor and exiled in a hostile land, where every day sees wars and very great misfortunes. Console my banishment, assuage my sorrow. My whole desire is for You. Whatever solace this world offers is a burden to me. I desire to enjoy You intimately, but I cannot attain to it. I wish to cling fast to heavenly things, but temporal affairs and unmortified passions bear me down. I wish in mind to be above all things, but I am forced by the flesh to be unwillingly subject to them. Thus, I fight with myself, unhappy that I am, and am become a burden to myself, while my spirit seeks to rise upward and my flesh to sink downward. Oh, what inward suffering I undergo when I consider heavenly things; when I pray, a multitude of carnal thoughts rush upon me!

O my God, do not remove Yourself far from me, and depart not in anger from Your servant. Dart forth Your lightning and disperse them; send forth Your arrows and let the phantoms of the enemy be put to flight. Draw my senses toward You and make me forget all worldly things. Grant me the grace to cast away quickly all vicious imaginings and to scorn them. Aid me, O heavenly Truth, that no vanity may move me. Come, heavenly Sweetness, and let all impurity fly from before Your face.

Pardon me also, and deal mercifully with me, as often as I think of anything besides You in prayer. For I confess truly that I am accustomed to be very much distracted. Very often I am not where bodily I stand or sit; rather, I am where my thoughts carry me. Where my thoughts are, there am I; and frequently my thoughts are where my love is. That which naturally delights, or is by habit

pleasing, comes to me quickly. Hence You Who are Truth itself, have plainly said: "For where your treasure is, there is your heart also." If I love heaven, I think willingly of heavenly things. If I love the world, I rejoice at the happiness of the world and grieve at its troubles. If I love the flesh, I often imagine things that are carnal. If I love the spirit, I delight in thinking of spiritual matters. For whatever I love, I am willing to speak and hear about.

Blessed is the man who for Your sake, O Lord, dismisses all creatures, does violence to nature, crucifies the desires of the flesh in fervour of spirit, so that with serene conscience he can offer You a pure prayer and, having excluded all earthly things inwardly and outwardly, becomes worthy to enter into the heavenly choirs.

The Forty-Ninth Chapter: THE DESIRE OF ETERNAL LIFE; THE GREAT REWARDS PROMISED TO THOSE WHO STRUGGLE

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, when you feel the desire for everlasting happiness poured out upon you from above, and when you long to depart out of the tabernacle of the body that you may contemplate My glory without threat of change, open wide your heart and receive this holy inspiration with all eagerness. Give deepest thanks to the heavenly Goodness which deals with you so understandingly, visits you so mercifully, stirs you so fervently, and sustains you so powerfully lest under your own weight you sink down to earthly things. For you obtain this not by your own thought or effort, but simply by the condescension of heavenly grace and divine regard. And the purpose of it is that you may advance in virtue and in

greater humility, that you may prepare yourself for future trials, that you may strive to cling to Me with all the affection of your heart, and may serve Me with a fervent will.

My child, often, when the fire is burning the flame does not ascend without smoke. Likewise, the desires of some burn toward heavenly things, and yet they are not free from temptations of carnal affection. Therefore, it is not altogether for the pure honour of God that they act when they petition Him so earnestly. Such, too, is often your desire which you profess to be so strong. For that which is alloyed with self-interest is not pure and perfect.

Ask, therefore, not for what is pleasing and convenient to yourself, but for what is acceptable to Me and is for My honour, because if you judge rightly, you ought to prefer and follow My will, not your own desire or whatever things you wish.

I know your longings and I have heard your frequent sighs. Already you wish to be in the liberty of the glory of the sons of God. Already you desire the delights of the eternal home, the heavenly land that is full of joy. But that hour is not yet come. There remains yet another hour, a time of war, of labour, and of trial. You long to be filled with the highest good, but you cannot attain it now. I am that sovereign Good. Await Me, until the kingdom of God shall come.

You must still be tried on earth, and exercised in many things. Consolation will sometimes be given you, but the complete fullness of it is not granted. Take courage, therefore, and be strong both to do and to suffer what is contrary to nature.

You must put on the new man. You must be changed into another man. You must often do the things you do not wish to do and

forego those you do wish. What pleases others will succeed; what pleases you will not. The words of others will be heard; what you say will be accounted as nothing. Others will ask and receive; you will ask and not receive. Others will gain great fame among men; about you nothing will be said. To others the doing of this or that will be entrusted; you will be judged useless. At all this nature will sometimes be sad, and it will be a great thing if you bear this sadness in silence. For in these and many similar ways the faithful servant of the Lord is wont to be tried, to see how far he can deny himself and break himself in all things.

There is scarcely anything in which you so need to die to self as in seeing and suffering things that are against your will, especially when things that are commanded seem inconvenient or useless. Then, because you are under authority, and dare not resist the higher power, it seems hard to submit to the will of another and give up your own opinion entirely.

But consider, my child, the fruit of these labours, how soon they will end and how greatly they will be rewarded, and you will not be saddened by them, but your patience will receive the strongest consolation. For instead of the little will that you now readily give up, you shall always have your will in heaven. There, indeed, you shall find all that you could desire. There you shall have possession of every good without fear of losing it. There shall your will be forever one with Mine. It shall desire nothing outside of Me and nothing for itself. There no one shall oppose you, no one shall complain of you, no one hinder you, and nothing stand in your way. All that you desire will be present there, replenishing your affection and satisfying it to the full. There I shall render you glory for the

reproach you have suffered here; for your sorrow I shall give you a garment of praise, and for the lowest place a seat of power forever. There the fruit of glory will appear, the labour of penance rejoice, and humble subjection be gloriously crowned.

Bow humbly, therefore, under the will of all, and do not heed who said this or commanded that. But let it be your special care when something is commanded, or even hinted at, whether by a superior or an inferior or an equal, that you take it in good part and try honestly to perform it. Let one person seek one thing and another something else. Let one glory in this, another in that, and both be praised a thousand times over. But as for you, rejoice neither in one or the other, but only in contempt of yourself and in My pleasure and honour. Let this be your wish: That whether in life or in death God may be glorified in you.

The Fiftieth Chapter: HOW A DESOLATE PERSON OUGHT TO COMMIT HIMSELF INTO THE HANDS OF GOD

THE DISCIPLE

LORD God, Holy Father, may You be blessed now and in eternity. For as You will, so is it done; and what You do is good. Let Your servant rejoice in You -- not in himself or in any other, for You alone are true joy. You are my hope and my crown. You, O Lord, are my joy and my honour.

What does Your servant possess that he has not received from You, and that without any merit of his own? Yours are all the things which You have given, all the things which You have made.

I am poor and in labours since my youth, and my soul is sorrowful sometimes even to the point of tears. At times, also, my spirit is troubled because of impending sufferings. I long for the joy of peace. Earnestly I beg for the peace of Your children who are fed by You in the light of consolation. If You give peace, if You infuse holy joy, the soul of Your servant shall be filled with holy song and be devout in praising You. But if You withdraw Yourself, as You so very often do, he will not be able to follow the way of Your commandments, but will rather be obliged to strike his breast and bend the knee, because his today is different from yesterday and the day before when Your light shone upon his head and he was protected in the shadow of Your wings from the temptations rushing upon him.

Just Father, ever to be praised, the hour is come for Your servant to be tried. Beloved Father, it is right that in this hour Your servant should suffer something for You. O Father, forever to be honoured, the hour which You knew from all eternity is at hand, when for a short time Your servant should be outwardly oppressed, but inwardly should ever live with You.

Let him be a little slighted, let him be humbled, let him fail in the sight of men, let him be afflicted with sufferings and pains, so that he may rise again with You in the dawn of the new light and be glorified in heaven.

Holy Father, You have so appointed and wished it. What has happened is what You commanded. For this is a favour to Your friend, to suffer and be troubled in the world for Your love, no matter how often and by whom You permit it to happen to him.

Nothing happens in the world without Your design and providence, and without cause. It is well for me, O Lord, that You have humbled me, that I may learn the justice of Your judgments and cast away all presumption and haughtiness of heart. It is profitable for me that shame has covered my face that I may look to You rather than to men for consolation. Hereby I have learned also to fear Your inscrutable judgment falling alike upon the just and unjust yet not without equity and justice.

Thanks to You that You have not spared me evils but have bruised me with bitter blows, inflicting sorrows, sending distress without and within. Under heaven there is none to console me except You, my Lord God, the heavenly Physician of souls, Who wound and heal, Who cast down to hell and raise up again. Your discipline is upon me and Your very rod shall instruct me.

Behold, beloved Father, I am in Your hands. I bow myself under Your correcting chastisement. Strike my back and my neck, that I may bend my crookedness to Your will. Make of me a pious and humble follower, as in Your goodness You are wont to do, that I may walk according to Your every nod. Myself and all that is mine I commit to You to be corrected, for it is better to be punished here than hereafter.

You know all things without exception, and nothing in man's conscience is hidden from You. Coming events You know before they happen, and there is no need for anyone to teach or admonish You of what is being done on earth. You know what will promote my progress, and how much tribulation will serve to cleanse away the rust of vice. Deal with me according to Your good pleasure and

do not despise my sinful life, which is known to none so well or so clearly as to You alone.

Grant me, O Lord, the grace to know what should be known, to praise what is most pleasing to You, to esteem that which appears most precious to You, and to abhor what is unclean in Your sight.

Do not allow me to judge according to the light of my bodily eyes, nor to give sentence according to the hearing of ignorant men's ears. But let me distinguish with true judgment between things visible and spiritual, and always seek above all things Your good pleasure. The senses of men often err in their judgments, and the lovers of this world also err in loving only visible things. How is a man the better for being thought greater by men? The deceiver deceives the deceitful, the vain man deceives the vain, the blind deceives the blind, the weak deceives the weak as often as he extols them, and in truth his foolish praise shames them the more. For, as the humble St. Francis says, whatever anyone is in Your sight, that he is and nothing more.

