

## Icon # 1 = Beatitude 1

### Psalm 1

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the way of scoffers...”

This passage reminds me of the beatitude pronounced by Christ: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted...” etc.

So this passage is another beatitude still pronounced by Christ because the spirit of Christ pervades not only in the Scriptures but also in the psalms.

I am struck by the three action words: walks, stands, and sits. Now the beatitude is pronounced on those who walk not in the counsel of the wicked, because the counsel of the wicked is slippery and dark. They do not want to come into the light of truth lest their plans be exposed.

Thus the person who walks not in their counsel will not walk in darkness and will not stumble and fall.

The other beatitude is not to stand in the way of sinners, because if we do not stand on the road where sinners always pass by we will be less exposed to the occasion of sin.

If we stand on the way where sinners pass we will have several options: we could just watch them pass by, or tell them that the end of the road that they are travelling leads to death, or we will be tempted to follow them because their way seems to be broad and wide and it is easy and there are pleasures on every side which satisfy the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

An example of this would be some religious, and even priests who frequent disco houses with women with them and they will tell you that there's nothing wrong with it because it is part of human development, that we have to cultivate the human side of us to be psychologically healthy.\*[I do not say here those who visited night spots once (this too is even questionable) out curiosity, but who frequented. It became part of their life-style. There are some recreations that are healthy, but we wonder why they chose that which is not good for the soul].

But they do not know that not only does it give scandal but it is also slippery and dark and the end of that road will probably lead to the death of the spiritual life,

because there are roads which seem right to people but its end is death or destruction.

If these people are adamant in maintaining that what they are doing is right and are in no danger of falling, then, they will be sitting in the seat of scoffers. They will join the scoffers in scoffing at their other colleagues for not being like them and for being "kill joy."

But they will give an account to Him who said, "You do this and I kept silent. Do you think that I am like you?"

Oh, if only they would heed what St. Paul said: "You are called to freedom, but do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh," then, they would have crucified their flesh with all its desires and will no longer live for themselves but for Him who loves us and was raised from the dead for us justification. →

### **Icon # 2 = Law of the Lord**

"But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night."

So instead of walking in the counsel of the wicked, or standing in the way of sinners, or sitting in the seat of scoffers, we find pleasure in the law of the Lord for His law makes us wiser than the father of lies.

The law of the Lord is love and the keeping of this law will give us understanding for love has its own knowledge. It is the eye that permits us to see God and the sharpness of its vision is in proportion to its purity.

The keeping of His law is the surest sign that we love God, for Christ said, "He who has my commandment and keeps it he it is who loves me and he who loves me will be loved by my Father and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

And not only that, but heeding to His law is also an assurance of immortality, and immortality brings us near to God, so the keeping of His law leads to a kingdom.

If this is so, it is just natural; it becomes part of our being, to meditate on this day and night. This where the true pleasure lies, the foretaste of eternal delight which God has prepared for those who love Him. →

### **Icon # 3 = Tree Beside Streams of Water**

“He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”

This image is like the image Christ painted on a man who puts into practice His teachings. This person is likened to a man who built his house upon a rock that when the rains of adversities and calamities fell, and the floods of sorrow and distress came, and the winds of trials and tribulations blew against that soul, it did not collapse for its faith and trust is founded upon Christ the rock of our salvation.

Now we are likened to a tree planted by streams of water. There are times in our life that we experience dryness, yet the leaf of our trust does not wither because our faith, like a root, always drinks the grace of God which is the spring of water inside us welling up to eternal life. We still yield the fruits of virtues as St. Paul said, “Even though our body is wasting away, but our soul is being renewed everyday.”

In all that we do we prosper because God is with us, He is at work in us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. This doesn't mean that in all that we do we will always be successful, otherwise we will be frustrated when we have failures, but rather all that we do are opportunities to prosper in virtues. →

### **Icon # 4 = Wicked: Chaff driven by Wind**

“The Wicked are not so, but are like chaff which the wind drives away.”

The wicked are not so, because they delight in vice rather than in virtue. And vice is like chaff which has no weight in it so it is carried away easily by the winds of trials and distress.

The wicked are not so, because their deeds are evil and they don't want to come into the light lest their deeds should be exposed. Their deeds serve as their foundation, and since it is evil, therefore, it is weak, and since it is weak, so it could not stand in the day of Judgment where all will be judge according to their deeds. →

### Icon # 5 = Sinners vs. Righteous

“Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.”

At this present time the sinners and the righteous stand side by side like the weeds and the wheat, but on the Day of Judgment the sinners will collapse not only because their foundation is weak, but also because they do not heed how they stand as St. Paul said, “Those who stand take heed lest you fall.” They do not take heed how they stand, because they are standing in the way of evil. And as we have said evil is slippery, dark, and weak. No substance in it, it is like chaff driven by the wind. →

### Icon # 6 = The Righteous' Way

“For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but they way of the wicked will perish.”

The Lord knows that the ways of the righteous are righteousness, honesty, peace, and truth; but they way of the wicked are falsehood, violence, and dishonesty which will perish eventually like smoke. →

### Icon # 7 = Nations: in Resistance

#### Psalm 2

“Why do the nations conspire, and the people plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his anointed, saying, ‘Let us burst their bands asunder, and cast their cords from us.’”

The nations conspire, and the people plot in vain, because they want to be absolute rulers of this world and promulgate laws that are contrary to the will of God and the dignity of man.

They plot against the Lord and His anointed saying, “This is the heir, come let us kill him that the inheritance will be ours.”

They do not want that God will be the ruler of their lives, and instead they want to follow their own ways.

God binds us to Him with the cord of mercy and the bond of love so that with St. Paul we can say, “Who can separate us from the love of Christ?” But they want to burst these bonds asunder so that they can do what they like and use their freedom as an opportunity for the flesh and as a pretext for doing evil.

Oh, if they only knew that the cord of mercy and the bond of love are far better than silver, diamonds, and gold, or all the riches of this world, then, they would not have plotted against the Lord and broken these bonds asunder. Instead, they would pray every day that the Lord will strengthen these bonds so that it will never be broken, for the cord of mercy is easy and the bond of love is light and they can find rest for their souls.

But now that they want to shatter these bonds to pieces, they become restless like the waves of the sea that is being tossed to and fro by the winds of their passions. Everything that appeals to them they consider it as holy and everything that displeases them they consider as unlawful.

What is more absurd than this? →

### **Icon # 8= Derision**

**“So, He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord has them in derision.”**

For the time of judgment has come to repay everyone according to his deeds. God did everything for them and even died on the cross for them, so that they will no longer live for themselves, but they despised Him and would not submit to His ways. They said in their hearts: “We do not want this man to rule over us.” →

### **Icon # 9 = Wrath**

**“Then the Lord will speak in his wrath...”**

Saying, “As for this enemies of mine who do not want me to rule over them, slay them in my presence.” →

### **Icon #10= King of Zion**

**“He will terrify them in his fury, saying, “I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill...”**

And at His name every knee shall bend in heaven, on earth, and under the earth and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. →

### Icon #11 = Declaration of Sonship

"I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, 'You are my son, today I have begotten you.'"

Even the tongue of God the Father Himself confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord, for on the day of Christ's baptism the heavens opened and a voice came out saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom my soul is pleased." "Listen to him." If you listen to Him you also are listening to me because He and I are one. My Son and I are one. →

### Icon #12 = Heritage

"Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

The Son asks only one thing of the Father: that He should lose nothing of all that the Father has given Him and that they will be with Him wherever He is to behold His glory which the Father has given Him before the foundation of the world.

At the present time, the Son will break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel, that is to say, the Son will break the evil habits in us which is characteristic of the old man, made of dust, and will refashion it into a new man like the Man that came down from heaven in all His glory, glory like that of an only Son from the Father. →

### Icon #13 = Be Wise

"Now therefore, O Kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth..."

So that you, too, will inherit the Kingdom of God and be considered as a wise and faithful servants who administer justice and give food to God's people at its proper time. Be wise according to God and not according to this world, because the wisdom of the world is foolishness to God. →

### Icon #14 = Fear

"Serve the Lord with fear, with trembling kiss his feet, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way; for his wrath is quickly kindled."

Serve the Lord with fear and it will show that you are truly wise, because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. At first it is servile fear that His wrath might be kindled against you. This kind of fear is necessary to prevent you from perishing on the way. This is preliminary fear and you have to pass through it. But later on, as you make progress in knowledge and wisdom, it will change into a

filial fear, a fear no longer based on punishment but based on love, respect, and gratitude that God considers you as a worthy partner to establish His kingdom here on earth in which justice and peace shall reign and where His people can freely serve Him without fear all the days of their lives. Therefore: →

### **Icon #15 = Beatitude 2**

**Blessed are all who take refuge in him.**

Again, this is another beatitude. Blessed are we if we take refuge in God, because God is the rock of our salvation, a bulwark and strong fortress in times of distress so, we shall not fear when trials and difficulties and challenges of life come our way. Our God is our safest place for rest, because He is like a hen that gathers us under its wings. Thus blessed are we who take refuge in Him. →

### **Icon # 16 = Paraphernalia 1**

**Psalm 3**

**"O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; many are saying of me, there is no help for him in God."**

Yes, we have foes, because we are still in the flesh. Our passions constantly rise against us. The devil, too, and our self-will are the inveterate foes of our spiritual progress. They wage war against our souls. If this is the case, then, we, too, should be prepared for spiritual combat, putting on the whole armor of God that we may be able to withstand the wiles of the enemy and may be able to withstand in the evil day.

We need to gird our loins with truth, that is to say, to gird our loins with Christ because He is the Truth. In this way we can attain true knowledge of God which will prevent us from despair. Despair is falsehood because it deprives the soul of God's mercy.

To gird our loins with truth prevents us also from becoming excessively proud, because it enables us to attain self-knowledge which leads us to humility – and we know that humility is truth. Therefore, there's nothing more efficacious in acquiring humility than knowledge of ourselves as we really are.

This twofold knowledge, that is, knowledge of God and knowledge of self, come from girding our loins with truth, because seen in this light there appears the need for an encounter between our own weakness and misery, and God's strength and mercy.

What the enemy contrives is to deceive us to think that we are self-sufficient, that we don't need God anymore, that God is just a projection of our own imagination. So, we have to combat this by girding our loins with truth and to shout with the battle cry of St. Michael, "Who is like God!"

We have to put on also the breastplate of righteousness. This will protect us if evil desires beleaguered us from all sides. Even if they strike against us they could not harm us because righteousness has the power to repel their insidious attacks. And shod our feet with the Gospel of peace, that is to say, we need to be eager to maintain the unity of spirit in the bond of peace, try as much as possible not to enter into an argument with anybody even if it seems to us that we are right because an argument will only lead to more arguments and it doesn't lead to peace because it doesn't change the heart.

We also shod our feet with Gospel of peace if we control the itch of being too self-assertive. Peace does not necessarily mean the complete absence of tension or disagreement with somebody in matters of opinions and temperaments, but rather not to let our disagreement undermine our love and respect for one another, and never to bear a grudge against each other for this, certainly, will not bring peace to our hearts. Peace is one of the gifts our God promised us before He ascended to the Father: "Peace I leave to you, my peace I give you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you." This is a peace that surpasses all understanding.

Above all taking the shield of faith, with which we can quench all the flaming darts of the evil One. If the darts of doubts, distrust, jealousy and envy, lust or anger are shot by the evil One against us, then, faith shields us from them. Imagine a person who is shot by these arrows without any shield! The evil and fellow evil spirits will be saying to this person, "there is no help for him in God." →

### **Icon #17 = Paraphernalia 2**

"But thou, O Lord, art a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head."

If faith is one of the theological virtues that unite us to God without intermediary, then, the Lord is truly our shield. If the Lord is truly our shield, then, we feel confident and unafraid even if thousands arrayed on us on every side such as misunderstanding, hunger, poverty, persecution, even the threat of death. In all this we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us for He is our shield, our glory, the lifter of our head. He is the One who fights for us, for alone and unaided we could not withstand our enemy.



There's also the helmet of salvation which is offered in advance to encourage us to know that the victory is already ours if we only persevere and put our whole trust in Him at all times.

This combat is hard because we have to pass many tribulations, but the assurance of our victory gives us the impetus to go on, for "to him who conquers," says the Lord, "I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. He shall not be hurt by the second death. I will give him some of the hidden manna and a white stone, with a new name written on the stone."

And finally, to take the sword of the spirit which is the word of God. The word of God is the sword of our spirit. This sword is sharper than any other human sword, for it not only evaluates the deepest motivation of our hearts, as the sword of Solomon discerned the intentions of the two women, but it has a supernatural power to strike down our foes.

This sword is our prayer. When we are tempted by the evil One we can strike him down by this sword, saying, "O God, come to my assistance. O Lord, make haste to help me."

St. Paul encourages us to let the word of God dwell in us abundantly. If the word of God dwells in us abundantly, so the enemy has to think twice before attacking us, lest he will be struck down by this sword.

He will always attack us in different ways but often times in our weakest point. However, this sword has power to detect his advances, as St. Paul would say, "We are not ignorant of his designs." St. Paul was able to say this because he himself was filled with the word of God as he testifies that it is no longer he that lives, but Christ lives in him.

Notice that in the girding our loins with truth, putting the breastplate of righteousness, shodding the feet with the equipment of the Gospel of peace, taking the shield of the spirit, and wearing the helmet of salvation, the soul is in the defensive position just protecting herself from the onslaught of the evil One, but now that it has a sword it can strike back the enemy and can fully engage in a meaningful spiritual combat. That is why the soul can say, →

**Icon #18 = Prayer answered**

"I cry out to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy mountain."

This is a prayer with the assurance that it has been answered. Christ gives us also this assurance when He said, "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be granted to you." →

**Icon #19 = Sleep:Awake**

"I lie down and sleep; I wake again, for the Lord sustains me."

Even though the soul is beset with different kinds of temptations or trials or difficulties, or loaded down with responsibilities she can easily go to sleep because the Lord grants her inner peace – the victory over the passions. But this doesn't mean that the war has already ended for as long as we are still in this world our life is characterized by a continual warfare, but our advantage is that we are no longer slaves to our passions because the Lord sustains us with His grace. Ultimately, even when we lie down and sleep in death, we will rise again from the dead, for it is the Lord who gives life to our souls. →

**Icon # 20 = Courageous**

"I am not afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me around about."

In this stage the soul has attained a tremendous trust and confidence in God because it has been equipped with the whole armor of God. Imagine you have God as a shield! You have also the sword of the spirit and the helmet of salvation!

Now the soul is ready to face various challenges in life whether it will be in the form of sickness, or lose of loved ones, or persecution because of her beliefs and convictions. She is not even afraid if they kill her body, for they could not kill her soul. They could imprison her body but they could not stifle her spirit. Or if it will be in the form of temptations, for she is confident that she will not be tested beyond her strength and with the temptation there's always a way provided for her that she may be able to escape.

Thus she cries out, →

## Icon # 21 = Enemies of the Soul

"Arise, O Lord! Deliver me, O my God! For thou dost smite all my enemies on the cheek, thou dost break the teeth of the wicked."

These are the enemies that set themselves against us on all sides. But who are they? For those who are not ignorant of their designs it would not be difficult to identify them even if these enemies go in and out of the territory of the soul sometimes in disguise and sometimes openly. But the spirit of watchfulness who keeps vigilance within the soul can detect them. These are: the spirits of lust, pride, anger, gluttony, dejection, envy, vainglory, & avarice, etc..

No doubt that for the soul to exclaim that God smites all her enemies on the cheek is a highly reasonable exception to the law, for Our Lord commanded that if our enemy strikes on the right cheek we have to turn the other also, but now lest our souls be seduced, God has smite them and break their teeth, otherwise, they will continue roaring like a lion seeking someone to devour. We have to resist them with our shield of faith and the sword of the spirit.

It is interesting to note that God only strikes their cheek and break their teeth and hasn't killed them yet. This is because as long as there is still blood in our veins, our vices and evil tendencies cannot be completely rooted out, but they are under our control and they could no longer harm us because they don't have teeth anymore, for their venom is in their teeth and that is why God has to break their teeth.

This is also to give us a moral lesson that so long as we dwell in this body we will be deceived not matter what progress we made, if we think that our passions are already dead and not merely handled constructively.

We have also to pray day and night for the grace to persevere in keeping God's commandment, because if our souls become so negligent in keeping God's command, then, these teeth will grow again and without our noticing it they will bite us.

So we have to examine from time to time whether these teeth have grown up or not. If they have grown up then we have to cry out to God again to break them. St. Benedict advises us that while they are still young, that is, starting to show up, we have to dash them against the rock – which is Christ Himself. This means that if we notice within ourselves evil thoughts or evil inclinations we have to call without delay the name of the Lord. When this becomes a habit, that is, always calling upon the name of the Lord not only in times of adversity but also in prosperity, then, these teeth will never become big.

It is a tremendous blessing for the soul to have arrived at this point in her spiritual journey. She is now in a balanced state neither denying the evil tendencies within nor yielding to them. Her journey in this life will be characterized by this healthy tension until she will reach her final destiny, to that kingdom where nothing whatsoever that troubles the soul can be found.

God alone gives the soul this victory and she knows it that is why she attributes it to the Lord, saying: →

### **Icon # 22 = Blessing upon God's People**

"I am not afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me around about."

Gratitude, of course, is our fitting response for all the blessing that the Lord has bestowed on us, especially the deliverance from the passions of our soul. If the Lord had not been on our side we could not hope to win control over our evil tendencies, for they are too strong for us. But with the Lord to help us, victory is assured. Thus we need always to cry out: →

### **Icon # 23 = God answers Prayers**

#### **Psalm 4**

"Answer me when I call, O God of my right! Thou hast given me room when I was in distress. Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer."

As monks, we chant this psalm at Compline every night, 365 days a year. This reminds us that the God we worship is a God of justice, and that He is a just judge. Trusting that He is a just judge, so we approach Him every night with confidence bringing all our troubles and distress believing that He hears and answers us. We are no different from other people in having trials and difficulties, but perhaps the only difference is that we are so importunate to approach the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find help in our distress. We do it every night just as the poor widow went to the judge everyday.

God is not only a just judge but also a kind judge that is why he gives us a room that we may be able to rest in times of distress. This echoes what Christ said: "Come to me you who are weary and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." And not only that, but in His Father's house there's also lots of rooms. So it is in God alone that we can find rest when we are in trouble, for the Father's heart is our safest place of rest.

God is always gracious to us and hears our prayer, yet there are times that He answers us not in ways that we want, but in ways that is best for us. To be sure we can get what we need but not all that we want. This requires an openness on our part to the workings of the Holy Spirit within us who works for His good pleasure to mold in us the divine image until we reach a perfect manhood, to the fullness of the stature of Christ.

God is gracious to us and hears our prayer because it is the Holy Spirit within who intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words and God knows the thoughts of the Holy Spirit because He and the Holy Spirit are one. That is why we, too, are one with God because of the Holy Spirit He has given us. The Holy Spirit, too, can say to God the Father, in His relation to us, "Thou in me, and I in them."

Thus we can always find room in the heart of God when we are in distress. We can cast all our anxieties to Him for He cares for us like the manner of a hen who gathers her chicks under her wings. →

### **Icon # 24 = God's Honor**

"O men, how long shall my honor suffer shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies?"

God desires to draw us to Himself, but oftentimes we choose to follow our own ways and squander all the graces and blessings that God has given us. For this reason the honor of God suffers shame, because we no longer act as worthy children of God. We love useless words, and gossips, and seek after false happiness. We look for it in material things and in earthly values.

In the depths of His heart God cries out, "How long...?" how long are you going to continue to look for things that couldn't satisfy the longing of the human heart? "Your heart is designed to be absolutely satisfied by Me alone and to enjoy the true pleasures in beholding My glory which the angels and the saints in heaven are already partaking without end. This is the reason why I made you that you may me with Me for all eternity. I became man that you might become God. This is the dignity and honor that I gave you. But if you love useless words and search after earthly things more than heavenly things, then, my honor suffers shame because your soul no longer reflects the divine beauty that is in you. Not that I don't want you to have earthly or material things, but what I want is that you seek first the kingdom of God and all the necessary earthly things will be given to you as well so as to facilitate your search for Me. I am inside you because your body is My temple. So if you search for me within your inner self you will find Me. If you find Me within yourself you will also find Me in creation, and in the beauty of human life."

“Know that happiness does not consist in acquiring and possessing much, but in having few needs and satisfying them at little expense. That is why I want you to seek first the kingdom of God and to look up at the things that are above and not on the things that are below. If you do this My honor will not suffer shame and you will eventually know how to control your tongue.” →

### **Icon # 25 = Godly: Unity in Voice**

“But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him.”

The Lord has set apart the godly for Himself as His own possession to declare His wonderful deeds as He called them out from the darkness of sin into the marvelous light of a virtuous life. Once their countenance was darkened and distorted by their evil ways, but now the Lord sees His own face begins to shine in them in great splendor, even brighter than the noonday sun. So now they are the apple of His eyes. For this reason the Lord is attentive to the voice of their supplication and hears them, because the Lord recognizes His own voice in them, for it is the spirit of the Lord who intercedes for them with sighs too deep for words; and the Lord knows the thoughts of the Spirit because He and the Holy Spirit are one. And the godly becomes also one with the Lord because everyone who is united with the Lord becomes one spirit with Him. At this point in the soul's journey there's not only unity in spirit, but also unity in voice. That is why the Lord says that He knows His sheep and His sheep recognizes His voice. →

### **Icon # 26 = Be angry but not Sin**

“Be angry, but sin not; commune with your own heart on your beds, and be silent.”

Our experience tells us that even though we belong to the Lord and we are the sheep of His flock, yet there are times that we feel angry especially when we are constantly dealing with people who are very provocative. However, this will lead us to humility because we realize that the passion within us is not yet completely dead, and it can never be completely rooted out while we are still in the flesh. This is a healthy feeling as long as we do not let the sun go down on our anger, that is to say, we do not bear a grudge against our brother or sister, but still maintain Christian charity toward them as much as we could. Doing good to them when there's an opportunity in doing so or showing some gestures of deference toward them. And above all to include them in our prayer when we commune with our hearts in silence.

We should not be discouraged when the feeling of anger surfaces in our heart, but rather need to be grateful that it did surface so that we may be able to deal with it. Though it is good to be watchful of our feelings, because this can give us some data of the condition of our soul, but it is much better to be watchful of our will because our will is the lamp of our soul. If our will is good the light in our soul will still be shining even if the dark cloud of passion tries to cast a shadow on it. And besides, feelings just come and go. Thus we need not judge our spiritual progress by our feelings whether they are good or bad.

The best way to listen to what is going on in our heart is to be silent. For example, if we fall into a trap of arguing with someone, even if we think that we are right, it is much better to be silent and let the other speak until they too will eventually be silent. This requires an amount of humility in our heart, even not a big amount but just enough to realize that argument does not lead to peace because it doesn't change the heart. Once we notice that the passion within us is aroused it is a noble gesture to keep silence for it is an obvious sign that we have won the argument because everyone who masters himself is much stronger than he who conquers a city. We have only to be silent and God will argue for us because it is He who searches the heart. →

### **Icon # 27 = Right Sacrifices: Paddles**

"Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord."

No doubt, to keep silence while the other is shouting is a right sacrifice pleasing to God, because this shows that it is in the Lord in whom we put our trust just as Christ put His trust in the Father by keeping silent in the presence of Pilate when the people were demanding His condemnation. Citizens on earth might think that if we keep silent while the other is shouting is a kind of weakness of spirit, but the citizens of heaven are filled with awe and admiration that we have acquired the strength of God, because the weakness of God is stronger than men.

A grateful and contrite heart is also a right sacrifice. To be grateful in whatever circumstances we find ourselves either in times of prosperity or adversity is a clear indication that we are not far from God, that we are already halfway in our spiritual journey. If it is blended with a contrite heart it becomes so fragrant that it captivates not only the exquisite sense of smell of the angels, but above all of God. They are like incense that we keep on burning on the altar of our heart.

To have a grateful heart makes us sensitive to the actions of Divine Providence even in the simple events of our daily lives. It makes us see that all things work

together for good to those who love God, that nothing happens either good or bad without God's knowledge. Therefore, we can securely put our trust in Him. To have a contrite heart prevents us from becoming proud, because it makes us realize that no matter how great progress we have made in the spiritual life, there is still something in us that has to be removed.

Gratefulness and a contrite heart are like paddles that the soul uses in rowing in this sea of life until it reaches its final destination – our heavenly home. →

### **Icon # 28 = Goodness: Smile**

“There are many who say, ‘O that we might see some good! Lift up the light of thy countenance upon us, O Lord!’”

Right from the beginning of our conversion we have already began seeing some good, because the eyes of our hearts are open to see the goodness of the Lord. Once we were darkness, but now we are light in the Lord. It is in this light that we are able to perceive goodness in our surroundings, in creation, and in the people around us, for we participate in the goodness of the Lord Himself who sees everything He made as good, very good. Our souls began to be conscious that the Lord makes His face to shine upon us and is gracious to us; He lifts up His countenance upon us and gives us peace. Isn't that good? Yes, that's very good!

St. Therese of the child Jesus was even willing to endure all sufferings as long as she could make the face of Christ smile. Not that Christ will smile if we suffer, for that would be contrary to His nature, but it is the endurance of sufferings that makes us conformable to Him, who in the days of His flesh had endured sufferings and pains. Thus it is just natural that He smiles when He looks at us when we endure something for the love of Him, no matter how little or insignificant it might be, because we grow in our conformity to Him. →

### **Icon # 29 = Joy**

“Thou has put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.”

There is more joy in our hearts when we grow in our conformity to Christ than those who have abundance of food and wine. Not that having abundance of food and wine cannot bring joy, for our experience tells us that if we have food, and drink some wine, even occasionally, our hearts rejoice, but the joy that Christ puts in our hearts is far greater than the joy that comes from food or drink because the joy that comes from food or drink is induced by a material



substance such as food or wine, so it is still a lower kind of joy because it is an earthly joy. Whereas the joy that Christ puts in our hearts is a joy that comes from the Holy Spirit. It is already a foretaste of the kingdom of God because the kingdom of God is love, Peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

For this reason, even if our body is wasting away our spirit is being renewed everyday to be conformed into the likeness of Christ until we grow into a mature spiritual manhood, into the fullness of the stature of Christ. →

### **Icon # 30 = Sleeping easily**

"In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for thou alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety."

Since we find security in the heart of Christ we can now go to sleep easily, because we have learned to cast all our anxieties upon Him. His heart is our safe dwelling place where we can be at home with ourselves and where we can receive mercy to help us in times of need. So, sleep is now pleasant, for our souls find contentment in the Lord. Even if we ultimately sleep in death we are confident that we will rise again to a new life, for in our flesh we shall see God. →

### **Icon # 31 = Inner Groaning**

#### **Psalm 5**

"Give ear to my words, O Lord; give heed to my groaning. Hearken to the sound of my cry, my king and my God, for to thee do I pray."

Since we are still in this world our souls experience a certain inner groaning as we await the redemption of our bodies. We long to arrive soon to our heavenly home, because here on earth we don't have a lasting city but we are looking forward to that city not made by human hands which God has prepared for those who love Him since the foundation of the world.

This kind of groaning, no doubt, touches the heart of God so deeply because the intensity of His longing for our return is much greater than the intensity of our desire to arrive. He has already prepared the fattened calf for our arrival and He, too, groans inwardly for the celebration to begin.

The sound of this groaning is like a melody in God's ear and He loves to listen to it. The angels, too, take delight in this melody for there is rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents. →

**Icon # 32 = Sacrifice of Praise**

“O Lord, in the morning thou dost hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for thee, and watch.”

As monks, we rise up at 3:15 in the morning and offer to the Lord our sacrifice of praise. We watch and pray so that when He comes and knocks at the door He will find us wide awake.

At this time of day the sound of the knocking is very clear, because all is quiet; and besides, the groaning of a humble and contrite spirit is still fresh. Thus we have an assurance that God hears our voice. See, both sides hear each other. Our souls hear the sound of His knocking in our hearts and God hears the voice of our repentance and praise. We can add thanksgiving, too, because we now realize that we are forgiven sinners and this realization makes us grateful that God counts us worthy to stand in His presence and serve Him. This is the sacrifice that we offer to God every morning all the days of our lives. →

**Icon # 33 = No room for evil**

“For thou art not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not sojourn with thee.”

God does not delight in wickedness because wickedness is so contrary to God's nature, for what does Belial have to do with Christ? Thus evil has no room in God, but if we confess our wickedness and turn away from evil and do good, then, none of the wickedness in our hearts will be remembered by God for as far as the east is from the west so far does God remove our sins. Evil may not sojourn with thee, that is, nothing evil can enter the kingdom of God. We have to be purified first by repentance or by passing through many trials and tribulations before we can enter the kingdom of God. →

**Icon # 34 = Boasting 1**

“The boastful may not stand before thy eyes; thou hatest all evil doers.”

To be boastful is like a house built upon sand which may look sound and well from the outside, but since it has no foundation it cannot stand before the torrents of floods and the buffeting of winds. It also suggests that we are exalting ourselves; and in we exalt ourselves that is an indication of pride, for St. Benedict said that every exaltation is a form of pride, so, if it is a form of pride, therefore, it cannot stand before God because God who is the most high humbled Himself even to death on the cross.

There is only one exception of boasting that is acceptable to God and that is to boast in the name of the Lord, as St. Paul said, "Let him who boast, boast in the name of the Lord." If we have to suffer for the sake of this name, then we have to rejoice and be glad in it, because God is counting us worthy to share in His glory. →

### **Icon # 35 = Hates – Destroys - Abhors**

"Thou hatest all evildoers. Thou destroyest those who speak lies; The Lord abhors bloodthirsty and deceitful men."

God hates evil deeds but He still loves the human person because of His image and likeness that is in them. He destroyest those who speak lies because he came down to earth to destroy the works of the devil, the father of lies. The devil works in deceitful and bloodthirsty men for he is a murderer from the beginning. He deceives men by inculcating in them earthly values and the pleasures of this world so that men will completely forget the true happiness that God has prepared for them since the foundation of the world. →

### **Icon # 36 = True Worship**

"But I through the abundance of thy steadfast love will enter thy house, I will worship toward thy holy temple in the fear of thee."

Here the soul acknowledges that it is only through the grace of God that enables her to worship God with awe and wonder. God condescended to make our body His temple that is why we are asked to make our body holy as the Lord God is holy. We can now enter within ourselves and worship God within in spirit and truth, for this is what God desires for those who would worship Him. The steadfast or merciful love of God is so abundant for those who serve Him day and night and pray continuously. To worship God is to give Him His due. We give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God what belongs to Him. When a person desires to enter the palace of the king, he has to do his best to be in proper attire, so also when the soul enters within the depths of her being to worship God she will do her best to be in proper motivation and clothe herself with the virtue of humility and put on the jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit which is pleasing to the Lord. She acknowledges who she is and who she is engaging with and remains in that state till she goes back to the presence of men. Because of the abundance of the steadfast love of the Lord, she can go in and out into the depths of her being and find pastures, that is, find strength to help her in her daily life – her challenges and difficulties. She will worship God unceasingly within, in spirit and in truth, not only in times of prosperity but also in times adversity, not only in times of success but also in times of distress. →

**Icon # 37 = Straight Way**

"Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness because of my enemies; may thy way straight before me."

Part of the soul's prayer is that the Lord will continually lead us in His righteousness because the devil is always roaming around looking for an opportunity to devour us. He will devour us if we fall into despair that we could no longer see and feel God's mercy. We become so weak spiritually that we don't have strength anymore to rise again, and begin a new beginning. So, the soul is praying that she may not fall into this ditch, but may walk uprightly in the path of God's commandment. There could be several factors why we may fall into the ditch. One would be if the road is slippery. So if we notice within ourselves that there are some areas in our lives that does not conform to that of Christ then those areas are quite slippery. If we will not be very careful walking or traveling in those areas eventually we will fall into a ditch. The other thing that makes it risky is that not only that it is slippery but it is also crooked, so it makes it more difficult. Our heart is slippery and crooked if we desire and love more the things of this world than the things of heaven, and if we live only for this present life while forgetting the life of the world to come.

Experiencing and tasting the sweetness of the life of the world to come even while we are still on earth is already a response of our prayer that the Lord makes His way straight before us. This way is narrow and hard at the outset, but as we make progress in the spiritual life our hearts expand and we shall run with unspeakable sweetness in the way of God's commandments.

God's commandments and teachings are the way that we should walk. This way is straight because Christ Himself is the Way, and He is also the light of the world. We know that light travels in straight line. So, keeping God's commandments and teaching is traveling in a straight way. It is our prayer that we may have the grace to persevere walking in this way and not swerving to the left of a life of dissipation or to the right of a life of over-indulgence nor turning back to a life of vices and sin, for if we not do so, then there is no truth in our mouth, our heart is leading towards destruction, our throat is an open sepulcher, and we are just flattering with our tongue. →

### Icon # 38 = Wrong Counsels vs. Purification

"Make them bear their guilt, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; because of their many transgressions cast them out, for they have rebelled against thee."

Vices and passions have to bear their own guilt. Covetousness counsels us to possess more than we need; Gluttony makes our mouth water when we see delicious food; Lust insinuates in our mind impure thoughts; Pride lets us think that we are already something; Dejection counsels us not to rise up for vigils and other community exercises because it doesn't give satisfaction; Vainglory counsels us to wear gold and earrings and even meticulous in the way we dress; Anger makes us remember the hurts that others inflict on us; Envy counsels us to compete with others to be sure that we might have what they have even to the expense of the other.

Since these counsels are not of God, we pray that God will cast them out from our hearts. God will not remove all these at once to test us whether we really desire to live the spiritual life, and besides, if God will remove all these at once we might become proud and won't feel the need of His grace anymore. So, it is to our own advantage if there are times that we feel either one or two of these passions and vices as long as we strive, with the help of God, to cooperate with Him in His work of purifying our hearts because He respects our freedom and he will not purify us if we don't want Him to.