The Fifty-First Chapter: WHEN WE CANNOT ATTAIN TO THE HIGHEST, WE MUST PRACTICE THE HUMBLE WORKS

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, you cannot always continue in the more fervent desire of virtue, or remain in the higher stage of contemplation, but because of humanity's sin you must sometimes descend to lower things and bear the burden of this corruptible life, albeit unwillingly and wearily. As long as you wear a mortal body you will suffer weariness and heaviness of heart. You ought, therefore, to bewail

in the flesh the burden of the flesh which keeps you from giving yourself unceasingly to spiritual exercises and divine contemplation. In such condition, it is well for you to apply yourself to humble, outward works and to refresh yourself in good deeds, to await with unshaken confidence My heavenly visitation, patiently to bear your exile and dryness of mind until you are again visited by Me and freed of all anxieties. For I will cause you to forget your labours and to enjoy inward quiet. I will spread before you the open fields of the Scriptures, so that with an open heart you may begin to advance in the way of My commandments. And you will say: the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the future glory which shall be revealed to us.

The Fifty-Second Chapter: A MAN OUGHT NOT TO CONSIDER HIMSELF WORTHY OF CONSOLATION, BUT RATHER DESERVING OF CHASTISEMENT

THE DISCIPLE

LORD, I am not worthy of Your consolation or of any spiritual visitation. Therefore, You treat me justly when You leave me poor and desolate. For though I could shed a sea of tears, yet I should not be worthy of Your consolation. Hence, I deserve only to be scourged and punished because I have offended You often and grievously, and have sinned greatly in many things. In all justice, therefore, I am not worthy of any consolation.

But You, O gracious and merciful God, Who do not will that Your works should perish, deign to console Your servant beyond all his merit and above human measure, to show the riches of Your

goodness toward the vessels of mercy. For Your consolations are not like the words of men.

What have I done, Lord, that You should confer on me any heavenly comfort? I remember that I have done nothing good, but that I have always been prone to sin and slow to amend. That is true. I cannot deny it. If I said otherwise You would stand against me, and there would be no one to defend me. What have I deserved for my sins except hell and everlasting fire?

In truth, I confess that I am deserving of all scorn and contempt. Neither is it fitting that I should be remembered among Your devoted servants. And although it is hard for me to hear this, yet for truth's sake I will allege my sins against myself, so that I may more easily deserve to beg Your mercy. What shall I say, guilty as I am and full of all confusion? My tongue can say nothing but this alone: "I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned; have mercy on me and pardon me. Suffer me a little that I may pour out my grief, before I go to that dark land that is covered with the shadow of death."

What do you especially demand of a guilty and wretched sinner, except that he be contrite and humble himself for his sins? In true sorrow and humility of heart hope of forgiveness is born, the troubled conscience is reconciled, grace is found, man is preserved from the wrath to come, and God and the penitent meet with a holy kiss.

To You, O Lord, humble sorrow for sins is an acceptable sacrifice, a sacrifice far sweeter than the perfume of incense. This is also the pleasing ointment which You would have poured upon Your sacred feet, for a contrite and humble heart You have never despised. Here

is a place of refuge from the force of the enemy's anger. Here is amended and washed away whatever defilement has been contracted elsewhere.

The Fifty-Third Chapter: GOD'S GRACE IS NOT GIVEN TO THE EARTHLY MINDED

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, my grace is precious. It does not allow itself to be mixed with external things or with earthly consolations. Cast away all obstacles to grace, therefore, if you wish to receive its infusion.

Seek to retire within yourself. Love to dwell alone with yourself. Seek no man's conversation, but rather pour forth devout prayer to God that you may keep your mind contrite and your heart pure.

Consider the whole world as nothing. Prefer attendance upon God to all outward occupation, for you cannot attend upon Me and at the same time take delight in external things. You must remove yourself from acquaintances and from dear friends, and keep your mind free of all temporal consolation. Thus the blessed Apostle St. Peter begs the faithful of Christ to keep themselves as strangers and pilgrims in the world.^[39]

What great confidence at the hour of death shall be his who is not attached to this world by any affection. But the sickly soul does not know what it is to have a heart thus separated from all things, nor does the natural man know the liberty of the spiritual man. Yet, if he truly wishes to be spiritual, he must renounce both strangers and friends, and must beware of no one more than himself.

If you completely conquer yourself, you will more easily subdue all other things. The perfect victory is to triumph over self. For he who holds himself in such subjection that sensuality obeys reason and reason obeys Me in all matters, is truly his own conqueror and master of the world.

Now, if you wish to climb to this high position you must begin like a man, and lay the ax to the root, in order to tear out and destroy any hidden unruly love of self or of earthly goods. From this vice of too much self-love comes almost every other vice that must be uprooted. And when this evil is vanquished, and brought under control, great peace and quiet will follow at once.

But because few labour to die entirely to self, or tend completely away from self, therefore they remain entangled in self, and cannot be lifted in spirit above themselves. But he who desires to walk freely with Me must mortify all his low and inordinate affections, and must not cling with selfish love or desire to any creature.

The Fifty-Fourth Chapter: THE DIFFERENT MOTIONS OF NATURE AND GRACE

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, pay careful attention to the movements of nature and of grace, for they move in very contrary and subtle ways, and can scarcely be distinguished by anyone except a man who is spiritual and inwardly enlightened. All men, indeed, desire what is good, and strive for what is good in their words and deeds. For this reason the appearance of good deceives many.

Nature is crafty and attracts many, ensnaring and deceiving them while ever seeking itself. But grace walks in simplicity, turns away from all appearance of evil, offers no deceits, and does all purely for God in whom she rests as her last end.

Nature is not willing to die, or to be kept down, or to be overcome. Nor will it subdue itself or be made subject. Grace, on the contrary, strives for mortification of self. She resists sensuality, seeks to be in subjection, longs to be conquered, has no wish to use her own liberty, loves to be held under discipline, and does not desire to rule over anyone, but wishes rather to live, to stand, and to be always under God for Whose sake she is willing to bow humbly to every human creature.

Nature works for its own interest and looks to the profit it can reap from another. Grace does not consider what is useful and advantageous to herself, but rather what is profitable to many. Nature likes to receive honour and reverence, but grace faithfully attributes all honour and glory to God. Nature fears shame and contempt, but grace is happy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus. Nature loves ease and physical rest. Grace, however, cannot bear to be idle and embraces labour willingly. Nature seeks to possess what is rare and beautiful, abhorring things that are cheap and coarse. Grace, on the contrary, delights in simple, humble things, not despising those that are rough, nor refusing to be clothed in old garments.

Nature has regard for temporal wealth and rejoices in earthly gains. It is sad over a loss and irritated by a slight, injurious word. But grace looks to eternal things and does not cling to those which are temporal, being neither disturbed at loss nor angered by hard

words, because she has placed her treasure and joy in heaven where nothing is lost.

Nature is covetous, and receives more willingly than it gives. It loves to have its own private possessions. Grace, however, is kind and openhearted. Grace shuns private interest, is contented with little, and judges it more blessed to give than to receive.

Nature is inclined toward creatures, toward its own flesh, toward vanities, and toward running about. But grace draws near to God and to virtue, renounces creatures, hates the desires of the flesh, restrains her wanderings and blushes at being seen in public.

Nature likes to have some external comfort in which it can take sensual delight, but grace seeks consolation only in God, to find her delight in the highest Good, above all visible things.

Nature does everything for its own gain and interest. It can do nothing without pay and hopes for its good deeds to receive their equal or better, or else praise and favour. It is very desirous of having its deeds and gifts highly regarded. Grace, however, seeks nothing temporal, nor does she ask any recompense but God alone. Of temporal necessities she asks no more than will serve to obtain eternity.

Nature rejoices in many friends and kinsfolk, glories in noble position and birth, fawns on the powerful, flatters the rich, and applauds those who are like itself. But grace loves even her enemies and is not puffed up at having many friends. She does not think highly of either position or birth unless there is also virtue there. She favours the poor in preference to the rich. She sympathizes with the innocent rather than with the powerful. She rejoices with

the true man rather than with the deceitful, and is always exhorting the good to strive for better gifts, to become like the Son of God by practicing the virtues.

Nature is quick to complain of need and trouble; grace is stanch in suffering want. Nature turns all things back to self. It fights and argues for self. Grace brings all things back to God in Whom they have their source. To herself she ascribes no good, nor is she arrogant or presumptuous. She is not contentious. She does not prefer her own opinion to the opinion of others, but in every matter of sense and thought submits herself to eternal wisdom and the divine judgment.

Nature has a relish for knowing secrets and hearing news. It wishes to appear abroad and to have many sense experiences. It wishes to be known and to do things for which it will be praised and admired. But grace does not care to hear news or curious matters, because all this arises from the old corruption of man, since there is nothing new, nothing lasting on earth. Grace teaches, therefore, restraint of the senses, avoidance of vain self-satisfaction and show, the humble hiding of deeds worthy of praise and admiration, and the seeking in every thing and in every knowledge the fruit of usefulness, the praise and honour of God. She will not have herself or hers exalted, but desires that God Who bestows all simply out of love should be blessed in His gifts.

This grace is a supernatural light, a certain special gift of God, the proper mark of the elect and the pledge of everlasting salvation. It raises man up from earthly things to love the things of heaven. It makes a spiritual man of a carnal one. The more, then, nature is held in check and conquered, the more grace is given. Every day the

interior man is reformed by new visitations according to the image of God.

The Fifty-Fifth Chapter: THE CORRUPTION OF NATURE AND THE EFFICACY OF DIVINE GRACE

THE DISCIPLE

O LORD, my God, Who created me to Your own image and likeness, grant me this grace which You have shown to be so great and necessary for salvation, that I may overcome my very evil nature that is drawing me to sin and perdition. For I feel in my flesh the law of sin contradicting the law of my mind and leading me captive to serve sensuality in many things. I cannot resist the passions thereof unless Your most holy grace warmly infused into my heart assist me.

There is need of Your grace, and of great grace, in order to overcome a nature prone to evil from youth. For through the first man, Adam, nature is fallen and weakened by sin, and the punishment of that stain has fallen upon all mankind. Thus nature itself, which You created good and right, is considered a symbol of vice and the weakness of corrupted nature, because when left to itself it tends toward evil and to baser things. The little strength remaining in it is like a spark hidden in ashes. That strength is natural reason which, surrounded by thick darkness, still has the power of judging good and evil, of seeing the difference between true and false, though it is not able to fulfil all that it approves and does not enjoy the full light of truth or soundness of affection.

Hence it is, my God, that according to the inward man I delight in Your law, knowing that Your command is good, just, and holy, and that it proves the necessity of shunning all evil and sin. But in the flesh I keep the law of sin, obeying sensuality rather than reason. Hence, also, it is that the will to good is present in me, but how to accomplish it I know not. Hence, too, I often propose many good things, but because the grace to help my weakness is lacking, I recoil and give up at the slightest resistance. Thus it is that I know the way of perfection and see clearly enough how I ought to act, but because I am pressed down by the weight of my own corruption I do not rise to more perfect things.

How extremely necessary to me, O Lord, Your grace is to begin any good deed, to carry it on and bring it to completion! For without grace I can do nothing, but with its strength I can do all things in You. O Grace truly heavenly, without which our merits are nothing and no gifts of nature are to be esteemed!

Before You, O Lord, no arts or riches, no beauty or strength, no wit or intelligence avail without grace. For the gifts of nature are common to good and bad alike, but the peculiar gift of Your elect is grace or love, and those who are signed with it are held worthy of everlasting life. So excellent is this grace that without it no gift of prophecy or of miracles, no meditation be it ever so exalted, can be considered anything. Not even faith or hope or other virtues are acceptable to You without charity and grace.

O most blessed grace, which makes the poor in spirit rich in virtues, which renders him who is rich in many good things humble of heart, come, descend upon me, fill me quickly with your consolation lest my soul faint with weariness and dryness of mind.

Let me find grace in Your sight, I beg, Lord, for Your grace is enough for me, even though I obtain none of the things which nature desires. If I am tempted and afflicted with many tribulations, I will fear no evils while Your grace is with me. This is my strength. This will give me counsel and help. This is more powerful than all my enemies and wiser than all the wise. This is the mistress of truth, the teacher of discipline, the light of the heart, the consoler in anguish, the banisher of sorrow, the expeller of fear, the nourisher of devotion, the producer of tears. What am I without grace, but dead wood, a useless branch, fit only to be cast away?

Let Your grace, therefore, go before me and follow me, O Lord, and make me always intent upon good works, through Jesus Christ, Your Son.

The Fifty-Sixth Chapter: WE OUGHT TO DENY OURSELVES AND IMITATE CHRIST THROUGH BEARING THE CROSS

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, the more you depart from yourself, the more you will be able to enter into Me. As the giving up of exterior things brings interior peace, so the forsaking of self unites you to God. I will have you learn perfect surrender to My will, without contradiction or complaint.

Follow Me. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Without the Way, there is no going. Without the Truth, there is no knowing. Without the Life, there is no living. I am the Way which you must follow, the Truth which you must believe, the Life for which you must hope. I am the inviolable Way, the infallible Truth, the unending Life. I am

the Way that is straight, the supreme Truth, the Life that is true, the blessed, the uncreated Life. If you abide in My Way you shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free, and you shall attain life everlasting.

If you wish to enter into life, keep My commandments. If you will know the truth, believe in Me. If you will be perfect, sell all. If you will be My disciple, deny yourself. If you will possess the blessed life, despise this present life. If you will be exalted in heaven, humble yourself on earth. If you wish to reign with Me, carry the Cross with Me. For only the servants of the Cross find the life of blessedness and of true light.

THE DISCIPLE

Lord Jesus, because Your way is narrow and despised by the world, grant that I may despise the world and imitate You. For the servant is not greater than his Lord, nor THE DISCIPLE above the Master. Let Your servant be trained in Your life, for there is my salvation and true holiness. Whatever else I read or hear does not fully refresh or delight me.

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

My child, now that you know these things and have read them all, happy will you be if you do them. He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves Me. And I will love him and will show Myself to him, and will bring it about that he will sit down with Me in My Father's Kingdom.

THE DISCIPLE

Lord Jesus, as You have said, so be it, and what You have promised, let it be my lot to win. I have received the cross, from Your hand I have received it. I will carry it, carry it even unto death as You have laid it upon me. Truly, the life of a good religious man is a cross, but it leads to paradise. We have begun -- we may not go back, nor may we leave off.

Take courage, brethren, let us go forward together and Jesus will be with us. For Jesus' sake we have taken this cross. For Jesus' sake let us persevere with it. He will be our help as He is also our leader and guide. Behold, our King goes before us and will fight for us. Let us follow like men. Let no man fear any terrors. Let us be prepared to meet death valiantly in battle. Let us not suffer our glory to be blemished by fleeing from the Cross.

The Fifty-Seventh Chapter: A MAN SHOULD NOT BE TOO DOWNCAST WHEN HE FALLS INTO DEFECTS

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, patience and humility in adversity are more pleasing to Me than much consolation and devotion when things are going well.

Why are you saddened by some little thing said against you? Even if it had been more you ought not to have been affected. But now let it pass. It is not the first, nor is it anything new, and if you live long it will not be the last.

You are manly enough so long as you meet no opposition. You give good advice to others, and you know how to strengthen them with

words, but when unexpected tribulation comes to your door, you fail both in counsel and in strength. Consider your great weakness, then, which you experience so often in small matters. Yet when these and like trials happen, they happen for your good.

Put it out of your heart as best you know how, and if it has touched you, still do not let it cast you down or confuse you for long. Bear it patiently at least, if you cannot bear it cheerfully. Even though you bear it unwillingly, and are indignant at it, restrain yourself and let no ill-ordered words pass your lips at which the weak might be scandalized. The storm that is now aroused will soon be quieted and your inward grief will be sweetened by returning grace. "I yet live," says the Lord, "ready to help you and to console you more and more, if you trust in Me and call devoutly upon Me."

Remain tranquil and prepare to bear still greater trials. All is not lost even though you be troubled oftener or tempted more grievously. You are a man, not God. You are flesh, not an angel. How can you possibly expect to remain always in the same state of virtue when the angels in heaven and the first man in paradise failed to do so? I am He Who rescues the afflicted and brings to My divinity those who know their own weakness.

THE DISCIPLE

Blessed be Your words, O Lord, sweeter to my mouth than honey and the honeycomb. What would I do in such great trials and anxieties, if You did not strengthen me with Your holy words? If I may but attain to the haven of salvation, what does it matter what or how much I suffer? Grant me a good end. Grant me a happy

passage out of this world. Remember me, my God, and lead me by the right way into Your kingdom.

The Fifty-Eighth Chapter: HIGH MATTERS AND THE HIDDEN JUDGMENTS OF GOD ARE NOT TO BE SCRUTINIZED

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, beware of discussing high matters and God's hidden judgments -- why this person is so forsaken and why that one is favoured with so great a grace, or why one man is so afflicted and another so highly exalted. Such things are beyond all human understanding and no reason or disputation can fathom the judgments of God.

When the enemy puts such suggestions in your mind, therefore, or when some curious persons raise questions about them, answer with the prophet: "Thou art just, O Lord, and righteous are Thy judgments";^[40] and this: "The judgments of the Lord are true and wholly righteous."^[41] My judgments are to be feared, not discussed, because they are incomprehensible to the understanding of men.

In like manner, do not inquire or dispute about the merits of the saints, as to which is more holy, or which shall be greater in the kingdom of heaven. Such things often breed strife and useless contentions. They nourish pride and vainglory, whence arise envy and quarrels, when one proudly tries to exalt one saint and the other another. A desire to know and pry into such matters brings forth no fruit. On the contrary, it displeases the saints, because I am the God, not of dissension, but of peace -- of that peace which consists in true humility rather than in self-exaltation.

Some are drawn by the ardor of their love with greater affection to these saints or to those, but this affection is human and not divine. I am He who made all the saints. I gave them grace: I brought them to glory. I know the merits of each of them. I came before them in the blessings of My sweetness. I knew My beloved ones before the ages. I chose them out of the world -- they did not choose Me. I called them by grace, I drew them on by mercy. I led them safely through various temptations. I poured into them glorious consolations. I gave them perseverance and I crowned their patience. I know the first and the last. I embrace them all with love inestimable. I am to be praised in all My saints. I am to be blessed above all things, and honoured in each of those whom I have exalted and predestined so gloriously without any previous merits of their own.

He who despises one of the least of mine, therefore, does no honour to the greatest, for both the small and the great I made. And he who disparages one of the saints disparages Me also and all others in the kingdom of heaven. They are all one through the bond of charity. They have the same thought and the same will, and they mutually love one another; but, what is a much greater thing, they love Me more than themselves or their own merits. Rapt above themselves, and drawn beyond love of self, they are entirely absorbed in love of Me, in Whom they rest. There is nothing that can draw them away or depress them, for they who are filled with eternal truth burn with the fire of unquenchable love.

Therefore, let carnal and sensual men, who know only how to love their own selfish joys, forbear to dispute about the state of God's saints. Such men take away and add according to their own

inclinations and not as it pleases the Eternal Truth. In many this is sheer ignorance, especially in those who are but little enlightened and can rarely love anyone with a purely spiritual love. They are still strongly drawn by natural affection and human friendship to one person or another, and on their behaviour in such things here below are based their imaginings of heavenly things. But there is an incomparable distance between the things which the imperfect imagine and those which enlightened men contemplate through revelation from above.

Be careful, then, My child, of treating matters beyond your knowledge out of curiosity. Let it rather be your business and aim to be found, even though the least, in the kingdom of God. For though one were to know who is more holy than another, or who is greater in the kingdom of heaven, of what value would this knowledge be to him unless out of it he should humble himself before Me and should rise up in greater praise of My name?

The man who thinks of the greatness of his own sins and the littleness of his virtues, and of the distance between himself and the perfection of the saints, acts much more acceptably to God than the one who argues about who is greater or who is less. It is better to invoke the saints with devout prayers and tears, and with a humble mind to beg their glorious aid, than to search with vain inquisitiveness into their secrets.

The saints are well and perfectly contented if men know how to content themselves and cease their useless discussions. They do not glory in their own merits, for they attribute no good to themselves but all to Me, because out of My infinite charity I gave all to them. They are filled with such love of God and with such overflowing joy,

that no glory is wanting to them and they can lack no happiness. All the saints are so much higher in glory as they are more humble in themselves; nearer to Me, and more beloved by Me. Therefore, you find it written that they cast their crowns before God, and fell down upon their faces before the Lamb, and adored Him Who lives forever.