However, if we will resist Him in purifying our hearts in this life we could not escape the purification by fire in purgatory which is even far more painful than all the pains combined together that we experienced here on earth. Thus it is far wiser to let God cast out all our vices and passions, even little by little, while still journeying towards our heavenly home not only because it makes our travel lighter, but also because the more we are purified the more the image of Christ shines in our hearts. →

### Icon # 39 = Song of God: Name of Jesus

"But let all who take refuge in thee rejoice, and let them sing for joy; and do thou defend them, that those who love thy name may exult in thee."

If we constantly take refuge in God, not only in times of troubles and difficulties but even in times of peace and security, we can experience, from time to time, an internal joy; and we can even laugh at our mistakes! Even our failures does not weigh us down heavily because we grow in trust and confidence that all things work together for our good.

To take refuge in God is to go in and out of His heart to find nourishment for our souls – to encourage us in times of weakness, console us when we are sad, correct us when the affection of our hearts deviate from His ways, rejoice with us when we approach Him in humility, be gracious to us when we keep His word, and bless us when we do not curse other people.

Since in God alone do our souls find rest, so we have a good reason to sing for joy within our hearts with songs of praise, especially the magnificat and other spiritual hymns. Now we can rejoice in the Lord always for He is our refuge where we can cast all our anxieties for we know by our own experience that He cares for us more than a mother for her infant child.

Just as a mother sings a song for her little child, so also God sings a song for us as He places us in His arms to strengthen the bonds between us and Him. This song of God is His words in the Scripture. So if we let the words of God dwell in us richly, we can sing together with Him. Thus the soul and God sing together the eternal hymn of praise which already begins in this life and which will be perfected in the next. This song of God can be heard also in the sacraments especially in the Eucharist and Reconciliation. The angels are just so delighted to hear this song because they rejoice when one sinner repents. Much more when after the sinner repents he/she also receives Holy Communion, because the Eucharist is our pledge of eternal glory, the foretaste of the heavenly banquet of the marriage of the Son of God with us where He gives Himself totally to us. He Himself will intone the eternal song of glory which no one knows except those whom the Father has given Him.

God Himself will guard and defend them like a shepherd guarding his flock. They will go in and out and find pastures in the tree of life and will drink to their full the water of living water. This living water is the Holy Spirit which Christ gives to those who believe in Him.

This Holy Spirit who is within us will defend us every time the devil accuses us before God, for the Holy Spirit is our advocate in the presence of God. So long as we will not grieve Him by deliberate sin we are assured that nothing can separate us from Him. He it is whom Christ was referring to when He said, "I will be with you even until the consummation of the world."

That those who love Thy Name may exult in Thee. For Christians, the name of Jesus is music to the ear, honey in the mouth, and song in the heart. That is why those who love this Name have a fairly good reason to exult in God and can sing in their hearts a new song to the Lord. We are proud in this Name, because even if we suffer for the sake of this Name we are blessed for we have been counted worthy to share in His suffering that we may also rejoice when His glory is revealed. Those who love this Name have their names written in the book of

life because their good deeds follow them. They strive always to do what is good, right, and true, and also strive to avoid every form of evil. Even if they fail sometimes, but they rise again and learn a lesson from their mistakes. In this way they will grow in wisdom and humility. They live a life worthy of this Name and pray daily that this Name won't be tarnished by acting or doing what is contrary to His teachings. So, in order to know more about this Name they will spend regular time to read His love letter which is the Holy Scripture. They will also read the writings of the fathers of the Church who had close contact with this Name, and also the lives and writings of the saints so as to elevate the standard of their lives when they see how the saints imitated this Name so closely. If they are called to a monastic way of life they have to read also monastic literature both the East and the West such as the Institute of John Cassian, the Philokalia, the lives and Wisdom of the Desert Father, the Ladder of Divine Ascent of St. John Climacus, the Spiritual World of St. Isaac the Syrian, the Life of St. Anthony of Egypt, the Ascent of Mount Carmel by St. John of the Cross, the writings of St. Teresa of Avila and St. Therese of the Child Jesus.\*<sup>1</sup> This is just an example, but there are still lots of them and if all will be written the whole notebook will not be enough to contain them. They are the clouds of witnesses in the spiritual life. They are the ones who love this Name. They not only know about this Name, but they also experienced the sweetness of this Name as the Psalmist says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." This Name had been engraved in their hearts and written on their foreheads; and once the angels see them the angels will say, "These are the people who longs to see His face."

Whoever we are who feel that from time to time our souls are tossed by the waves of diverse desires if we do not want to sink in the tempest we should not cease on calling upon this Name. Whether we are tossed about by the waves of pride, jealousy, or envy we have to invoke this Name.

When rage or anger or resentment or lust or fleshly desires are battering our souls then we have to call upon the Name of Jesus. When the immensity of our sins weigh us down and we are bewildered by the loathsomeness of our conscience we have to think upon this Name of Jesus.

In dangers, doubts, and difficulties we need to think upon this Name of Jesus and call out to His Name. If we keep this Name in our hearts and it is always in our lips then even before we call upon Him He will say, "Here I am."

If we strive to follow the example of His life we will obtain the favor of His prayer. Asking His help we will never despair, because He is full of mercy and compassion and His nature is all good; following Him we will never go astray, for

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\*To Cistercian monks and nuns it is almost obligatory to have knowledge of some of the writings of our fathers St. Benedict and St. Bernard

He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; keeping Him in our thoughts we will never wander away, for He is the light of our minds. With our hands in Him we will not stumble. With Him guarding and defending us we will not be afraid even if we walk in the dark valley of challenges, trials and distress. With Him leading us back to our heavenly home we will not get tired. His loving kindness and merciful love will see us through to the end and we will know by our own experience that this Name is no other than Our Lord Jesus Christ. To Him belong all blessings, wisdom and thanksgiving, glory and honor, and power and might forever and ever. Amen. So be it. →

### **Icon # 40 = Blessings of the Righteous**

"For thou dost bless the righteous, O Lord; thou dost cover him with favor as with a shield."

For the righteous souls the name of our Lord Jesus bring blessings into their lives, for once the Lord enters and becomes a part of our lives He gives us back ourselves which we have lost by the sloth of disobedience when we did not listen to His voice and take heed to His words. But now that we have been reconciled to God our spiritual senses are opened. Our inner ears have learned to listen to the voice within and can distinguish whether it is the voice of the Good Shepherd or from the evil one. And once it becomes highly cultivated it can distinguish even the sound of the knocking at the door whether it is the Good Shepherd who knocks or whether it is the evil one.

For example, when we are sick, incapacitated or when we fail, the evil one will knock at the door of our hearts too, but the tone of the sound of the knocking is more of discouragement. The evil one will let the soul feel and think that she is useless. But blessed is the soul whom the Lord is always within her, because when she hears the sound of the knocking of the evil one she can request the Lord saying, "My Lord, kindly please open the door for me." When the evil one hears even just the footsteps of the Lord he will depart at once.

The soul can also recognize the voice of the evil one because it tends to criticize and despise the other brothers and sisters within the heart, but the voice of the Good Shepherd tends towards what is just, honest, true, honorable, and worthy of praise. It speaks to her about the joy and glory of the New Jerusalem and this gives her enough strength to go on for now she knows that the suffering of this present life is not worth comparing to the glory to be revealed; for the slight and momentary afflictions in this world is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison.



These are some of the blessings which the Lord bestows on the righteous which are sufficient to sustain us in our spiritual journey. They are like shields which cover us so that when the evil one strikes us with the arrow of temptation or the sword of adversity we can always protect ourselves with the thoughts of the eternal happiness prepared for us since the foundation of the world. →

### **Icon # 41 = Rebuke not in anger**

#### **Psalm 6**

“O Lord, rebuke me not in thy anger, nor chasten me in thy wrath.”

Whether we like it or not there will be times that we fail in the exercise of virtues. God allows this so that our hearts will be become so proud and to make us realize that without His grace we are just too weak to even make the first step, for apart from Him we can do nothing.

What the soul is praying here is that in our weakness Our Lord will not rebuke us in anger or chasten us in His wrath, but rather rebuke us in mercy and chastise us in kindness, for this is part of God's way of disciplining us. It is for discipline, then, that we have to endure. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

If the Lord rebukes and chastises us it is because of His zeal for the cleansing of our souls. He might overturn the table of our selfishness and greediness and drive away the bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in our hearts. All these entail same pain within us, because it demands a continual death to our old self. The old man within might cry out, “Why are you doing this, who gives you the authority to such a thing?” But the new man, who did not offer resistance to the action of the Holy Spirit within will say: “Create a clean heart within me, O God. Put a steadfast spirit within me. Wash me more and more from my sins and cleanse me from all my guilt.” →

### **Icon # 42 = Yoke: Community life**

“Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; O Lord heal me, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is sorely troubled. But thou, O Lord – how long?”

If it happens that sometimes we experience a lack of interest in community exercises or feel weak to rise up even for vigils, we should not be discouraged because if we persevere in our community exercise for love of Christ even if the feeling is not there as long as we are faithful, time will come that there will be a

sudden infusion of grace and our hearts will expand and the beauty and value of community living will be unfolded to us. We will see Christ as the center of our community, the unseen guest in every meal, and the silent listener to every conversation.

Every time that we feel weak and weary we can always take encouragement and consolation in His words: "Come to me all of you who are wearied and overburdened, and I will give you rest." If the community life is the yoke that is placed upon us, then we need to learn from Christ and from each other how to take this yoke upon us and bear each other's burden. This yoke becomes easy and each other's burden light when we are faithful in our private prayer, then community prayer and other community exercises will become a tangible expression of our love for God and for one another. Thus community living becomes less burdensome. The community itself is our strong support when we are languishing and are sorely troubled. The graciousness of God, then, is channeled through the community. →

### **Icon # 43 = Remembrance of God**

"Turn, O Lord, save my life; deliver me for the sake of thy steadfast love. For in death there is no remembrance of thee; in Sheol who can give thee praise?"

Our faith tells us that God does not delight in the death of a sinner, but that he/she may be converted and lives. Even here on earth if we are too overindulgent we are already dead though we do as other people do such as breathing, walking, eating, etc... If the remembrance of God is not part of our life, then, it is tantamount to being a living dead or to be a dead person walking, because the life of grace which is the true life of the soul is no longer in us. It is this life of grace that makes us continually remember God. It becomes part of our breathing, that is to say, the remembrance of God is combined with our breathing. When we experience this, we shall know that our soul is alive and we will become aware of God in all that we do even in the most trivial and insignificant works that we do such as doing dishes or washing pots and pans or cleaning restrooms, and in other menial work.

The greatness of these actions lie in our conformity to the Son of God who came not to be served, but to serve, and not so much in the actions itself for other can also do such things. These works become a song of praise which we offer to God. We now can pray while working, for remembrance of God is already a prayer. And prayer is a song sung only to God in the stillness of our hearts. So, if people no longer pray it means that they are unmindful of God, unmindfulness of God is the same thing as not remembering God; and if we do not remember God we are already dead even though we seem to be alive in the eyes of

other people. But God sees the heart. That is why in death there is no remembrance of God and in Sheol no one can give him praise. →

### **Icon # 44 = Tears 1**

“I am weary with my moaning, every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with weeping. My eye wastes away because of grief, it grows weak because of all my foes.”

Tears are a tremendous gift from God. It softens the hardness of our hearts. It is one of the authentic signs of true repentance, for if we truly repent we certainly shed tears. Tears mingled with silence and solitude is a fertile soil where the word of God can easily grow and bear fruit in our hearts.

John the Baptist encourages us to bear fruits that befit repentance. The seed of this fruit is tears. There are also tears that flow from our eyes out of joy when our hearts are touched by the memory of God's goodness in our lives by bringing us back to Him when He calls us out of darkness into His marvelous light. There are also tears that flow from our eyes when we have done something good to a person out of pure love without any slightest expectation that that person will repay us for that person is poor. The only word that comes out from the person's lips is “Thank you.” There is also another kind of tear, which is also sweet, that issues when our hearts are touched by the memory of the Lord's passion and death – how He suffered so much for us out of His great love for us to snatch us from the claws of the evil One who always roam around like a lion seeking someone to devour.

When our heart is sad or overburden with problems and we are able to confide it to someone, and while confiding we shed tears, then, we too, can experience a tremendous relief.

For some people, tears might be interpreted as womanish, childish, and a form of cowardice, but by and large, it is quite the contrary. For a grown person to cry is like expanding one's own horizon, and is a form of courage too, for at least we have the courage to face our own humanity. Even God Himself cried and gave us a model when He cried for Lazarus and for Jerusalem. →

### **Icon # 45 = Weeping**

“Depart from me, all you workers of evil, for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping.”

To the Lord the sound of our weeping is like the sound of a melodious music, therefore, He listens to it. St. Benedict encourages his monks to pray more with tears than with words. No doubt, because God looks at the intentions of the heart. The evil spirits will depart from the sound of our weeping, because it's a torment to them for it reveals that their deeds are not of God, so it convicts them of sin.

The Lord God hears the sound of our weeping for in it He hears the echo of the cry of Christ, for in the days of His flesh Christ offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to Him who is able to save Him from death and was heard, for on the third day after His death He rose again from the dead. Our tears then are seeds planted within us that it may bear fruit of new life, a life of prayer and union with God. So, naturally, the evil spirits will depart when they hear the sound of this weeping, because they could not endure living together with Christ within us. They will visit us from time to time though, to check whether there's no more sound of weeping within us, that is, if the tears of repentance have dried up and our hearts are hardened to the point that we start flattering ourselves and could no longer see our faults.

But as long as Christ lives in our hearts this sound of weeping will continue in the days of our flesh here on earth, yet the melody will vary. Sometimes it will be a sound of repentance and sorrows, and at other times it will be a sound of joy and gladness. Christ will pluck the strings in our hearts and this music will sound.

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### **Icon # 46 = Lines of Communication**

“The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord accepts my prayer.”

Prayer that comes from a humble and contrite heart and mingled with tears are highly acceptable to God. He listens more to this than to a multitude of words, for this is a signal that the soul has entered the threshold of purity. The lines of communication between the soul and God are open. →

### **Icon # 47= Initial Victory**

“All my enemies shall be ashamed and sorely troubled; they shall turn back, and be put to shame in a moment.”

Once the lines of communication between us and God are open, and we know by experience that God hears the voice of our supplication and answers our prayer, we can gain enough strength to face our own temptations. And if we

do not consent to them they will be ashamed and sorely troubled. This initial victory gives joy to our hearts and we can only say, "Not to us Lord, not to us, but to you name give the glory," for we know that by our own self we could not overcome the power of the temptations that beset us, but with God we can do bravely, for in Him lies our strength.

However, we should not grow slack but rather be vigilant because whether we like it or not, they will appear again. The more we overcome them the more they become powerless and the more we become stronger. For example, if some lustful thoughts are dancing in our imagination and once we are aware of it we turn our gaze to Christ or the Blessed Virgin or the saints we will notice that these lustful thoughts will eventually dissipate. If we do this constantly it will become a virtue, that is, as if our second nature. This is a sign that we are entering into the realm of purity of heart, into the land of passionlessness, because passionlessness does not mean that we no longer feel any passion, but we still feel it, yet are not overcome by it. →

### Icon # 48 = Pursuers

#### Psalm 7

"O Lord my God, in thee do I take refuge; save me from all my pursuers, and deliver me lest like a lion they rend me, dragging me away, with none to rescue."

If greed or selfish ambition or evil desire pursues us, the gate of God's heart is always open for us to take refuge. They can only pursue us up to this gate, so we have to run faster that they may not overtake us, that is, we have to call immediately upon the name of the Lord in a form of ejaculatory prayer. If we do this, even if they pursue us they cannot overtake us, that is, taken captive by them, but if not, then they will tear us to pieces. Our souls will be confused and we will become weak to resist their suggestions. Our spiritual insights will also become dim, and heavenly wisdom will be diminished. Even though we still have the sword of the spirit within us, that is, the word of God, but its sharpness will be blunted and we could no longer discern the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. This is one of the reasons why it is possible for a person to have a vast amount of knowledge even of Sacred Scriptures, but still act as though they are on the enemy's side.

If the soul will question God, saying: "why did you not rescue me when they persecute me?" God will answer, "Because you did not call upon my name. I am in your heart and in your lips; you have only to invoke my Name. Besides, I give you freedom and I want you to exercise your freedom; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh and as a pretext for doing evil."

"If you strive to do what is good, right, and true, even if I do not answer you immediately as you called upon my Name when the enemy was pursuing you, yet I am always watching you and your struggles and will not let the enemy overcome you. You have only to continue calling upon my Name and not be discouraged for this is My method of teaching so that you will know by your own experience how true it is that I am always at your side and My eyes are always upon you. By this you will gain strength of soul." →

### **Icon # 49= Repaying Evil for Good**

"O Lord my God, if I have done this, if there is wrong in my hands, if I have requited my friend with evil or plundered my enemy without cause, let the enemy pursue and overtake me, and let him trample my life to the ground, and lay my soul in the dust."

If to repay evil for evil to someone whom we dislike is already a downfall to us, how much more if repay our friends with evil when they had done nothing wrong to us.

Our Lord had commanded us to do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us, pray for those who persecute us or anyone that annoys us so that we may be called children of our Father in heaven who lets His sun rise to both the just and the unjust.

Christ no longer calls us His servants but His friends because He has made known to us what He has heard from the Father. And to show that greater love has no one than this that a man lays down his life for his friends, Christ died for us on the cross to ransom us from death. So, we owe our life to Him. For this reason we no longer live for ourselves but for Him who died for us and was raised for our justification. Since we owe our life to Him, therefore, if we turn back again to a life of sin we are repaying Him evil for good. And as a consequence to this our enemy will be happy in pursuing us and won't find any difficulty in overtaking us. If this case happens, it would have been better if we had not known Christ than to know Him and deliberately offend Him by doing, what we know, would separate us from Him. It is not He who will separate from us, but we who separate from Him as though we exchanged His beauty and glory with the transitory glamour of the things of this world. This, too, is repaying evil for good, because if we have been raised with Christ then we have to look at the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father and not on the things below where the devil, like a roaring lion, is roaming around seeking someone to devour. →

**Icon # 50= Cleansing of hearts**

“Arise, O Lord, in thy anger, lift thyself up against the fury of my enemies; awake, O my God; thou hast appointed a judgment.”

But those who don't want to be separated from Christ will pray that, if ever it happens that Christ is angry as He did when He overturned the tables in the Temple, it will be directed towards the cleansing of our hearts of all the things that does not belong to God, for the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God. →

**Icon # 51= Greatest Assembly**

“Let the assembly of the people be gathered about thee; and over it take thy seat on high.”

Christ said that whenever two or three are gathered in His name He is in the midst of them. How much more if the whole community gathers together in His name either in the Liturgy or in common meal or in some communal gatherings. To light one candle is good, and yet it is much better to have plenty of lighted candles, because it gives bright light to the assembly and those who wish to join it may see the light.

Our assembly here on earth, no matter how small it is, is a reflection of the greatest assembly in heaven where the elect from all nations and tongues are gathered before the throne of God singing a song of victory to the Lamb. Over this assembly Christ takes His seat on high as the main Celebrant. Humanity becomes the tenth choir of angels and joins with the nine choirs of angels to sing the eternal sanctus. →

**Icon # 52= Judgment: Nothing is Hidden**

“The Lord judges the peoples; judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness and according to the integrity that is in me.”

The Lord will judge everyone according to his/her deeds. “To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, God will give eternal life, but for those who do evil and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be distress, and there will be glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good.”

The judgment of the Lord is just because He sees and knows everything. He knows our thoughts and what is in our hearts and He sees all our actions. That is why when judgment comes nobody can offer excuses, because in a single flash of light the whole life of the person will be revealed and he could not deny the evidence. It is the same with good deeds. Even if it is hidden now, but when judgment come that, too, will be revealed. And the smallest virtue that a person a person practiced will shine as bright as the noonday sun. That is why our said that to offer a cup of water to anyone who asks of it will not lose his/her reward. Our righteousness and integrity lie in God alone, for apart from Him we can do nothing not even to think of holy and pious thoughts. So apart from His grace in us we could not imagine that we could attain righteousness and integrity. That is why St. Paul said: "I am what I am, because of the grace of Christ in me." →

### **Icon # 53= No to Sin**

"O let the evil of the wicked come to an end, but establish thou the righteous, thou who tries the minds and hearts, thou righteous God."

I have to clarify that when I use the word "wicked" or "enemy" what I am referring to is the devil himself or different kinds of demons within us, e.g., the demon of Lust, or anger, or pride, etc... It could implicitly refer to a human person, but I would rather leave it to God who alone knows the thoughts and hearts of people and who alone judges rightly. In this way, instead of condemning other people we direct our efforts in examining ourselves and endeavor to eradicate everything in us which is not pleasing to God.

So, when we pray that the evil of the wicked comes to an end, we are praying that the wickedness that is in us will eventually come to an end. This is our hope. This is a lifelong process. But we already experience the realization of this every time we refuse to succumb to the stirring of the unhealthy desires within us and when we say, No, to sin no matter how small it might be. Sin here means a deliberate sin, that is, we know consciously and yet we still freely do it without any pressure.

However, if we may fall into sin, yet we should not be discouraged but shall rise again and begin anew, for we have an advocate at the right hand of the Father, Our Lord Jesus Himself, who died and rose from the dead that we may no longer live for ourselves but for Him. This will reassure our hearts whenever our hearts condemn us, for Christ is greater than our hearts and He knows everything. →



### **Icon # 54= Founded upon the Rock**

“But establish thou the righteous, thou who triest the minds and hearts, thou righteous God.”

Once our hearts are established in God, the virtue of confidence will become stronger that when trials and difficulties come and test us we will not entirely collapse, because we have been founded upon the rock, which is Christ Himself. He is our righteousness and in Him and through Him alone we will become righteous, for once we were darkness but now we are light in the Lord.

→

### **Icon # 55= Shield: Prayer**

“My shield is with God, who saves the upright in heart.”

If our shield is with God, then, even if we experience from time to time difficulties and challenges in our everyday life, we believe that the arrow of depression or “burn-out” will not hit us. It is only when we put down this shield, that is, when we rely more on our own courage and strength that this arrow has power to strike us down. So it is important that we always hold this shield even if we think that our enemy is not attacking us, that is to say, we have to keep on praying even if we think that our passions are not harassing us.

That is why St. Paul encouraged us to pray without ceasing. And Our Lord also said that we have to watch and pray that we may not enter into temptation. If the devil will tempt us even if we pray, as he did to Christ in the desert, how much more if we do not pray. In other words, if he shoots his arrows even if we shield ourselves, how much more if we do not have a shield. In this case he will laugh and even can shoot us blindfolded.

Gazing at God or remembrance of Him is already a prayer. This, too, is a shield, a bulwark in times of distress and temptations. If we keep God always in our sight it would be likened to a house lighted during the night which makes the thief hesitant to enter because he will be discovered. He can lie in wait only in the areas of the house that is not lighted. So also with our souls, the continuous remembrance of God is like a burning light which can discover our evil tendencies and the plans of the evil One. That is why St. Paul said: “We are not ignorant of his designs.”

Memory can even be healed by a continuous remembrance of God consolidated by the action of prayer. This is a shield against unmindfulness of God.

But there are some areas in our lives that are still dark. The evil One can use these areas to lie in wait for us. He lurks and hides in these areas. Thus it would be part of our prayers that God will lighten these areas. But we have to discover and acknowledge it first before it can be lightened, because God respects our freedom. Often times it is very scary to go down to these areas especially if we are alone. But if God is our companion our souls can gain a tremendous trust and courage to explore these areas, for the soul can hear the voice of God saying: "Everyone who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." →

### **Icon # 56= God: Righteous Judge**

"God is a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation every day. If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and strung his bow; he has prepared his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts."

At first, it boggled my mind that the Psalmist says that God is a righteous judge, and yet has indignation every day. How can a judge who is righteous, and yet have indignation, not just once a week or once a month, but every day? Is righteousness compatible with indignation? In one sense, I believe that there is truth in what the Psalmist said because Christ who is a righteous judge, for all judgment has been given to Him by the Father, was also angry when the Holy Temple was polluted with different merchandise. This is a holy anger, because it is motivated by zeal for God's glory, as the Scripture says: "Zeal for thy house consumes me."

There was also an incident one Sabbath day when Christ healed a man with a withered hand. The Pharisees watched Him to see if He would heal the man on a Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. And Christ looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart.

In this sense, the Psalmist is right that although God is a righteous judge, yet He has indignation every day. It is every day, because sinners continue to commit sin every day. That is why the Psalmist continues to say that if a man does not repent, God will whet His sword.

We have said earlier that the sword of the spirit is the Word of God. This Word is sharp, because it penetrates our inmost being. It discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Since there's a need for repentance every day, Christ commanded the apostles, and modern day missionaries, to preach His word to all the nations for the forgiveness of sins. The sharpness of this Word is such that it not only penetrates our inmost being, but also can cut the heart. We have an example of this in the preaching of St. Peter on the day of Pentecost. "When the people heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins...'"

It is only when a person does not repent that God will whet His sword. This shows how hard the human heart could be. →

### **Icon # 57= Boomerang**

"Behold the wicked man conceives evil, and is pregnant with mischief, and brings forth lies. He makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole which he has made. His mischief returns upon his own head, and on his own pate his violence descends."

It is a law in spiritual life that whatever we plan against other people sooner or later we will fall into that same evil.

We have an example of this in the story of Haman, in the book of Esther. Haman had prepared a gallows for Mordecai, uncle of Esther, and had arranged that at such and such a time Mordecai will be hang. He planned all these, for his heart was already pregnant with jealousy, hatred, and malice against Mordecai. But in the end, it turns out that he was the one who was hanged in the gallows that he made.

It is also the same with us. If we pass judgment on other people, especially if the judgment is condemnatory, eventually we will fall in that same thing which the other person did. For this reason, there is a need for us to be more cautious in passing judgment on other people. In religious life/community passing judgment will be in a form of evaluation done by the formation or vocation committee or by the monastic council or by the conventual chapter. In this case, each can make an observation of his actual experience with the postulant or the novice or the junior professed. Yet it is has to be done humbly and honestly for the good of the community or of the brother himself. If we are not a member of any of these committees or monastic council or conventual chapter, it would be safe to be cautious in passing judgment on other people.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Our Lord said that we should not judge so that we will not be judged, we should not condemn so that we shall not be condemned, because the measure we measure with will be measured back to us. →

### **Icon # 58= Gratitude**

“I will give to the Lord the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the Lord, the Most High.”

I believe that it is already a tremendous blessing to be able to give thanks to God in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, not only in favorable circumstances, but also in unfavorable circumstances because this is also a sign that the soul is making progress in the spiritual life. Yet it doesn't mean that we could no longer feel the pain, we can still feel it, but we have learned to unite this pain with that of Our Lord for the good of His body the Church.

This is also an opportunity to exercise our trust in God that all things work together for our good if only we have love for Him, that nothing happens to us without His permission. If He permitted it only because He can draw good out of it. I know that this is painful that is why I say that it is already a tremendous blessing to be able to give thanks to God not only in times of prosperity, which is easy to do, but also in times of adversity, which requires grace to do.

God deserves our gratitude, because our existence is from Him. Even this alone is already a sufficient reason to render Him thanks. Can we imagine if we have to pay for oxygen rental since the day of our birth! If people in the ICU (intensive Care Unit) are charged thousands of dollars just for a week or so, how much more we who used it all the days of our lives. This is to exclude water and some other essential things for life, because sometimes we have to buy it (though from other people). But oxygen is completely free unless we got sick and we have to pay for it (again to other people). So it is other people who extract the rental which ultimately belongs to God. We can only hope that they will give God a share! The problem is if they will act like the tenants of the vineyard who finally killed the Son of the owner so that the inheritance will be theirs.

It is also the same with us. Our existence is a gratuitous gift from God. Therefore, our most fitting response is to express our gratitude to Him, and live a life worthy of the children of God.

Once we live a life worthy of the children of God, then, we can also express our gratitude in term of songs of praise, because songs of praise are fitting for loyal hearts. That is why if we do not live a life worthy of God to sing a hymn of praise

to Him is like kissing a wife on her lips but is having an affair with another woman. This echoes what Our Lord Jesus said: "This people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. In vain do they worship me." However, this doesn't mean that we are already impeccable and no longer capable of distractions, especially during prayer, because whether we like it or not we will still experience distractions in prayer. But since God considers our whole manner of life, this distraction is likened to a married man or woman who feels attracted to someone else but does not succumb to the temptation of having an affair with that person. It is also the same with us. Once we are aware that we are distracted, we can always go back to the center of our being, which is God. In other words, we can always refocus our attention to the object of our meditation. St. Teresa of Avila said that distractions in prayer is natural for us human beings and we have to attribute it to the weakness of our intellect.

I believe that as long as our motivation is good, even our distractions will turn out for our good because it can evoke humility in us – the realization that we are not yet perfect, that is in this life we are gazing at God only like in a dim mirror. Yet, even this is already an object of thanksgiving because, at least, we have an experiential knowledge of God. For this reason, we can sing praise to the name of the Lord, the Most High either privately inside our hearts (or vocally when we are alone, say in the woods, but not inside the house especially in the kitchen, because it can disturb the silence of the place, and besides, other people might interpret it as being showy that we are aware of God's presence all the time).

However, we can do it vocally and publicly in choir as a community. This is the most fitting place to sing praise to our God, because of His special presence in the tabernacle. This doesn't mean that any other appropriate places are of less importance, for God is everywhere, but His presence in the Tabernacle is of special importance because of its sacredness just as the Ark of the Covenant makes the place where it was placed the holiest of the holy and God's presence there was strongly felt.

To sing praise to the name of the Most High Lord is also appropriate if we strive to live a worthy of our calling. In this sense, our manner of life becomes a song that is pleasing to the Lord. →

### **Icon # 59= Majestic: Name of Jesus**

#### **Psalm 8**

**"O Lord, Our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth."**

The name of the Lord is majestic in all the earth, first and foremost, because He is the Inventor of the universe, and of which earth is only a tiny part, yet it is a very special place to Him because on it He placed us humans, the crown of His

creation, as our waiting place for our final destination and true home – the kingdom of heaven.

But sad to say, that although He came into the earth and lived among us humans, for He doesn't want to be distant from us, and although the earth was made by Him, yet the people on earth know Him not. However, His dignity, glory, and grandeur does not depend whether we humans know Him or not. It is more to our own advantage if we know Him so that we will be able to chant His glory together with the babes and infants, that is, together with the saints and holy ones who are babes and infants of what is evil but are grown up and mature in all that is good, right, and true.

For us Christians the name of the Lord Jesus is majestic in all the earth, because by this Name many signs and wonders were made. Demons were cast out through this Name, the sick were healed, and even the dead were raised.

This Name is also a great treasure, for although Peter and John had no silver and gold, yet at the Name of Jesus, which is their only treasure, they gave this Name to a crippled man begging at the temple and he was restored to health. Peter said: "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." The man was healed. Then leaping up he stood and walked and entered the temple walking and leaping and praising God. He, too, joined the babes and infants in chanting the glory of God, for he now lives a new life in the Lord. →

### **Icon # 60= Resisting the Evidence**

"Thou whose glory above the heavens is chanted by the mouth of babes and infants, thou hast founded a bulwark because of thy foes, to still the enemy and the avenger."

It has been said that the imperfection of human nature strongly appears when godly people are offended and grieved at things which should excite their joy and gratitude. Sometimes they are even ready to find fault with God and with those who execute God's plan if their own plans are broken.

This is what had happened in the healing of the lame man in the temple. The priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees were annoyed. But seeing the man that had been healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. They just repressed their anger.

Instead of joining with the innocents in chanting and praising the Lord for all the wonders He had made they resisted the evidence before them and told the

apostles never to preach the name of the Lord Jesus anymore, that is, never to chant or even mention His name anymore.

But this could not be because if the apostles won't chant and praise His name, it is the rocks that will do it. We have an example of this when the Lord Jesus entered Jerusalem. The whole multitude of disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" And some of the Pharisees said to Christ, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." The Lord answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out." →

### **Icon # 61= Prayer: Bulwark & Medicine**

"Thou whose glory above the heavens is chanted by the mouth of babes and infants, thou hast founded a bulwark because of thy foes, to still the enemy and the avenger."

God founded prayer as a bulwark because the devil is continually attacking us at all sides. Prayer, then, is a bulwark in times of temptations in which we can resist the wiles of the evil One. If we pray continually (this does not mean that we have to say a vocal prayer unceasingly, but even just a remembrance of God or awareness of God's presence wherever we are and whatever we do) we are within this bulwark; but if we do not pray we expose ourselves outside in the open air and become an easy prey to the evil One. We would be like a sick person whose immune system is weakened which could no longer resist the bacteria that is continually attacking the body.

Prayer is not only a bulwark in times of temptations; it is also a medicine in times of sickness. Just as a person needs medicine in times of sickness, we too need prayer in times of trials. The prayer that we utter in times of prosperity are like vitamins that supplement the body, but prayers uttered in distress and difficulties are like medicine for the soul. That's where we really need prayer, because just as a seriously sick person will eventually die if he/she doesn't take any medicine, so also the soul without prayer.

That is why we need prayer both in times of prosperity and adversity to keep our souls healthy. If the soul is healthy it is like a strong fortress against the onslaught of sin that constantly besiege it like a bacteria that constantly attacks the cells in our bodies. It has power to withstand against tribulations, dangers, and doubts. God Himself gave us an example to pray always that we may not enter into temptation. In the days of His flesh Christ offered up prayers and supplications to

Him who is able to save Him from death and He was heard for His godly reverence. →

### **Icon # 62= God's Creation: Sky at Night**

“When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou has established; what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?”

One of the great advantages of living in a place, like a monastery, apart from a city, is that during the night the moon and the stars are quite obvious, but you could hardly see these in the city because of the artificial lights that surround it. And besides, if we live in the city there are lots of things that distract us that to look up at the beautiful sky during the night does not even register in our memories. We are so engrossed with the things below that we don't even bother to look at the things above.

Lots of guests that came to our monastery for retreats came to appreciate the beauty of the evening sky where the moon and stars speak eloquently of the grandeur and majesty of God. They said that they are deprived of these in the city.

It always boggles my mind every time I imagine the size of a star and its distance from one another and how many stars in one galaxy and how many galaxies in the universe. Considering all this, our planet earth is just small dot in a huge span of space. Imagine the distance of one star from the other is billion of miles!

Retreatants from St. Louis will say that St. Louis is quite far from here, and yet it is only 200 miles! And people who fly from New York to California will say that it's a long flight, and yet it is only 3,000 miles! How much more the billion miles distance from one star to another, and there are billions and billions of stars in one galaxy and there are billions of galaxies in the universe! And much more if we consider the size of a star that it is more or less 20 times bigger than the earth! [conservative estimate].

Yet it is on earth that God placed human beings, the crown of His creation. It is for the well being of man that God became man that man might become God. It is on earth that God walked as a human being and shared everything in our human nature except sin. He experienced an inner joy when He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit thanking the Father for hiding these things from the clever and worldly wise and has revealed them to the humble. He also experienced grief and anger when the leaders of His people strongly oppose His message, in spite of all the good things He had done as an evidence before them, because of the



hardness of their hearts. He also cried for Jerusalem and Lazarus to express His love and concern. He felt sorrow even unto death as He prayed at the garden of Gethsemane as He was about to undergo His passion.

All these are for the sake of us human beings. For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, as the Psalmist would say, "what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?" Christ cares for us because He is our Good Shepherd. He leads us into the green pastures of the Holy Scripture and the sacraments to nourish our souls. As a good shepherd He laid down His life for us that we may have life and have it abundantly, that is, for all eternity. We have already began this life here and now, every time we give ourselves to one another in charity, for this is the sign that we are His disciples if we have love for one another.

We are able to love one another truly when the love of God is within us, for we cannot truly love unless the love of God is in us. For this reason we need to pray that God gives us His love and to increase and deepen it as time goes by. For us Catholics, especially for us monks, the obvious sign that God gives us His love is the Eucharist, because it is His entire being that is given to us: His Body, Soul, Humanity, and Divinity. In the Eucharist God shows His love and care for us, "what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?" As a mother nourishes her children so God nourishes us not just with ordinary food but He Himself which is highly nutritious for the soul, the heavenly food, for in partaking this food we become what we partake, that is to say, we will be transformed into God. In other words, what God is by nature we will be by grace. In the Eucharist He also fulfills what He had promised saying, "I will be with you until the consummation of the world."

God with us all the days of our lives either in joys and sorrows, or consolations and desolations is an evidence that He is mindful of us and cares for us. He cares for us because we are worth more than many sparrows, and the glory and dignity of our souls is more beautiful than the lilies of the field. Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like the beauty of the soul in the state of grace, for we shine like the stars in resplendent light for all eternity. We will share in the light of God Himself who is the light of the world, and everyone who follows Him in truth will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. Life itself is tantamount to light, because God is the author of all life and He is also light and in Him there is no darkness at all. That is why we say that if a person is in a state of sin he is in darkness and is already dead even though he seems to be alive. But if we walk in the light, as God is pure light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Christ cleanses us of our sins. The forgiveness of our sins is a crown of glory and honor which God bestows on us, just as the prodigal son was restored to his former dignity and glory when he returned to his father's house. →

### Icon # 63= Man: Crown of God's Creation

"Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor. Thos hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet."

I am struck by the phrase "Yet thou hast made him little less than God...." The Psalmist did not say, "Thou hast made him infinitely less than God," but just a "little less than God." This is to show how great is the love of God for us human beings, for love desires no inequality. As human we are always infinitely lower than God, but God became man to raise us up to His own level. In the person of Christ, God took our human nature. As man, Christ is a little less than God that is why He said: "The Father is greater than I," but as God, Christ is equal to the Father that is why He said: "The Father and I are one." To show that we, too, are destined to be one with the Father, He said: "I will ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you." This union between God and us is like the union of iron and fire. Once an iron is placed in the fire it will be transformed into fire without losing its properties. So it is also in our union with God. We will be like Him without losing our human nature. We began this at our baptism, and is intensified in this life by our contact with the word of God, for "he called them gods to whom the word of God came." "I say, 'you are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you....'"

If we are called gods, and children of the Most High, then we are heirs of His kingdom. If we are heirs, then we are given dominion over all creation. For this reason, no matter how poor a person is, what color is his skin, what race he belongs, what language he speaks, no one has the right to despise him/her, because no matter how poor a person is if only he serves God he is greater than the kings of the earth unless that king or that president also serves God. That is why it is said: "To serve God is to reign." Here on earth we begin this when we are able to handle our passions constructively. We reign over them and not they over us, for everyone who has a good control of his passions is much greater than he who conquers a city. But sad to say there are still lots of people who want to reign without serving God, and want to have dominion over all creation while being a slave to one's passion, for whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.

So, if we want to really reign we have to serve God and those whom God put in our paths; and if we want to have dominion over all creation we need to cultivate a virtuous life. We have an example of this in the prophet Daniel who stayed among the lions, and of St. Francis of Assisi who preached to the birds and tamed wild beasts, and of St. Anthony of Padua who preached to the fish, and still other men and women of God. These are the true rulers of God's

creation and have dominion over the works of His hands, for they served God and through the grace of God they have a good control of themselves. They acknowledge God in their deeds. →

### **Icon # 64= Majesty of God: Religious Life**

**“O Lord, Our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth!”**

Now there are 5 billion people on earth. Even if two-thirds of this population does not acknowledge or believe in God, yet it doesn't diminish a bit the glory and majesty of God, for God is sufficient in Himself. We have said that there are billions and billions of stars in a galaxy and there are billions of galaxies in the universe. Our planet is only a tiny dot in the galaxy we belong. So, if people on earth will not acknowledge and praise the Lord there are still other billions and billions of His creation who will magnify and give glory to His name, for if God is able to raise children to Abraham out of the stones, He is also able to let the sun, the moons, the stars, and other planets declare His wondrous deeds, for they, too, will shout: “We are the work of thy hands! You made us and we belong to you.”

For this reason, we don't need numbers of people on earth to glorify the name of the Lord. Even if there are only 300 people on earth who truly seek God and are humble, this would be enough for God, for God is glorified by the humble. The 300 is the lowest estimate just to show that numbers don't matter with God, for in actual fact there are lots of them. Pope John Paul II alone has beatified and canonized a thousand; and there are still thousands of thousands of hidden saints throughout the world who lived simply and humbly either amidst prosperity or adversity. These are they who have learned to be content in whatever state they find themselves. They know how to be abased and they know how to abound. In any and all circumstances they have learned the secret of facing joys and sorrows, gladness and pains, consolations and desolations, plenty and hunger, abundance and want. They can do all things through Him who strengthens them, who loves them to the end and has given His life for them. Now they no longer live for themselves, but for Him.

Their lives declare the glory and majesty of God through all the earth. Though in terms of percentage they are too small, yet their voice penetrates the heaven and is a sweet melody to the ears of God. They cry out, O Lord, Our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth.” We, too, are called to join them. As monks we have the privilege of chanting the praises of God seven times a day. We have to be grateful for this vocation and treasure it in our hearts, for apart from the vocation of the Blessed Virgin to be the mother of God, the vocation to devote one's entire life just to chant the praises of God night and day is the greatest gift that God could bestow on His creatures. Yet it has to go hand in

hand with the quality of one's life that our hearts be totally given to Our Lord, because if not then the words of the Lord will be addressed to us, "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me - in vain do they worship me."

The reason why I said that the vocation to devote one's entire life just to chant the praises of God day and night is the greatest gift that God could bestow on His creatures, because this kind of life is geared toward the contemplation of God. St. Benedict calls it the "Opus Dei," the work of God.

This doesn't mean that the other forms of vocations are not great, for we know that from the beginning of the Church until now thousands and thousands of men and women from other forms of vocations has been canonized. They are like stars that shine for all eternity. Quite a number of them are martyrs. They too are doing the works of God, for them Christ continues the works of the Father, as He said: "My Father is working still, and I am working."

I think it would not be an exaggeration to say that even today there are lots of men and women in the active orders who are faithful in their prayer life. They combine action and contemplation. This is the source of the fruitfulness of their ministry. They went to the presence of God to get all the energy that they need, and from the presence of God they will go out into the presence of men, sharing the blessings they have received from God, and then from the presence of men they go back again to the presence of God. This is the dynamics of those in the active orders or in the married life who live a healthy spiritual life. They are the ones that bear fruit that will last forever.

Being led to this reasoning, I have to qualify the statement that to devote one's entire life just to chant the praises of God day and night is the greatest gift that God could bestow on His creatures. I would say that apart from the vocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary as the Mother of God, the vocation to the Religious Life, whether it would be active or contemplative, is the greatest gift that God could bestow on His creatures. Yet the atmosphere in the contemplative life favors so well in the process of our purification, because we constantly encounter the word of God in our liturgy. We also have ample time for other spiritual readings. The solitude and silence allows the painful memories in the unconscious and sub-conscious to surface. Also the things that we are afraid of will surface. We have less distraction here, so it is to our advantage to deal with it squarely without escaping from it. This is a time to grow more in self-knowledge and trusting in God's love and mercy to bring healing to wounded souls.

It is also a life which is very conducive to the cultivation of good thoughts from which good actions flow. It is also a place where we can rub elbows with God to facilitate the process of our purification and transformation, just as an iron is readily transformed into fire and burned all its rust when it is placed right in the fire, so also our constant contact with God is meant to transform us unto Him - to

grow into mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ who is Lord forever. Amen. →

### **Icon # 65= Gratefulness: Humility**

#### **Psalm 9**

"I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will tell of all thy wonderful deeds."

Since everything that we have comes from God, as the Scripture says, "What have you that you did not receive?" so it is just right and fitting that we have to be thankful to God in our prayers not only for the joys that come from positive experience, but also from the sorrows and sufferings that come our way, because whether we like it or not, our life here on earth is always a mixture of gladness and pain – it is an alternation between positive and negative experiences.

To be able to give thanks with our whole heart in whatever happens to us is a luminous sign that we are now entering into the threshold of His kingdom. This is not a denial of the pain and hurt that we experience, but it's an inner attitude that is developed by exercising our trust in God, it's a belief that all things will work together for our good if only we have love for God, because not even a sparrow falls on the ground without His notice; and we are of more value than many sparrows.

If a person is about to be executed and then somebody volunteers to take his place, this person will be grateful forever to the one who took his place. We have an example of this in the man whom St. Maximilian Kolbe replaced. This man had nothing to give in return to St. Maximilian Kolbe except to be grateful, constantly remembering and treasuring in his heart what St. Maximilian did for him. So, it is also with us. We are ready to be executed because of our sins, but Our Lord Jesus took our place and died for us. By His wounds we are healed.

When we live no longer for ourselves but for Christ, then we express our gratitude to Him. Aside from love, I believe that gratitude is the most appropriate response that we can give to Christ not only because we have nothing of our own but everything comes from God, but also because gratitude is an expression of humility. Persons who are humble are grateful. When the face of Christ is always before the eyes of our mind it will easily evoke thanksgiving, because it leads to remembrance of what He did for us, either by His birth or Passion or Resurrection or Ascension into heaven where He is now seated at the right hand of the Father preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison.

Our Lord Jesus not only died for us, but also prepares for us an eternal kingdom which cannot be shaken, a joy that no one can take away from us. For all this we need to be grateful.

I believe it might be helpful to listen to some luminaries of the Church of their experiences of gratitude. St. Anthony the Great said, "When there is no evil in man, then thanksgiving alone is more pleasing to God than costly sacrifice." For St. Isaac of Syria/Nineveh, "A heart aroused to constant thanksgiving attracts Divine gifts." So, the giving of thanks, then, means the certainty of receiving new graces. St. Isaac also said, "Gratitude from the receiver incites the giver to bestow gifts greater than before."

For Sts Barsanuphius and John [fathers of the Philokalia] to be able to give thanks to God in all circumstances is already a powerful intercession before God for our weaknesses. That is why I believe St. Paul encourages us to dedicate ourselves to thankfulness – to be grateful in everything. When we are weak, yet we are still strong because the power of gratitude is within us.

Also in the Book of Tobit when the archangel Raphael had finished his mission in helping both Tobit and Tobias he called the two of them and said to them: "praise God and give thanks to him; exalt him and give thanks to him in the presence of all the living for what he has done for you. It is good to praise God and to exalt his name, worthily declaring the works of God. Do not be slow to give him thanks. It is good to guard the secret of a king, but gloriously to reveal the works of God." →

### **Icon # 66= Declaring God's Wonderful Deeds**

"I will tell of all thy wonderful deeds."

To reveal the works of God and declare His wonderful deeds is also a form of thanksgiving. It will just come out of a person. It is very hard to restrain it. We have an example of this when "a certain leper came to Christ beseeching him, and kneeling said to him, 'If you will, you can make me clean.' Moved with pity, He stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I will; be clean.' And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. And He sternly charged him, and sent him away at once, and said to him, 'See that you say nothing to any one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to the people.' But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news...." So, for the leper to express his thanks to God is to declare the wonderful deeds Christ has done for him.

There are many ways in which we can express our gratitude to God. One would be when we no longer live for ourselves but for Christ. Another would be when we declare the wonderful deeds Christ have done in our lives. For example, for calling us to live in a monastic way of life. This is a tremendous gift that we have to be grateful for all the days of our life. Another would be when we keep Christ's commandments, for keeping His commandments is the surest sign that we love Him, as He Himself said: "He who has my commandments and keeps it, he it is who loves me."

These are some of the ways in which we can express our gratitude to God and declare His wonderful deeds. →

### **Icon # 67 = Be glad and rejoice in God**

"I will be glad and exult in thee, I will sing praise to thy name, O Most High."

This reminds me of the Magnificat of Our Lady. Her soul magnifies the Lord and her spirit rejoices in God her savior.

Often times we can experience a certain gladness when a close friend of ours, or loved one, will come and see us. This is because we have an affinity with them. This is also true in our relationship with God. He comes and sees us either through His words in Scripture or through creation or through the simple events in our daily lives.

When we have an affinity with God we can often exclaim, when we are struck by the beauty of a wild flower, "Oh, wow!" "If this creature is so beautiful, so gorgeous, how much more the beauty of the Creator!" To have experienced this is already a foretaste of that eternal beauty, joy, and gladness which God has prepared for those who love Him.

We can also experience gladness in God whenever our conscience bears witness to us that we done what is pleasing in His sight no matter how trivial or menial it might be. It can be in a simple act of kindness that we show to another, or respect to one's idea or personality. It can be also in our pursuit of whatever is good, right, and true, for God is found in whatever is good, whatever is right, and whatever is true.

Doing faithfully our everyday chores such as doing dishes, pots and pans, wrapping and decorating fruitcakes, is good because we believe that this is the will of God for us. The will of God for us is for our best, thus doing some manual

labor is good both for our soul and body. We can prolong our prayer and meditation if we have something “material” to hold on rather than just sitting, with our eyes closed, eight hours a day.

The Desert Fathers weaved baskets all day while saying a mantra, an ejaculatory prayer. They rejoiced in God, because they were convinced that what they were doing was. St. Teresa of Avila said that she found God in the pots and pans!

Since God is righteous, so whoever does what is right is acceptable to Him. And also, “if we know that God is righteous, we may be sure that every one who does right is born of him.” If we are born of God, then we have a fairly good reason to rejoice in God, because we are now His children. If we are children, then we are heirs of His promise, not only of eternal life, but what God is, for we shall see Him as He is. Everything that belongs to God is ours, too.

Since everything belongs to God, so everything is ours, too. This is realized in our union with Christ, for in Him, with Him, and through Him we are to receive the entirety of God – His wisdom, power, glory, honor, knowledge, beauty, goodness, truthfulness, kindness, His love, etc. as Christ said: “All that the Father has is mine.” To accomplish this, He said (referring to the Holy Spirit), “He will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

Since everything will be ours, so, in that day we will ask nothing from Him, and our hearts will rejoice and no one will take that joy from us. This joy is secure because it is in the Father’s hand and no one can snatch it from the Father’s hand. So, we will be glad and exult in God for all eternity. →

### **Icon # 68 = Praise the Lord**

“I will sing praise to thy name, O Most High.”

As monks, it’s a tremendous blessings to dedicate our whole lives for the specific purpose of singing the praises of God. This is our contribution to the mystical body of Christ, Once we are convinced that this is the kind of life that God is calling us, then we will be at rest and contented in this way of life, for this way of life is a life of prayer and love; and prayer is a song sung only to God in the stillness of our heart. “Be still and know that I am God.” In the stillness of our heart we grow in knowledge of God, just as Elijah had known the presence of God in the gentle breeze and not in the earthquake and strong wind.



If our heart is still, it is a fertile ground for the cultivation of virtues. It doesn't mean that it has no longer weeds in it, but since it is soft the pulling out of the weeds is not as hard when it is impermeable or even restless. In the stillness of our heart we can easily hear the word of God whispering within. We can also hear the sound of the birds, and appreciate the beauty of the flowers and all other of God's creation. All this evokes a song of praise to the name of Our God, the Most High. →

### **Icon # 69 = Overcome Evil with Good**

"When my enemies turned back, they stumbled and perished before thee."

Our enemies will stumble and perish before God whenever we divert our attention from them. For example, when we find ourselves thinking evil or lustful thoughts, once we are aware of these we think of Christ and what He did for us these evil and lustful thoughts will stumble, that is, will be weakened and then perish, oftentimes even without our notice. In other words, we overcome evil with good. However, we need always to be on guard, that is to say, we have to put the face of Christ before us always all the day long from the time of our rising from bed to the time we go to bed at night. In this way, evil thoughts and desires will be easily checked and we will not be off guard when they come to us. Our mind will be trained in distinguishing good from evil, and we will not be ignorant of the designs of the evil One, because Christ who is in us will be our light that enlightens our darkness, for when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible and anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, darkness will stumble and perish before the light.

Yet, we should not be too confident and relax our effort in practicing Christian value, because we are engaged in a spiritual war without truce. When we think that all is peaceful, then, suddenly our enemies will ambush us, for they are lying in wait whether we are always attentive to Christ the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, or whether we are thinking more of the things of this world: what we are to eat, what we are to drink, how we are to dress, etc.. These things are good but it should not become an endless preoccupation. Can we imagine if we are preoccupied with these things when there are millions and millions of people around the world who have nothing to eat and go to bed tormented by hunger and thirst, and lack clothing!

If we pay much attention to these things rather than to Christ, then, we become an easy target of our enemies, because food and drink can lead to gluttony and dissipation; and too much concern for dress will lead to vanity. But if we are sober in our use of these things, our enemies will stumble and perish when they try to attack us. →

## Icon # 70 = Just Cause

"For thou hast maintained my just cause; thou has sat on the throne giving righteous judgment."

Our cause is just when we live a life worthy of our calling with lowliness and meekness, eager to maintain the unity of spirit in the bond of peace. In this way God will be on our side. If God is on our side, then, who will be against us? If God, who is the judge, is our own advocate, then who will accuse us before Him? Is the evil One? Yes, but the accuser of our brethren has been cast out from heaven who accuses them day and night.

Yet, even though God Himself is our advocate and judge, He will judge us according to our deeds, "For he will render to every person according to his deeds: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil..., but glory and honor and peace for every one who does good...."

Therefore, those who think they stand need to be careful lest they fall, because not every one who says, "Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father in heaven."

Our cause is just when we are willing to share our bread to the hungry and give drink to the thirsty even a cup of cold water for the sake of the Name of Christ, and not to say to those who ask for our help, "Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it" – when we have it with us. Also when we strive not to return evil for evil even though we are tempted to get even with someone who offends us.

I believe that Our Lord Jesus will certainly help us in this endeavor, for left to ourselves it is extremely hard to do it because it is beyond our wounded human nature, but with His help all things are possible. In so doing we give glory to Him who alone does wondrous deeds. We will grow in acknowledging the working of His grace within us, and with St. Paul we can say, "God's grace is sufficient for me, for his power is made perfect in weakness....I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

Once we are fortified with the grace of God, we will also develop a sense of confidence on the day of judgment, for Our Lord who sat on the throne will give a righteous judgment. We trust that we will hear Him say, "Come, blessed of my Father and inherit the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world." →

**Icon # 71 = Everlasting ruins**

"Thou hast rebuked the nations, thou hast destroyed the wicked; thou hast blotted out their name for ever and ever. The enemy have vanished in everlasting ruins; their cities thou hast rooted out; the very memory of them has perished."

Then the Lord will say to those who deliberately do evil and no longer have any sense of sin, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

The Son of Man will send His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers. But since the Lord is full of compassion and rich in mercy and does not delight in the death of the sinner, He always gives us a chance to repent, as it is written: If today you hear his voice harden not your heart." "Even if your sin is as red as scarlet I will make it as white as snow." None of the evil deeds we did shall be remembered.

On the other hand, if after repeated admonition we still despise His law and do not heed His command and does not want Him to rule over us, but continue to do what is evil in His sight, then, we will hear His terrible words: "These enemies of mine who does not want me to rule over them, slay them in my presence." Their memory, then, will perish. →

**Icon # 72 = Judge: Word of God**

"But the Lord sits enthroned for ever, he has established his throne for judgment; and he judges the world with righteousness, he judges the people with equity."

The Lord sits enthroned forever because He is a king from eternity to eternity. There is never a time that he is not king. Even when He became man He was still king. He humbled Himself that we may learn from Him. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. And His judgment is just, because He does not seek His own will but the will of Him who sent Him. The Father has given Him authority to execute judgment, because the Son knows what it is to be the Son of man.

People on earth judge according to appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. Thus His judgment is right. People on earth judge according to the flesh and often times pervert justice because of a bribe, but the Lord judges no one. Yet even if He judges, His judgment is true, for it is not He alone who judges, but He and the Father who sent Him. If anyone hears the sayings of the Lord and

does not keep them, Our Lord does not judge that person, for He did not come to judge but to save the world. Everyone who reject Him and does not receive His sayings has a judge; the word that He has spoken will be his judge on the last day.

The word of God is like a double-edged sword. On one side it will become our judge and opponent if we do not live in conformity with it, that is, if we do not live a life worthy of our calling. So, while we are still on earth we have to settle with the word of God lest it will be the One who will hand us over to the guard and the guard will put us in prison. On the other side it will be our advocate at the right hand of the Father. It will bear witness to our own spirit that we behave in good conscience. It alone will be out witness in all that we do even the deeds that is done in secret.

At first the word of God will walk with us on tortuous paths training our understanding on the conflicting events of life, both the positive and negative things that happen to us. He will bring fear and cowardice upon us to test us whether we will still trust Him and cling to Him whatever happens either in joy or in sorrow. He will examine us by His discipline, though for the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, and He will search us whether we are willing to take up our cross and follow Him. Once He sees the spark of our response He will come straight back to us and gladden our hearts and will reveal His secrets to us. That is why Our Lord rejoices in His spirit and thanked the Father saying, "Father, Lord of heaven and earth, I thank you for hiding these things to the worldly wise and the clever and thou hast revealed them to the little ones. Yes, Father, for such is thy gracious will." Then we will enter into a friendship with God. He no longer call us His servants but His friends, for all that He has heard from the Father He made known to us.

Thus the word of God will be our teacher, advocate, and guide. He will teach us no longer to judge anyone according to mere human standards though we once had done it. If we fail in this area He will remind us, for He will bring to our remembrance all that He had said. The word of God will also instruct us. He will be with us wherever we are and whatever we do. He will speak to our hearts. His voice becomes louder and clear when our heart is still and know that He is God, and also when we work in silence, because this is to allow the word of God to surface in our memory. Not that we don't have to speak while at work, but to speak only when it is necessary in favor of the higher good which is a heart to heart talk with God. When speaking with other people flows from our dialogue with God, then, it will be a healthy and beneficial communication.

Beneficial communication, then, is derived from a healthy form of silence. If we communicate this way there will be less chance of falling into the snare of the tongue which St. James called the unrighteous world among our members,

because we use it to bless the Lord and at the same time we use it to speak evil against another person. Conversation is often times very tricky, because we often begin it with something that is harmless even conversing about the things of God, then, when it is prolonged we notice that we start talking about people and their attitudes and how they do things. We even criticize them and consider it as “honesty of one's feeling.” We begin in spirit and end up in the flesh! This ought not to be so, because it is unnatural for a spring to pour forth from the same opening fresh water and brackish.

However, this doesn't mean that if we have some difficulties with another person we can no longer unburden our own feeling, but it has to be in a healthy way, that is, to unburden it to someone we can trust and is a lover of God and not just to anybody because it will become gossip. Gossip is not good for it will lead to slander and detraction.

Slander and detraction are not good and just because it is contrary to love, for love demands the good name and reputation of another person. In slander and detraction we destroy the reputation and good name of other people. In doing this we are also destroying ourselves, because the measure that we measure with will be measured to us.

Moreover, death and life are in the power of the tongue and those who love it will eat its fruits. So, how can we avoid the snares of the tongue? One way to avoid the snares of the tongue is to cultivate the spirit of silence: both external and internal silence. One of the desert fathers carried a pebble in his mouth for three years to learn silence. Internal silence is even more difficult, because we often hear the inner voices within. At first we have to be nourished with the milk of faith – a belief that what we do to our brethren we do it to Christ. As we grow in faith, then, we will be prepared to be nourished with the solid food of sound doctrine so that our faculties will be trained to distinguish between the voice of the Good shepherd and the voice of the thief who enters our soul to snatch us away from Christ. If we are the sheep of Christ, then, we will know His voice, for the sheep know the voice of the shepherd and the voice of the stranger they will not follow, that is to say, once we recognize evil thought in our heart we do not entertain them but flee from them. We flee from them by constantly bleating out the name of Our Lord Jesus in our heart.

Once we do this we notice that evil thoughts diminish its intensity and vanished, for they could not withstand the name of Our Lord Jesus. However, this doesn't mean that evil thoughts no longer come to us, for as long as we are still here on earth evil thoughts will come to us whether we like it or not. They come from our wounded human nature, but we are given tools to discern good from evil thoughts because from our thoughts, either good or bad, issue our words and actions.

These tools are God's commandments or Christ's teaching. To know how to use these tools helps us not to pronounce condemnatory judgment against our brothers and sisters, for Christ said: "Judge not and you will not be judged; condemn not and you will not be condemned, for with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged." Thus slander or calumny and detraction are forms of pronouncing judgment against our neighbors. So, if we judge our neighbors we are not a doer of the law, but a judge. But there is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. So, who are we that we judge our neighbor?

Let us pray, then, for the grace to grow in self-knowledge, for self-knowledge tempers our tendency to judge other people, because no matter how great progress we make in the spiritual life there is still something in us that has to be removed. So, instead of judging other people we will learn to judge ourselves; and if we judge ourselves truly, we will not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

It has been pointed out that if someone commits a fault and we utter a condemnatory judgment against that person we will certainly fall in that same fault. I believe this is to caution us that harsh judgment is slippery, so we have to be very careful once we notice in our heart that we are judging other people. This doesn't prevent the thoughts to come, but once we notice them we are free to think something more positive about the other person. We can redirect the thoughts to something good, for example, by thinking about Christ, His life, death, and resurrection, or by thinking about heaven and the eternal joy prepared for us. We will be with the angels and saints for all eternity. All things in this world will pass away. God alone suffices. He judges the world and all people with righteousness and justice because He knows everything and sees everything even the deep recesses in our heart. We can trust that His judgment is just and be favorable to us especially when we have love for Him, for love covers a multitude of sins. →

### **Icon #73 = Stronghold in Different Kinds of Oppression**

"The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble."

In this world the oppressed are the poor and the weak. The perpetrators are the mighty and the arrogant. But in the other world (which already begins in this world), the poor in spirit are the blessed ones because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The weak are the strong because God's grace is sufficient for them, for God's power is made perfect in weakness, that is to say, God who is with them is stronger than he who is in the world. The thoughts of the arrogant are being confused, and if they are mighty, or at least they think they are, they will be cast

down from their position that they may learn a lesson, in the hope that on the Day of Judgment their soul will be saved. Their inner eyes will be opened to see that everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and everyone who humbles himself will be exalted, for it is not the person who commends himself that is accepted by the Lord, but the person whom the Lord commends.

Oppression can be physical or spiritual or both. For instance, a person can be oppressed physically by means of bodily sickness or by an accident that cripples the body, and yet as he/she passes through it he/she is able to find meaning in this condition, and accept it. So, even if his/her body is wasted away his/her spirit is being renewed everyday. He/she still puts his/her trust in the Lord, for in the Lord he/she found peace which the world cannot give.

On the other hand, a person could be healthy in body but is oppressed spiritually. For example, if a person is paranoid he will never be at rest because the spirit of suspicion is tormenting him. He will see things through dark colored glasses. He will turn upside down the good intention of other people. Or when a person is oppressed by the spirit of greed. He could hardly sleep at night thinking how to make gain and amass material things not knowing that when he woke up in the day of reckoning he was just dreaming.

A person could also be oppressed both physically and spiritually. For instance, if a person suffer from a severe disease or has an accident and is paralyzed and becomes bitter about it and his spirit continuously weighs him down, then, he is oppressed both physically and spiritually. A person can be also oppressed by another person when he is abused or maltreated, being unjustly treated or exploited or used. A person can also be oppressed by the spirit of lust or the desire for power, or by the spirit of vainglory or pride.

In all these different kinds of oppression if the Lord is not our stronghold, then we will surely be battered-up to pieces. We will be likened to a house built on sand without a foundation that is being buffeted by the winds and knocked down by the floods. They are too much for us human beings whose wounded human nature makes us vulnerable to various kinds of evils. Yet when we learn to pray and put our trust in the Lord, then, He will become our stronghold, because is a bulwark in times of distress, a fortress where we can take refuge. Our Lord summons us to come to Him when we feel that life become burdensome so that in Him we can find rest for our wearied souls. If the Lord is the stronghold of our life we can have strength and courage to withstand the different kinds of oppression that try to harm us not so much with an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth, but by overcoming evil with good and by the conviction that all things will work together for good with those who have love for God. We can call this the resistance of love. This kind of resistance is stronger than any other kind of resistance, because He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world. Thus

we will be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man. So, the Lord is our stronghold both in times of peace and trouble. As long as we do not go out from this stronghold we will be safe, that is, as long as we live a life worthy of our calling with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, and eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. →

### **Icon # 74 = Eucharist: Spiritual Sex**

“And those who know thy name put their trust in thee, for thou, O Lord, has not forsaken those who seek thee.”

After St. Paul has a concrete experience of Christ in his daily life – in all his troubles, trials, difficulties, sufferings, in his joys and consolations, he declared with boldness: “I know whom I have believed.”

Often times, it is through the little things, no matter how insignificant or menial it might be that we notice God's providential guidance in our lives. It is through these little things that our trust in God is developed. This trust is dynamic, for it will grow and strengthen. It is like a seed that is being planted in us. In biblical sense, to know someone is to have a concrete experience of someone. For example, Adam knew Eve and Eve conceived a child. So, when we know God we also conceive the child of virtue, for virtue is the fruit of the encounter between us and God just as the child is the fruit of the union between a man and a woman. Knowing each other, the man and the woman are no longer two but one. Christ knew the Father so well that He could say with absolute certainty: “I and my father are one.” St. Paul knew Christ so well that he could say with confident: “It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me.”

So, we too, as we grow in trust and knowledge of God will become one spirit, one body with Him. This union of our body and spirit with the body and spirit of Christ is realized concretely in the Eucharist, for our blood becomes one with His blood and our body becomes one with His body. In other words, the Eucharist is the spiritual sex-union between the soul and God. This is the most intimate knowledge that we could have of God in this world and reach its unending climax when our soul is forever united with God with all its delight and sweetness in the kingdom of heaven.

No matter how delightful sexual union is between a man and a woman in this world it is infinitely lesser compared to the eternal union of the soul and God which begins here on earth in the Eucharist and be consummated in heaven, because the sexual union of a man and a woman cannot be sustained for a long period not even for 5 minutes though you can feel its afterglow but then will pass away. Whereas in heaven the joy and sweetness and the indescribable



beauty of its delight will last for all eternity. This is what God had promised to those who love Him.

Some of us may wonder how come that many people even in the religious life who receives the Eucharist every day, that is, have spiritual sex with God, still does not bear the fruit of virtue; whereas some have one or two virtues, and some have lots of virtues.

In the first case, we can offer two possible reasons: whether the soul is completely sterile or she took an abortifacient pill, that is, doing deeds contrary to the will of God, full of pride in her heart, uttering harmful words, etc..These she did either before or after she received the Eucharist, so it prevents the action of grace within the soul just as the abortifacient pill that a woman took after or before sexual intercourse prevents the formation of a child within her womb. This pill could also be "immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like." St. Paul warn that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God, that is to say, shall not bear the fruit of virtue.

In the second case, one or two virtues are tangible in a person but the others are not developed either because the soul took secretly the abortifacient pill, or the time of her menopause has come, that is to say, she became very rigid and don't want to open herself to the point of views of other people. She also closed herself to the possibilities of how to do things. She always insist that what she had been doing is the only best way to do things. In other words, she is full of self-will which also prevents the formation of other virtues.

However, in these two cases the soul should not ultimately be discouraged because there's still hope. In the first case, the soul has to go to a physician, that is, to Christ the physician of our soul, and laid bare her case, then, undergo a thorough examination whether she is really sterile or not, or it might be that her cell count is too low that she needs more of the vitamins of spiritual reading and ejaculatory prayer or meditation to enhance her cell count.