Many ask who is the greater in the kingdom of heaven when they do not know whether they themselves shall be worthy of being numbered among its least. It is a great thing to be even the least in heaven where all are great because all shall be called, and shall be, the children of God. The least shall be as a thousand, and the sinner of a hundred years shall die. For when THE DISCIPLES asked who should be greater in the kingdom of heaven they heard this response: "Unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven."^[42]

Woe to those, therefore, who disdain to humble themselves willingly with the little children, for the low gate of the heavenly kingdom will not permit them to enter. Woe also to the rich who have their consolations here, for when the poor enter into God's kingdom, they will stand outside lamenting. Rejoice, you humble, and exult, you poor, for the kingdom of God is yours, if only you walk in the truth.

The Fifty-Ninth Chapter: ALL HOPE AND TRUST ARE TO BE FIXED IN GOD ALONE

THE DISCIPLE

WHAT, Lord, is the trust which I have in this life, or what is my greatest comfort among all the things that appear under heaven? Is it not You, O Lord, my God, Whose mercies are without number? Where have I ever fared well but for You? Or how could things go badly when You were present? I had rather be poor for Your sake than rich without You. I prefer rather to wander on the earth with You than to possess heaven without You. Where You are there is heaven, and where You are not are death and hell. You are my desire and therefore I must cry after You and sigh and pray. In none can I fully trust to help me in my necessities, but in You alone, my God. You are my hope. You are my confidence. You are my consoler, most faithful in every need.

All seek their own interests. You, however, place my salvation and my profit first, and turn all things to my good. Even though exposing me to various temptations and hardships, You Who are accustomed to prove Your loved ones in a thousand ways, order all this for my good. You ought not to be loved or praised less in this trial than if You had filled me with heavenly consolations.

In You, therefore, O Lord God, I place all my hope and my refuge. On You I cast all my troubles and anguish, because whatever I have outside of You I find to be weak and unstable. It will not serve me to have many friends, nor will powerful helpers be able to assist me, nor prudent advisers to give useful answers, nor the books of learned men to console, nor any precious substance to win my

freedom, nor any place, secret and beautiful though it be, to shelter me, if You Yourself do not assist, comfort, console, instruct, and guard me. For all things which seem to be for our peace and happiness are nothing when You are absent, and truly confer no happiness.

You, indeed, are the fountain of all good, the height of life, the depth of all that can be spoken. To trust in You above all things is the strongest comfort of Your servants.

My God, the Father of mercies, to You I look, in You I trust. Bless and sanctify my soul with heavenly benediction, so that it may become Your holy dwelling and the seat of Your eternal glory. And in this temple of Your dignity let nothing be found that might offend Your majesty. In Your great goodness, and in the multitude of Your mercies, look upon me and listen to the prayer of Your poor servant exiled from You in the region of the shadow of death. Protect and preserve the soul of Your poor servant among the many dangers of this corruptible life, and direct him by Your accompanying grace, through the ways of peace, to the land of everlasting light.

BOOK FOUR

AN INVITATION TO HOLY COMMUNION

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

COME to Me, all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you.^[43] The bread which I will give is My Flesh, for the life of the world.^[44] Take you and eat: this is My Body, which shall be delivered for you. Do this for the commemoration of Me.^[45] He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, abideth in Me, and I in him.^[46] The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."^[47]

The First Chapter: THE GREAT REVERENCE WITH WHICH WE SHOULD RECEIVE CHRIST

THE DISCIPLE

THESE are all Your words, O Christ, eternal Truth, though they were not all spoken at one time nor written together in one place. And because they are Yours and true, I must accept them all with faith and gratitude. They are Yours and You have spoken them; they are mine also because You have spoken them for my salvation. Gladly I accept them from Your lips that they may be the more deeply impressed in my heart.

Words of such tenderness, so full of sweetness and love, encourage me; but my sins frighten me and an unclean conscience thunders at me when approaching such great mysteries as these. The sweetness of Your words invites me, but the multitude of my vices oppresses me.

You command me to approach You confidently if I wish to have part with You, and to receive the food of immortality if I desire to obtain life and glory everlasting.

"Come to me," You say, "all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you."^[48]

Oh, how sweet and kind to the ear of the sinner is the word by which You, my Lord God, invite the poor and needy to receive Your most holy Body! Who am I, Lord, that I should presume to approach You? Behold, the heaven of heavens cannot contain You, and yet You say: "Come, all of you, to Me."

What means this most gracious honour and this friendly invitation? How shall I dare to come, I who am conscious of no good on which to presume? How shall I lead You into my house, I who have so often offended in Your most kindly sight? Angels and archangels revere You, the holy and the just fear You, and You say: "Come to Me: all of you!" If You, Lord, had not said it, who would have believed it to be true? And if You had not commanded, who would dare approach?

Behold, Noah, a just man, worked a hundred years building the ark that he and a few others might be saved; how, then, can I prepare myself in one hour to receive with reverence the Maker of the world?

Moses, Your great servant and special friend, made an ark of incorruptible wood which he covered with purest gold wherein to place the tables of Your law; shall I, a creature of corruption, dare so easily to receive You, the Maker of law and the Giver of life?

Solomon, the wisest of the kings of Israel, spent seven years building a magnificent temple in praise of Your name, and celebrated its dedication with a feast of eight days. He offered a thousand victims in Your honour and solemnly bore the Ark of the Covenant with trumpeting and jubilation to the place prepared for it; and I, unhappy and poorest of men, how shall I lead You into my house, I who scarcely can spend a half-hour devoutly -- would that I could spend even that as I ought!

O my God, how hard these men tried to please You! Alas, how little is all that I do! How short the time I spend in preparing for Communion! I am seldom wholly recollected, and very seldom, indeed, entirely free from distraction. Yet surely in the presence of Your life-giving Godhead no unbecoming thought should arise and no creature possess my heart, for I am about to receive as my guest, not an angel, but the very Lord of angels.

Very great, too, is the difference between the Ark of the Covenant with its treasures and Your most pure Body with its ineffable virtues, between these sacrifices of the law which were but figures of things to come and the true offering of Your Body which was the fulfilment of all ancient sacrifices.

Why, then, do I not long more ardently for Your adorable presence? Why do I not prepare myself with greater care to receive Your sacred gifts, since those holy patriarchs and prophets of old, as well as kings and princes with all their people, have shown such affectionate devotion for the worship of God?

The most devout King David danced before the ark of God with all his strength as he recalled the benefits once bestowed upon his

fathers. He made musical instruments of many kinds. He composed psalms and ordered them sung with joy. He himself often played upon the harp when moved by the grace of the Holy Ghost. He taught the people of Israel to praise God with all their hearts and to raise their voices every day to bless and glorify Him. If such great devotion flourished in those days and such ceremony in praise of God before the Ark of the Covenant, what great devotion ought not I and all Christian people now show in the presence of this Sacrament; what reverence in receiving the most excellent Body of Christ!

Many people travel far to honour the relics of the saints, marveling at their wonderful deeds and at the building of magnificent shrines. They gaze upon and kiss the sacred relics encased in silk and gold; and behold, You are here present before me on the altar, my God, Saint of saints, Creator of men, and Lord of angels!

Often in looking at such things, men are moved by curiosity, by the novelty of the unseen, and they bear away little fruit for the amendment of their lives, especially when they go from place to place lightly and without true contrition. But here in the Sacrament of the altar You are wholly present, my God, the man Christ Jesus, whence is obtained the full realization of eternal salvation, as often as You are worthily and devoutly received. To this, indeed, we are not drawn by levity, or curiosity, or sensuality, but by firm faith, devout hope, and sincere love.

O God, hidden Creator of the world, how wonderfully You deal with us! How sweetly and graciously You dispose of things with Your elect to whom You offer Yourself to be received in this Sacrament! This, indeed, surpasses all understanding. This in a special manner

attracts the hearts of the devout and inflames their love. Your truly faithful servants, who give their whole life to amendment, often receive in Holy Communion the great grace of devotion and love of virtue.

Oh, the wonderful and hidden grace of this Sacrament which only the faithful of Christ understand, which unbelievers and slaves of sin cannot experience! In it spiritual grace is conferred, lost virtue restored, and the beauty, marred by sin, repaired. At times, indeed, its grace is so great that, from the fullness of the devotion, not only the mind but also the frail body feels filled with greater strength.

Nevertheless, our neglect and coldness is much to be deplored and pitied, when we are not moved to receive with greater fervour Christ in Whom is the hope and merit of all who will be saved. He is our sanctification and redemption. He is our consolation in this life and the eternal joy of the blessed in heaven. This being true, it is lamentable that many pay so little heed to the salutary Mystery which fills the heavens with joy and maintains the whole universe in being.

Oh, the blindness and the hardness of the heart of man that does not show more regard for so wonderful a gift, but rather falls into carelessness from its daily use! If this most holy Sacrament were celebrated in only one place and consecrated by only one priest in the whole world, with what great desire, do you think, would men be attracted to that place, to that priest of God, in order to witness the celebration of the divine Mysteries! But now there are many priests and Mass is offered in many places, that God's grace and love for men may appear the more clearly as the Sacred Communion is spread more widely through the world.

Thanks be to You, Jesus, everlasting Good Shepherd, Who have seen fit to feed us poor exiled people with Your precious Body and Blood, and to invite us with words from Your own lips to partake of these sacred Mysteries: "Come to Me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you."

The Second Chapter: GOD'S GREAT GOODNESS AND LOVE IS SHOWN TO MAN IN THIS SACRAMENT

THE DISCIPLE

TRUSTING in Your goodness and great mercy, O Lord, I come as one sick to the Healer, as one hungry and thirsty to the Fountain of life, as one in need to the King of heaven, a servant to his Lord, a creature to his Creator, a soul in desolation to my gentle Comforter.

But whence is this to me, that You should come to me? Who am I that You should offer Yourself to me? How dares the sinner to appear in Your presence, and You, how do You condescend to come to the sinner? You know Your servant, and You know that he has nothing good in him that You should grant him this.

I confess, therefore, my unworthiness. I acknowledge Your goodness. I praise Your mercy, and give thanks for Your immense love. For it is because of Yourself that You do it, not for any merit of mine; so that Your goodness may be better known to me, that greater love may be aroused and more perfect humility born in me. Since, then, this pleases You and You have so willed it, Your graciousness pleases me also. Oh, that my sinfulness may not stand in the way!

O most sweet and merciful Jesus, what great reverence, thanks, and never-ending praise are due to You for our taking of Your sacred body, whose dignity no man can express!