If she is really sterile, again, she should not be discouraged because she can still have a child, for instance, by means of adoption. She can adopt a new born child of humility and nourish it as her own. Then, when the child of humility grows she can adopt again another child of kindness and patience, etc.

On the other hand, if she is really fertile but only took abortive pills for fear of responsibilities and to satisfy her own self-interest and passionate desires, this would be very difficult because each one of us were given the freedom that befits a human person, but only not to use our freedom as pretext for doing evil or as an opportunity for the flesh to gratify its desires.

In this state she needs to re-evaluate her values and need to be mindful that when she entered the religious life she gave herself to Christ as His bride, as St. Paul said: "I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband."

Once she realized that heavenly values are far greater than the earthly values, then, the process of true conversion begins. She no longer judge anyone by merely human standard like she used to, she is now prudent in her speech, no longer uttering unkind words, she also uses things properly knowing that things are only means to an end not an end in itself. Remembrance of God become more alive in her and God's presence is so tangible. Then she begins to bear fruit that befits repentance, that is, the fruits of virtues.

In the second case, if it is through a natural process that a soul had only one or two virtues that are so apparent, that is to say, she strives to live a godly life, then, she should not be discouraged, because just as not every sexual intercourse produces a child even if they had it every day, so also it is possible that not every reception of the Eucharist will produce the child of virtue right away. But again, the soul has to check from time to time whether she is taking abortive pills secretly because she doesn't want to have many children of virtues, that is to say, she wants to limit the actions of God in her life.

If the time of her menopause has come, even this the soul should not be discouraged, because just as Sarah and Elizabeth bore a child in their old age, so also by the mercy of God the soul who lives in the religious life for many years, though having no children of virtues, but still persevere in their commitment, will eventually give birth to virtues, as it is written, "The barren woman has borne many children." But, "how can this be?" asked the soul. This thing is impossible to man, but not with God for all things is possible with God. This is to show that the life of virtue is primarily God's doing and that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. God is faithful in His promise, so He will bring to perfection the good works He has began in us. No doubt, the day when we offered ourselves to God in the religious life is one of the highest goods that God worked in us, because the only thing He asked of us was our free and conscious offering of ourselves – to give ourselves totally to Him. So, as long as we are faithful to God and do not look for another lover, just as Sarah and Elizabeth were faithful to their respective husband, God will look kindly upon us and remember the day when we signed the marriage covenant with Him. Another lover here means worldly desires or inordinate love for the things of this world, because if anyone loves the world, love for God us not in the soul. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of God but is of the world.

There's also another woman named Hannah the wife of Elkanah who was barren and yet bore a child in her old age. All this shows that there's nothing impossible with God. There's always hope.

However, the soul has to pray earnestly to give birth to virtue, just as these three women earnestly desire to have a child. Another example is Rachel who said to Jacob: "Give me children, or I shall die!"

So, if the soul remains faithful to God in spite of her trials and does not look for another lover, but earnestly pray to God to give her children of virtue so that she will not die, then God will grant the desire of her heart, as Christ said: "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be granted to you. By this my Father will be glorified if you bear much fruit...fruit that will last forever."

In the third case the soul is very fruitful. She and God does not practice family planning, as the world knows it, but rather family planting. The soul loves to have spiritual sex with God everyday in the Eucharist. They are cooing with each other in some other times during the day through spiritual reading or meditative walk in which the soul is very much aware of the presence of her beloved and conversing with Him in the depths of her heart, or through private prayer, because when we read God is speaking to us and when we pray we speak to God. Our reading supports our prayer, and our prayer helps us to understand what we read, especially when we read Scripture or other spiritual books.

Prayer is a kiss which we give to our beloved. Just as husband and wife (or any other lovers) begin their sexual intercourse with a kissing and then kissing ceases when their sexual organs are united, so also prayer is the beginning of the soul's union with God, and prayer ceases when the soul is lost in God. That is why St. Isaac of Nineveh said that the highest form of prayer is when the monk no longer knows that he is praying.

Remembrance of God during the day or awareness of His presence is also a form of cooing with God. We never gaze God without God gazing at us. When we constantly look at Him we will eventually be transformed into Him, because love makes the lover equal to the object of his/her love. When we love someone we will have a certain knowledge about that person, because love itself has its own knowledge. So, if we have love for God we have a certain knowledge of Him. This knowledge is more of an experiential knowledge, because when the love of God for us and our love for Him meets it begets the fruit virtues. Since the soul is fertile it bears lots of virtues, just as the seed that falls on fertile soil bears much fruit. Christ had confirmed this when he said: "He who abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit."

Just as children give joy and happiness to their parents (we are talking here of children who are not rebellious to their parents and are not engaged in lawless deeds), so also the life of virtue gives happiness to the soul. This doesn't mean that the soul has no longer any weakness or doesn't fail or doesn't have any more sin, because when we say we have no sin we lie and the truth is not in us, as St. John would say. That is why we can hear lots of saints, as if vying with each other, say: "I am the greatest of sinners." St. Therese of Lisieux is one of these saints who said she is the greatest of sinners. There are still lots of them who said this. This boggles our minds, because we know that the saints have reached the height of sanctity and have practiced heroic virtues and yet they will say that they are the greatest of sinners. One of the most obvious reasons for this is that they have attained a profound self-knowledge, because the more they draw closer to God the more their souls are enlightened and the more their souls are enlightened the more they saw the holiness of God and the more they saw the holiness of God the more they saw that their own holiness is still far beyond the holiness of God. God is now their standard of holiness. They adhere to the admonition of God Himself: "Be holy as I, the Lord your God, am holy."

These are the people who have a clear knowledge of God. Even their simple and menial job such as washing dishes and pots and pans is of high value in God's sight, because the greatness of a person is consist in living a virtuous life and not so much in the kind of work he/she is doing. We have a good example of this in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We never heard of any extraordinary deeds she has done. All were very simple and menial jobs such as washing the swaddling clothes, preparing meals, and the other household works. Yet, her little gesture is highly pleasing to God than all the works of angels and saints combine together. God knows her and she knows God and this union of knowing begets the eternal Son of God, Our Lord Jesus Christ. She already conceives Him in her heart before she conceived Him in her womb. Her knowledge of God reaches to such an extent that she bears fruit of God Himself in the likeness of man. God in His knowing of the Blessed Virgin Mary became man, so, we too, in our knowing of God will become like God. What God is by nature we will be by grace. Isn't this a wonderful form of knowing?

This kind of knowing is noble because it unites, guides, and leads us to our ultimate destiny – to be with God forever. The Baltimore catechism illustrates this when it said: "Why does God made man? God made man in order that man may know Him, serve Him, and love Him in this life and be happy with Him in the next." This kind of knowing is also very safe because it does not puff up. If it is force to boast it can boast in the Lord, as St. Paul said: "if anyone should boast let him boast in the Lord."

Finally, this form of knowing begets the fruits of the Spirit, that is to say, the children of the Spirit such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, fortitude, temperance, courage, justice,

faith, & hope. There are still many children of the spirit that are not mention here for they are many to be counted. Whatever is good, whatever is just, whatever is true – these are children of the Spirit. All these children are in the soul. Just as a woman does not bear 20 children at one time, but normally only one at a time and sometimes twins or triplets, so also the soul does not bear all these virtues at once. And just as a child does not become an adult right away at the moment of his/her birth but has to pass through the different stages in life until it becomes more responsible and mature, so also the soul does not become full-grown right away but has to pass through the different stages of purification and illumination until she attains to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Just as trust is very important for the development of a child, so also those who know the name of the Lord put their trust in Him in order to grow in maturity. Trust is like a seed that grows and develops when nourished by prayer and experiential knowledge of the sweetness of the Lord, as the Psalmist says: "Taste and see how sweet the Lord is." But some people would say, "What if you have not tasted the sweetness of the Lord?" In this case the soul has not yet an experiential knowledge of God, because once the soul has an experiential knowledge of God sweetness is part of it just as sweetness or delight or pleasure (whatever you call it) is part of the sexual intercourse of a man and a woman. But in this life this sweetness is not a permanent state, because the soul has to learn to walk by faith and not by feelings. Feelings will come and go, but it is necessary that the soul has to experience the sweetness of the Lord so that in times of adversity she will not be forgetful of prosperity and in times of prosperity she will not be unmindful of adversity.

Just as love is more important in the relationship of a man and a woman than the sexual pleasure, so also faith or trust in God is more important than the sweetness the soul feels in her relationship with God, because without faith the soul cannot hope to please God. Just as without love the sexual pleasure derives from the intercourse of a man and a woman became more of an animal instinct, because animals do it, too, by mere instinct, so also the feeling of sweetness derives from the relationship of the soul and God became more of an emotionalism if the soul doesn't have a faith in God.

Some people might wonder how the soul can enter into a relationship with God if she doesn't have faith in the first place. In this state the soul is likened to the seed that fell on rocky ground who at first experienced sweetness and gladness in her relationship with God, but falls away when trials or tribulations came because she has no root in herself. In other words, the seemingly faith that she has is devoid of charity expressed in good works because faith without work is dead. For example, her brother and sister are and in lack of daily food and she just say to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the

things needed for the body. She praise God with her lips but her heart is far from Him. In this case she still doesn't know the Lord, or if she had some knowledge of the Lord it is not yet enlightened, because the Lord said that whatever we do to the least of His brethren we do it to Him.

Therefore, the surest sign that a person has an enlightened knowledge of the Lord and that her faith is alive is when she strives to put into practice the teachings of the Lord, as the Lord said: "He who has my commandments and keep them he it is who love Me." So, everyone who loves God has an enlightened knowledge of God. Consequently, the soul will put her trust in God, just as it is natural for a woman to put her trust in the man she loves. →

### **Icon # 75 = Searching: God & Man**

"For thou, O Lord, has not forsaken those who seek Thee."

When the first man and woman sinned against God they hid from God and God was seeking for them in the garden. Sin is a movement away from God, but when a person experienced conversion he will be drawn toward God. We have an example of this in the life of St. Peter. His knowledge of his own sinfulness makes him say to the Lord: "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man." But after his conversion, when they were fishing, he was told that it was the Lord and immediately he jumped into the water toward Christ. Before he jumped he was naked then put on his clothes, that is to say, he puts on a new man, for if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation.

Another example is St. Mary Magdalene. We are told that she was possessed by seven devils which remind us of the seven capital sins, but her encounter with Christ completely changed her whole life and she follows Christ and never left Him even at the Cross.

On Easter Sunday she went to the tomb seeking for Christ. Her self-knowledge that she was a forgiven sinner gave her enough confidence to seek Him whom her soul loves. It also happened in the garden, and the Lord did not forsake her for eventually He revealed Himself to her. Just as Adam and Eve were found by God when they were hiding from Him, so also God was found by St. Mary Magdalene when she sought Him with all her heart.

Though God is wholly Other, yet the beauty of this searching for God is that we don't have to travel around the world to look for Him because God is within us and around us, for in Him we live and move and have our being. We can find God not only in the exquisite beauty of creation and the precise order of the universe, but also in the suffering humanity and those who were abandoned because God, too, had suffered on the Cross and was abandoned by those closest to Him to remind us that joy and suffering are part and parcel of our

human existence. On Calvary Christ was brave enough to die and the Blessed Virgin Mary was brave enough to live to teach us that both dying and living demand the same ingredience of courage.

We seek God because we have already been found by Him just as we love God because He loved us first. Hiding from God and seeking God all happen in the garden of our hearts. We hide from God because of our sins. We seek God by our repentance, and finally find Him by His forgiveness. God will never forsake those who seek Him with all their hearts, with all their minds, with all their souls, and with all their strength, for God ardently longs for us more than our desire to seek Him. He even left the angels in heaven to look for us to bring us back to Him.

God, in looking for us, emptied Himself and took off the robe of His glorious splendor and took the form of a servant and becoming like us in all things except sin. He who is adored and served by the angels became a servant for our sake to teach us that in our seeking for Him we, too, need to empty ourselves and take off the robe of our human pride and be willing to serve one another looking not only to our own interests, but also to the interests of others. This demands a dying to self that we may learn how to yield to the wishes of other people and control the itch of being self-assertive.

Our belief tells us that God is in each person and whatever we do to the least of our brethren we do it to Him. Thus we begin to look for Him in each other in our community which is the setting – the new garden wherein we are to find God concretely, not only in spirit but also in flesh and blood.

Once the eyes of our soul are opened we can see God in the little act of kindness that we show to one another, in the gentle smile that we exhibit, and in our patience in bearing each other's weakness wither in mind or body, for this, too, is a sign of love and a form of laying our life for our brothers and sisters as the Lord said: "Greater love has no man that this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

The Scripture tells us also that it is in our patience that we share in the sufferings of Christ; and we need patience to do the will of God.

Love then is the eye that makes us see God in each other and the sharpness of its vision is proportion to its purity. Love is nourished by sacrifice, for if there is no sacrifice there is no love and if there is no love we cannot see God and if we cannot see God we are in the darkness still.

St. John said that everyone who loves abides in the light and everyone who does not love is in the darkness and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. This darkness is like a veil that covers the eyes

of the soul. It can be lifted up only when anyone turns to the Lord just as darkness is vanish when light shines upon it, for Our Lord said: "I am the light of the world. Everyone who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Seeking God, therefore, is a form of discipleship. We follow Him wherever He leads us even to the place where, for our natural instinct, we don't want to go. We have an example of this in St. Peter. Our Lord said to him: "When you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go." In the case of St. Peter the place where he does not wish to go was the place of death.

At this time Christians were persecuted and St. Peter wanted to leave Rome, but on his way out he was met by Christ. St. Peter asked Him, "Lord, where are you going?" Our Lord told him that He was going to Rome to be crucified again. Then and there St. Peter went back to Rome and was crucified upside down.

As Christians, it is only in Christ that we can have the courage and strength to face squarely the trials and difficulties that come our way. In our case, that could be to face the areas in our lives that we are afraid of. For example, some painful memories. We normally don't want to go to the place of our painful memories. Often times we are tempted to run away from them, but when we found Christ in our lives He gave us enough strength and confidence to allow them to surface in our consciousness that we may be able to handle them constructively; and by the help of Christ's grace it will be healed eventually. For some people this healing may take a good number of years. One of the monks I know at New Clairvaux Abbey in Vina, California, said that "things that bothered me 20 yrs ago doesn't bothered me now." So inner healing is part of searching for God. In this case we can say, "When I found Him He gave me back myself."

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### **Icon # 76 = Angels & Men: Singing God's Praises**

"Sing praises to the Lord, who dwells in zion! Tell among the peoples his deed!"

Once we found God in our lives we will learn to praise Him and even sing that praises. Praises are fitting for loyal hearts. It is an expression of gratitude for all the things that God does in our lives. St. Paul encourages us all to sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in our hearts to God. Singing makes our hearts young. It lifts our hearts when we are happy. It tempers our sorrows when we are sad.



For us monks and nuns who devote ourselves to the singing of the praises of God, as the Psalmist say, "Seven times a day I praise Thee," it is a tremendous gift that God has given us to be able to experience a foretaste of the life of the Cherubim and Seraphim who continuously sing the praises of God. The Cherubim and Seraphim don't have an active apostolate. Their main task is to stay in the presence of God singing His praises. It is the guardian angels and even the archangels who do the active ministry. They are the ones who are directly involved with people. It is our belief that each one of us has a guardian angel assigned to us by God since birth. We also knew from Scriptures that the archangels, e.g., Sts. Gabriel and Raphael were sent by God to deliver a message or to help people recover from their sickness as in the case of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Zechariah, Tobit, & Peter, etc.

And none of the guardian angels and the archangels would ever criticize the Seraphim and Cherubim for having no active apostolate especially that the needs are getting bigger because of the increase of population of the human race. On the other hand, none of the Cherubim and Seraphim would ever despise the guardian angels or the archangels for having an outside apostolate but are grateful to God for giving them such beautiful and wonderful ministry, for there are varieties of gifts, but the same spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one.

However, it doesn't mean that only the Cherubim and Seraphim are constantly in the presence of God. Our guardian angels, too, constantly gaze at the face of God. Our Lord made this clear when He warned all of us, saying: "See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven."

So, even though they are doing an active ministry they constantly behold the face of God. Therefore, they gave us an example how to go about an active apostolate. But the most perfect paradigm is Christ Himself who rises up early in the morning, while it is still dark, and goes to a lonely place to pray. He sings a song to the Father in the stillness of His heart. This is to teach us that "early morning" is the most conducive time for prayer, meditation, or singing the praises of God, because the mind is still fresh at this time and there is less distraction. This doesn't mean that the other Divine Offices are of less value. They are all of high value because they are the "Opus Dei" – the work of God.

For us monks and nuns it is in our singing the praises of God that we tell the whole world His deeds. Someone might ask, "How is this possible when in fact you don't even have retreatants or guest in your chapel and you are just singing by yourselves as if you are in a studio?" That's a good question.

There was a time when heaven has no human guest, yet the Cherubim and Seraphim continue forever singing the praises of God. Then by Divine Providence the prophet Isaiah became their guest and saw the glory of God and heard the Cherubim and Seraphim singing the "Sanctus" which is now part of the Mass. Since the Mass is celebrated all over the world, 24 hrs a day, and Sanctus is part of the Mass, therefore, the praises of God is declared all over the world. Yet not all people heard this because not all people attend Mass.

If this is true it is also true that the Contemplative Orders in the Catholic Church are spreading all over the world. The monks and nuns of these Orders are singing the praises of God night and day. The guests and retreatants that come to their monasteries will also tell their friends what they have seen and heard. Some people read about monastic literature and that is how they know that there are some men and women who devoted their entire lives to the singing of the praises of God. Yet not all people heard and know about this, because not all people go to monasteries or read about monastic life, but this doesn't prevent the monks and nuns to sing the praises of God. On the contrary, they will continue to sing the praises of God day and night until all the people will join with them and with all the Cherubim and Seraphim and all the angels and saints in heaven to sing forever the eternal sanctus, for humanity is destined to be the tenth choir of angels.

As monks and nuns whose lives are dedicated to the singing of the praises of God, we begin here on earth what we will be doing in heaven. In other words, we are already part of eternity. We have entered the threshold of the kingdom of heaven. In the language of Jacob we can say, "Truly God is in this place." Heaven is where God is. If God is here, therefore, heaven is already here and now. →

### **Icon # 77 = Cry**

"For he who avenges blood is mindful of them; he does not forget the cry of the afflicted."

If God is with us here and now, so it is just natural that He will be mindful of us and do not forget our cry, especially if our cry is a cry to grow in love and be able to do His will all the time as if it becomes our bread in imitation of Christ whose bread is to do the Father's will. We surely cry not to be deprived of this bread, for this bread is our food and the life of our soul. If we also cry that we prefer to die than commit a deliberate sin and that He will not allow us to be separated from Him, then, certainly God does not forget this kind of cry. Through this kind of cry that touches the apple of His eyes He easily listen to the other kind of cry of humanity dying of hunger, families torn by dissensions, nations lacerated by hatred and war, individuals ruptured by incurable diseases. God

listen to these cries and took action to help them through different people that work in these various ministries.

Often time we hear of people accusing God of being silent or indifference to the suffering of humanity and even going too far in saying that God does not exist because if God exists He will surely do something to assuage the pains and sorrows of sad humanity, or won't allow these things to happen because it is inappropriate to human dignity made in the image and likeness of God Himself and destined to eternal glory.

This kind of people wants a God that will appear out of the blue sky and prevents every kind of calamities that befalls the human race, but if this kind of people does not see God working and helping through the goodness of people who ministered to the needs of the afflicted ones neither will they be able to see even if God will appear out in the sky.

They had forgotten that God allowed His beloved Son to suffer on the Cross leaving us an example that we may follow in His steps, not that we will be roaming around like a hen without a head looking for suffering, but that we would be willing to endure even the little inconveniences that come our way. It always begins with little inconveniences or pin pricks that we experienced from time to time just by living the normal daily life on our community when we rub elbows with one another. If we are faithful to endure this little pin pricks it is likely that we can also endure the bigger trials and sufferings that come our way. On the other hand, if we couldn't endure the little inconveniences and pin pricks that come our way it is likely that we will shrink right away when bigger trials or pains or difficulties or sufferings come to us knocking at our door. As Christ said, "He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much."

Christ comes to us in varieties of forms either in a form of joy or sorrow, in consolation or desolation, in positive or negative experience. The best way to recognize Him in these different forms is to be familiar with Him or develop an intimacy with Him because love has its own knowing.

I remember when I was thirteen yrs old I felt in love with a girl of my age. Even if she was 300 yards away I can still recognize her. That's how mysterious love is. When we love Our Lord Jesus we enter into the mystery of His love not to solve it but become part of it, then we develop a sense of recognizing His presence even in the ordinary events of our daily life. We can also hear His voice in the words of Scripture. For example, when we take a walk and see some wild flowers, then suddenly the words of Scripture will just come out and say to us: "Look at the lilies of the field how they grow. They do not toil nor spin. Yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Or if we see birds in

the sky the words of Scripture reminds us saying: "Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them." Or if we see rivers, mountains, trees, sky, etc. All these remind us of some passages in Scripture. In other words we develop an affinity with creation, for we become aware that the God who made them is also the God who made us. They exist through His Word that created them and this Word is with us in our hearts and in our lips. This Word is in the Scripture we read or hear. That's why familiarity with Scripture is also familiarity with Christ, and "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ," as St. Jerome would say.

But not all who read or listen to Scripture know Christ. They may know about Christ, but it is possible that they do not know Christ. When we strive to put into practice what we read or hear from the Scripture this is an obvious sign that we have some knowledge of Him. For it is not the reader or the hearer of the Word that is justified but the doer of the Word. Once we become doer of the Word and not merely a hearer, then certainly the Lord does not forget our cry because action speaks louder than word. →

### **Icon # 78 = Devil's Hatred vs. Christ Instruction**

"For he who avenges blood is mindful of them; he does not forget the cry of the afflicted."

The devil is like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. He wants to devour us not only because he is hungry but also because he hates us. For every time he sees us he remembers the glory and majesty that he and his buddies had forsaken and was given to us. He couldn't reclaim it because the choice that he made was definitive, full, conscious, and deliberate. It was done without the slightest ripple of emotion. It was clear as a bell and he knows all the consequences of his choice that it is irreversible, and yet he still does it. Now he suffers all the consequences of his choice. It moves him away farther and farther from God not so much by distance, for they are spirits, but by goodness, beauty, and truth.

The devil doesn't want us to inherit the kingdom prepared for us since the foundation of the world because this is a reproach to him, so he does everything in his power to block all access that lead to this kingdom and open up avenues that draw us away from God. These avenues are wide and easy and many people choose to take this road. Some of them are conscious and some are half-conscious not knowing that in the end it will lead to destruction, because "there is a way which seems right to a person but its end is the way to death."

Conscious here means that there are some people who knew that what they were doing are morally wrong and they could have avoided it, but they still chose to continue doing it. Half-conscious means that there are some people who knew that what they did was morally wrong, but the inner stress and pressures so clouded their choice to such an extent that it overpowered their minds.

All these are forms of afflictions which we could suffer from the evil One who hate us. This is not what God intended to be, "for God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil's envy death entered the world."

But God shows His graciousness to us through His Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, who became like us in all things except sin and even died for us that we may live and have life to the full, "for the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." Above all, Christ who is in us is greater than the devil who is in the world. We have only to cling to Him and ask Him that He will not let us be parted from Him. And Christ will say to us, "You have only to be still and know that I am God. I will fight for you so that the evil One who hates you will know that I love you. Even if he can kill your body, but he cannot kill your soul. Thus do not be afraid of him. Resist him and he will flee from you. You can resist him by calling upon my Name. When he introduces some evil thoughts in your mind, once you notice it, dash it immediately against Me by calling constantly upon Me. You can flog him by constantly invoking my Name. And you will notice by your own experience that the evil thoughts will lose its strength and will dissipate like a smoke that is blown away. Cultivate a good thought by recalling a verse from the Scripture that struck you. If you get distracted as you meditate on that verse what it meant for you, then you can invoke my Name. For example you can say, 'Jesus, my love stay always in my heart,' or you can also say, 'Jesus living in Mary come and live in us in Thy Spirit of sanctity.' In some other times just to look at my face in your inner eye is already sufficient. That, too, is also a form of prayer. In this way your mind is on the things that are above and not on the things that are below. They are above because they have spiritual values. Your soul needs it to grow into a mature and responsible Christian. What water is to plant, they are to your soul.

"They will also guide you and lead you to my kingdom. My kingdom is where I reign. If I reign in your heart, your heart becomes my kingdom and that would be the fulfillment of the prayer which I gave to the apostles: 'Thy kingdom come.' That's the moment when My Father, the Holy Spirit, and I make our home within you. It makes a heap of living to call your body our home. Your body may be a house but unless we live there it will never become a home.

“This is only we ask of you as we make our home within you: to act justly, show kindness, love tenderly, and walk humbly with us. Just as a teaspoon of honey can attract more flies than a barrel of vinegar, so kindness can bring souls to me than an attitude of strictness. Be strict with yourself, but kind and understanding with others bearing their burdens either of soul or body knowing that you, too, have your own weaknesses and failures. This is part of growing in self-knowledge. If you understand yourself better you will likely to understand other people because the dynamics of human nature is basically the same with all personality types.

“Although feelings are highly important, but be more attentive to your will because feelings just come and go but if you have a good will all will be well even though things may seem rougher in the surface at first.

“Love tenderly because love covers a multitude of sins. Pray daily that My Love within you will grow and strengthen. You have experienced before a human love and it is very helpful to understand divine love, because just as My goodness and beauty are reflected in creation so also My love is reflected in human love. Drink constantly of My love like a thirsty deer that longs for running stream, for unless human love is nourished by divine love there's a danger for it to fade away especially when it is tested by the crucible fire of sufferings and tribulations, for you have to pass through many tribulations before you can enter the threshold of My kingdom. Divine love is like an underground river which never runs dry. Once the roots of your love reach this source it will continually supply you with enough strength and courage to face trials and difficulties; prudence and discretion to speak and act what is proper in a given situation; humility to accept the things you cannot change and understand; wisdom to discern what kind of spirit is moving in each person and every doctrine whether they agree with My words and the teaching which accords with godliness; and all the other virtues such as the cardinal virtues and the theological virtues, and also the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. If these things are yours and abound they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in your knowledge of Me.

“Instead of you suffering from the Evil Ones who hate you, they will also suffer from you, because the fact that you won't consent to their evil desires is already a torment for them. They will continue to hate you just as I continue to love you. They will do all they can to separate you from Me by discouraging you, tempting you, or threatening you, but nothing can separate you from Me for I have carved you in the palm of My hands. They will attempt to snatch you from My hands, but no one can snatch you out of My hands for My Father who has given you to Me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch you out of My Father's hands.

“This is how I show MY graciousness to you and make My face to shine upon you. You will always walk in My presence and be mindful of Me wherever you are, with whomsoever you are, and in whatever you are doing. Even though you will walk in the valley of darkness, trials, and challenges in life you will fear no evil for I am always with you and in you. You will know by your own experience how much I love you and that all things both positive and negative, even the little things that happen to you will, will work together for you good. I do not ask that you will accomplish great things and become great in the sight of men, but to be simple and humble but always do all you can to overcome evil with good. As you make progress in these things, even if it will happen that you can accomplish something either big or small, your heart will not be elated but will always cry out: ‘Not to us Lord, not to us, but to your Name give the glory.’” →

### **Icon # 79 = Hoisted from Death: Recounting the Deeds of God**

“O thou who liftest me up from the gates of death, that I may recount all thy praises, that in the gates of the daughter of Zion I may rejoice in thy deliverance.”

Usually, people who are cured from illnesses even by quack doctors or self-styled messiahs or faith healers are very grateful to them and will become their devotees and supporters. Some of them will even dedicate their lives in service to these quack doctors or self-styled messiahs.

If this is true it is also true that people who encountered Christ in their lives will learn to recount all the wonderful deeds that Christ wrought in their lives. Before they met Christ they were spiritually blind to see the goodness, beauty, and loveliness of God in creation, but now their inner eyes are open to see the beauty of God in wild flowers and in the rising and setting of the sun, the goodness of God in providing food even to little insects that crawl on the ground, the majesty and grandeur of God in the flying eagle, the loveliness of God in the face of the little child, and even the humor of God in creating a giraffe. Once they were dumb to sing and recount all the praises of God, but now their lips are open and can speak of what God had done in them. They also addressed one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all their hearts. Once they were deaf to hear the words of God, but now their ears are open to listen attentively to the words of Scripture. They are also attentive when other people speak and since they have a new sense of hearing they can distinguish whether their words are from God or not, for everyone who belong to the earth speaks of the things of the earth but everyone who belongs to God utters the things of God for it is not by measure that God sent His Spirit so that those who belong to Him will not be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine invented by the cunning of men.

Their hearts become soften and receptive to hear the voice of God, as the Scripture says, "If today you hear His voice do not harden your heart."

And finally, once they were dead in sin for they lived a life of over-indulgence, as it is written, "Anyone who is over indulgent is already dead even while he is still alive." They were like dead dry bones, but Christ breathed on them His Spirit and restored back their life, for He came that they may have life and have it to the full. Since they have a new life in Christ, the life that they now live they no longer lived for themselves but for Christ who saves them and gave Himself up for them. Christ gave Himself up for them because He is the good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. This is the difference between Christ and the quack doctors or self-styled messiahs. Never was it known that a self-styled messiah will lay down his life for his followers. They will even kill them by some subtle means, for example by mass suicide than by protecting them. They come only to steal and kill and destroy human souls. On the other hand, Christ lift us up from the gates of death for He does not take delight in the death of us sinners but that we may be converted and live.

However, this requires an interplay between grace and freewill. Christ gives us all the necessary graces we need for our final salvation but we have also the free will to accept or refuse it. We are like shipwrecked people drifted at sea. We have all the ropes and life-boats needed for our salvation but if we refuse to hold on to the rope or ride on the life-boat we will still be in danger of dancing with death. The tragedy here is that many people like to dance with death because its tempo is so appealing such as the different kinds of unlawful pleasures and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Even in the face of death they do not love their lives, for if they have love for their lives they would have clung to the rope or ride on the life-boat of our salvation which is Christ Himself and obedience to His teachings. But for those who clung to the rope or ride on the life-boat who by patience in well-doing seek for true glory and honor and immortality Christ will give them eternal life. They longed to be with Christ for that is far better than the fleeting pleasures of this world. They know how to use the things of this world properly recognizing full well that they are only means to help them attain the end they are seeking which is union with God. They also know that there's a danger of possessing things unless a person is first possessed by God because things can possess a person in many insidious ways. So, the only true way to possess the things we need is to be first possessed by God. For this reason Christ said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and these things shall be yours as well."

In regards to possession of things, I found it a helpful practice to ask from time to time (even once or twice a year), "Do I really need this or that? This helps a lot to make one's life simple and uncluttered and also prevents the piling up of things



which seem at first to be needful but had been sitting there for a long time and had never been used.

The wisdom here is to discern the “needs” and the “wants.” This is quite confusing at first because needs and wants present themselves like twin sisters. We know that if we put them side by side they are not exactly the same. There are differences in them. Both of them will introduce themselves but it takes a while not to be confused by them. It is only through our familiarity with them, observing them, talking to both of them individually, listening to their voices, their gestures, etc. that we can identify them when they come to us. Wants is so attractive that most people, including us religious, could hardly resist her. It is only through prayer and a deep longing to grow in the spiritual life that we may have the grace to be cautious and more prudent in our relationship with her. If we got entangled with her it would be very difficult for the other virtues to grow because she will liken to thorns that grew up and choked them.

Moreover, happiness does not consist in possessing and consuming much but in having few needs and satisfying them at a small expense. This is a sign of freedom – a liberation from the domination of the flesh, as St. Paul said: “We are called to freedom, but not to use our freedom as an opportunity for the flesh.” Lest the soul will attribute this liberation to his own effort and be forgetful of God who is behind it, the psalmist unequivocally cried out, “O thou who liftest me up from the gates of death, that I may recount all thy praises, that in the gates of the daughter of Zion (Zion symbolizes the soul) I may rejoice in thy deliverance.” This is a song of gratitude – a continual remembrance of all that God has done in our lives – for gratitude is the memory of the heart that the life we now live in the flesh we live by faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ who loved us and gave Himself for us. →

### **Icon # 80 = Entrapped in One’s Trap**

“The nations have sunk in the pit which they made; in the net which they hid has their own foot been caught.”

The desert Fathers were very strong in asserting that we will certainly fall in the same faults or sins which we judged in other people especially if the judgment is condemnatory.

Another example is the story of Haman who prepared a gallow for Mordecai to be hanged, but in the end was hanged himself in the gallow he made. All these were written for our instruction that we may learn not to put a trap against our brothers or sisters either in their speech or actions. Another example would be the Pharisees and the Herodians who came to Christ to entrap Him in His talk,

but they were caught in the trap they made, for Christ knew their hypocrisy. Not only nations who are unmindful of God, but also individuals who live in sin are sinking in the pit they made because sin is a like a pit. The words “they made” suggest that it is deliberate. In other words they commit sin deliberately – they made it.

Sin is also like a net that entrapped people. Some sins are open and some are hidden, but both of them will be revealed sooner in this life or later on the day of judgment for nothing that is hidden that will not be made known or covered that will not be revealed. But notice that the psalmist uses the singular “foot.” This suggests that there is still a chance of escape because the other foot and their hands were not caught and they can use it to break the net. In other words, there is still a chance of repentance in this life. This is one of the reasons of Christ's coming to our world to bring deliverance to those who are in the captivity of sins. He also commanded His disciples to preach to all the nations the forgiveness of sins. The Creed of the Catholic Church highlighted this when it says, “We believe in the forgiveness of sins.”

But if people won't repent in this life and would not accept grace even though it is being spoon fed to them, then it would be tantamount to being bound hand and foot. In this case the chance of escape is almost impossible because of the deliberate refusal of the person itself. There was no proper disposition needed to be liberated from the net of sin. What await is a terrible sentence: “Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.” Their teeth could have been used as the last opportunity to break the net by biting it, but even this opportunity they voluntarily repudiate. They do not love their lives even at the point of death. So, the king executed His judgment: “These enemies of mine who do not want me to rule over them slay them in my presence.” →

### **Icon # 81 = Hands & Feet & Eyes: Instruments of the heart for one's Final Destiny**

“The Lord has made himself known, he has executed judgment; the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands.”

Our hands and feet are itself neutral. They are neither good nor bad. They are tools for the soul to achieve its end either for good or for bad. If we use it to do evil things, then we need to heed the warning of the Lord that if our hand or foot causes us to sin we have to cut it off for it is better for us to enter life maimed or lame than that we have two hands and two feet and be thrown into the hell of fire were our worms will never die, that is to say, our own conscience will be our own accuser and it will never end. But if we use them to do what is good, right, just, and true, then it will guide and bring us to eternal life, for God

will render to every person according to their works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, He will give eternal life. There will be glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good.

But for those who do wicked things, there will be wrath and fury, for God shows no partiality. So, in this case the wicked are again snared in the work of their own hands. Thus wherever we go if we live in sin we are already snared by the evil deeds we did for we always bring with us ourselves wherever we go and our deeds accompany us. It would be a form of blindness if we couldn't see or acknowledge our own sinfulness. What is worst is that when we insist in saying that "we see." In this case our guilt remains with us, as the Lord said: "'For judgment I come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who say, 'we see,' may become blind.'" Some of the Pharisees near Him heard this, and they said to Him, 'Are we also blind?' Jesus said to them, 'If you are blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'we see,' your guilt remains.'" If our guilt remains with us, then we are snared or trapped by them. If there is no change of heart on our part, so, how can we escape from this trap since this snare can only be dismantled by turning over a new leaf? By ourselves we cannot do this because we are not the creator of our hearts. Besides, the heart of every human being is so deep that even the angels could not fathom it. Only He who designed it, with all its exquisite intricacies, can fully understand it and can change it from a heart of stone to a heart of flesh. But how can He change it if we don't want to, or resist His actions in our lives since He gives us freedom? St. Paul said that we are called to freedom but not to use our freedom as a pretext for doing evil – not to use our freedom as an opportunity for the flesh. If we use our freedom as a pretext for doing evil, then we are snared in the work of our own hands. →

### **Icon # 82 = Two Things Necessary**

**"The Wicked shall depart to Sheol, all the nations that forget God."**

The wicked shall depart to Sheol because they are being snared by the works of their own hands. Their deeds became their passport to Sheol the land of the dead. Oftentimes it makes us wonder why they chose to migrate to Sheol. Do they have some knowledge of what life is like in Sheol? It is not difficult to believe that there must be a recruiter who enticed them in believing that once they got to sheol all their problems are gone and buried with them, so they don't have to worry about doing evil deeds here on earth because, anyhow, nothing is out there – death is the end of our human existence. They say to themselves, "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die." If they belong to the category of the materially poor they will envy and curse the rich. If they are rich they will succumb to covetousness – amassing treasures for themselves. They will say to their souls, "My soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your

ease, eat, drink, and be merry." But God will say to that person, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." If we lay up treasures for ourselves but are not rich in the things of God, then our whole life is a lie because our heart is far away from God. We may honor God with our lips, but our heart is far away from Him. The more balanced approach is to ask God two things, saying: "Two things I ask of Thee; deny them not to me before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny Thee, and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or lest I be poor, and steal, and profane the name of my God." →

**Icon # 83 = Different Kinds of Poverty vs. Beatific Vision & Infinite Riches  
[Dekanaire] Golden Street**

"For the needy shall not always be forgotten, and the hope of the poor shall not perish for ever."

There are different kinds of poverty. There's a poverty of material things. To this belong the people who have no sufficient food, shelter, and clothing. In third world countries the dress of these people, at least to the standard of the more affluent countries, are almost like rags. And since they don't have sufficient dress for change they keep on wearing it without washing. Instead of wash and wear it becomes wear and wear without wash. Their food is barely enough to fill their stomach and of poor quality because they couldn't afford to buy food in the market. Their shelter is just enough to protect them from the rain and the heat of the sun. They don't have the convenient of an air-conditioner or a water bed. Some of them will just even sleep on sidewalks or parks. In terms of shelter foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests but they don't have a home to lay their heads. There's also an intellectual poverty. To this belong the mentally handicapped, the dull, and those who lack sufficient common sense.

There's also an emotional and affective poverty. To this belong those who could not handle their emotions constructively and those who don't have compassion and sympathy toward other people even in times of distress and adversities.

They are just indifferent. If we pipe to them they will not dance; if we wail they will not mourn. They look but do not see; and listen but do not hear.

There's also a moral poverty. In general, to this belong those who have lost the sense of sin. This kind of poverty is the worst kind of poverty; because it struck the core of one's being, that is, the state of one's soul. That is why Christ said: "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?" From this we can see the infinite value of one's soul. Imagine if you own a piece of land right in the heart of New York City and you sell it. No doubt it will cost millions of

dollars. And what about if you own, not only all of New York City, but all of New York state. And what about if you also own the neighboring states, say New Jersey and all of New England states and down to Georgia and Florida. Without a shadow of a doubt you will be considered as the richest man in the United States. And what if you also own, not only all of the Eastern States, but also all of the central, Southern, Northern, and Western states from Mississippi, Texas, California, and San Diego to North Dakota, Washington, and Oregon. In other words, you own all of the United States including Hawaii and Alaska. And not only that you also own all of Canada. To repeat the same words, you own all of North America the third largest continent in the world. All of these are yours since you are the only son of your father – so you were born with a silver spoon in your mouth.

Imagine also if you own, not only of North America, but also all the countries in South America. To make argument short, you own all the countries of Asia, Africa, Europe, and the whole world. Certainly, you will be called not only a billionaire or a trillionaire, but probably a dekanaire (billion has 9 zeros after 1, trillion has 12 zeros, deka [from the Greek word ten] has 30 zeros after 1).

Bill Gates and all the other rich men in the world combined together compared to yours would not even worthy of comparison. This is how rich you are, and yet your soul is infinitely valuable than this because your father who gave you all these riches is also the owner, not only of the whole world, but also of the whole universe. If you look at the chart of the universe the whole world is just like a tiny dot (like this: ".") in a galaxy and there are billions and billions of stars in a galaxy which are of enormous sizes than the earth; and there are billions of galaxies in the whole universe. If you, too, own all of these, how would you call your riches? Isn't it the most ridiculous thing if you will lose all these riches by a single deliberate grievous sin? St. James' argument reflects this when he says, "How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire." From all these we can see the boundless proportion of the things of heaven and the things of earth, eternal riches and temporal riches, and how one's moral deficiency can forfeit one's unimaginable riches.

This reminds us of the parable of the prodigal son who, after receiving his inheritance, set off to a far country and squandered all his possessions in loose living. "Far Country" suggests that is a serious sin because sin is a movement away from God. The distance is proportionate to its seriousness. Since it is a far country, so the soul went to the land of unlikeness because once a person commits a dangerous sin he/she becomes unlike God. The image of God within becomes like gold covered with mud and its likeness is distorted. It is like a person who owns the whole world and suddenly goes bankrupt and all his riches are given to another person who can produce the fruits of righteousness in proper time.

You can just imagine this kind of tragedy. You once were a dekanaire and owns the whole world now lost everything you have even your car. There must be varieties of thoughts and feelings juggling in your heart and mind. No doubts the feelings of anxiety, fear, chagrin, regret, sorrow, and even hatred are in the forefront. Apprehension, insecurity, vulnerability, etc., are lurking within.

That's why this kind of poverty is the worst kind of poverty because it struck right at the core of one's destiny – the kingdom of God. The riches of the kingdom of God is even far superior than the riches you have when you still own the whole world. Let us stretch out again our conception. In the book of Revelation it says that the road of the city of God is made of pure gold. Now let us consider the price of pure gold. The cheap estimate of one pound of pure gold is probably 10,000. We lower our price so that you can see the tremendous difference of the earthly treasures and the heavenly treasures. One cubic meter of gold would probably weigh 200 lbs. Again, we lower our estimate in the hope that you will appreciate the value of the heavenly treasures.

The distance from here (Assumption Abbey, Ava) to Springfield is about 75 miles. It's a four lane highway. Each lane is about 8 ft. wide. Now we will change all those four lanes into gold. Just the two lanes alone would need millions and millions of pounds of gold. What about the other two lanes? And what about if you will change all the streets in Springfield into gold and all the roads to St. Louis, Chicago, Memphis, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Iowa, and all the streets and highways all over the United States? This alone boggles our minds. And what about if will wall all the boundaries all over the United States from Maine to Vermont to New Hampshire to New York to Massachusetts to New Jersey down to North and South Carolina to Georgia to Florida to Alabama to Mississippi to Louisiana to Texas to New Mexico to Arizona then to California to Oregon to Washington to Montana to North Dakota to Minnesota to Wisconsin to Michigan and back again to Maine, and this wall is made of precious jewel say jasper and every foundation will adorned with unimaginable beauty of precious pearls and all kinds of precious jewels say sapphire, agate, emerald, onyx, carnelian, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, Jacinth, amethyst, and diamond, and the height of this wall all around will about 26 ft high and its width is 4 ft?

Some countries in the Middle East are famous for gold, yet none of them has a path way that is made of gold. It is possible to find some chalices, forks and spoons made of gold in the king's palace. It is also possible that they will use it only for a very special occasion, say if there would be presidents or ambassadors or diplomatic corps from other countries, but in the city of our God it is only a footstool because all gold is but a little sand in His sight and silver is accounted as clay before Him. That is why St. Paul who was caught up to the third heavens and heard and saw things that cannot be uttered managed to

mumble few words when he said: "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him." Think also that not only that God will give us all the riches and treasures of heaven but he will also deify us, for what God is by nature we will be by grace. That is why God became man so that we might become like God. Adam and Eve wanted to become like God without God's help. But now in Christ Jesus God destined us in love to be His children according to the purpose of His will to the praise of His glorious grace which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son in order that He might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom He predestined He also called; and those whom He called He also justified; and those whom He justified He also glorified.

Now let us also consider the nature of the glorified body. First, it is no longer subject to decay, corruption, or death. There's no more pain, sicknesses or diseases that ravaged the body. Second, it is no longer subject to space and time. We are even lighter than the wind and more mobile than any motion and pervades and penetrates all things even the thickest wall. Just by a mere desire to go to one place we will be there in a twinkling of an eye without even riding a jet plane or a rocket.

Just think that we will no longer die a second death. We will always be young and handsome or beautiful for all eternity. If only eternal life can be bought no doubt thousands and thousands of people both young and old would buy it even at a high price. Just consider the tons of advertisements in the field of cosmetics. They vied in advertising that such and such a product makes you look young. Lots and lots of people all over the world would rush to the counter to pay for it. Many people all over the world would take vitamins and do some exercise, say, walking or jogging to make themselves healthy and feel young. Thus there is in us an innate desire for something eternal. Yet Christ gave this to us as a free gift, as He said "To the thirsty I will give water without price from the fountain of the water of life." The thirsty here are those who are thirsting for righteousness and holiness and eternal life. Their thirst shall be quenched, for the water that Christ gives will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life. So the glorified body is no longer subject to any unrighteousness, unholiness, and mortality, for death has no longer dominion over it. Death is swallowed up in victory and has no longer any place in the glorified body.

And finally, the glorified body is now capable of seeing God face to face. This is what we call the Beatific Vision. In this Beatific Vision lies the ultimate joy and happiness of the soul. The soul will be completely one with God and everything that belongs to God belongs also to the soul through Our Lord Jesus, as He said, "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you....All that the Father is mine." In another passage He also said, "The glory which thou has given me I have given to them, that they may be one as we are

one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou has sent me and has loved them even as thou has loved me."

Imagine all that is of God is also ours too – His beauty, grandeur, majesty, His goodness, all His virtues, His power, wisdom, and knowledge. Can you imagine that?

Just consider the human brain alone. It has an intrinsic power to digest 2 million volumes of books if it is thoroughly cultivated. Here on earth only ten percent of its capacity is being utilized. You can just imagine if it is being utilized. You will be a super genius in all field of knowledge from Sociology, Psychology, Geology, Theology, Philosophy, Medicine, Chemistry, Quantum Physics, Liberal Arts, Business Administration, Architecture, Civil Engineering, Mechanical and Electrical Engineering, Industrial Engineering, etc. Imagine how your knowledge in all these fields keeps growing if you will not die. You have such sharp intelligence and a retentive memory that you won't forget what you have learned.

Therefore, in creating us God has planted a seed of Omniscience in us which will flower and bear fruit when we see Him face to face. Yet this is only a part in our sharing of the life of God, for how about His beauty, majesty, goodness, power, wisdom, and all His virtues? We will have all these for all eternity without the slightest fear of losing them. It will just keep on growing and growing and growing for all eternity from glory to glory. Who doesn't want all these?

Christ offered all these as a free gift in exchange for the cup of cold water given in His name but, sad to say, there's still lots of people who will say, "It's a bad bargain, it's a bad bargain." As if they are cheated in the transaction.

Ultimately, there's another kind of poverty worthy of its name which Christ has canonized. This kind of poverty is common to both poor and rich alike. This is the poverty of spirit. Those who are rich materially had acquired their riches either through inheritance by birth or through legitimate and honest business. These kinds of people do not put their trust in riches even if their riches abound but put their trust in God and are generous in helping the poor and the needy. They are also generous to the needs of the Church and other humanitarian organizations. They use their riches in a proper way, not only to their own advantage but also for the welfare of the less fortunate. We have an example of this in the person of King St. Louis of France who used his riches for the good of the Church and for the good of the people in his kingdom. Another example would be St. Hedwig, St. Elizabeth of Portugal, and St. Elizabeth of Hungary, to name only a few, who used their riches in a proper way.



Those who are materially poor do not curse the rich people and do not envy them, but rather are very grateful for the help they receive. They don't have any desire to become rich for they know that the love of money is the root of all evil and those who want to become rich by any means will be pierced with various unruly desires on all sides. If they only have food and clothing and shelter they are content with this and sleep peacefully like a millionaire of virtues.

To this kind of poverty Christ has promised the kingdom of heaven, as He said: "Blessed are the poor in Spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Even here and now these people have already experienced the foretaste of the kingdom of heaven because Christ lives in their hearts, for the kingdom of heaven is where God is, and since God is in their hearts, therefore, they are already living out the life of the kingdom of heaven. This is their guarantee that their hope shall not perish for ever, as the Scripture says: "He has given us his own Spirit as a guarantee of our future inheritance." →

### **Icon # 84 = Nations are just but men**

"Arise, O Lord! Let not man prevail; let the nations be judged before thee! Put them in fear, O Lord! Let the nations know that they are but men!"

One of the concrete signs that nations, no matter how powerful and rich they might be, know that they are but men, that is, no absolute power and control over all things, is when natural calamities and national tragedies hit their country or when their security is badly threatened. An example of this would be the recent event of Sept. 11 when the Twin Towers – World Trade Center in New York City were leveled to the ground plus the considerable damage of the Pentagon in Washington. The Twin Tower, both 110 stories high – about 1,100 ft high, are symbols of America's towering riches which surpasses all other nations in the whole world. The Pentagon is also a symbol of America's military might like a giant Octopus whose tentacles reach to different nations of the world.

Because of its riches and might America felt itself secure and invulnerable but the recent terrorists attacks shake off its security and invulnerability. It stirred up not only the whole country but also the whole world. Reactions about the event ranged from mourning to dancing. All over the United States mourning and sadness were hovering in the atmosphere, but on the other side of the globe another group of people were dancing and singing in the streets as they heard the news and they even considered it as a punishment from their god.

Americans began to wonder why God could allow such diabolic and horrendous attacks to happen which killed more than 3,000 people. In both military and humanistic jargon these people are innocents because they are

non combatants but, on the other hand, all these people may not be morally innocents for it is possible that were living in sin.

To answer the question why God could allow such a thing to happen, first we have to say explicitly that God would never allow an evil thing to happen unless He can draw something good out of it. This is quite difficult for us human beings because the disastrous event itself stirred up our emotions and clouded our vision. Often times it will take an eye of a child to see the positive thing that comes out of it.

Let us consider some of the positive things that came out of it. First and foremost it united the entire nation to such a degree that was not known before, that is, that even the Democrats and Republican, the CIA and the FBI, as if by miracle, were banded together. President Bush and his inveterate opponent Al Gore were reconciled.

Americans all over the country, young and old, and from all walks of life shared the same mixed feelings as the immediate members of the families and relatives of those who died in the attacks which ranged from sadness and sorrow, to hope and trust, from anger and revenge, to forgiveness and dialogue.

And above all it united the nation in prayer to God as when the President called a national day of prayer asking the entire nation to pray: from the common laborer to the Chief Executive Officer of a multi-national Corporation. Employers gave time to their employees to pray. Christians of various denominations and all religions all over the country heeded the appeal to pray. This has a parallel to the gesture of the king of Nineveh who made a decree that his entire kingdom would do fasting and prayer and cry mightily to God. He also said that everyone should turn from his evil way and from the violence which is in his hands. This too has an echo when the President said not to harm the Arab-Americans. Right after the Sept. 11 attacks there were several Arab-Americans killed just because they were of Arab origin. This too is a form of violence, so it has to be avoided. There were several people who said that the Sept. 11 tragedy is a wake-up call for the entire nation; in other words, to realize that they are just men. America prided itself of its vast riches and military might and felt secure and invulnerable, but now that security and invulnerability are shattered. When we realize that we are but men then we will learn how to pray, for prayer is a form of acknowledgment of our own humanness. We are more human when we pray. Those who never or no longer pray are descending to the level of animal existence. They just eat and drink and have sex as animals do. And that's it. They also work, travel, and have sleep as animals do. But we humans are more than animals because we have souls that have intelligence, memory, and will. The goal of our existence here on earth is to ascend to the level of the spirit which is a life in union with God. Prayer is the means to achieve this end. For some

people and nations it took a great tragedy to learn the rudiments of prayer. This is what happens as a result of the Sept. 11 tragedy. At least some people who have never or no longer prayed for decades or years have learned to mumble a prayer in their hearts. Now they realize that they are but men, for prayer is an acknowledgment that there is a supreme Being who has absolute control over everything, and who guides the course of events not only personally but also collectively as nations all over the world. →

### **Icon # 85 = God is always shining**

#### **Psalm 10 (9)**

"Why dost thou stand afar off, O Lord? Why dost thou hide in time of troubles?"

There could be times in our life in which it seems that God is absent. This is a subjective observation because in reality God is never absent from us, for in Him we live and move and have our being. God is always with us and in us but we are not always in Him for it is us who wander away from Him either through sin or through following our own passions and unlawful desires.

In times of trouble God is always with us and in us but His presence is clouded by pain, or sorrow, or disappointment we feel. He is closer to us than we are to ourselves. It is like the sun that is being blocked by dark clouds. People would never say that the sun stops shining just because dark clouds block it. So it is the same with God. He is always with us no matter what happens to us. For most people it is trouble that prevents them from recognizing the presence of God, but for some people they can still recognize the presence of God amidst the trials and troubles in life because their inner eyes penetrate beyond the troubles itself just as our natural reason believes that the sun keeps shining even though the clouds are dark. Again, for some virtuous people who have attained a high degree of sanctity they even rejoice when they experience trials and sufferings in life not because of the trials and sufferings in itself for this would be sadistic, but because of a healthy desire to share in the sufferings of Christ no matter how little or insignificant it might be, so that they might also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed. In this case, they have a foretaste of the joy of the new life to come even amidst trials and difficulties. It is like rain even though the sun is shining, because we always associate rain with dark clouds and the sun not shining. So the sun does not hide itself in times of rain.

It is a basic principle that our love and faith in Christ has to undergo a test for not everyone who says to Him, "Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven."

At first He will let us experience His intimacy and consolation as an initial sign of His love and care for us, but in order that we will not be attached to the gift but to the giver itself He will walk with us on tortuous paths. This is a period in which

we experience some confusion either in our understanding of His words in Scriptures for there are some passages in Scripture which seem to contradict each other. In reality they don't contradict each other, but they throw light on each other. It is only after gaining some familiarity with it and striving to put it into practice that we begin to see some connections between them. Confusion can come also through negative experiences such as tragedies, etc. Then Christ will bring fear and cowardice upon us and will even torment us by His discipline and will test us with His ordinances until He trusts us. This is a period where God seems to be standing afar off, and hides from us. This is also a period in which we are challenged to walk by faith and not by sight or feelings. After we have withstood the test Christ will come straight back to us and gladden us with His continual presence and will reveal His secrets to us. This is a state of union with Christ in which Christ and the soul got married, so to speak, as the Scripture says, "He who is united with the Lord become one spirit with him." Christ and the soul are united with a bond that cannot be broken. This union is such that the soul can cry out, "Who can separate me from the love of Christ, shall trials and distress, sorrows and sufferings, difficulties and challenges, hunger and pain? No. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. We are more than conqueror through Him who loves us." At this stage the soul has gained tremendous confidence, courage, and trust that it can say, "Though I walk in the valley of darkness I fear no evil for You are with me." Darkness here is the tragedy or negative experience that a person may encounter in this present life. In other words, even if a person may experience tragedy in this life he doesn't lose his trust and faith in Christ, for faith is the inner light that enables him to see Christ in the darkness of tribulation. And we have to pass through many tribulations before we can enter the kingdom of God. And yet even amidst the darkness of tribulations we do not fear because Christ is with us and in us. He is our strength and courage. He is close to us than we to ourselves. →

### **Icon # 86 = Exploitation vs. Prayer**

"In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor; let them be caught in the schemes which they have devised."

The demons know fairly well the poverty of our human nature – how weak it is. So they take advantage of it and exploit us because of our weakness and vulnerability. They have no pity on us human beings. Their spirits are reflected in heinous crimes and diabolical acts such as smashing skulls of humans by a hammer or stabbing a pregnant woman right at her belly or by becoming a suicide bomber to kill other people or by killing the unborn children in the pretext that they are not yet fully humans or that their tissue can be used for the advancement of scientific research to cure other forms of human illnesses.

You can just see the arrogance of these wicked spirits by hotly pursuing the poor who are in themselves very helpless. Why do they not pursue the other wicked ones or the rich who amass riches even by unjust means, and use their riches for their own self-aggrandizement without regard to the plight of the needy and oppressed? Are they afraid of the other wicked and the rich for fear that they might retaliate against them? Or are they their allies? This is even worse than the survival of the fittest because the poor in themselves are powerless and defenseless. I am very convinced that deep down in the soul of these poor people lie tremendous courage and strength and even heroism to safeguard themselves against the onslaught of the wicked spirits if only there's someone who can arm them. This is what Christ has done for us in His paschal mystery: His birth, passion, and resurrection. He arms us with prayer to be able resist the wiles of the devil. Lend your ear to what He says, "Watch and pray that you will not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." In another passage He also says: "This kind of demon cannot be cast out except by fasting and prayer."

Therefore prayer is a powerful weapon. Just as there are different kinds of weapons, so also there are different kinds of prayers. The best kind of prayer comes from a pure and honest heart. Just as rocket launchers are used to shoot down helicopters or airplanes, so also ejaculatory prayer is very good in shooting down temptations or evil thoughts that appear in our consciousness. In other words , just say continuously an ejaculatory prayer (other people call it a mantra) until evil thoughts or passions are shot down. You know that they are shot down because their intensity lessens, and eventually die down, and are gone. But do not be too self-assured because there are lots of them and they won't hesitate to attack you even when you are in a sacred place like a Church. But at least you have a weapon to shoot them down.

People who no longer pray become an easy prey to their attacks. The first thing that they will do so that they can easily gain access and attack us is to weaken our prayer life. Our prayer life can be compared to military bases and communication systems. Once these are destroyed, the enemy can easily gain access inside a country and send ground troops. So also if our prayer life is weakened or destroyed the devil can easily gain access into our hearts and send despair, hopelessness, discouragement. Thus when a certain tragedy happens in our life we no longer have the strength to rise, and we feel so despondent because our prayer life is devastated. But if our prayer life is strong then we have the strength to withstand tragedies and not be totally cast down. Christ illustrates this in His parable of the two builders – one built his house upon a rock and the other upon sand. The rain of adversities and distress fell, and the flood of sorrows and calamities came, and the wind of trials and tribulations buffeted those houses, and it completely destroyed the one built upon sand while the one built upon rock stood firm.

Prayer can also be compared to communication systems which facilitate access to the furthest corners of the world. So prayer gives us access to God and we can communicate with Him any time wherever we are, with whomsoever we are with, and in whatever we are doing.

In this spiritual warfare, God is the super power, every soul is a nation, the virtues are the soldiers, the angels and saints are our allies. Just as soldiers are trained to fight effectively so also we exercise our virtues in order for the soul to be always prepared. Christ is our trainer, the angels and saints are His assistants. That's why we strive to follow the example of the saints because they follow Christ more closely. We read their lives and their writings not so much for curiosity's sake but that we might elevate the standard of our moral lives. We also read Scriptures to know more the heart and mind of Christ and His motivation because "ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ." Even if people do not know how to read they still can have access to Scripture by going to Mass, if not every day because of the nature of their work, but at least every Sunday.

The Scripture is our primary source. This is our manual, for it contains everything necessary for our salvation. The lives and writings of the saints and Fathers of the Church support our understanding of the Scripture especially when we strive to put it into practice and try to live holy lives. By doing so, the faculties of our mind are trained to distinguish between good and evil. If it can distinguish between good and evil, then it has now a tool to capture evil spirits in the schemes which they are devising, as St. Paul would say, "We are not ignorant of their designs." Just as a radar can detect an approaching warplane that's going to enter its aerial zone and the person monitoring can see it on screen, so also by constant remembrance of God the soul can detect unhealthy desires and evil thoughts and can see it on the screen of our consciousness. It is in this arena that it has to be caught. Therefore, instead of being discouraged or feeling dirty because we have these unhealthy desires and evil thoughts, we should even be more grateful to God for letting it surface in our consciousness for; in this case, we are in a much better position to deal with them. If we can deal with them constructively it's an obvious sign that God's grace is working within us to catch them in the schemes they have devised. →

### **Icon # 87 = Greed**

"For the wicked boasts of the desires of his heart, and the man greedy for gain curses and renounces the Lord."

Greed is one of the seven capital sins, so it is not surprising that a person who is greedy curses and renounces the Lord. To renounce the Lord is tantamount to

separating ourselves from Him and that's what sin does. Sin separates us from God. It is a movement away from God. Thus greed is rightly considered as one of the serious sins because it puts riches and other material possessions on the top priority of the scale of values while brushing off God into a hidden corner of one's life.

Once a person is greedy for gain and put riches on the top priorities, then it encourages a false independence. For example, if a person is well-supplied with this world's good, he is very apt to think that he can deal well with any situation may arise. The thought of God doesn't come to him because he has some things to rely on. Riches make him think that everything has its price, that if he wants a thing enough he can buy it, that if any difficult situation descends upon him, he can buy his way out of it. He can come to think that he can buy his way into happiness and buy his way out of sorrow. So he comes to think that he can do well without God, that he is quite able to handle life by himself. In this case he renounces the Lord.

He boasts of the desires of his heart to amass lots of treasures, but he ignores the danger that this would shackle him to this earth, for Our Lord said: "Where you treasure is there will your heart be also." If everything a person desires is contained within this world, if all his interests are here, he never thinks of another world and the hereafter. It is perfectly possible for a person to be so interested in earthly gains that he forgets heavenly things, to be so involved in the things that are seen that he forgets the things that are unseen – and herein lies the tragedy, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are unseen are eternal.

The person greedy for gain curses and renounces the Lord because he is never satisfied with what he has – there is still a deep seated ascending strong tendency to want still more, for nothing is enough for a person of whom enough is too little. →

### **Icon # 88 = Pride: False Self**

"In the pride of his countenance the wicked does not seek Him; all his thoughts are, 'There is no God.'"

One of the most obvious signs of pride is when a person no longer desire to seek God for it shows that he has no more need of God, and that he can manage to control things by himself. But this is an illusion because no human being no matter how rich, influential, and powerful he might be has a perfect control of everything.

If we do not seek God, then who are we seeking for? We might be seeking only ourselves. But again, this is a deception because we could not really find our true selves unless we find God. Therefore, those people who do not seek God are living in their false self. Their thoughts are, "There is no God" because this would give them the license to do whatever they like without feeling guilty of being held accountable for all their actions. But how long this will last?

Only those people who have reach the zenith of their pride are bold to say, "There is no God." In this case, they triggered in us the impression that they wanted to set a world record which even surpassed that of the demons because the demons themselves believe that there is God and they shuddered, but these people say, "There is no God," and seem comfortable with it. But where will they go once they die? This reminds of a certain story: Mike and Pat were working side by side at the shipyard. "listen, Pat" said Mike, "that was an awful break you made yesterday at Calaghan's funeral." "What do you mean?" asked Pat. "Why," Mike said, "you and me went in to see him, and you no sooner took a look at him and you burst out laughing. That was no way to do at a funeral, you're hurting people's feelings." "Oh, that?" said Pat. "I'll tell you why. You see, the day before he was killed, he and me was working together and he was telling me he didn't believe there's God or either in heaven or hell; so when I looked at him, I had to laugh, for there he was: all dressed up and no place to go." [Quote] →

### Icon # 89 God: Source of true Wisdom

"His ways prosper at all times; thy judgments are on high, out of his sight; as for all his foes, he puffs at them. He thinks in his heart, 'I shall not be moved; throughout all generations I shall not meet adversity.'"

Just by saying that "I shall not be moved," and "I shall not meet adversity" he is already convicted on several counts. First, since he does not seek the Lord, so his foundation is very weak for he is building on false security. Therefore, he shall be easily moved. Second, he is greedy for gain, so he is not satisfied with what he already have. If he is not satisfied and content with what he has, so he is restless; and if he is restless he is contradicting with what he says, "I shall not be moved," because restlessness indicates a certain instability. If a person is unstable, therefore, he is easily moved. Third, he is lying when he says, "Throughout all generations I shall not meet adversity," because no human being no matter how holy or wicked he might be is exempted from adversity or trial or misfortune or difficulty while still in this life for it is part and parcel of our human condition. Even Christ Himself was not exempted from the crucible of humiliation and suffering. This may vary in degrees, but it is certain that we will encounter it. If his heart had not been puffed up he could have said, "In times of adversities do not be forgetful of prosperities, and in times of prosperities do not be unmindful



of adversities." In this way he will learn the wisdom of attaining the right balance of being not too elated when things seem to prosper and not be downcast when things seem to go wrong. But how can he obtain such wisdom when he does not seek God and does not believe that God exist?

God alone is the source of true wisdom and it is in our seeking and finding Him that we obtain true wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this world but in adherence to the teachings of Christ, for Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Once a person obtains the wisdom of God, he keeps the judgments and precepts of God always before him and strives to love his enemies and do good to them instead of despising them.

This is the opposite of the person who says, "There is no God," for this person keeps the judgments and precepts of God out of his sight because he despises all his foes instead of adhering to Christ's commandment to love one's enemies, to do good to those who hate him, and to bless those who persecute him. →

### **Icon # 90 = Reaping what one sows**

"His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue are mischief and iniquity."

Instead of blessing his enemies he curses them. He loved cursing, so cursing will boomerang to him. In other words, a person will reap only what he sows. Since he sows cursing, deceit, and oppression, he will also reap the harvest of mischief and iniquity. Since he scorned blessing, blessing will pass him by. God has set before him life and death, blessing and cursing, but he chooses cursing because all his wisdom is gone.

He so flatters himself in his mind that he knows not his guilt. He lost the sense of sin. This is a terrible thing to happen to a person. But how did he arrive in such a state? First and foremost is that he does not seek the Lord and he kept out of his sight the judgments and precepts of God, and "all his thoughts are, 'there is no God.'" Therefore there is no wonder why his mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression. This is what defiles a person because it comes from the heart.

Unless our heart is changed and purified, we are always in constant danger of uttering evil talks. Our heart becomes hard and our inner ear no longer hear the sound admonition of St. Paul, "Let no evil talk come out of your mouth, but only those that are edifying which befit the occasion." If we will render an account for every idle word we utter how much more if our mouth is filled with cursing, deceit, oppression, mischief, and iniquity, for by our words we will be justified and by our words we will be condemned! If a person's mouth is filled with

cursing and all kinds of evil talks then this is a sign that he doesn't love his life because we are told that if we would love life and see good days we have to keep our tongue from evil and our lips from speaking deceit; and we don't have to return evil for evil or reviling for reviling but on the contrary we have to bless for to this we have been called that we may obtain a blessing.

Although this is difficult for our wounded human nature but it is not impossible because in Christ all things are possible. It is only in Christ that we will learn prudence when to speak and when to remain silent as to what is proper in every situation. His spirit working within us will help us to gain self-control especially when our tongue is a little bit itchy. We can let go even of good words in favor of silence. Only then can our speech be gracious for he who knows how to be silent knows also how to speak. But no so are the wicked not so.... →

### **Icon # 91 = The Senses**

"He sits in ambush in the villages; in hiding places he murders the innocent. His eyes stealthily watch for the hapless, he lurks in secret like a lion in his covert; he lurks that he may seize the poor, he seizes the poor when he draws him to his net."