But on what shall I think in this Communion, this approach to my Lord, Whom I can never reverence as I ought, and yet Whom I desire devoutly to receive? What thought better, more helpful to me than to humble myself entirely in Your presence and exalt Your infinite goodness above myself?

I praise You, my God, and extol You forever! I despise myself and cast myself before You in the depths of my unworthiness. Behold, You are the Holy of holies, and I the scum of sinners! Behold, You bow down to me who am not worthy to look up to You! Behold, You come to me! You will to be with me! You invite me to Your banquet! You desire to give me heavenly food, the Bread of Angels to eat, none other than Yourself, the living Bread Who are come down from heaven and give life to the world.

Behold, whence love proceeds! What condescension shines forth! What great thanks and praise are due You for these gifts! Oh, how salutary and profitable was Your design in this institution! How sweet and pleasant the banquet when You gave Yourself as food!

How admirable is Your work, O Lord! How great Your power! How infallible Your truth! For You spoke and all things were made, and this, which You commanded, was done. It is a wonderful thing, worthy of faith, overpowering human understanding, that You, O Lord, my God, true God and man, are contained whole and entire under the appearance of a little bread and wine, and without being consumed are eaten by him who receives You!

You, the Lord of the universe, Who have need of nothing, have willed to dwell in us by means of Your Sacrament. Keep my heart and body clean, so that with a joyous and spotless conscience I may be able often to celebrate Your Mysteries and to receive for my eternal salvation what You have ordained and instituted for Your special honour and as an everlasting memorial.

Rejoice, my soul, and give thanks to God for having left you so noble a gift and so special a consolation in this valley of tears. As often as you renew this Mystery and receive the Body of Christ, so often do you enact the work of redemption and become a sharer in all the merits of Christ, for the love of Christ never grows less and the wealth of His mercy is never exhausted.

Therefore, you should prepare yourself for it by constantly renewing your heart and pondering deeply the great mystery of salvation. As often as you celebrate or hear Mass, it should seem as great, as new, as sweet to you as if on that very day Christ became man in the womb of the Virgin, or, hanging on the Cross, suffered and died for the salvation of man.

The Third Chapter: IT IS PROFITABLE TO RECEIVE COMMUNION OFTEN

THE DISCIPLE

BEHOLD, I come to You, Lord, that I may prosper by Your gift and be delighted at Your holy banquet which You, O God, in Your sweetness have prepared for Your poor. Behold, all that I can or ought to desire is in You. You are my salvation and my redemption, my hope and strength, my honour and glory.

Gladden, then, this day the soul of Your servant because I have raised my heart to You, O Lord Jesus. I long to receive You now, devoutly and reverently. I desire to bring You into my house that, with Zacheus, I may merit Your blessing and be numbered among the children of Abraham.

My soul longs for Your Body; my heart desires to be united with You. Give me Yourself -- it is enough; for without You there is no consolation. Without You I cannot exist, without Your visitation I cannot live. I must often come to You, therefore, and receive the strength of my salvation lest, deprived of this heavenly food, I grow weak on the way. Once, most merciful Jesus, while preaching to the people and healing their many ills, You said: "I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way."^[49] Deal with me likewise, You Who have left Yourself in this Sacrament for the consolation of the faithful. You are sweet refreshment to the soul, and he who eats You worthily will be a sharer in, and an heir to, eternal glory.

It is indeed necessary for me, who fall and sin so often, who so quickly become lax and weak, to renew, cleanse, and inflame myself through frequent prayer, confession, and the holy reception of Your Body, lest perhaps by abstaining too long, I fall away from my holy purpose. For from the days of his youth the senses of man are prone to evil, and unless divine aid strengthens him, he quickly falls deeper. But Holy Communion removes him from evil and confirms him in good.

If I am so often careless and lax when I celebrate or communicate, what would happen if I did not receive this remedy and seek so great a help? Although I am neither fit nor properly disposed to celebrate every day, yet I will do my best at proper times to receive

the divine Mysteries and share in this great grace. This, indeed, is the one chief consolation of the faithful soul when separated from You by mortality, that often mindful of her God, she receives her Beloved with devout recollection.

Oh, wonderful condescension of Your affection toward us, that You, the Lord God, Creator and Giver of life to all, should see fit to come to a poor soul and to appease her hunger with all Your divinity and humanity! O happy mind and blessed soul which deserves to receive You, her Lord God, and in receiving You, is filled with spiritual joy! How great a Master she entertains, what a beloved guest she receives, how sweet a companion she welcomes, how true a friend she gains, how beautiful and noble is the spouse she embraces, beloved and desired above all things that can be loved and desired! Let heaven and earth and all their treasures stand silent before Your face, most sweetly Beloved, for whatever glory and beauty they have is of Your condescending bounty, and they cannot approach the beauty of Your name, Whose wisdom is untold.

The Fourth Chapter: MANY BLESSINGS ARE GIVEN THOSE WHO RECEIVE COMMUNION WORTHILY

THE DISCIPLE

O LORD my God, favour Your servant with the blessings of Your sweetness that I may merit to approach Your magnificent Sacrament worthily and devoutly. Lift up my heart to You and take away from me this heavy indolence. Visit me with Your saving grace that I may in spirit taste Your sweetness which lies hidden in this

Sacrament like water in the depths of a spring. Enlighten my eyes to behold this great Mystery, and give me strength to believe in it with firm faith.

For it is Your work, not the power of man, Your sacred institution, not his invention. No man is able of himself to comprehend and understand these things which surpass even the keen vision of angels. How, then, shall I, an unworthy sinner who am but dust and ashes, be able to fathom and understand so great a mystery?

O Lord, I come to You at Your command in simplicity of heart, in good, firm faith, with hope and reverence, and I truly believe that You are present here in this Sacrament, God and man. It is Your will that I receive You and unite myself to You in love. Wherefore, I beg Your mercy and ask that special grace be given me, that I may be wholly dissolved in You and filled with Your love, no longer to concern myself with exterior consolations. For this, the highest and most worthy Sacrament, is the health of soul and body, the cure of every spiritual weakness. In it my defects are remedied, my passions restrained, and temptations overcome or allayed. In it greater grace is infused, growing virtue is nourished, faith confirmed, hope strengthened, and charity fanned into flame.

You, my God, the protector of my soul, the strength of human weakness, and the giver of every interior consolation, have given and still do often give in this Sacrament great gifts to Your loved ones who communicate devoutly. Moreover, You give them many consolations amid their numerous troubles and lift them from the depths of dejection to the hope of Your protection. With new graces You cheer and lighten them within, so that they who are full of anxiety and without affection before Communion may find

themselves changed for the better after partaking of this heavenly food and drink.

Likewise, You so deal with Your elect that they may truly acknowledge and plainly experience how weak they are in themselves and what goodness and grace they obtain from You. For though in themselves they are cold, obdurate, and wanting in devotion, through You they become fervent, cheerful, and devout.

Who, indeed, can humbly approach the fountain of sweetness and not carry away a little of it? Or who, standing before a blazing fire does not feel some of its heat? You are a fountain always filled with superabundance! You are a fire, ever burning, that never fails!

Therefore, while I may not exhaust the fullness of the fountain or drink to satiety, yet will I put my lips to the mouth of this heavenly stream that from it I may receive at least some small drop to refresh my thirst and not wither away. And if I cannot as yet be all heavenly or as full of fire as the cherubim and seraphim, yet I will try to become more devout and prepare my heart so that I may gather some small spark of divine fire from the humble reception of this life-giving Sacrament.

Whatever is wanting in me, good Jesus, Saviour most holy, do You in Your kindness and grace supply for me, You Who have been pleased to call all unto You, saying: "Come to Me all you that labour and are burdened and I will refresh you."

I, indeed, labour in the sweat of my brow. I am torn with sorrow of heart. I am laden with sin, troubled with temptations, enmeshed and oppressed by many evil passions, and there is none to help me, none to deliver and save me but You, my Lord God and Saviour, to

Whom I entrust myself and all I have, that You may protect me and lead me to eternal life. For the honour and glory of Your name receive me, You Who have prepared Your Body and Blood as food and drink for me. Grant, O Lord, my God and Saviour, that by approaching Your Mysteries frequently, the zeal of my devotion may increase.

The Fifth Chapter: THE DIGNITY OF THE SACRAMENT AND OF THE PRIESTHOOD

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

HAD you the purity of an angel and the sanctity of St. John the Baptist, you would not be worthy to receive or administer this Sacrament. It is not because of any human meriting that a man consecrates and administers the Sacrament of Christ, and receives the Bread of Angels for his food. Great is the Mystery and great the dignity of priests to whom is given that which has not been granted the angels. For priests alone, rightly ordained in the Church, have power to celebrate Mass and consecrate the Body of Christ.

The priest, indeed, is the minister of God, using the word of God according to His command and appointment. God, moreover, is there -- the chief Author and invisible Worker to Whom all is subject as He wills, to Whom all are obedient as He commands.

In this most excellent Sacrament, therefore, you ought to believe in God rather than in your own senses or in any visible sign, and thus, with fear and reverence draw near to such a work as this. Look to yourself and see whose ministry has been given you through the imposition of the bishop's hands.

Behold, you have been made a priest, consecrated to celebrate Mass! See to it now that you offer sacrifice to God faithfully and devoutly at proper times, and that you conduct yourself blamelessly. You have not made your burden lighter. Instead, you are now bound by stricter discipline and held to more perfect sanctity.

A priest ought to be adorned with all virtues and show the example of a good life to others. His way lies not among the vulgar and common habits of men but with the angels in heaven and the perfect men on earth. A priest clad in the sacred vestments acts in Christ's place, that he may pray to God both for himself and for all people in a suppliant and humble manner. He has before and behind him the sign of the Lord's cross that he may always remember the Passion of Christ. It is before him, on the chasuble, that he may look closely upon the footsteps of Christ and try to follow them fervently. It is behind him -- he is signed with it -- that he may gladly suffer for God any adversities inflicted by others.

He wears the cross before him that he may mourn his own sins, behind him, that in pity he may mourn the sins of others, and know that he is appointed to stand between God and the sinner, never to become weary of prayer and the holy offering until it is granted him to obtain grace and mercy.

When the priest celebrates Mass, he honours God, gladdens the angels, strengthens the Church, helps the living, brings rest to the departed, and wins for himself a share in all good things.