In the realm of the human person our senses and faculties can be considered as villages. These are the areas in which the evil spirit is sitting in ambush. If we are not careful in guarding our senses we will easily become his prey. For example, in the case of the eyes. Our eyes are good because through it we can see our surroundings with all the exquisite beauty of God's creation and it guides us in the way we should go. But the eyes can be exploited, for example, by deliberately using it in watching pornographic movies or pictures. This endangers the soul because it places itself in a position where the spirit of lust, lurking in secret like a lion in his lair, will seize her. Then it will eventually devour her for the devil is like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

The same with the mouth. It is good because by it we can taste the sweetness of the melody of God and sing His praises. By it we can also declare our faith that Jesus is Lord to the glory of the Father. We can also use it to speak words of comfort to the weary and encourage the faint hearted and also to bless God and bless other people. But the mouth is also subject to aberration, for example, when it is use for cursing and spreading evil talks and gossips and when it is use to sing bad and malicious songs and when it is use to put down other people. The same with the other senses. All of these come from the heart. The heart is like a junction where the senses meet. So the heart becomes a place where evil desires are lurking to seize the poor, that is, the person who is devoid of self-control and is without discipline who considers all things as permissible.

On the other hand, the heart can be guarded by a constant remembrance of God consolidated by the action of prayer. Only then can we check what is going on inside us and intercept the evil one who sits in ambush in our senses. →

### **Icon # 92 = Prayer: Essential to Spiritual Development**

“The hapless is crushed, sinks down, and fall by his might. He thinks in his heart, ‘God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it.’”

Our prayer life is absolutely essential to our spiritual development. By it God will grant us the grace to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man that we may not be crushed and sinks down by the relentless onslaught of the evil one who attacks us on every side. By prayer we will have the power to bind the evil one because Christ who is with us is stronger than the evil one who is in the world. Only those who have no help from God will be crushed, sink down, and fall by the might of the evil spirit. The Scripture says that life on earth is a continual warfare. It is a lifelong struggle between our wounded fallen nature and divine grace.

Divine Grace is the working of the Spirit of God within us to help us in our day to day struggle. Therefore if a person has no help from God the fallen nature will dominate him and there will be chaos within him because the wounded fallen nature is incline towards what is evil as the Scripture says, “Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” He might think that God has forgotten and will never see what he is thinking or doing, but again this is an illusion because nothing is hidden from God – even darkness is not dark for Him. If modern soldiers had goggles called “Night Vision” in which darkness turns into brightness, how much more of God who created both night and day. In other words, can He who formed the eye not see?

You can just see how the Devil deceives human beings. He creates a lot of commotion and confusion in the hearts of men. First, he leads men to think “There is no God.” Yet he is contradicting himself because later men think in their hearts, “God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it.” The fact that he mentioned God and will never see what men are doing is already a confirmation that there is God, for if there is no God then there is no use of saying “God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see.”

What those who deny the existence of God really doing is that they just don't want to face and accept the truth. If truth is the light of the soul, then one of the most highly possible reasons why they don't want to face and accept the truth is that they might be doing some evil deeds in secret, for everyone who does evil does not come to the light lest his deeds should be exposed. Since evil deeds are work of darkness, and that by nature people couldn't see in the dark, so they think that God, too, will never see what they are doing. But God will say to them, "Do you think I am like you?" You do these and I kept silent. I am patient with you, for My patience is meant to lead you to repentance. So, if today you hear My voice do not harden your heart. Follow Me so that you will no longer walk in darkness, for I am the light of the world. He who follows Me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. Even if your sin is as red as a scarlet I will make it as white as snow. If you will return to Me none of your sins will be remembered or held against you. If you will follow Me you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. I called you to live in freedom but only do not use your freedom as a pretext for doing evil. In Me alone is your soul be at rest. It will be restless until it rests in Me. So, while there is still time cease to do evil. Do not think in your heart that I will never see it or has utterly forgotten it. I will only forget it if you will change over a new leaf. But if you will still persist in your own way and would not repent even through a series of admonitions, then you will hear the cry of My angels and saints saying: →

### **Icon # 93 = God's admonition**

"Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up thy hand; forget not the afflicted. Why does the wicked renounce God, and say in his heart, 'Thou wilt not call to account.'"

"This is not to threaten you but to give you a chance to repent and have peace with Me. If you think yourself as a king since you rule your own self with your vices as your soldiers, then remember that no king who is going to encounter another king in war will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand. And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an embassy and asks terms of peace.

You have ten thousand vices and evil desires, but I will come to you with twenty thousand virtues to convert you, that is, if you will for I don't force anybody to surrender his life to Me against his will. If you surrender your life to Me with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, you will be welcomed with a red carpet and there will be music and dancing and the angels in heaven will rejoice, as it is written: 'All the angels in heaven will rejoice over one sinner who repents.' So think wisely and consider all possibilities. Life and death is placed

before you. Choose life and you will live. Turn away from evil and do good. Once you decided to come back to Me I have to tell you clearly that it is not enough only to turn away from evil, but you have also to do good for if not, then the demons that has gone away from you will come back and will bring another demons more deadly than themselves and your condition will be worse than the first. When I say you have to do good I do not mean that you have to apply a job or volunteer to humanitarian organizations to provide aid to the poor and needy though this is a praiseworthy kind of work. What I mean of doing good is that you have to do another kind of work, that is, the Opus Dei – the work of God. This is the direct service to God just as humanitarian aid is a direct service to My creatures who are made in My image and likeness, but in the scale of values you have to put the Opus Dei on the top priority and not the other way round because humanitarian works can be done by social workers who does not necessarily have to offer their lives to Me to do such a praiseworthy work. There are lots of My people who offered their lives to Me and, as part of their way of life, did humanitarian works. This is a very healthy way of life, but these people has to cultivate their prayer life more deeply so that their works will not become an obstacle to their intimate union with Me, because, if not, then they will be like Martha who was so distracted by too much serving when in fact only one thing is necessary. Once you have done what is good and had strove to be faithful in it, then say, 'I am unworthy servant, I just do what is commanded me.' In this way you will preserve humility because you will not attribute to yourself the good things you have done but to Me, saying: 'Not to us Lord, not to us, but to your name give the glory.'"

God is so balanced in His approach to us. He will never forget us in our affliction because He, too, was being afflicted. At the same time He continuously admonishes those who renounced Him and corrected them in their illusion that God will not call to account of the evil deeds they have done. →

### **Icon # 94 = God's Pedagogy**

"Thou dost see; yea, thou dost note trouble and vexation, that thou mayest take it into thy hands; the hapless commits himself to thee; thou has been the helper of the fatherless."

God takes note of our trouble and vexation not to push it away from us and be exempted from it, but rather to teach us how to handle our trouble and vexation. This is part of His method in teaching. He teaches us through our joys and sorrows. He did it first so that we can muster sufficient courage to follow, for Christ also suffered for us leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps. If He had not done it first it would be tremendously difficult for us to face the troubles and vexations in life because our human nature has the tendency

to shun troubles and pains. To give us an example that it is legitimate to pray to be delivered from pains and sorrows and troubles and at the same time to accept it trusting that it will bring greater good, Our Lord Jesus prayed to the Father saying, "Father, let this cup pass from me if it is possible, but if it will not pass from me unless I drink it, then not my will but your will be done." From this we can see a healthy tension between human nature and divine grace. Human nature prays to be delivered from any form of sufferings but divine grace has always the last word. Another example of this is when we are sick with cancer or any terminal illnesses. It is very legitimate to pray for healing and we even have the moral obligation to take all the necessary medicines needed for our speedy recovery, but once we do all our part and the sickness still persist, then divine grace takes over and cries out, "Not my will but your will be done." We call this an abandonment to divine providence believing that He holds us in the palm of His hand and that He will never allow any tragedy to happen to us unless He can draw something good out of it.

This is painful but in the midst of this pain there is a profound peace that surpasses all understanding because we allow God to settle at the core our being. It is like the eye of the typhoon which remains peaceful in spite of the pressure of winds it carries. God will never allow His Son to die on the cross if He would not be resurrected. So God draws a higher good out of this tragic event. It is inevitable that we have to experience trouble and vexation in different forms because this is part and parcel of our human condition but wisdom lies in jumping into the heart of God to be united with Him. It is like martyrdom because in our own little suffering we bear witness to the unalterable love of God. For this reason we count it all joy when we meet various trials for we know that the testing of our faith produces steadfastness. So, blessed are we when we endure trial for when we had stood the test we will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love Him.

We commit ourselves to God in imitation of Our Lord Jesus who on the cross commits His life to the Father, saying, "Father into your hands I commend my Spirit." →

### **Icon # 95 = On-going Purification of One's Interior Life**

"Break thou the arm of the wicked and evildoer; seek out his wickedness till thou find none."

First and foremost, we have to say that there is so much good in the worst of us and so much bad in the best of us that it is really hard to tell who among us has to reform the rest of us. Therefore, breaking the arm of the wicked and evildoer is not ours to do but for God alone who sees everything and knows the secrets

of the heart and judges justly. So, instead of being concerned in breaking other people's arm we have to be more concern of watching the performance of our own hands because Our Lord told us that if our hands or feet cause us to sin we not only have to break it but to cut it off and throw it away for it is much better to enter life with no hands or feet than have two hands and two feet and be thrown into the hell of fire where our worms will never die, that is to say, our own conscience will continually accuse us of the sins we have done. Thus it is much better that God will break the arm of the wicked and evil doer, and our arm too, while still in this mortal life in the hope that all of us may change our way of life and be converted and live, for God does not desire the death of us sinners.

We also pray that God may gently seek out our own wickedness till He finds none. This is painful because it involves a process of purification of our interior life. It is like peeling an onion one layer after another until we reach the core of it which is white and shining and pure and immaculate. The core of our being is God because we are made in His image and likeness. So, there is in us a divine beauty and sanctity but is covered and marred by the various layers of our unhealthy desires and passions. It is very reasonable to say that the peeling of the various layers of our own wickedness may take a lifelong process.

The primary reason for this is that if it is done overnight it would do more harm to our wounded human nature than good, because our human nature is so weak to bear the intensity of this purification. Christ perfectly understands the weakness and frailty of our human nature and in dealing with it He sets us an example in Jacob who said to Esau, "My Lord knows that the children are frail, and that the flock and herds giving suck are a care to me; and if they are overdriven for one day, all the flock will die." So it is the same with us. It is a tremendous grace if in one or three years one of our bad habits is peeled off. This may sound easy but actually it is really difficult because unless we are fortified with prayer or cultivate our prayer life and have inner vigilance this habit will spring up again. So, there is a need of an on-going purification. We will be deceived, no matter how great progress we made in the spiritual life, if we think there is no more in us that has to be removed.

The only advantage that we could have if we perseveringly remove the weeds that sprang up is that it no longer requires as much effort than if we just let it grow and is deeply rooted. Take for instance when we work in the garden. It has to be cleaned first. All the weeds has to be removed. Some of the weeds are big and some are small. This requires lot of efforts at first especially if we do it by our bare hands without the help of garden tools. But if we have garden tools, though it still requires lot of effort, it becomes easier. We need only to persevere in checking out the weeds that will spring up again and we can easily take it out. So also in the garden of our soul. It has to be cleansed first from all its vices. Some of our vices are big and some are small; and without the tool of prayer

and the grace of God it is tremendously difficult to remove all these vices for it is tantamount to cleaning a garden by our bare hands.

But by the help of prayers and the grace of God our heart will be soften for it is being cultivated and watered and fertilized. Then the flowers of virtues will start to grow in all its beauty and splendor. It is likely that after a while some of these small vices will sprout again because it is so ingrained in our fallen human nature just as the small seeds and tiny roots of the weeds is mixed up with the soil. Our part, then, is to visit from time to time this garden and check the weeds that start to grow. Some of these weeds are vines that can choke the flowers. This, too, has to be cut off. These vines are like our attachments to some material objects such as a pen or a book. When we entered the monastery we left a house or a property and it doesn't bothered us much, but after a while living in a monastery if someone took our pen we feel irritated by it. This is because we are still attach to things. Feeling irritated is something that would try to choke our soul. It is like the weeds that sprang up again after a while. If we let it grow it hinders the growth of the flower and there is a danger that eventually it will kill it. So also with our soul. Attachment to little things seems to be harmless at first but if we will let it grow it prevents our progress in the spiritual life for it choke the word of God in our soul. Once the word of god in us is choke, then, the weeds and vines of the cares of this world and the delight in material things will eventually kill our soul.

This doesn't mean that to have a pen or a book or precious notes or a dress or even a car is by itself wrong, but the attachment to them. The gauge that can be use to determine our attachment is our feeling. The more at peace we are if anything, even the one that we hold so dear, is taken from us the more we know that we are detached from it. In this case, it is safe to have it. But the more we are troubled or angry if someone took, even by mistake, the small things that we have the more it indicates that we are still attach to them. In this case, it is not safe to have them unless we will cut off this attachment.

It is very helpful that from time to time we will look at the things that we have and honestly ask ourselves: "If today all these things will be taken away from me, am I willing to let it go?" If we can honestly say Yes to this question and be at peace with it, then, it is safe to have it.

But again, this is not a license to accumulate things but to use them as a concession and always mindful that only one thing is necessary – the possession of God. If we are possessed by God, He will seek out our own wickedness to cleanse and purify it till He finds none. God is like a gardener, our soul the garden, the flowers are the virtues, our own wickedness the weeds or vines. Just as the gardener removes the weeds that sprang up in his garden, so also the Spirit of God dwelling in our soul will graciously purify and sanctify us. God is not yet finished with His work within us, as Our Lord said, "My Father is working still, and I am working." Isn't it a wonderful and magnificent honor and dignity which



God bestows on us that the Father Himself and the Son and the Holy Spirit are working within us day and night until they could no longer find any wickedness in us? →

### **Icon # 96 = The Kingship of God within us**

**“The Lord is King for ever; the nations shall perish from his land.”**

Whether we will serve and love God in this life or not, God will always remain a King forever and ever. God will never force us to serve and love Him, but He gave us first an example of service and love that we may follow in His steps and respond to His love. For instance, He washed the feet of Peter and the other disciples and said to them, “You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.”

And to show us how much He loves us in a very concrete and tangible way even though we have offended Him by our sins, He patiently and willingly endured the humiliation and suffering on the cross. God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. He died for us that we might no longer live for ourselves but for Him and to freely love Him not only as our King and God, but as a lover of our soul. It is love alone that makes the unequal equal. Once we respond to the love of God and allow Him to rule our life trusting Him in everything even in the most unpleasant thing that will happen to us, then we will see by the very own eyes of our soul that God is already establishing His kingdom within us. Since God doesn’t want any rival because no one can serve two masters for either he will be devoted to the one and despise the other or he will love the one and hate the other, so, as a consequence, other nations shall perish from His kingdom, that is to say, all self-seeking, desire for comfort and worldly pleasures, all disobedience to legitimate authority, all impurity, jealousy, and anger and competition, etc. All this has to perish from the soul. This may not be done over night or in a single day, but the soul with the help of prayer and God’s grace shall patiently and perseveringly has to work on it. Once one of these nations will collapse the others will diminish its power and eventually fall down. It is like a domino – one nation is closely connected with each other. It is also like the fall of communism. Thus there’s a need for solidarity

among inherent virtues of the soul to stand firm and fight for its freedom so that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Our King and God Jesus Christ without fear in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. →

### **Icon # 97 = University of Love**

“O Lord, thou wilt hear the desire of the meek, thou wilt strengthen their heart, thou wilt incline thy ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.”

In the spiritual life – we can also call this interior life – Christ is our teacher par excellence and we are all students. Christ has also a school – we can call this school as the University of Love. In this school there are different subjects such as: purity of life and intention, obedience not only to lawful authority but also among equals and even to inferiors, simplicity of life-style, Discretion or Prudence, Hope, Faith, Fortitude, Self-denial, Justice, Courtesy in Manners and Thoughts (courtesy in thoughts might sound new to you but really it is not. It simply mean to be slow to judge, and to think of others better than ourselves). All these are excellent subjects in the University of Love, but Christ teaches only two courses, namely: Meekness and Humility, as He Himself said: “Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart.” This doesn’t mean that He could not teach the other subjects, but it is noble to say that these two courses are His favorite subjects. No doubt St. Paul who was one of the great alumni of this school had understood it clearly when he said concerning Our Lord Jesus: “Though he was in the form of God he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.”

For God to become a man and be like us in everything except sin is already the breadth and the height and the depth of infinite humility. Consider Him who own the entire universe with all the hydrogen and oxygen and all the various elements in the space and the golds and silver and diamonds and pearls and all the precious stones and minerals on earth and all the oil in Saudi Arabia and the other parts of the world, who had nowhere to lay His head and without a slightest shadow of a doubt had not the luxury of the 20<sup>th</sup> century North American rest room.

For a North American millionaire to spend 3 months in a house of a poor Mexican or Filipino family and stay with them and sleep and eat with them and dress like them would boggle the minds and imaginations of his contemporaries how much more of God who is not only a millionaire or billionaire or trillionaire or dekaniare, but a beyondnaire. On our reflection of Psalm 9, I mentioned there the different titles of riches such as millionaire or billionaire or dekaniare. I got the term dekaniare from the Greek word deka which means ten. Million has 6 zeros after 1, billion has 9, trillion has 12, and dekaniare has 30. As an individual of this world no one has ever even reached the prestigious and elusive title as a trillionaire. As a nation, the United States can be considered as a trillionaire, but never ever as a dekaniare. In a paradoxical way, Dekaniare can be reached only by those who have studied and persevered and graduated at the University of Love who have learned from Christ how to be meek and humble of heart and how to be at peace with God, with themselves, and with one another for blessed are the peacemakers because they shall be called children of God. If children, then, an heir of all the treasures and wealth and riches of God who is Himself a beyondnaire, that is to say, His treasures and wealth and riches are beyond our human imagination because all the silver and gold and pearls and diamonds of this world combine together are just clay and dust in His eyes. He made them all out of nothing and they came to be, but they shall be given to the meek and humble of heart, as the Lord said: "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth."

The meek desire only one thing which is necessary, that is, to be united with God for all eternity, for everyone who is united with the Lord becomes one spirit with Him. All the rest flows from this desire. So, even if we only have food and clothing we shall be content with it and if we have riches in addition to our food and clothing we will not put our trust in it but learn to share what we have to the less fortunate having the eyes of our heart enlightened to see that we are His instrument to diffuse His love and care for all His people who are in most need of His love and mercy.

God will strengthen the heart of the meek so that they could withstand the inevitable trials and challenges of life and also that they may gain possession of their interior life. In this way they are more stronger than the kings and presidents of this world who easily lost their temper if they could not get what they want; for "he who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city."

"God will incline His ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more." The fatherless can be considered as those who are deprived of human affection, those whom nobody shows them love. They are orphans of love. The oppressed are those who are tormented by the sorrows and pains that they experienced in life. Some of these

sorrows and pains are caused by the betrayal of those whom they loved, and others are caused by some tragic events. It weighs them down that it became so oppressive. They were like the man who was beaten black and blue by robbers and left half dead lying beside the road whom nobody care for him except a Samaritan who brought him to an inn to be cared for. So also with God. When we found ourselves powerless and helpless and are oppressed by painful memories and are very weary and found life burdensome and nobody seems to care for us, then God will do justice to us by bringing us to His Sacred Heart where we will be cared for and can find rest for our soul. Justice simply means to give a person what is his/her due. In our case, what we deserve is compassion and love and mercy and forgiveness. God gave these to us out of His sheer goodness. God never cease walking up and down the roads and highways of our life inviting all of us, saying, "Come to Me all of you who are weary and find life burdensome and I will give you rest...and learn from Me for I am meek and humble of heart and you will find rest for your souls."

Little by little we are healed by our inner woundedness and in our recuperation God allows us to be enrolled in His University of Love where we will study and learn His two favorite courses: Humility and Meekness. While in this University we will also learn some other courses such as: joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; and everything that is good, honest, and true. Once we learned all this even little by little, then, man who is of the earth, that is to say, the part in us that is selfish, harsh, dark, lustful, and self-opinionated may strike terror no more because they have been educated in this prestigious University of Love where sinners became saints, the selfish became generous, the harsh became meek, the lustful became chaste, and the self-opinionated became humble. But in order for us not to be elated by this heavenly wisdom and knowledge, God had allowed that our evil tendency, which inherent to our fallen human nature, will still remain in us to teach and remind us that apart from Him we can do nothing. It safeguards the virtue of humility. →

### **Icon # 98 = Cities of Refuge**

#### **Psalm 11 (10)**

"In the Lord I take refuge; how can you say to me, 'Flee like a bird to the mountains; for lo, the wicked bend the bow, they have fitted their arrow to the string, to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart; if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?'"

In the time of Moses, the Lord commanded him to appoint cities of refuge that the manslayer might retire there and have time to prepare himself for justification before the judges, so that the relatives of the deceased might not pursue him there and kill him. These cities are to be easy of access and to have

smooth and good roads to them with inscription directing the way to the city of refuge.

This city was to be well supplied with water and all kinds of provisions. The case then came before the judges. If he was found innocent, he dwelt safely in the city; if otherwise, he was put to death according to the severity of the law. Though he was found innocent he was not immediately set at liberty but he was obliged to dwell in this city without going out of it till the death of the high priest. If before this time he should anywhere go out of the city, the relatives of the deceased might safely kill him (Num. 35: 9-28).

We have to admit that we are manslayer in many ways. Some people might say, "Well, I haven't killed a person, so how can I be a manslayer?" These people said this because they think that to kill a person you have to use a knife or gun or a bomb or suffocate that person or throw him down a high precipice. It is true that they might not have done any of these, but listen to what Our Lord said: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment....'" From this we can have a glimpse that to act out our anger against a brother or sister is already a form of killing him, thus we are liable to judgment. Therefore, who among us has never been angry with someone? Know that even a look can already slay a person. To feel angry by itself cannot kill a person, but to act out our anger is tantamount to killing a person because it proceeds from the heart. We have to say that we are not our own feeling because feelings just come and go, but to nourish an unhealthy feeling is highly dangerous for sooner or later it will give birth to a sinful gesture and action; and then when it is full grown it brings forth death. This is also true to other kinds of unhealthy passions such as Lustful desires. To feel sexually aroused by itself is not sinful, but to nourish it by continually thinking about it is highly dangerous because it will lead to sinful actions such as masturbation, fornication, and adultery. To commit fornication or adultery is like slaying each other on the bed of unchastity. You ruined the reputation of the other person and destroyed his or her family which is the foundation of society. In this case, if we don't want to be killed by the relatives of the deceased, that is, the other passions, then we have to flee to one of the cities of refuge. See the kindness of God that He appoints not only one city but several cities that we can take refuge.

One of these cities is the Sacrament of Reconciliation where we acknowledged our own sinfulness before God and before the Church and never to depart from the state of penitence while we are still in this mortal life, because if we will depart from this state of penitence we might be killed by pride and self-indulgence that are pursuing us. The other cities are the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus, the Divine Mercy Devotion, Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary as

Refuge of Sinners or Our Mother of Perpetual Help or her Immaculate Heart, Devotion to Saints, etc. These are the cities of refuge where we can be safe as long as we stay within them. They are well supplied with water and all kind of provisions to nourish and sustain us while we wait for our final liberation, that is to say, we are supplied with the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist for the nourishment of our souls, and good books for the nourishment of our minds, and prayer for the nourishment of our hearts, and on top of it we are given the Holy Spirit as a spring of water welling up to eternal life. If these things are ours and abound, there would be no need for us to flee like a bird to the mountains. To flee like a bird to the mountains is also an image of safety; because once the bird fled to the mountains it would be hard for the hunter to pursue it. If he will attempt to climb the mountains, even before he will reach the top the bird will flee again to the other mountain. Though mountains are good places of refuge, yet it is far better to take refuge in the Lord because time will come when all the mountains will be gone but Our Lord will stay forever. →

### **Icon # 99 = Christian Discipleship**

“For lo, the wicked bend the bow, they have fitted their arrow to the string, to shoot in the dark at the upright of heart.”

The most popular image of cupidity is a little boy with a bow and arrow ready to shoot. It is intriguing to note that it is pictured as a little boy and not a mature and adult man. It is possible that it is pictured as a little boy to remind us that our lustful desires start first from a little thought and once we entertained it, it will become bigger and bigger and stronger and will shoot us right in our heart; that is to say, we can feel a very strong passion. It is shot in the dark because all of us have our weak area. Therefore, there's a need for us to pray every day of our lives for the grace to be strengthened in our weaknesses and be enlightened in our darkness. For us Christians it is in Our Lord Jesus that we can be strengthened in our weaknesses and be enlightened in our darkness, because everyone who follows Christ sincerely will not walk in darkness. Christian discipleship always involves interacting and engagement with Our Lord Jesus. At first we may feel ashamed to expose ourselves to Christ, but little by little once we develop an intimacy with Him we will become more open to Him and will no longer be embarrassed to reveal ourselves before Him with all the foibles that we have.

We can develop this intimacy by perseverance and fidelity in our prayer life. if our prayer life is healthy our soul becomes sensitive enough to detect the bow of temptation that is lurking in the dark areas of our life which is just finding an occasion to shoot us, because each of us is tempted when we are lured and enticed by our own desire.

A healthy prayer life does not only detect our evil inclination but can gain a strength to resist and evade the temptation that may come to us, because God is faithful and He will not let us be tempted beyond our strength but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape that we may be able to endure it and resist it.

To pray is to acknowledge that by ourselves we are weak, but in God we are strong for His grace is sufficient for us because His power is made perfect in weakness.

Our prayer, then, is the foundation on which we build our relationship with God. But, what happen if our prayer life is destroyed? In this case the wicked spirit will be dancing and can shoot us even blind folded in the dark. We know that the destruction of our prayer life begins always in small things, say for instance, we feel lazy to pray – we don't feel like praying, spiritual reading does not give us delight, we feel unusually irritable against other people, then we begin to enjoy worldly pleasure and go out with women to an innocent party.

These things are small and harmless at first, because whether we like it or not there will be times that prayer doesn't give us delight and we don't get much from our reading and we may feel a dislike with our brother or sister, and can have a legitimate enjoyment at an innocent party, but if we keep on nourishing them and would no longer lift up our eyes to God, then, little by little they will gnaw, like termites, the foundation of spiritual life. The great tragedy here would be if we know that these termites are already gnawing the foundation of our spiritual life and yet we just ignore them, or do not do something about them or not talk about them with our confessor or spiritual director or a close friend whom we can trust. In other words, we became secretive.

No wonder that eventually our foundations will be destroyed. We will even be more embarrassed and ashamed as the words of Christ are realized, "Nothing that is hidden that will not be known, or covered that will not be made manifest."

This is a constant struggle from the early centuries of Christianity. This is a struggle whose arena is our heart. Only those who totally gave themselves to Christ without any slightest reserve can win this battle, for everyone who is not with Him is against Him and everyone who does not gather with Him scatters, that is to say, if Christ is not the source and object of all our actions it will dissipate and lose its value no matter how seemingly benevolent that action might be. But if we do everything in Christ and with Christ and for Christ, then, no matter how small and insignificant our works would be it has an incomparable value in His sight.

When I said that only those who totally gave themselves to Christ can win this battle, I do not mean that we will no longer be subject to imperfection or failures or even what theology called venial sin. We will still have failures, we will still fall into venial sin, we will still have imperfections and weaknesses, but the grace of Christ working in us will give us enough strength and courage not to be discouraged and will turn it to our own advantage because it teaches us humility and make us realize that sanctification is not our own doing. However, we have our own part which we hope to be carried out, that is, to cooperate with the grace of Christ molding us into His own image and likeness until we grow into mature manhood to the fullness of Christ. This is a strong and solid foundation but, in a staggered amazement, can be destroyed by our own negligence. Filled with awe and bewilderment we can only exclaim: "how strong a foundation that is ruined by a small carelessness." In other words, we begin in the life of the spirit and ended up in the life of the flesh. This is a mysterious struggle which has its origin in our little infidelities and brushing off God's inspiration. Of course, our own free will is the master mind of this ruin, for God has a high respect for our freedom and could only wish that that we should not use it as an opportunity for the flesh to follow its unbridle desires; but unfortunately we freely chose the lead of our unhealthy desires which ended up in the ruins of the foundation of our interior life.

How many priests and religious who begin in the life of the spirit and ended up in the life of the flesh? At first they sang the song of freedom of the children of God with the melody and lyric of a virtuous life, but for whatever mysterious reason were led into captivity to a foreign land of worldly desires. The temple of their souls is destroyed. Now they sat and wept as they recall the sweet intimacy they have with the Lord. We may wonder whether they really had experienced a sweet intimacy with the Lord, because if they really had experienced a sweet intimacy with the Lord, how come that they were led into captivity, for to experience even a drop of this sweetness is powerful enough to make all worldly pleasures insipid? I do believe that at some points in their lives they had experienced a close relationship with God but it had not been nourished and nurtured by humble perseverance in prayer and by even little sacrifices and acceptance of trials that come along the way, because love will die if it is not nourish by sacrifice and prayer. Just as a body which has no nourishment will come to ruin, so also the soul which has no nourishment will eventually be destroyed. →

### **Icon # 100 = Building a New Foundation**

"If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?"



Notice that they wept as they recall the sweet intimacy they have with the Lord. As long as this weeping is not out of self-pity but out of humility, that is, a humble acceptance of one's infidelity and never justify oneself before God and before men, then, mercy will twist the arm of justice so as not to pronounce a terrible sentence against them but give them another chance to build a new foundation. The mercy shown to them is meant to lead them to rely more on God and not on themselves and to avoid once more all occasion that may contribute to the ruin of this new foundation. It meant also to make them realize that unless the Lord builds the house those who labor on it labors in vain. →

### **Icon # 101 = Body: Temple of God**

"The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven; his eyes behold, his eyelids test, the children of men."

Since we have been given another chance to build a new foundation, so, the life that we now live should no longer be for ourselves but for the Lord. We do the best we can to cooperate with the graces He gave us so as to make our body His holy temple where we can worship Him in holiness of life all the days of our lives. This is a tremendous condescension on the part of God to make our body His temple, as St. Paul said: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"

Since our body is the temple of God, so, it shall be called a house of prayer where all the faculties of our soul can make a pilgrimage as often as we wish. The beauty of this new temple surpasses that of the old because this new temple is adorned with all the virtues of the soul and it is left open night and day so that we can pray without ceasing and can go in and out to find rest if we are wearied, comfort when we are afflicted, consolation when we are in desolation. To this temple we bring all our joys and sorrows and offer them to God in spirit of thanksgiving.

The heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain God, and yet He makes our body His dwelling. Isn't this a wonder of wonder? "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men," as the Scripture says. We trust and pray every day that God feels at home within us, and that we may never do or say or think anything that would deliberately offend Him; that He, too, can freely go in and out in the house of our soul without the need to knock and ask us whether we would open the door or not, for to knock and ask permission to enter suggest that our heart is not yet His home because if we are already His home, then there is no need for Him to knock and ask permission to enter just as the owner of a house would never knock in view of asking permission to enter.

The surest sign that God feels at home within us is when we strive to keep His commandments, for keeping His commandments is the most tangible hallmark that we love Him, as Christ Himself said: "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father...and we will come to him and make our home with him."

To maintain the holiness of this temple so as to be a worthy home of God there's a need for us to have a daily examination of conscience. This practice will prevent us from sliding down to the dangerous abyss of the loss of the sense of sin, because if we lost the sense of sin the temple of our body will become the dens of thieves instead of a house of prayer. We don't want this to happen not only because we have been given another chance to live a new life, but also because this offends God greatly and even provokes Him to anger. And we don't want to provoke Him to anger not only because He has power to cast both our body and soul into eternal misery, but above all because of our love for Him, for love does no wrong to his beloved. →

### **Icon # 102 = Awareness of God's Presence**

"The Lord's throne is in heaven; his eyes behold, his eyelids test, the children of men."

Heaven is where God is. If God is in our heart, so we are already experiencing heaven even while still on earth. For this reason our heart becomes His throne. It is like a tabernacle. What the tabernacle is to the Church is what the heart is to our body. From the heart God looks at us, and if our heart is pure we can also look at Him and be able to see Him because purity of heart enables us to see God, as the Scripture says, "Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God." So, now there's a mutual gazing. God looks at us and we in turn look at Him. This is a characteristic of loving. Notice that lovers spend more time in looking at each other's eyes by which each of them find access to each other's heart. They are so absorbed at each other as though they are the only ones that exist. All the things that they hear and see and even their surroundings only serve as a background to their encounter.

In the same way, though we are in the world but, if we are engaged in a mutual gazing with God, we are not of the world, that is to say, our values are not of this world. We use the things of this world so as to facilitate our relationship with the Lord, as the Scripture says, "Those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it." On the other hand, whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we do it to the glory of God, giving thanks to God the Father through Christ Jesus Our Lord.

Our Order, Order of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance, is geared toward a concrete encounter with God. It is a great blessing to be in a monastery where God's presence is palpable. The solitude and silence of the place, the Liturgy of the Hours, the coming together for meal, our private prayer and reading, and our work are means to help facilitate our encounter with God. When the awareness of God's presence becomes part of our being, that is to say, God looks at us and we look at Him, this gives meaning to all that we do no matter how small and trivial it is. We become pleaser of God rather than pleaser of men, that is to say, we do our work assignment to the best of our ability not in view to impress other people but to please God. We also do things that come our ways that could or need to be done. For example, when we wash our own dish and it happens that there are utensils or pots or pans in the sink certainly we are not obliged to wash it because the monk/s who are assigned that week has the responsibility in washing it, but our love for God enables us to make the choice in freely washing it even though no human person is looking at us. In this case God alone is our witness. Little by little, slowly but surely, we will develop a testimony of a good conscience. One sign that this comes from God is that we don't become too scrupulous about it when circumstance demand that we should forego doing it in favor of something much better. For example, when it happens that while washing our own dish the bell rings for the divine office, then we need only to finish our dish but would not be troubled for not washing the remaining pots or pan. These are all small and insignificant things which people outside the monastery would not even think of, yet there's a need to remember that fidelity to little things is a wide avenue that leads to fidelity in bigger things. One instrument in which we can test our character is whether we will do things even though nobody sees us.

It really makes a colossal difference once the awareness that God's eyes constantly behold us became part of us, because this not only prevents loneliness but also because it teaches us to do what is good and avoid what is evil; it teaches us also when to speak and when to remain silent. In other words, it teaches us discretion and prudence what is proper to do in given situation.