The Sixth Chapter: AN INQUIRY ON THE PROPER THING TO DO BEFORE COMMUNION

THE DISCIPLE

WHEN I consider Your dignity, O Lord, and my own meanness, I become very much frightened and confused. For if I do not receive, I fly from Life, and if I intrude unworthily, I incur Your displeasure. What, then, shall I do, my God, my Helper and Adviser in necessity? Teach me the right way. Place before me some short exercise suitable for Holy Communion, for it is good to know in what manner I ought to make my heart ready devoutly and fervently for You, to receive Your Sacrament for the good of my soul, or even to celebrate so great and divine a sacrifice.

The Seventh Chapter: THE EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE AND THE RESOLUTION TO AMEND

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

ABOVE all, God's priest should approach the celebration and reception of this Sacrament with the deepest humility of heart and suppliant reverence, with complete faith and the pious intention of giving honour to God.

Carefully examine your conscience, then. Cleanse and purify it to the best of your power by true contrition and humble confession, that you may have no burden, know of no remorse, and thus be free to come near. Let the memory of all your sins grieve you, and especially lament and bewail your daily transgressions. Then if time permits, confess to God in the secret depths of your heart all the miseries your passions have caused.

Lament and grieve because you are still so worldly, so carnal, so passionate and unmortified, so full of roving lust, so careless in guarding the external senses, so often occupied in many vain fancies, so inclined to exterior things and so heedless of what lies within, so prone to laughter and dissipation and so indisposed to sorrow and tears, so inclined to ease and the pleasures of the flesh and so cool to austerity and zeal, so curious to hear what is new and to see the beautiful and so slow to embrace humiliation and dejection, so covetous of abundance, so niggardly in giving and so tenacious in keeping, so inconsiderate in speech, so reluctant in silence, so undisciplined in character, so disordered in action, so greedy at meals, so deaf to the Word of God, so prompt to rest and so slow to labour, so awake to empty conversation, so sleepy in keeping sacred vigils and so eager to end them, so wandering in your attention, so careless in saying the office, so lukewarm in celebrating, so heartless in receiving, so quickly distracted, so seldom fully recollected, so quickly moved to anger, so apt to take offense at others, so prone to judge, so severe in condemning, so happy in prosperity and so weak in adversity, so often making good resolutions and carrying so few of them into action.

When you have confessed and deplored these and other faults with sorrow and great displeasure because of your weakness, be firmly determined to amend your life day by day and to advance in goodness. Then, with complete resignation and with your entire will offer yourself upon the altar of your heart as an everlasting sacrifice to the honour of My name, by entrusting with faith both body and soul to My care, that thus you may be considered worthy to draw near and offer sacrifice to God and profitably receive the Sacrament

of My Body. For there is no more worthy offering, no greater satisfaction for washing away sin than to offer yourself purely and entirely to God with the offering of the Body of Christ in Mass and Communion.

If a man does what he can and is truly penitent, however often he comes to Me for grace and pardon, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live";^[50] I will no longer remember his sins, but all will be forgiven him.

The Eighth Chapter: THE OFFERING OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS; OUR OFFERING

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

AS I offered Myself willingly to God the Father for your sins with hands outstretched and body naked on the cross, so that nothing remained in Me that had not become a complete sacrifice to appease the divine wrath, so ought you to be willing to offer yourself to Me day by day in the Mass as a pure and holy oblation, together with all your faculties and affections, with as much inward devotion as you can.

What more do I ask than that you give yourself entirely to Me? I care not for anything else you may give Me, for I seek not your gift but you. Just as it would not be enough for you to have everything if you did not have Me, so whatever you give cannot please Me if you do not give yourself.

Offer yourself to Me, therefore, and give yourself entirely for God -- your offering will be accepted. Behold, I offered Myself wholly to

the Father for you, I even gave My whole Body and Blood for food that I might be all yours, and you Mine forever.

But if you rely upon self, and do not offer your free will to Mine, your offering will be incomplete and the union between us imperfect. Hence, if you desire to attain grace and freedom of heart, let the free offering of yourself into the hands of God precede your every action. This is why so few are inwardly free and enlightened -- they know not how to renounce themselves entirely.

My word stands: "Everyone of you that doth not renounce all that he possesseth, cannot be My disciple."^[51]

If, therefore, you wish to be My disciple, offer yourself to Me with all your heart.

The Ninth Chapter: WE SHOULD OFFER OURSELVES AND ALL THAT WE HAVE TO GOD, PRAYING FOR ALL

THE DISCIPLE

ALL things in heaven and on earth, O Lord, are Yours. I long to give myself to You as a voluntary offering to remain forever Yours. With a sincere heart I offer myself this day to You, O Lord, to Your eternal service, to Your homage, and as a sacrifice of everlasting praise. Receive me with this holy offering of Your precious Body which also I make to You this day, in the presence of angels invisibly attending, for my salvation and that of all Your people.

O Lord, upon Your altar of expiation, I offer You all the sins and offenses I have committed in Your presence and in the presence of Your holy angels, from the day when I first could sin until this hour, that You may burn and consume them all in the fire of Your love,

that You may wipe away their every stain, cleanse my conscience of every fault, and restore to me Your grace which I lost in sin by granting full pardon for all and receiving me mercifully with the kiss of peace.

What can I do for all my sins but humbly confess and lament them, and implore Your mercy without ceasing? In Your mercy, I implore You, hear me when I stand before You, my God. All my sins are most displeasing to me. I wish never to commit them again. I am sorry for them and will be sorry as long as I live. I am ready to do penance and make satisfaction to the utmost of my power.

Forgive me, O God, forgive me my sins for Your Holy Name. Save my soul which You have redeemed by Your most precious Blood. See, I place myself at Your mercy. I commit myself to Your hands. Deal with me according to Your goodness, not according to my malicious and evil ways.

I offer to You also all the good I have, small and imperfect though it be, that You may make it more pure and more holy, that You may be pleased with it, render it acceptable to Yourself, and perfect it more and more, and finally that You may lead me, an indolent and worthless creature, to a good and happy end.

I offer You also all the holy desires of Your devoted servants, the needs of my parents, friends, brothers, sisters, and all who are dear to me; of all who for Your sake have been kind to me or to others; of all who have wished and asked my prayers and Masses for them and theirs, whether they yet live in the flesh or are now departed from this world, that they may all experience the help of Your grace, the strength of Your consolation, protection from dangers,

deliverance from punishment to come, and that, free from all evils, they may gladly give abundant thanks to You.

I offer You also these prayers and the Sacrifice of Propitiation for those especially who have in any way injured, saddened, or slandered me, inflicted loss or pain upon me, and also for all those whom I have at any time saddened, disturbed, offended, and abused by word or deed, wilfully or in ignorance. May it please You to forgive us all alike our sins and offenses against one another.

Take away from our hearts, O Lord, all suspicion, anger, wrath, contention, and whatever may injure charity and lessen brotherly love. Have mercy, O Lord, have mercy on those who ask Your mercy, give grace to those who need it, and make us such that we may be worthy to enjoy Your favour and gain eternal life.

The Tenth Chapter: DO NOT LIGHTLY FOREGO HOLY COMMUNION

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

YOU must often return to the source of grace and divine mercy, to the fountain of goodness and perfect purity, if you wish to be free from passion and vice, if you desire to be made stronger and more watchful against all the temptations and deceits of the devil.

The enemy, knowing the great good and the healing power of Holy Communion, tries as much as he can by every manner and means to hinder and keep away the faithful and the devout. Indeed, there are some who suffer the worst assaults of Satan when disposing themselves to prepare for Holy Communion. As it is written in Job, this wicked spirit comes among the sons of God to trouble them by his wonted malice, to make them unduly fearful and perplexed, that

thus he may lessen their devotion or attack their faith to such an extent that they perhaps either forego Communion altogether or receive with little fervour.

No attention, however, must be paid to his cunning wiles, no matter how base and horrible -- all his suggestions must be cast back upon his head. The wretch is to be despised and scorned. Holy Communion must not be passed by because of any assaults from him or because of the commotion he may arouse.

Oftentimes, also, too great solicitude for devotion and anxiety about confession hinder a person. Do as wise men do. Cast off anxiety and scruple, for it impedes the grace of God and destroys devotion of the mind.

Do not remain away from Holy Communion because of a small trouble or vexation but go at once to confession and willingly forgive all others their offenses. If you have offended anyone, humbly seek pardon and God will readily forgive you.

What good is it to delay confession for a long time or to put off Holy Communion? Cleanse yourself at once, spit out the poison quickly. Make haste to apply the remedy and you will find it better than if you had waited a long time. If you put it off today because of one thing, perhaps tomorrow a greater will occur to you, and thus you will stay away from Communion for a long time and become even more unfit.

Shake off this heaviness and sloth as quickly as you can, for there is no gain in much anxiety, in enduring long hours of trouble, and in depriving yourself of the divine Mysteries because of these daily

disturbances. Yes, it is very hurtful to defer Holy Communion long, for it usually brings on a lazy spiritual sleep.

How sad that some dissolute and lax persons are willing to postpone confession and likewise wish to defer Holy Communion, lest they be forced to keep a stricter watch over themselves! Alas, how little love and devotion have they who so easily put off Holy Communion!

How happy and acceptable to God is he who so lives, and keeps his conscience so pure, as to be ready and well disposed to communicate, even every day if he were permitted, and if he could do so unnoticed.

If, now and then, a man abstains by the grace of humility or for a legitimate reason, his reverence is commendable, but if laziness takes hold of him, he must arouse himself and do everything in his power, for the Lord will quicken his desire because of the good intention to which He particularly looks. When he is indeed unable to come, he will always have the good will and pious intention to communicate and thus he will not lose the fruit of the Sacrament.

Any devout person may at any hour on any day receive Christ in spiritual communion profitably and without hindrance. Yet on certain days and times appointed he ought to receive with affectionate reverence the Body of his Redeemer in this Sacrament, seeking the praise and honour of God rather than his own consolation.

For as often as he devoutly calls to mind the mystery and passion of the Incarnate Christ, and is inflamed with love for Him, he communicates mystically and is invisibly refreshed.

He who prepares himself only when festivals approach or custom demands, will often find himself unprepared. Blessed is he who offers himself a sacrifice to the Lord as often as he celebrates or communicates.