This awareness of God's presence is already a form of prayer. By this we fulfill St. Paul's injunction to pray without ceasing. God looks at us not as a perfectionist master who is dissatisfied with the mistakes of his slave nor as a police agent who keeps track of a drug dealer, but as a loving Father who can smile at us as we stumble and fail in our attempts to imitate and follow His example, who is pleased to see us grow into His likeness and practice virtues even if we stagger and seem to look awkward at first. This staggering and awkwardness should not surprise us because growth in virtues come with time just as a boy or a girl doesn't become proficient right away as he or she makes an apprenticeship in his or her parents' trade. As long as this mutual gazing continues it will bring

maturity to our soul just as a boy who perseveres in his trade will eventually develop his skill.

Just as Christ looked at the young man with love, so also He looks at us with love. This looking is already a form of a test because it evokes a response whether we are willing to let go the lower kinds of love in favor of a much better and lasting love, a love which no thief can steal and no moth can devour and no rust can consume. It is a lasting love because it is nourished by prayer and sacrifices.

Though God looks at us with love, yet His presence has a variety of effects on people. A former postulant here told me that God's presence is so tangible and overwhelming – it's just there, yet he left because he could not bear it. Is he afraid to gaze at God, or is he afraid to face his own self and explore those areas that are in need of God's pardon and mercy? Is he afraid to let go of his possessions, namely, his self-will and attachments? Positive answer to these questions is not far from reality. →

### **Icon # 103 = Violence: Healthy & Unhealthy**

“The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, and his soul hates him that loves violence.”

The things that happen to us either positive or negative does not really makes us good or bad but only reveal what is already in us. Take for example the gold that is mixed with metals. Then fire came along. The fire does not produce the gold, but only manifest the genuiness of the character of the gold. This has a resemblance with people. For example, we are diagnosed with a terminal illness. This illness itself does not make us righteous or wicked, but only brings to light what is already in our heart. If our heart had been disposed to trust and confidence in God this trust and confidence will be revealed when we hear the news of our illness. This doesn't mean that since we have been disposed to trust and confidence in God we will no longer feel any anxiety or even fear. These feelings are in the lower part of our soul, but as long as the superior part of our soul remain rested in God we can still maintain an equilibrium and in the process purifies our soul and reveals the genuiness of our faith and love for God. Just as the stars, which are hidden during the day, shine brightly in the darkest part of the night, so also the true character of our soul, which is hidden in time of prosperity, will be revealed in time of adversity.

“...and his soul hates him that loves violence.” There is a healthy form of violence and there is also an unhealthy form of violence. Those who love this unhealthy form of violence is what the Lord hates. An example of this unhealthy kind of violence is the killing of innocent people in the name of God. This kind of violence is unhealthy because it is a desecration of the image of God in each

human person. As Christian, we believe that our body is the temple of God, so whoever destroys this temple God will also destroy. I believe that we are not far from reality if we say that this is the reason why God will destroy death forever because death kills the human body. It even attempts to kill and destroy the body of the Son of God, but death has no dominion over Him, for in attempting to destroy the body of the Son of God death is destroyed, as it is written: "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." Thus in Christ death is already destroyed. In His resurrection Christ is victorious over death.

Some scoffers might deride, saying: "Where is the promise of his victory over death for us human race? For ever since the time of Christ until now people still dies in their hundreds per minute and a good portion of these die a violent death in war, famine, abortion, illnesses and diseases of every kind such as AIDS and cancer, etc." These scoffers deliberately ignore the truth that all people whether good or bad has to die first before being resurrected. But woe to those who do violence to other people, who love the work of darkness. In so doing, they also do violence to themselves in a destructive way for this will lead to eternal death. The lovers of this kind of violence are what the Lord hates.

And yet, there's another form of violence which is a healthy one, that is, to do violence to our self-assertiveness by not looking only to our own interest but also to the interest of others; to do violence to our talkativeness by discerning when to speak and when to remain silent in order to be able to listen to the still small voice of God within us; to do violence to our ego by always looking at Christ the pioneer and perfecter of our faith; to do violence to our cravings for worldly things by being cautious how to use them and by reminding ourselves that these things are very thorny and will choke the spiritual longings for the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father; to do violence to our desire to be consulted or preferred to by counting others better than ourselves; to do violence to our self-will by humbly obeying one another as long as the wishes or commands does not contradict God's commandments; to do violence to our pride by having a healthy self-knowledge of the truth about ourselves; to do violence to our self-love by reaching out to others (for us monks reaching out to others does not mean we have to go out of the monastery to do active apostolate because this is not our vocation. Our community is a world in itself. Thus we can still reach out to the entire universe by our sacrifice of praise and prayer, and by our active charity to each other because everyone who is united to God is united to all, for God is in all); to do violence to our anger by either a gracious silence or return a soft answer. In other words, we have to do violence to the lower parts of our human nature so that the superior parts will flourish.

All these kinds of violence will also lead to death, but it is a noble death because it is a death to the old Adam in us and the birth of the new Adam in us

– the new life in Christ Jesus Our Lord, for everyone who is in Christ is a new creature. The former have passed away. Behold, they are made new.

These kinds of violence are healthy, because these are the only kinds of violence that can open the door of heaven. The other kinds of violence shut the door of heaven. →

### **Icon # 104 = Eternal Punishment vs. Eternal Gratitude**

“On the wicked he will rain coals of fire and brimstone; a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.”

The image of raining coals of fire and brimstone reminds us of Sodom and Gomorrah where the wickedness of the people forcedly demands God to rain fire and brimstone. God was very reluctant to yield to their demands because He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He patiently waited if there be among them, even just five of them, who would protest by living a godly way of life against the unbridled wickedness of the inhabitants who is forcing Him to rain coals of fire and brimstone, but no one among them protested for they do not love their lives even unto death.

In a certain sense they had already a foretaste of what is known as gehenna or hell but in a milder form because it was like taking a shower of fire, whereas in hell, as Sr. Lucia saw it in her vision and also as St. Faustina Kowalska saw it, the souls are completely immersed in the fire. In this case it's no longer a shower but a bath tub of ocean of fire.

It is no wonder that from every generation the devil would inculcate in the minds of people the denial of the existence of hell; first and foremost, because he hates us and doesn't want us to inherit the happiness he had forfeited. Thus by looking at us he is filled with envy and jealousy; and in order to obliterate our attention from God and from true happiness of God, he entices us with another kind of happiness, for example, a hedonistic way of life. Therefore, by inculcating into the minds of people that there is no hell, and that the doctrine of hell is only a fabrication of Christianity, especially the Catholic Church, he gave them a license to indulge in their immoral behavior without any qualm of conscience not knowing that they are like a flock of chicken lead to be slaughtered.

People who deny the existence of hell has a serious doubts of the goodness of God. Can God, who is so good and loving and full of mercy and compassion and slow to anger and rich in clemency, punish a finite offense with an everlasting torture? "What kind of God would this be?" they reason out.

Their objections would be valid if the Supreme Judge were to consider only their outward deeds without looking into their hearts. To be sure, the sins that they commit come to an end when they die. But, would they not be willing to live on endlessly, if that were possible, in order to continue sinning? By not leaving off sinning during their life time, they show their desire to continue to sin forever. The full justice of God, therefore, demands that the wicked who never wished to be rid of sinning during this earthly life, should never be without punishment in eternity.

In their malice they persuade other people saying, "God has merely threatened sinners with eternal punishment to keep us from committing sins."

Justice demands that we should respond to their arguments even if it's a mere flicker of hoping against hope to win them over to our side and that they may be converted and live.

If God makes use of empty threats to keeps us from sin and injustice, then the promises He Makes to lead us to justice and holiness are likewise worthless. But no one in his right mind would entertain such a thought. If God threatened us without intending to fulfill His threat, we should have to call Him deceitful instead of merciful.

To what purpose, then, do the wicked burn in hell forever? Almighty God, being a God of love, does not gratify His anger by torturing wretched sinners. However, since He is a God of justice, the punishment of the wicked cannot satisfy Him even if it continues eternally. All the wicked condemned to hell are being punished for their wickedness, to be sure. Yet the other reason why they burn is that the elect may see in God all the joys they experienced and may see in the damned all the tortures they escaped. Seeing the terrible punishment for sins which they avoided with God's help, they become all the more conscious of the eternal debt of gratitude they owe God for the graces they received.

On the other hand, all causes of sin and all evil doers shall be thrown into the furnace of fire; there they will weep and gnash their teeth while the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father, who is God Himself. →

### Icon # 105 = Conjoin Twins: Humility & Obedience

“For the Lord is righteous, he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.”

If we know that God is righteous, we may be sure that everyone who does right is born of Him.

Just as a loving father naturally loves his children, so also God naturally loves righteous deeds, because righteous deeds come from Him. All who belongs to the household of God can recognize that the eldest of these righteous deeds is charity. The youngest is humility, but it is the apple of His eyes. It is the virtue dearest to Him. Humility has a twin brother called obedience. They are conjoin twins. Right from the very beginning when the soul is born of God humility and obedience sprang up together. They grow together in their knowledge of God. When one of them dies or in serious sickness the other is in grave danger, that is to say, when a person who is obstinately disobedient it means that his or her humility is seriously sick or had died. In the same way with pride. When we see proud people it means that his or her obedience is in great jeopardy. He would find it extremely difficult to obey. We have an example of this in the devil who in his pride finds it impossible to obey. On the other hand, if a person is humble there is a willingness to obey deep down in his heart even in difficult circumstances. This doesn't mean that he is already impervious to the pain that oftentimes difficult command entails. We have an example of this in Our Lord Jesus who in His agony in the garden had a heart to heart talk with His Father telling Him how He feels and if possible to let the cup of suffering pass Him by, if this is possible, but deep down in His heart there was a willingness to obey the difficult demand of His Father, so He said: “Father, if this cup will not pass from me unless I drink it, not my will but your will be done.”

By Christ's humility and obedience, then, He dismantled the stronghold of the devil and gave us the power and strength to resist temptation and avoid occasions that can endanger these conjoin twins. An example of an occasion that can endanger these conjoin twins is self-assertiveness to the extent that we become so arrogant and emotional in declaring our ideas as though our ideas and ways of doing things are the only correct ones and would no longer listen to other peoples' viewpoint.

Charity and humility, with his twin brother obedience, has still lots of brothers and sisters. One of them is named Hope, the other is Faith; and the rest are kindness, gentleness, patience, chastity, self-control, modesty, alms giving, prudence, fortitude, justice, Opus Dei, etc. That is why we often say, “We have to make an act of faith or I have to make an act of faith.” If it is an act, then, it is a deed. These are all righteous deeds which the Lord loves. All who does them are called



upright. And the upright shall see God, for all the deeds he has done in righteousness enable him to stand erect and look up at the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father. →

### **Icon # 106 = Faith on Earth? Yes & NO**

#### **Psalm 12 (11)**

“Help, Lord; for there is no longer any that is godly; for the faithful have vanished from among the sons of men”

It is a terrible thing to happen when there is no longer any person that is godly, for it would be like Sodom and Gomorah wherein the faithful have vanished from them. This could be the other side of the answer to the question of Our Lord when He asked: “When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

This question can be answered Yes and No. No, if you and I and all who consecrates their lives to God no longer live a life worthy of our calling. Instead of passionately longing for the coming of Our Lord we eat and drink with the drunkards and have quarrels with one another devouring each other; spending our days in malice; looking only to our own interest rather than that of others; beating our brothers or sisters with harsh and unkind words; when we no longer forgive each other; when we repay evil for evil, and hatred for the good done to us; when we are no longer grateful to God for all He has done in our lives; when we closed our eyes to the beauty of creation and does not acknowledged God who created them out of His sheer love for us; when we willingly embraced the destructive option of the culture of death rather than the culture of life (this culture of death includes: abortion; human cloning; euthanasia, capital punishment, drugs and sex and rock 'n roll, and assisted suicide; dishonesty in business dealings; hedonistic way of life, etc). So, if we and all people of goodwill willfully join those who do these things or those who approve them, then the Son of Man, Christ Jesus, will not find faith on earth when He comes. In this case we are living a life of lie or our whole life is a lie; and the assuage the throes of one's conscience: →

### **Icon # 107 = Culture of Death : Abortion, Human Cloning, Euthanasia, Assisted Suicide, Capital Punishment, Drugs & Sex & Rock n' Roll, Hedonism, etc. vs. Culture of Life**

“Every one utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.”

Abortion raises up its head and unashamedly utters lie and flattery, saying: You will be alright, don't worry. This child will be just a burden to you. It is much better to get rid of him while it is still early. Anyhow he is not yet a fully develop human

being – he is still a fetus. Then you can go on living as usual. Enjoy yourself and have sex, but be sure to take your pills or put on your IUD. If by accident you got pregnant again and you don't want the child don't hesitate to abort him and don't worry about what people think or say of you especially the Catholic Church, for they are all 'kill joy' and won't allow you to make a free choice. See how good abortion is that the government itself, who in their money put 'In God we trust', supported it. If it is not good, then, the government won't endorse it. The government of the United States of America even encouraged other nations to do so. See, how good it is! So don't be threatened by the Catholic Church and all Pro-Life advocates, for they are all crazy. Imagine some of them will even say a rosary in front of an abortion clinic. Isn't it an absurd thing?" Then, the poor soul was deceived by the lie and flattery of abortion and allowed herself to be slaughtered like a goat that is being led to the slaughter house.

Here comes human cloning who dresses herself in scarlet swaddling clothes as though she is innocent. With flattering lips and a double heart she utters lies to the whole human family in a form of concern or solicitude to heal human diseases. Impudently she climbs the tree of scientific knowledge with the tiny frozen baby in her hands. See! She is already contradicting herself. She seems to have solicitude for humans who have disease, and yet she puts another more innocent human beings in a freezer as though they were beefs or chickens. How can you justify such an action? Yet, shamelessly, she wipes out the baby's tissue from her mouth and cunningly says, "Does God tell you not to clone human beings? God knows that when you cloned human beings by taking genetic material from a person's body and injecting it to an egg, the cloned embryo is almost identical genetically to the person whose body cells was used. In this way you will become like God who can create an almost exact copy of yourself. God is jealous of this, because He thinks He alone can made man in His image and likeness and He doesn't want you to have this wisdom and knowledge. And besides, do you not know that the cloned embryos opens up windows to medical research to heal various diseases that is ravaging the human family which is not worthy to the dignity of the children of God who are made in His image and likeness?" And the poor scientist looks at the cloned embryo and he finds it delightful to behold, for it incites his curious mind, so he experimented it. Now, he wants to give it to the whole human family! Now our challenge remains: "Are we going to accept it?" The moment will come, either in this life or in the next, that the eyes of these scientists and all who support them will be opened and they will realize that they have been deceived by the subtlety of

the serpent. We hope and pray that it will be in this life so that there's still time to repent and go back to the Lord in humility whom they have forsaken in their pride.

Then Euthanasia the first cousin of human cloning, deceitfully clothes herself with the garment of mercy and makes a daily round in hospitals, especially government hospitals, in nursing homes, and in private houses where there are bed ridden and suffering people writhing in the agony of pain, telling them that she pities them and it breaks her heart to see them in such a miserable condition. She also instill a doubt in their hearts telling them that they are just a burden to their families and that it would be very costly to take care of them. So the best possible solution is to put them to eternal sleep. In this way their suffering ended and nothing to worry about. She also inculcates a bogus compassion in the heart of the members of their families telling them how they could afford to see their loved ones be racked in the bed of suffering. This sounds appealing to them and it so flattered them that they succumbed to it. They closed their eyes to the God-man on the cross who also suffered an excruciating agony to give us courage to walk on the way of the cross and to face and accept the trials and sufferings that come our way.

The people also tempted Christ and they uttered lies and flattered Him that if He will come down from the cross they will believe in Him. This, too, is a lie because even if Christ did come down from the cross they still would not believe in Him; for Moses and the prophets spoke about Christ, and if they do not believe in Moses and the prophets they would not be convinced even if Christ came down from the cross. The cross is the bed of suffering. The temptation to come down from the cross sounds appealing, but Christ did not succumbed to this flattery just as He resisted the temptation to change the stone into bread when He experienced a terrible hunger.

So, Euthanasia is offering a deceitful promise to those who are tortured by pain and their families to come down from the agony of the cross and be killed in a more softer and gentle way. But if they could not bear the suffering and pain of this life, how can they bear it in the next?

I do not mean that the people who are in terrible agony has to be deprived of pain reliever because it is legitimate to alleviate their pain by some powerful pain reliever, but it is a deceit to kill them because we pity them, for this would be a contradiction of their own solicitude and compassion.

No one in their right minds would allow their loved ones to be killed in the pretext that they have clemency upon them. It is even more possible that deep down in their hearts the desire to get rid of them is lurking, because if they truly have compassion on them and love them they would encourage them to endure courageously their suffering knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope will not disappoint them because God's love will be poured into their hearts through the Holy Spirit given to them.

They would also pray at their bedside, and inspiring them to look at Our Lord Jesus the pioneer and perfected of our faith who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. So, in sharing Christ's suffering they will also rejoice when His glory is revealed and they will be crowned with eternal life, because blessed is the person who endures trials for when he had withstood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love Him.

When Euthanasia heard these words she hardens her heart and retorted, saying, "It's a hard saying, who can accept it?" She walks away.

Then came Assisted Suicide the twin sister of Euthanasia who was at the back of the door listening to this argument. Of course she defended her sister Euthanasia and even go so far in saying that to endure one's suffering for the sake of Christ and will also rejoice with Christ when His glory is revealed, is just a baloney. She was so depressed to such an extent that life has no more meaning to her. She doesn't want to listen anymore to the words of Life. Her surroundings were so bleak that it attracts the attention of Death.

Death courted her and it did not take too long that she dated with death, for she finds death to be the only person who understands her, and could lead her to the final exit.

Then Capital Punishment came forward with a flag of justice in his right hand brandishing it for all the people to see. With a stern look on his face he demanded that felons who are convicted with a serious crime should be executed because they are a threat to peace and order of society. He acted like a god who has power over life and death. But he is a god whose mathematics is very poor who only knows subtraction. No wonder he could not preserve convicted criminals by commuting their sentences to life imprisonment without parole instead of executing them.

In subtle rhetoric of justice he masterfully lies that executing convicted criminals is the most appropriate action to be taken by any State or Country. In this way people has to think twice before they have to commit a serious crime. This, too, is a lie because unless the heart of these people are changed they will even challenge society by multiplying their crimes and doing it in broad day light. An example of this is in the Philippines. In 1992 when the issue of Capital Punishment was heavily debated, kidnap for ransom suddenly escalated at fever pitch as though these kidnapers were telling the advocates of Capital Punishment that they are not afraid to die, and that Capital Punishment is not the best solution to diminish crimes in society or even hinders the criminal activities of these bedraggle people.

As I have said unless the hearts of these people are changed they are ingenious to invent and carry out evil deeds. They are scientists of wickedness, so to speak. In a broader sense, they are under the umbrella of the culture of death.

Capital Punishment is a paradigm of flattery. It flattered some people in society because, at least, someone who is a threat to them is being exterminated. It is a flattery because it doesn't touch the roots of the problem. It is like putting a "band aid" on a deep wound to such an extent that no matter how many band aids will be used the wound will never be healed, but it flatters the wound because, at least, it has been treated. So also no matter how many executions a country or state performs it doesn't touch the core of the problem which lies in the very depth of man's being. However, just as a deep wound could be healed if the person will go to the doctor, though it may take a while to heal it, so also the deep wound which lies at the very core of man's nature can be healed if man will humbly and sincerely approach God, though it may not be an overnight process but, at least, man is on the road to recovery.

As a doctor just don't put a band aid on a deep wound but rather put a stronger medicine on it and stitches it, and then let the patient take some pills to prevent from swelling or infection, so also Our Lord Jesus does not favor Capital Punishment for He knows that its effect is just like a band aid that cannot really cure a mortal wound, but rather put a stronger medicine of forgiveness and stitches it with His love and mercy; and then, to prevent it from swelling or infection He let us take some pills of His commandment and tells us to sin no more.

We have an example of this when a certain woman was caught in the act of adultery. The advocates of Capital Punishment brought the woman before Our

Lord and told Him that in the law Moses had commanded to stone such a one, but Christ told them that whoever among them that has no sin let him be the first to cast a stone at her. These words of Christ are like a brilliant light that searches the darkness of their hearts; so each of them, from the eldest to the youngest, walked away.

To cast our vote in favor of Capital Punishment, then, is tantamount to casting a stone at these criminals. No doubt the woman was guilty. So also, in all probability, unless proven otherwise, these convicted criminals are guilty; but who among the advocates of Capital Punishment has no sin so as to cast a stone at these felons? In this case the Scribes and the Pharisees are more righteous than them, because, at least, in their soul searching the Scribes and the Pharisees recognized that they were not free from guilt; but the advocates of Capital Punishment are so bold to take justice in their hands as though they are guiltless. And to assuage their conscience they let someone to perform the execution. In this way they can go to bed without worrying too much.

Capital Punishment also speaks with a double heart, because at the other side of the flag of justice which he brandishes there is an apparent injustice. It is very obvious that there have been rich people who were guilty of serious crimes, but have access to top notch lawyers, that were not executed.

He is so quick to inflict justice upon poor criminals and very slow upon rich criminals.

Let's go back to the story of the woman caught in the very act of adultery and see the injustice of Capital Punishment. If it takes two to tango, so also it takes two to commit adultery. But how come that it was only the woman that was dragged to justice by the Scribes and Pharisees to be condemned to death? Where is the other person that was guilty of adultery, too? Why did they not bring him to Christ together with the woman? Was the man too strong for them so as to run away and escape? But justice can run after him even if he will escape to another country. Is justice only for the poor and the weak and not also for the strong and powerful? Did the man bribe them? So, in this case, there is partiality and perversion of justice. The Scripture had already warned them saying, "You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality; and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise, and subverts the cause of the righteous. Justice, and only justice, you shall follow....In rendering judgment you shall not consider who the person is, but shall render justice to both the rich and the poor alike."

When Capital Punishment heard all these words he stopped his ears like a serpent who doesn't want to hear the charmer's voice. He stealthily sneaks out and run away.

Then, with music and dancing, Drugs and Sex and Rock n' Roll in a state of ecstasy cries out in a loud voice that penetrated the depths of the human soul: "Make love not war!" This, too, is a lie, because it is a perversion of responsible love and leads to promiscuity. With flattering lips and a double heart they speak saying, "Come to us all of you who are weary and find life burdensome and we will refresh you. Try drugs and sex and rock n' roll and you will know for yourself that it is already heaven on earth. You will experience that though you are in the world, but you are not of the world. All your problems, and cares, and worries will be transformed into unimaginable delight of heavenly music, a music that you can feel as though it has a flesh. You will also experience a peace that surpasses all understanding and a love that will satisfy your deepest human emotion. So, do not delay. Do not wait for the next world which God has promised you. You have it here and now. Besides, do you not know that God made you to be happy? What God has promised you in the next world we will give it to you now. If your parents does not and could not give you the love, care, and understanding that you need we will provide it to you. We will also provide you with a high quality self-esteem that you can really feel and think that you are so great. All these we will give to you if you will fall down and worship us, for all these has been given to us and we will give it to anyone whom we will."

Isn't this a master piece of flattery and deceit? Just consider how many millions of souls all over the world have been ruined by the combinations of drugs and sex and rock n' roll. Without any shadow of a doubt this is one of the gods of this world that attracts a huge number of devotees. They are willing to sell their souls for the freedom of drugs and sex and rock n' roll. This becomes their religion. The rock stars and drug dealers are their apostles and preachers. They are also spread throughout the world and making disciples in every nations.

St. Paul says that we are called to freedom only not to use our freedom as an opportunity for the flesh to follow its desires, but the preachers and apostles of drugs and sex and rock n' roll say that we are all called to freedom, so we have to use our freedom as opportunity for the flesh to follow and satisfy all its desire for that is what we are called to. We are made to be happy, so we have to attain it now.

Let us unveil their flattery and deceit and see how they are distorting the truth. Yes, it is very true that we are made to be happy. The Baltimore Catechism clearly states that God made us to know Him, serve Him, and love Him in this life and be happy with Him in the next. The Blessed Virgin Mary also told St. Bernadette saying, "I do not promise you happiness in this world, but in the next." See the difference here! Our ultimate happiness is not in this world, but in the life to come. However, this does not mean that we should be devoid of all joy, consolation, peace, and happiness in this world because God could not be outdone in generosity. As a matter of fact, to know God and serve Him and love Him in this life is already a foretaste of the unimaginable joy, peace, and happiness that God has prepared for those who love Him. If we experience a tremendous joy, peace, and happiness while only sucking a dew of this indescribable glory, how much more if we will be immersed in it and be one with it like a drop of water mingled in the Pacific Ocean, or like iron in the fire! God has a burning desire to give to us everything that He has than we to receive it, as He said to the Psalmist: "Open wide your mouth and I will fill it." It is like the mystery of water and wine where we share in the divinity of Christ who humbles Himself to share our humanity. With intense love Christ expresses this desire, saying: "Father, I desire that they also who thou has given me may be with me where I am to behold my glory which thou has given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world." This is the glory which St. Paul was referring to when he said, "No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor it enters into the hearts of men what God has promised to those who love Him."

But with a mastery of cunning and deceit, drugs and sex and rock n' roll ingeniously offer it to their devotees and those who will worship them, and say: "Come and see and taste how good and sweet drugs and sex and rock n' roll is. We will assure you that you will see things you have never seen before and hear sound that will ravish and captivate your hearts."

And their poor devotees, seeing that drugs and sex and rock n' roll is pleasant to behold and delightful to the eyes, ate it and got hooked to it. Now, the journey of their tragedy begins.

They now start pawning their pants, their dress, their cars, and sell anything that they could find just to satisfy the demands of their god. This god who pretends to be genial, affable, and solicitous at first, now reveals the cruelty of his tyranny to such an extent that if his devotees doesn't have any money to buy drugs he will



force them to steal or become a prostitute, otherwise he will drag them down to the pit of depression, sadness, and confusion.

See how cunning and deceitful this god is. To be sure that he can gain followers, he transforms himself as an angel of light and also invited those who are weary and find life burdensome to come to him so that their problems, cares, and worries will be vanished just as Christ has invited those who are also weary and find life burdensome to come to Him that they may find rest for their souls.

Both Christ and drugs and sex and rock n' roll are inviting those who are weary and find life burdensome to come to them. But notice the difference. Drugs and sex and rock n' roll has promised that the problems, care, and worries of their followers will be vanished, whereas Christ never promised that if we will come to Him our problems, cares, trials, difficulties, worries, challenges, etc. will be vanished, but in Him we will find rest for our souls because He will give us the grace and strength and courage to face the inevitable challenges and trials of our day to day existence which is part and parcel of our wounded fallen nature. Christ is honest and straight forward in telling us that in this world we will have tribulations, but we have to be of good cheer for He has overcome the world. He also said that if we wish to follow Him we have to deny ourselves and take up our cross. With His natural skill of making analogy, He likens our struggles in this world to a woman in travail who has great sorrow for her hour has come, but when she is delivered of the child she no longer remembers the anguish for joy that a child is born into the world. So also, we ourselves will have sorrows in this world and has to pass many tribulations before we can enter the kingdom of heaven, but our sorrows will turn into joy and no one will be able to take that joy from us, not only because it is an everlasting joy, but also because it is the joy of Christ Himself. And no one can snatch this joy from Christ's hand.

Drugs and sex and rock n' roll are offering an ephemeral peace and joy to their devotees, but once they are hooked to it they become more miserable. Just consider their misery if they had a bad trip. They can be likened to riding an elevator at 1,000 feet high and suddenly the elevator lost control and dropped down with an incredible speed to the ground. They can also be likened to a glass or a bottle that has hole which looks full when you immerse it in water, but when you take it out from the water it is empty for it cannot hold the water itself. So also they seem to feel happy and at peace because they are taking drugs, but once they could not take it they become so empty and miserable. They become so dependent on drugs that their happiness lies in it. In this case their

happiness and peace are lies. They are only flattering themselves and with a double heart they speak. They are so bold in saying, "There is peace and security" in us, but then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape. Then, the sound of harpers and minstrels, of flute players, guitarists, drummers, trumpeters, and all musical instruments, shall be heard in them no more. Since they have misused it in this life they will lose it in the next. They think they have it in this life, but it shall be taken away from them.

When Hedonism the sister of drugs and sex and rock n' roll, together with her boyfriend Epicurius, saw that the happiness and joy of drugs and sex and rock n' roll were taken away from them, she and Epicurius protested, saying: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." This is their battle cry. They are like the people whom Moses took out from the land of Egypt who, when Moses went up to the mountain, sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play, and said: "As for this Moses who took us from the land of Egypt we do not know what happen to him now." For this reason they made gods for themselves who shall go before them.

In the same way, Hedonism with her lover Epicurius cried out: "As for this man Jesus who took us out from the slavery of the desires of the flesh we do not know of His return. We do not know what has become of Him." So, they eat and drink and get drunk. They totally forgot and ignored the admonitions: "Let the time that is past suffice for doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry. Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness."

But Hedonism and Epicurius retorted, saying: "This is a hard saying, who can accept it?" They not only refused the admonitions of Sts. Peter and Paul, but they insolently criticized them and accused them of being "kill joy" and "religious fanatics" who are devoid of any sense of worldly pleasures. Not only that, but to insure that their followers will no longer raise their eyes to the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right of the Father, they propagate an almost unimaginable distractions which ranges from the hundreds of channels in television with its mind boggling advertisements to computer games to Mega Malls, etc.

With her brother, drugs and sex and rock n' roll, Hedonism and her devotees advocate a freedom of choice. That each person is responsible how to use

his/her own body and to afford it whatever pleasures it can find whether legitimate or illegitimate. This is an open rebellion against the Spirit, because those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh. And the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God.

St. Paul repeatedly warned Hedonism, saying: "If you live according to the flesh you will die." But, as typical to the children of the culture of death, Hedonism snapped back: "So what?" She said, "we are not ignorant of that. We know that we will die. That's why we have to eat and drink and enjoy life as much as possible, for tomorrow we will die."

I have no doubt that Hedonism and her devotees are like people who are dreaming that they were in a banquet with abundance of food and wine and all kinds of pleasures, but found out that they woke up at the wrong side of the bed and were so hungry and thirsty, and empty, for while they food was still in their mouths the anger of God rose against them. They begged if someone would dip the end of his finger in water to satisfy their thirst but there was no one to help them. They only heard a response which was so familiar to them: "Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things. You were clothed in purple and very expensive dress. You are like a fashion model who changed clothes everyday and always at expensive restaurants. This is what you chose in this life and it was given to you. But now you lose it, for anyone who has nothing even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him. If only you and your brother drugs and sex and rock n' roll have disciplined your bodies in this life and curtail your desires, all these things which you have been rudely craving will be yours in the next life for it has been prepared for those who love God. What have been taken away from you and your brother drugs and sex and rock n' roll has been given to those who eagerly await for the coming of the Son of God. Listen to what my servant John have seen and heard: 'The voice I heard was like the sound of harpers playing on their harps, and they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders....And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hand. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, 'Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, O King of the ages! Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord? For thou alone art holy. All nations shall come and worship thee, for thy judgments have been revealed.'

The Son of God Himself while He was on earth has given you an example of how to eat and drink modestly, for He, too, did not hesitate to eat and drink even with sinners to the extent that He was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard. But to show that He was not enslaved to food and drink, he said to his disciples: 'I have food to eat which you do not know...My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work. I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'

So, you see that in heaven there is music, eating, and drinking. 'I tell you many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.'

This is the joy and happiness that you bargained with the fleeting pleasures of this world. This is your inheritance right on the very day of your baptism, for on that day you became children of God, but you and your brother drugs and sex and rock n' roll and all your followers have squandered this in loose living. You went to a very far country to the land of unlikeness. You were like Me on the day of your baptism, but you became unlike Me by your immoral lives.

But do not lose heart, for I am very much willing to forgive you if you will come back to Me and repent. Even if your sins are as red as scarlet I will make it as white as snow. So, if today you hear these voices do not harden your heart. If you will return to Me I will restore back to you your former dignity. I will cloth you with the best robe of mercy, for I came to call sinners to repentance. Do you not know that my kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? I will put a ring of confidence on your hand that you may have the courage to approach the throne of Grace to receive mercy and find help in times of need. I will put new shoes on your feet that you may declare my wonderful deeds to the ends of the earth – who have called you out of the darkness of sin into the marvelous light of grace. On top of this I will nourish you with the fatted calf of My Body, Soul, Humanity, and Divinity in the Eucharist that you may eat me whole and entire and make merry to the depths of your soul to such an extent that even if your outward body is being wasted away, but your inner self is being renewed every day. This fatted calf of My Body, Soul, Humanity, and Divinity will sustain you that you may not grow weary as you ascend the mountain of holiness where you will meet Me in the stillness of your heart.

I will give you another chance to reconsider your motto: 'Let us eat and drink and have pleasure in this life, for tomorrow we die.' I will not force you to

change this, because I could not revoke the freedom I endowed on you as a free being; and besides, I do not force anybody to follow Me against their will. The only thing I will ask you is that 'Do not be wise in your own conceit.' Your motto sounded to Me like a spiritual suicide. I will offer you another motto which you can think over and pray. This motto is very healthy and leads you to the road of recovery and brings you to My kingdom: 'Lord, let me know the shortness of my life that I may gain wisdom of heart.' Can you see the difference between this motto and yours? Your motto is very short sighted, because you are only concern with the pleasures of this world, whereas, the motto that I proposed penetrates eternity. It goes beyond the things of this world. It knows that life on earth is very short compared to eternity that is why it prays that it may gain wisdom of heart, a heart that knows how to use the things of this world properly, a heart that knows how to pray and worship God and give thanks to Him not only in times of prosperities but also in times of adversities.