Be neither too slow nor too fast in celebrating but follow the good custom common to those among whom you are. You ought not to cause others inconvenience or trouble, but observe the accepted rule as laid down by superiors, and look to the benefit of others rather than to your own devotion or inclination.

The Eleventh Chapter: THE BODY OF CHRIST AND SACRED SCRIPTURE ARE MOST NECESSARY TO A FAITHFUL SOUL

THE DISCIPLE

O MOST sweet Lord Jesus, how great is the happiness of the devout soul that feasts upon You at Your banquet, where there is set before her to be eaten no other food but Yourself alone, her only Lover, most desired of all that her heart can desire!

To me it would be happiness, indeed, to shed tears in Your presence from the innermost depths of love, and like the pious Magdalen to wash Your feet with them. But where now is this devotion, this copious shedding of holy tears? Certainly in Your sight, before Your holy angels, my whole heart ought to be inflamed and weep for joy. For, hidden though You are beneath another form, I have You truly present in the Sacrament.

My eyes could not bear to behold You in Your own divine brightness, nor could the whole world stand in the splendour of the

glory of Your majesty. In veiling Yourself in the Sacrament, therefore, You have regard for my weakness.

In truth, I possess and adore Him Whom the angels adore in heaven -- I as yet by faith, they face to face unveiled. I must be content with the light of the true faith and walk in it until the day of eternal brightness dawns and the shadow of figures passes away. When, moreover, that which is perfect shall have come, the need of sacraments shall cease, for the blessed in heavenly glory need no healing sacrament. Rejoicing endlessly in the presence of God, beholding His glory face to face, transformed from their own brightness to the brightness of the ineffable Deity, they taste the Word of God made flesh, as He was in the beginning and will remain in eternity.

Though mindful of these wonderful things, every spiritual solace becomes wearisome to me because so long as I do not plainly see the Lord in His glory, I consider everything I hear and see on earth of little account.

You are my witness, O God, that nothing can comfort me, no creature give me rest but You, my God, Whom I desire to contemplate forever. But this is not possible while I remain in mortal life, and, therefore, I must be very patient and submit myself to You in every desire.

Even Your saints, O Lord, who now rejoice with You in the kingdom of heaven, awaited the coming of Your glory with faith and great patience while they lived. What they believed, I believe. What they hoped for, I hope for, and whither they arrived, I trust I shall come by Your grace. Meanwhile I will walk in faith, strengthened by the

example of the saints. I shall have, besides, for comfort and for the guidance of my life, the holy Books, and above all these, Your most holy Body for my special haven and refuge.

I feel there are especially necessary for me in this life two things without which its miseries would be unbearable. Confined here in this prison of the body I confess I need these two, food and light. Therefore, You have given me in my weakness Your sacred Flesh to refresh my soul and body, and You have set Your word as the guiding light for my feet. Without them I could not live aright, for the word of God is the light of my soul and Your Sacrament is the Bread of Life.

These also may be called the two tables, one here, one there, in the treasure house of holy Church. One is the table of the holy altar, having the holy Bread that is the precious Body of Christ. The other is the table of divine law, containing holy doctrine that teaches all the true faith and firmly leads them within the veil, the Holy of holies.

Thanks to You, Lord Jesus, Light of eternal light, for the table of Your holy teaching which You have prepared for us by Your servants, the prophets and Apostles and other learned men.

Thanks to You, Creator and Redeemer of men, Who, to declare Your love to all the world, have prepared a great supper in which You have placed before us as food not the lamb, the type of Yourself, but Your own most precious Body and Blood, making all the faithful glad in Your sacred banquet, intoxicating them with the chalice of salvation in which are all the delights of paradise; and the holy angels feast with us but with more happiness and sweetness.

Oh, how great and honourable is the office of the priest, to whom is given the consecration of the Lord of majesty in sacred words, whose lips bless Him, whose hands hold Him, whose tongue receives Him, and whose ministry it is to bring Him to others!

Oh, how clean those hands should be, how pure the lips, how sanctified the body, how immaculate the heart of the priest to whom the Author of all purity so often comes. No word but what is holy, none but what is good and profitable ought to come from the lips of the priest who so often receives the Sacrament of Christ. Single and modest should be the eyes accustomed to looking upon the Body of Christ. Pure and lifted up to heaven the hands accustomed to handle the Creator of heaven and earth. To priests above all it is written in the law: "Be ye holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy."

Let Your grace, almighty God, assist us, that we who have undertaken the office of the priesthood may serve You worthily and devoutly in all purity and with a good conscience. And if we cannot live as innocently as we ought, grant us at least to lament duly the wrongs we have committed and in the spirit of humility and the purpose of a good will to serve You more fervently in the future.

The Twelfth Chapter: THE COMMUNICANT SHOULD PREPARE HIMSELF FOR CHRIST WITH GREAT CARE

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

I AM the Lover of purity, the Giver of all holiness. I seek a pure heart and there is the place of My rest.

Prepare for Me a large room furnished and I with My disciples will keep the Pasch with you.

If you wish that I come to you and remain with you, purge out the old leaven and make clean the dwelling of your heart. Shut out the whole world with all the din of its vices. Sit as the sparrow lonely on the housetop, and think on your transgressions in bitterness of soul. Everyone who loves prepares the best and most beautiful home for his beloved, because the love of the one receiving his lover is recognized thereby.

But understand that you cannot by any merit of your own make this preparation well enough, though you spend a year in doing it and think of nothing else. It is only by My goodness and grace that you are allowed to approach My table, as though a beggar were invited to dinner by a rich man and he had nothing to offer in return for the gift but to humble himself and give thanks.

Do what you can and do that carefully. Receive the Body of the Lord, your beloved God Who deigns to come to you, not out of habit or necessity, but with fear, with reverence, and with love.

I am He that called you. I ordered it done. I will supply what you lack. Come and receive Me.

When I grant the grace of devotion, give thanks to God, not because you are worthy but because I have had mercy upon you. If you have it not and feel rather dry instead, continue in prayer, sigh and knock, and do not give up until you receive some crumb of saving grace.

You have need of Me. I do not need you. You do not come to sanctify Me but I come to sanctify you and make you better. You

come to be sanctified and united with Me, to receive new grace and to be aroused anew to amend. Do not neglect this grace, but prepare your heart with all care, and bring into it your Beloved.

Not only should you prepare devoutly before Communion, but you should also carefully keep yourself in devotion after receiving the Sacrament. The careful custody of yourself afterward is no less necessary than the devout preparation before, for a careful afterwatch is the best preparation for obtaining greater grace. If a person lets his mind wander to external comforts, he becomes quite indisposed.

Beware of much talking. Remain in seclusion and enjoy your God, for you have Him Whom all the world cannot take from you.

I am He to Whom you should give yourself entirely, that from now on you may live, not in yourself, but in Me, with all cares cast away.

The Thirteenth Chapter: WITH ALL HER HEART THE DEVOUT SOUL SHOULD DESIRE UNION WITH CHRIST IN THE SACRAMENT

THE DISCIPLE

LET it be granted me to find You alone, O Christ, to open to You my whole heart, to enjoy You as my soul desires, to be disturbed by no one, to be moved and troubled by no creature, that You may speak to me and I to You alone, as a lover speaks to his loved one, and friend converses with friend.

I pray for this, I desire this, that I may be completely united to You and may withdraw my heart from all created things, learning to relish the celestial and the eternal through Holy Communion and the frequent celebration of Mass.

Ah Lord God, when shall I be completely united to You and absorbed by You, with self utterly forgotten? You in me and I in You? Grant that we may remain so together. You in truth are my Beloved, chosen from thousands, in Whom my soul is happy to dwell all the days of her life. You are in truth my pledge of peace, in Whom is the greatest peace and true rest, without Whom there is toil and sorrow and infinite misery.

You truly are the hidden God. Your counsel is not with the wicked, and Your conversation is rather with the humble and the simple.

O how kind is Your spirit, Lord, Who in order to show Your sweetness toward Your children, deign to feed them with the sweetest of bread, bread come down from heaven! Surely there is no other people so fortunate as to have their god near them, as You, our God, are present everywhere to the faithful, to whom You give Yourself to be eaten and enjoyed for their daily solace and the raising of their hearts to heaven.

Indeed, what other nation is so renowned as the Christian peoples? What creature under heaven is so favoured as the devout soul to whom God comes, to feed her with His glorious Flesh? O unspeakable grace! O wonderful condescension! O love beyond measure, singularly bestowed upon man!

What return shall I make to the Lord for this love, this grace so boundless? There is nothing I can give more pleasing than to offer my heart completely to my God, uniting it closely with His. Then shall all my inner self be glad when my soul is perfectly united with God. Then will He say to me: "If you will be with Me, I will be with you." And I will answer Him: "Deign, O Lord, to remain with me. I

will gladly be with You. This is my one desire, that my heart may be united with You."

The Fourteenth Chapter: THE ARDENT LONGING OF DEVOUT MEN FOR THE BODY OF CHRIST

THE DISCIPLE

HOW great is the abundance of Your kindness, O Lord, which You have hidden from those who fear You!

When I think how some devout persons come to Your Sacrament with the greatest devotion and love, I am frequently ashamed and confused that I approach Your altar and the table of Holy Communion so coldly and indifferently; that I remain so dry and devoid of heartfelt affection; that I am not completely inflamed in Your presence, O my God, nor so strongly drawn and attracted as many devout persons who, in their great desire for Communion and intense heart love, could not restrain their tears but longed from the depths of their souls and bodies to embrace You, the Fountain of Life. These were able to appease and allay their hunger in no other way than by receiving Your Body with all joy and spiritual eagerness. The faith of these men was true and ardent -- convincing proof of Your sacred presence. They whose hearts burn so ardently within them when Jesus lives with them truly know their Lord in the breaking of bread.

Such affection and devotion, such mighty love and zeal are often far beyond me. Be merciful to me, O sweet, good, kind Jesus, and grant me, Your poor suppliant, sometimes at least to feel in Holy Communion a little of the tenderness of Your love, that my faith

may grow stronger, that my hope in Your goodness may increase, and that charity, once perfectly kindled within me by tasting heavenly manna, may never fail.

Your mercy can give me the grace I long for and can visit me most graciously with fervour of soul according to Your good pleasure. For although I am not now inflamed with as great desire as those who are singularly devoted to You, yet by Your grace I long for this same great flame, praying and seeking a place among all such ardent lovers that I may be numbered among their holy company.

The Fifteenth Chapter: THE GRACE OF DEVOTION IS ACQUIRED THROUGH HUMILITY AND SELF-DENIAL

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

YOU must seek earnestly the grace of devotion, ask for it fervently, await it patiently and hopefully, receive it gratefully, guard it humbly, cooperate with it carefully and leave to God, when it comes, the length and manner of the heavenly visitation.

When you feel little or no inward devotion, you should especially humiliate yourself, but do not become too dejected or unreasonably sad. In one short moment God often gives what He has long denied. At times He grants at the end what He has denied from the beginning of prayer. If grace were always given at once, or were present at our beck and call, it would not be well taken by weak humankind. Therefore, with good hope and humble patience await the grace of devotion.

When it is not given, or for some unknown reason is taken away, blame yourself and your sins. Sometimes it is a small matter that

hinders grace and hides it, if, indeed, that which prevents so great a good may be called little rather than great. But if you remove this hindrance, be it great or small, and if you conquer it perfectly, you shall have what you ask. As soon as you have given yourself to God with all your heart and seek neither this nor that for your own pleasure and purpose, but place yourself completely in His charge, you shall find yourself at peace, united with Him, because nothing will be so sweet, nothing will please you so much as the good pleasure of His will.

Anyone, therefore, who shall with simplicity of heart direct his intention to God and free himself from all inordinate love or dislike for any creature will be most fit to receive grace and will be worthy of the gift of devotion. For where the Lord finds the vessel empty He pours down His blessing.

So also the more perfectly a man renounces things of this world, and the more completely he dies to himself through contempt of self, the more quickly this great grace comes to him, the more plentifully it enters in, and the higher it uplifts the free heart.

Then shall he see and abound, then shall his heart marvel and be enlarged within him, because the Hand of the Lord is with him and in the hollow of that Hand he has placed himself forever. Thus shall the man be blessed who seeks God with all his heart and has not regarded his soul in vain. Such a one, receiving the Holy Eucharist, merits the grace of divine union because he looks not on his own thoughts, nor to his own comfort, but above all devotion and consolation to the glory and honour of God.

The Sixteenth Chapter: WE SHOULD SHOW OUR NEEDS TO CHRIST AND ASK HIS GRACE

THE DISCIPLE

O MOST kind, most loving Lord, Whom I now desire to receive with devotion, You know the weakness and the necessity which I suffer, in what great evils and vices I am involved, how often I am depressed, tempted, defiled, and troubled.

To You I come for help, to You I pray for comfort and relief. I speak to Him Who knows all things, to Whom my whole inner life is manifest, and Who alone can perfectly comfort and help me.

You know what good things I am most in need of and how poor I am in virtue. Behold I stand before You, poor and naked, asking Your grace and imploring Your mercy.

Feed Your hungry beggar. Inflammé my coldness with the fire of Your love. Enlighten my blindness with the brightness of Your presence. Turn all earthly things to bitterness for me, all grievance and adversity to patience, all lowly creation to contempt and oblivion. Raise my heart to You in heaven and suffer me not to wander on earth. From this moment to all eternity do You alone grow sweet to me, for You alone are my food and drink, my love and my joy, my sweetness and my total good.

Let Your presence wholly inflame me, consume and transform me into Yourself, that I may become one spirit with You by the grace of inward union and by the melting power of Your ardent love.

Suffer me not to go from You fasting and thirsty, but deal with me mercifully as You have so often and so wonderfully dealt with Your saints.

What wonder if I were completely inflamed by You to die to myself, since You are the fire ever burning and never dying, a love purifying the heart and enlightening the understanding.

The Seventeenth Chapter: THE BURNING LOVE AND STRONG DESIRE TO RECEIVE CHRIST

THE DISCIPLE

WITH greatest devotion and ardent love, with all affection and fervour of heart I wish to receive You, O Lord, as many saints and devout persons, most pleasing to You in their holiness of life and most fervent in devotion, desired You in Holy Communion.

O my God, everlasting love, my final good, my happiness unending, I long to receive You with as strong a desire and as worthy a reverence as any of the saints ever had or could have felt, and though I am not worthy to have all these sentiments of devotion, still I offer You the full affection of my heart as if I alone had all those most pleasing and ardent desires.

Yet, whatever a God-fearing mind can conceive and desire, I offer in its entirety to You with the greatest reverence and inward affection. I wish to keep nothing for self but to offer to You, willingly and most freely, myself and all that is mine.

O Lord God, my Creator and my Redeemer, I long to receive You this day with such reverence, praise, and honour, with such gratitude, worthiness and love, with such faith, hope, and purity as that with which Your most holy Mother, the glorious Virgin Mary, longed for and received You when she humbly and devoutly answered the angel who announced to her the mystery of the

Incarnation: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word."^[52]

Likewise as Your blessed precursor, the most excellent of saints, John the Baptist, gladdened by Your presence, exulted in the Holy Ghost while yet enclosed in the womb of his mother, and afterward seeing Jesus walking among men, humbled himself and with devout love declared: "The friend of the bridegroom, who standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth with joy because of the bridegroom's voice,"^[53] even so I long to be inflamed with great and holy desires and to give myself to You with all my heart.

Therefore I offer and present to You the gladness of all devout hearts, their ardent affection, their mental raptures, their supernatural illuminations and heavenly visions together with all the virtues and praises which have been or shall be celebrated by all creatures in heaven and on earth, for myself and all commended to my prayers, that You may be worthily praised and glorified forever.

Accept, O Lord my God, my promises and desires of giving You infinite praise and boundless benediction, which in the vastness of Your ineffable greatness are justly due You. This I render and desire to render every day and every moment of time, and in my loving prayers I invite and entreat all celestial spirits and all the faithful to join me in giving You praise and thanks.

Let all people, races, and tongues praise You and with the greatest joy and most ardent devotion magnify Your sweet and holy name. And let all who reverently and devoutly celebrate this most great Sacrament and receive it in the fullness of faith, find kindness and mercy in You and humbly pray for me, a sinner. And when they

have received the longed-for devotion and blissful union, and, well consoled and wonderfully refreshed, have retired from Your holy, Your celestial table, may they deign to remember my poor soul.

The Eighteenth Chapter: MAN SHOULD NOT SCRUTINIZE THIS SACRAMENT IN CURIOSITY, BUT HUMBLY IMITATE CHRIST AND SUBMIT REASON TO HOLY FAITH

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

BEWARE of curious and vain examination of this most profound Sacrament, if you do not wish to be plunged into the depths of doubt. He who scrutinizes its majesty too closely will be overwhelmed by its glory.

God can do more than man can understand. A pious and humble search for truth He will allow, a search that is ever ready to learn and that seeks to walk in the reasonable doctrine of the fathers.

Blest is the simplicity that leaves the difficult way of dispute and goes forward on the level, firm path of God's commandments. Many have lost devotion because they wished to search into things beyond them.

Faith is required of you, and a sincere life, not a lofty intellect nor a delving into the mysteries of God. If you neither know nor understand things beneath you, how can you comprehend what is above you? Submit yourself to God and humble reason to faith, and the light of understanding will be given you so far as it is good and necessary for you. Some are gravely tempted concerning faith and the Sacrament but this disturbance is not laid to them but to the enemy.

Be not disturbed, dispute not in your mind, answer not the doubts sent by the devil, but believe the words of God, believe His saints and prophets and the evil enemy will flee from you. It is often very profitable for the servant of God to suffer such things. For Satan does not tempt unbelievers and sinners whom he already holds securely, but in many ways he does tempt and trouble the faithful servant.

Go forward, then, with sincere and unflinching faith, and with humble reverence approach this Sacrament. Whatever you cannot understand commit to the security of the all-powerful God, Who does not deceive you. The man, however, who trusts in himself is deceived. God walks with sincere men, reveals Himself to humble men, enlightens the understanding of pure minds, and hides His grace from the curious and the proud.

Human reason is weak and can be deceived. True faith, however, cannot be deceived. All reason and natural science ought to come after faith, not go before it, nor oppose it. For in this most holy and supremely excellent Sacrament, faith and love take precedence and work in a hidden manner.

God, eternal, incomprehensible, and infinitely powerful, does great and inscrutable things in heaven and on earth, and there is no searching into His marvellous works. If all the works of God were such that human reason could easily grasp them, they would not be called wonderful or beyond the power of words to tell.

The End

The Imitation of Christ: Thomas à Kempis

Footnotes

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| [1] John 8:12. | [2] Eccles. 1:8. | [3] Job 7:1. |
| [4] Luke 12:43,44. | [5] Ps. 79:6. | [6] Ps. 24:17. |
| [7] Ps. 36:3. | [8] Luke 17:21. | [9] John 14:23. |
| [10] Isa. 48:22. | [11] 2 Cor. 10:18. | [12] Isa. 15:6. |
| [13] John 11:28. | [14] Ps. 29:7-12. | [15] Job 7:18. |
| [16] Apoc. 2:7. | [17] Luke 17:10. | [18] Ps. 24:16. |
| [19] Matt. 16:24. | [20] Matt. 25:41. | [21] Luke 24:46,26. |
| [22] Acts 9:16. | [23] Luke 9:23. | [24] Ps. 84:9. |
| [25] 1 Kings 3:9. | [26] Ps. 118:125. | [27] Ps. 118:36. |
| [28] Deut. 32:2. | [29] Exod. 20:19. | [30] John 6:69. |
| [31] Ps. 93:12. | [32] Isa. 23:4. | [33] Ps. 36:4. |
| [34] John 14:27. | [35] Ps. 54:7. | [36] Apoc. 3:18. |
| [37] Matt. 16:41. | [38] St. Agatha. | [39] Peter 2:11. |
| [40] Ps. 118:137. | [41] Ps. 18:10. | [42] Matt. 18:3, 4. |
| [43] Matt. 11:28. | [44] John 6:52. | [45] 1 Cor. 11:24. |
| [46] John 6:57. | [47] John 6:64. | [48] Matt. 11:28. |
| [49] Matt. 15:32. | [50] Ezek. 33:11. | [51] Luke 14:33. |
| [52] Luke 1:38. | [53] John 3:29. | |