I will explain to you in a very simple way why your motto is very short sighted and why the motto that I proposed is healthy and far sighted. Suppose you are now 20 yrs old, and your maximum age is 75, or say 80 (you are lucky if you would reach 80 yrs old because you have lots of vices). Since you are a human being, so you have to sleep. Thus sleeping is already a minus of the total numbers of the remaining yrs. that you have, that is, 60 yrs. So you have 60 yrs. of worldly happiness, but minus sleeping since you have to sleep whether you like it or not; minus problems, trials, distress, and difficulties, because these are part and parcel of just being a human, and besides, you have lots of vices and these require money and if you don't have money so you will even be more tormented. Considering all the sleepings, the trials and problems that you encounter in your day to day living you will have a net happiness of 40 yrs, that is, 350,400 hrs. Wow!!! You will certainly jump into this happiness. But what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and all its pleasures and at the end loses his life for all eternity? What is 40 yrs. compared to eternity?

I will give you an example of what eternity is. This may be a poor illustration, but at least it can give you a picture to see and think about. Suppose a cardinal (bird) is commissioned to level all the Ozark Mountains and hills to ground zero and transferred it to the other side of the Pacific Ocean, say the Philippines. Know that it will take a jumbo jet (747) 14 hrs. nonstop to fly from San Francisco or Los Angeles to Manila at a speed of 550 mph. The cardinal has to cut the

trees and chop its trunk and branches and leaves<sup>2</sup>to pieces tiny enough to carry it in his beck. He has also to break the rocks to pieces tiny enough to make him convenient to carry it. The same with the soil. Then he will fly from here across the Pacific Ocean to Manila and drop it and fly back right away to Missouri. Can you imagine how many days will it take just one trip across the Pacific Ocean? How about the round trip? How about the cutting of the trees and the chopping of its branches and leaves and the breaking of the rocks and the leveling of the soil to ground zero? Without any shadow of a doubt it will take him to do all these billions and billions, or even trillions and trillions of years. Once he finished everything eternity just begins, and still it will never end! Because time will be no more.

In the same way, if you deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Me so that wherever I am there you will be also – your maximum age will still be, say 80 yrs, but minus sleeping since you still have to sleep, minus the joys, the peace, and the consolations in serving God because God could not be outdone in generosity. He will always let His true followers sip the joys, the peace, and happiness as a foretaste of the world to come no matter how little it might be amidst their trials and suffering in this present life. Considering all the sleepings, the joys, the peace, and the consolations that you will have just by being a servant of God you will have a net sufferings of, say, 40 yrs, that is 350,400 hrs. 'Oh, No, that's too much for me,' you might exclaim. Your human nature will certainly detest it. But what is 40 yrs. compared to eternity! Know that the sufferings of this present life is not worth comparing to the glory to be revealed to you, for the slight and momentary afflictions of this life is preparing an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison. That is why because of the joy that was set before Me I endured the cross, despising the shame. I emptied Myself and takes the form of a servant. As a servant I descended to the depths of humility and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. But now I am seated at the right hand of My Father, and all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me.

You see now the difference between our mottos? See things in the light of eternity and you will know by your own experience how true it is that I am with you even unto the consummation of the world."

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<sup>2</sup> He doesn't have to chop the leaves but carry about 6 of them.

When Hedonism and her lover Epicurius and their followers heard all these words, they raised their voices in chorus: "It's a bad bargain, it's a bad bargain." They walked away, and there was a great silence. It was night.

Then last but not the least, Dishonesty in Business Dealings who is the most insidious among the children of the Culture of Death, when he saw that his brothers and sisters stood their grounds till the end like the seven children of the woman in the second book of Maccabees, muster up his courage and cried out, "When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain?" And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great, and deal deceitfully with false balances, that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and sell the refuse of the wheat?" They do not hesitate to cheat in their business dealings for this will make more profit. Dishonesty in Business Dealings is very insidious because it affects people who go to Church. And to flatter their conscience they will give donation to humanitarian organizations. They will even make the house of God a market place where they could buy and sell instead of paying more attention on prayer. No wonder the Son of God overturned the tables of the money changers and drove out those who sold pigeons.

They already made their own hearts a stock market even before they made the House of God into a market place. They just carried out externally what was going on internally in their souls disregarding the consequences that greediness for unjust gain only makes troubles in their hearts because those who desire to be rich and have lots of money fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction, for the love of money is the root of all evils.

But Dishonesty in Business Dealing answered back, saying: "Are you jealous of me because I have lots of money? Why do you meddle with me? Are you going to torment my conscience before the end of time? Why don't you leave me alone?"

These kinds of arguments are very typical of the Culture of Death. They want to worship a god that will go along with them and approves what they are doing and even flatters them to eat more of the forbidden fruit of dishonesty. It's so amazing why they like this fruit since its juice is so bitter that it makes them so difficult to sleep at night. They are haunted by fears and anxieties. Their way is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble. They ignored the admonition: "Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and

trouble with it." But they snapped back, saying: "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and get gain."

Our Lord, who desires that all people may be saved and would come to the knowledge of truth, justice, and righteousness, directs their minds, saying: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." "I do not mean that you have to abandon your business. What I mean is that you have to deal honestly even if this means that your profit would not be too high, but sufficient enough to support yourselves and your family, and pay wages to your workers if you have any. If you could not gain profit without resorting to dishonesty, it would be good for your soul to close your business or sell it than to enjoy the fleeting pleasure of sin. Remember eternity. Just a while ago, I gave an illustration to your sister Hedonism what eternity is like. It was clear and simple illustration which does not require anybody to become an Engineer or Scientist or a Mathematician to understand it. You are a businessman, so you have a basic knowledge of addition and subtraction. In business parlance you might call this credit and debit, or profit and loss. If you are really a true and wise businessman you will certainly look for a treasure that will last forever and a profit that will endure to eternal life. You will be like a merchant searching for a precious pearl. This pearl is in your heart. This is a pearl of honesty, sincerity, and truth. If you will rise up early in the morning to search this pearl of great price by prayer you will certainly find it, for prayer has an intrinsic power to purify the heart. Instead of rudely craving for material gain and riches you will learn to pray, saying: 'Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, 'who is the Lord?' or lest I be poor, and steal, and profane the name of my God.' This kind of prayer is so healthy and strikes a right balance. It doesn't advocate economic poverty nor material prosperity, but the uprooting of falsehood and lying which lead to the death of the soul. It also contains childlike simplicity when it says, 'feed me with the food that is needful for me....' It trusted in God who feeds the birds in the sky even if they did not sow nor reap nor gather into barns.

Remember that all the riches and treasures of this world: all the gold, silver, diamonds, pearls, and oils, combine together are just like dust and mud in comparison with the riches and treasures in My kingdom, for all things are Mine. I



created them out of nothing. I spoke and it came to be. Since the foundation of the world I prepared all these things for those who loved Me who preferred to do My will rather than their own even if this mean a continual death to their own Ego. Not only that, but they also strive to do the will of others as long as it does not contradict My commandments.

I will tell you another story which might help you to understand that money has no value in the other world if your life here on earth is not centered on God.

'There was a wealthy man laying on his deathbed. His entire life had been centered around money. As his life ebbed away, he presumed that in the afterlife, money would also be everything. So he gave orders that a purse filled with gold coins be placed in his casket alongside his body. His last wish was carried out. In the next world it took the bookkeepers a long time to find his name in any of the good books. In fact it took so long that he got very hungry and thirsty just waiting. He looked around and sure enough, he saw an attractive eatery not far away. 'Aha,' he said to himself, 'It's just like I thought. It's a good thing that I brought some money along with me.'

His mouth was already watering as he approached the restaurant. But before he sat down to eat, he was told that the money he had brought along had no value now. In fact, only money that was of any value now was the money he had gained by honesty and had given away on earth. The businessman dropped his head in deep thought, but could not remember having gained anything by honesty and sincerity and had given away on earth with a right motivation, so now he had none.'

Again, this is not to threaten you but a sincere desire to awaken your sleeping spirit, as it is written: 'Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light. Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is.' If you do not know what the will of the Lord is since you are preoccupied with your business dealings and make this as an excuse for prevaricating the truth, I will gladly tell what His will is: 'This is the will of God , your sanctification.' Sanctification is tantamount to honesty. It is not a monopoly of those who entered the religious life, but it is a universal call, as it is written: 'You shall be holy as I the Lord your God am holy.'

With his spirit still fighting Dishonesty in Business Dealings answered, "You are demanding too much from me. You put a heavy burden on my back. It is like

demanding chastity on those who are inflamed with lust." The Lord answered him, "I am not demanding too much from you nor I put a heavy burden on your back, for I do not command impossible things. If I command something which sounds difficult, it is that you may ask My help and I am very much ready to help you, for even before you call for help I will answer you. If you feel overburdened by My commands, then, come to Me and I will give you rest. I am not surprised that your initial feelings to My commands is that of heavily laden because you are not used to it, but once you become familiar with it your heart will expand and grow stronger and you will know by your own experience how true it is that My yoke is easy and My burden is light. The keeping of My precepts will even become your delight and you will run with unspeakable sweetness on the path of My commandments. You will desire for it more than gold or silver or diamond or pearl or any precious stones.

I introduce Myself to you that you may know Me and in knowing Me you will love Me and in loving Me you will possess Me, for no one can love what he does not know nor possess what he does not love. If you seek Me by your desires you will find Me; and if you desire Me in all your quest you will possess Me, for he who asks receives and he who seeks finds. So, be truly wise and you will have treasure that will last forever."

When Dishonesty in Business Dealings heard these kind and gentle words, though he is as obstinate as his other siblings, said in reply: "let me think about it." With this reply he opens up the possibility of conversion. This allows him to exercise freely his God-given freedom. With all this knowledge and free will if he still choose freely and consciously to continue in his dishonesty in business dealings, then what awaits him is the terrible sentence: "Depart from Me, you evildoers." Therefore, if we connive with the culture of death, then, the Son of Man will not find faith on earth when He comes.

On the other hand, Yes, the Son of Man will find faith on earth when He comes if you and me and all people of good will of whatever race, culture or religion, will strive to the best of our ability to do what is right, just, and true and to follow the Truth wherever it leads us no matter how dim its flicker might be or whether we stagger and fall in our following it. This truth is about ourselves and about God. The truth about ourselves is what we called self-knowledge and the truth about God is what we called divine-knowledge. We have to follow this truth, because knowledge of God preserves us from despair, for God is full of mercy; His nature is all good, and His actions pity and pardon. Knowledge of self preserves us from

pride, for nothing is more efficacious in acquiring humility than knowledge of ourselves as we really are. These two-fold knowledge of God and ourselves assure salvation, because in its light there appears the need for an encounter between our own misery and God's divine mercy.

The Son of Man will find faith on earth when He comes if we remain faithful to our vocation in life whether we are called to the religious life and priesthood or to the married life or to a life of single-blessedness. What is important is that we respond to the universal call to holiness in the state of life we are called. Holiness of life is not only for those who entered the religious life and priesthood, but for all people. As a matter of fact in October of the year 2001 Pope John Paul II beatified an Italian couple to highlight the fact that holiness is an integral part of the married life as it is to religious life. Holiness of life does not really consist in extraordinary and megalomaniac deeds, but in a simple and ordinary tasks that we do in our day to day living which is done in our union with God. We have an example of this in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We don't have any record that she performed an external miracle in her life time, but without any slightest shadow of a doubt her simple and ordinary actions such as: cooking and mending clothes for her family are most pleasing to God than all the good works of all the angels and saints combine together.

We don't have to be a bishop or a cardinal or a Pope to be holy nor we have to travel all over the world to preach about God, but holiness is within us because it is the divine life of God given to us. We have only to remove the debris of sin that covers it. By ourselves we cannot do it, because we are too weak. To lift up a load of sin is certainly too heavy for us. We need someone to help us – and that is the Holy Spirit, because sanctification is really the work of the Holy Spirit within us. It is not our own doing, but we have to cooperate with Him because He has a high respect for our freedom. He will not force us against our will. Sanctification is a lifelong process not because the Holy Spirit is too weak to purify us overnight, but because in His infinite wisdom He knows that if He will rob too much it might break the vessel of our human nature. In this case it will only do more harm than good and He doesn't want that because sanctification is really for our own good not for Him, for He is holy in Himself. Even if all people will not respond to the call of holiness the Holy Spirit will always remain holy, for He cannot be otherwise. In His work of sanctification He is very patient with us, and we, too, has to be patient with ourselves if it took a while to purify us.

Sanctification is also the formation of the life of Christ within us until we grow into mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. In order to grow in the life of Christ within us we need also the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary who formed Christ right from the very moment of His conception. So also if we allow the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Virgin Mary to form Christ within us they will be more than happy to do so. We will know by our own experience that holiness is not really that hard as we once imagined it to be. There is even more joy in the life of holiness than in the life of vices, for the life of holiness is already a foretaste of the eternal joy prepared for us since the foundation of the world. It is a joy that no one can take away from us. It is a joy that makes all other joys insipid unless it has this joy. It is a joy that renews our interior self everyday even if our external self is being wasted away.

The Son of Man will find faith on earth when He comes if we are eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of Peace, striving to live in Peace with other people; that no root of bitterness spring up among ourselves which by it we will be defiled; that we do not repay evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all; if we hold fast what is good, honorable, and true; whatever is gracious, and whatever is worthy of praise. And instead of complaining in whatever happens to us, we learned to be content and know how to be abased and how to abound; in any and all circumstances we are striving to learn the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want, because of Christ who strengthens us. If these things are ours and abound, then, certainly Christ will find faith when He comes again, for these things keep us from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of Our Lord Jesus Christ; but if we don't have any of these things, then, Christ will not find faith when He comes because whoever lacks these things is blind and shortsighted, that is to say, spiritually blind. They may indeed see but never perceive, for their heart has grown dull. Finally, when we live a life of virtue Christ will find faith in us. And blessed are we when Christ comes will find us so doing, because if not, then we are just flattering ourselves and other people and we will hear the terrible words of the Psalmist: →

### **Icon # 108 = The Tongue 1**

"May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts, those who say, 'with our tongue we will prevail, our lips are with us; who is our master?'"

St. James cautions us to use our tongue properly, for it is like a fire. We know too well that the tongue has power to encourage people who are in distress and enkindle the fire of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. It is a gift that is given to us that we may help other people also, as it is written: "The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary." The tongue is also an instrument to preach the good news of the kingdom of God and to teach other people the way of the Lord. It can also be used in singing the praises of God. On the other hand, the tongue is also highly dangerous when it is use to destroy the reputation of other people; when it is use in flattering people either to gain something from them or just to enjoy flattering; when it is also use in lying and to utter careless words, because each one of us will give an account on the day of Judgment for ever careless words that we utter, for by our words we will be justified and by our words we will be condemned. In other words, life and death is in the Power of the tongue. No wonder that the Psalmist would say, "He that would love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it." Death is in the power of the tongue when we use our tongue in blessing God and after a while cursing again another people who are made in the image and likeness of God. From the same tongue come blessing and cursing. When we use our tongue in both blessing and cursing, then, it is an obvious sign that our heart is divided.

In other words, we honor God with our lips but our heart is far from Him. If we honor God with our lips but our heart is far from Him, then, it is a form of deceit. An example of this is when we attend Mass or any prayer services in which we participate in singing and different responses, but when we go out we start gossiping or back biting, and when we arrive home we are irritable with those whom we live with or we still continue to do evil deeds. We love to say, "Lord, Lord." But we deny Him by our deeds. If this would be the case, then, we will hear the Lord say, "not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name? And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me you evildoers.'" Our Lord would not have said these words if there had not been any inconsistency with our words and actions, for lying lips are an abomination to the Lord and deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil. Just imagine that these people were prophesying in the name of the Lord and were casting out demons in His name and were doing many mighty works in God's name. These are all excellent and praiseworthy works, and yet they were told that the Lord does not know them because of the evil deeds they did, for nothing is hidden that will not be made known or covered that will not be revealed. How about the swindlers and the sycophants who use their tongues in flattering other people and make great boasts to cheat and defraud them? These are all serious issues in the light

of what Christ said that on the Day of Judgment each one of us will render an account for every careless word we utter, for by our words we will be justified and by our words we will be condemned. If this would be the case, does this mean that we should no longer speak for fear that we might utter useless words? By no means. The point of this saying is that we should be prudent in our use of words as befits the occasion, that we should learn when to speak and when to remain silent and not just utter whatever comes to our mind, because "when words are many transgression is not lacking but he who restrains his lips is prudent."

To be prudent and gracious in our speech is a tangible sign that we have love for life, and to say, "With our tongue we will prevail, our lips are with us; who is our master?" is a signal that we are heading to ruin, because "He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin." The letter to the Colossians also encourages us to let our speech be gracious, seasoned with salt so that we may know how we ought to answer every one.

On the other hand, "the tongue that makes great boasts," and "those who say, 'with our tongue we will prevail, our lips are with us; who is our master?'" is an obvious sign of arrogance. They so flattered themselves that they know not their guilt. No wonder that their lips and their tongues has to be cut off not only because it is harmful to other people, but also because it causes damage to themselves, as it is written: "If your hands or your feet cause you to sin, cut it off for it is better for you to enter life without hands or feet than that you have two hands and two feet and be thrown into the hell of fire where your worms will never die and you will gnash your teeth." So it is better that the lips and the tongue has to be cut off if it is detrimental to oneself and to other people, for charity begins at home. →

### **Icon # 109 = Kinds of despoiling: Material & Spiritual**

"Because the poor are despoiled, because the needy groan, I will now arise," says the Lord; I will place him in the safety for which he longs."

No doubt Our Lord Himself has a preferential option for the poor not only because though He was rich and opted to become poor that we might become rich by His poverty, but also because justice demands that the rights of the poor and the afflicted has to be protected. Isn't it a great injustice to despoil the poor who could hardly make both ends meet, who could hardly eat a delicious food and wear a decent cloth? Those who are despoiling the poor are acting like king David when he had sexual intercourse with the wife of Uriah, because king David had lots of wives and concubines (though not many as Solomon!). He could have sexual intercourse with any of them, but he despoiled Uriah of his one and only wife. This is tantamount to exploitation. Sad to say, it is usually the poor and the weak who are despoiled and exploited because they

don't have money or sufficient education to defend themselves. In cases of countries who are being despoiled by richer country, it is always with the connivance of the public officials who are more interested of their own welfare than that of the common good. But the Lord hears the cry of the poor and the groaning of the needy, so He arose and said to the despoilers: "How long will your hearts be closed? Will love what is futile and seek what is false? Don't you have any pity for the poor and the weak? You do this because your hearts have grown dull and your inner eyes have become blind. Seeing you do not see and hearing you do not understand. You do not know how pitiable you are, more than those you have despoiled. Therefore I counsel you to anoint your eyes with the salve of repentance that you may see. Sin no more lest something worse than this will befall you."

There are two kinds of despoiling. One is material despoiling, when we are despoiled of our properties either because of some tragedies that we encountered and we are forced by necessity to sell our properties, or we mismanaged our properties and we are entangled in exorbitant debts to such an extent that we are declared insolvent or bankrupt. The other kind of despoiling is spiritual and is even more acute and painful than material despoiling, because this kind of despoiling will eventually lead to the death of the soul. For example, we are despoiled of all virtues such as: gentleness, kindness, humility, chastity, faith, hope, charity, prudence, temperance, and justice. If we are despoiled of all these virtues we will be considered as a living dead. People will find us very disgusting. They could bear with us for a while, but sooner or later they will begin to avoid us. If you are rich you can hire sycophants who will surround you with their flatteries to assuage the throes of your anxiety, but deep in your heart you still feel miserable.

I think the best we can do if we find ourselves despoiled of all virtues is to cry for mercy and acknowledge our own misery. With the prodigal son we will cry in the depth of our heart: "How many of my fathers hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father...." We are perishing with hunger because we have been despoiled of all virtues. We are hungry for love, for kindness, and gentleness and nobody give these to us. Only when we came to our senses that we realized that even the least in the kingdom of heaven had abundant food to eat and wine to drink, for they had been nourished by the bread of life and the cup of eternal salvation, Jesus Christ Himself.

We have been despoiled of all virtues, but not of our sonship. This is what gave us courage to rise and go to our father. And our father Himself who hears our groaning, even in a far distant land, arises too and embraces us with His divine mercy. He longs for us more than we long for Him. He suffers more for our absence than we in our desire to go back to Him. He is always in us but we are not in Him because we have no more virtues. It is only when we realized that we

have been despoiled, and by this realization we approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find help in times of need that He gave us back ourselves and place us in the safety for which we long. It is only in God that we can have an assurance of safety wherever we are and with whomsoever we are and whatever we are doing because our God is a rock where we can find refuge not only in times of distress, but also in times of gladness. Because we are safe in God, we have confidence that He is with us in our ups and downs, in our joys and sorrows, in times of consolations and desolations, for Christ Himself said: "I am with you even unto the consummation of the world." Our life on earth is always a mixture of both positive and negative experiences until we reach our final destination. Our positive experiences urge and encourage us to go forward and our negative experiences make us prudent and cautious in our steps and teach us humility.

The wisdom in both these experiences is having to strike the right balance, that is, not to be proud in times of positive experiences and not to be downcast in times of negative experiences. We can attain this because of Our Lord Jesus who loves us and strengthens us, place us in the safety for which we long, for Our Lord Jesus is like a hen who wants to gather her chicks under her wings to protect them. If God is for us, who is against us? Well, "the devil," you would say. Yes, he is against us because his intention is to despoil us of all the graces that God has given us, even our dignity as children of God. But he cannot despoil us unless we give our consent. There is always a certain connivance with the vices within us for him to be successful in despoiling us. If we will not connive with him, even if he will beat us black and blue and rob us of all our possessions and leave us half dead, Our Lord Jesus will arise and come to our help and will place us in the safety for which we long, that is, the Universal Church in general and our community in particular. We may wonder why the despoiler was able to rob us of all our possessions and beat us black and blue when, in fact, we did not connive with him. One of the possible reasons for this is curiosity. Often enough we are very curious of the things outside us and we want to go out and see what is going on out there. This doesn't mean that this is totally evil, but it poses danger. The following story might help explain this: "An old parrot flew out of a farm house and joined some crows in a watermelon field. The farmer, not knowing this and wanting to protect the fruit of his labors, blasted them with his shotgun. The result was three dead crows and one ruffled parrot with a missing toe. The farmer tenderly took him home where excited children gathered around and asked, 'What did it?' The parrot answered, 'Bad Company! Bad company!'" This reminds us of what St. Paul said: "Do not be deceived, 'Bad Company ruins good morals.'"

So, as long as we are united with God and remained in the Church, the pillar and bulwark of truth, and remained faithful to our respective calling in life, then, we will be in the place of safety for which we ardently long. →



**Icon # 110 = Promises: God & Man**

“The promises of the Lord are promises that are pure, silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.”

The promises of the Lord are promises that are pure because Our Lord is truthful. Only a truthful person can make pure promises. First and foremost, Our Lord promises us eternal life. This is a promise which no other human being can give. Parents can be an instrument to give life to their children, but they could not give them eternal life. God alone can do this because He is the author and source of life; He has the words of eternal life. To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, He will give eternal life. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom He will. He also promises us that if we continue in His words we will know the truth and the truth will set us free, for everyone who sincerely follows Him will not walk in darkness of sin, but will have the light of life.

He also promises us that if we eat His flesh and drink His blood in the Holy Eucharist in a worthy manner, examining ourselves before we partake of it and yet not to be excessively scrupulous, He will give us eternal life and will raise us up at the last day. While we are still in this present life we have to struggle against sin and all temptations and evil inclinations, but Christ promises that He will be with us till the end of time; and if we conquer He will grant us to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God; and we will not be hurt by the second death; and He will give us a white stone with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except us who receive it, for it is our deepest identity in God. It is our own uniqueness in God which no other human beings or angels can duplicate.

These promises are pure and trustworthy because it comes from God Himself who is truth and life, as He said: “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.” It is in our participation in the truth and life of God that we, too, can make promises that are pure and trustworthy, although this will vary according to the degree of our purification. For this reason we enter religion and make vows or promises. These promises vary according to the state of life we are called. If we are diocesan priests we make a vow of celibacy and obedience. If we are religious priests or brothers or sisters we make vows of celibacy, poverty, and obedience. And if we belong to the Benedictine family we make vows of conversion of manners (which includes poverty and celibacy), stability, and obedience. If you are married lay people you make promises to be faithful to your spouse and stick with him/her through thick and thin, and say to each other “till death do us part.” All these promises are pure and noble because they are inspired by God. Christ Himself gave us an example of fidelity to His spouse, the Church, when He dies for her. In our struggle against our unhealthy desires we have not yet

resisted to the point of shedding our blood, but this should not discourage us, rather it should encourage us to be faithful to the state of life that God called us.

In our promise of celibacy we are imitating Our Lord Jesus who lived a celibate life and inviting us to taste even while still on earth the life of the world to come where men and women no longer marry for they will be like angels in heaven. In our vow of poverty we are also imitating Christ who, though He was rich and owns everything in heaven and on earth, yet He became poor for our sake that we may be enriched by His poverty. He lived a very simple life style to give us an example that we may follow in His steps. He had the very minimum of comfort and has nowhere to lay his head to teach us that desire for comfort could choke the word of God within us. Vow of poverty also mean that we do not murmur and grumble when things do not turn out what we want them to be. Vow of poverty does not also mean that we should have a loathsome if, occasionally, we may eat a good food in a fancy restaurant especially by necessity when we happen to travel and someone pick us up at the airport and bring us to a fancy restaurant. It also means that we are willing to sleep on the floor if circumstances demand it. In other words, vow of poverty is a promise to learn to be content in whatever state or condition we find ourselves. We know how to be abased and we also know how to abound. We have learned the secret of facing plenty and want, because of Christ our teacher who also eats and drinks but whose preferential option is always to be poor. In other words, if we travel by ourselves we consciously opted a poor or modest eatery than to an elegant one. But if we pick up somebody at the airport or bus or train station we have to let go of our own preference for the sake of the other person, unless he, too, will explicitly say that he would rather single out a plain and simple restaurant. In all things discretion the mother of virtues should guide us.

Our promise to live a celibate life does not mean that we should no longer feel any sexual passion. As long as there is still blood in our vein we are subject to feel it, but the remembrance of God – of our promise to Him – give us the strength not to be overcome by it. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to the humanity of Christ is indispensable to be able to keep our promise of celibacy. As a man, we have a natural longing for a woman, and a woman has a natural longing for a man. This longing creates a certain void in us until we are united to the other person. And since God designed our hearts that it can only be ultimately satisfied by Him, so no other human being no matter how close that relationship is can fully fill this void. And since the Blessed Virgin Mary is already in the mind of God from all eternity to all eternity and has bestowed on her the fullness of His grace and love to such an extent that the Blessed Virgin Mary can be considered as the reflection of the feminine side of God, therefore, by virtue of the merit of this grace and love she, too, can fill this void. “What the Catholic Church believes about Mary is based on what it believes about Christ, and what it teaches about Mary illumines in turn its faith in Christ.”

Devotion to the humanity of Christ is indispensable to be able to keep our promise of celibacy because it is the pivotal point in which depends the re-orientation of our love; from carnal it will become spiritual, concupiscence will become charity. As long as we are still on earth, however, it would be an illusion to believe that even with the help of grace we can quickly succeed, as though overnight or within a month, to transform our carnal love into spiritual love. So, what shall we do? Well, we have to present continuously to our carnal love an object proportionate to it or even more delightful than it. It is for this reason that our love for Christ should be both tender and intimate to oppose the sweet enticements of sensual pleasures, for sweetness can be conquered by sweetness. Here is the advantage of having a devotion to the humanity of Christ, thinking of Him from time to time during the day whether of His birth, childhood, hidden life, public ministry, His passion, death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven, to help us to be able to keep our promise of celibacy. If temptation assails us to break this promise we have to overcome it by means of remembrance of either one of these aspects of the mystery of Christ. And you will know by your own experience how true it is that sweetness can be conquered by sweetness.

In our promise of obedience we are also imitating the far excellent obedience of Christ who was obedient unto death even death on the cross. He came into this world not to do His own will but the will of Him who sent Him. This will is the food of His soul while on earth. It nourishes Him and gives Him strength to accomplish the works of His Father who sent Him, as He said: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his works." The Father is working still, so the Son is also working through the Holy Spirit in us. They are working for our sanctification, chiseling out our attachments to the lower parts of our human nature that are still hankering for sensual pleasures, the pride of life, and the delight in riches until the divine image in us which is patterned in the likeness of the Son will emerge and grow into mature manhood to the measure of the fullness of Christ.

Just as different kinds of tools are used in sculpture for the Sculptor to carry out his work, so also obedience is one of the tools that the Holy Spirit uses in forming Christ in us. We are unlike Christ by our willful disobedience, but we become like Him in our free obedience. The labor of obedience will bring us back to Him whom we have drifted through the sloth of disobedience, as St. Benedict had said.

Responsible obedience is a hallmark of a person of faith. It may require an honest, and heart to heart talk dialogue when we are asked by those in lawful authority to do something which we think and find difficult. We have to express our side humbly and sincerely and laid down the reasons why we found the command very difficult to do. Those in lawful authority has also to express their side humbly and sincerely and laid down the reasons why they commanded us

to do such a difficult thing. They have to encourage us and give us more time to think and pray over it. This span of time is the grace period to allow ourselves to be open to what the Holy Spirit wants of us. There are myriads of factors that lobbied our conscience to influence it whether to yield to the demands of those in lawful authority or not. First and foremost is the degree of our humility and pride. There's also the degree of our faith and our self-will. To what degree do we have to cling to our conviction that we could say, "we must obey God rather than men," and to what degree do we allow our conviction to fall into the ground and die believing that unless it dies it will never bear fruit? There's also the insight of our friends whom we consulted. All these will influence our decision.

For example, Sister X is being asked by the lawful authority in Vatican not to attend an International Convention for the Ordination of Women in the Catholic church. But sister X is highly convinced that it is the will of God that women has to be ordained to the ministerial priesthood because they are not just adjunct to the Church but is a constituent to it, otherwise sister X won't be advocating women's ordination if this is not God's will, for it will appear that she will only be fighting against the will of God.

On the other hand, the Church authority in Rome is also convinced that it is the will of God not to ordain women to the priesthood because if God had willed that women has to be ordained to the priesthood He would have ordained the Blessed Virgin Mary, for she has all the qualities ideal for women priesthood; and besides, there has never been a seed of women priesthood in the Catholic Church. Sister X argued about development of doctrine, but, on the other hand, how can a doctrine develop if there was no seed planted? No matter how big a tree is, it always comes from a small beginning – from a seed. Like human beings, too. We all came from a small seed. Even a test tube baby came from a seed. God alone can produce something out of nothing. So, in pushing women's ordination it is tantamount to saying that Sister X is implicitly asking the Church authority in Vatican to do the impossible.

And since this is an impossible thing, so, Sr. X has to rely more on God because nothing is impossible with God. On the other hand, the Pope and the College of Bishops who are the guardian of the faith that had been handed to them by the apostles are very wary to grant the request of Sr. X, for they have also to discern whether the request of Sr. X is really from God or just a reaction of the patriarchal dominance in the Church, because they knew that Christ had commanded the apostles to preach the good news to all creation, to heal the sick, cleanse lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons, and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that He has commanded them; but there was never a command to ordain women to the priesthood. They also knew that it is possible that within the members of the Church there will arise people will

who will be teaching doctrine contrary to what they have had received from the apostles. For these reasons they are very cautious to any new teaching within the Catholic Church. They are not like the Athenians who spent their days in listening and telling what is new. No doubt, there's a merit in this cautiousness as long as it does not become a phobia, because they have the duty to guard the Church who is the pillar and bulwark of the truth. But if this cautiousness becomes a phobia, then, it will be considered more as a disease than prudence. It is the same with those who dissent with the teaching authority of the Church who are motivated more by petulance or unwillingness to accept definitive or official Church teachings. This too is a disease. If this would be the case, then, it will do no good to the mystical body of Christ, because if one member suffers all the members will be affected.

This, however, does not include those who criticize the Church constructively. Critique is quite different from dissent. Critical remarks can also issue from an intense love of the Church and can be motivated by a burning desire to see the Church respond more effectively to its dignity and lofty vocation. Critique can also be a prophetic invitation to the Church's fuller self-realization under the power of grace.

We believe that the Church is holy by virtue of the very holiness of Christ. We also know that, as members of the Church, we are all sinners with no exception from the most simple member of the Church to the highest, say the cardinals, or even the pope, because if we say we have no sin we lie and the truth is not in us.

But we also know that no matter how sinful are those who guided the Church, history can confirm this, the Church never err in its teachings about faith and morals. So we are face with a very mysterious reality of the human-divine mystery that can never be totally comprehended. This is where faith comes in. Although our faith has an intrinsic desire to seek understanding and we are encourage to deepen our understanding of our faith, yet we know that there are lots of things that are beyond our understanding and at the point where we think we have a good grasp of something the more it becomes mysterious, because anyone who thinks that he knows something does not yet know what he ought to know; but if anyone loves God that one is loved by Him. Our love for God, then, is the sole basis of our obedience. We obey out of love for God, as an imitation of Christ who was obedient unto death even death on the cross. Although He is God and has all the angels at His beck and call, saying to them, "Do this, and they will do it, or come, and they will come," yet He learned obedience through what He suffered to give us an example that even though obedience is the greatest freedom it entails a certain suffering because it is a penance of the intellect. Does this mean that Christ has to do penance to His intellect even though He is God and knows all things, what is right, good, and true? Precisely, yet it is for our sake not for His to teach us how to obey when confronted with a difficult command to such an extent that we can say, even

with a stammering tone, "Father, if this cup of suffering will not pass from me unless I drink it, then, not my will but your will be done." But before we can utter these words, nights and days of prayer and reading scriptures has to precede it. In other words, persons of prayer and persons who have a certain familiarity with scriptures and has strived to put them into practice are in a fairly good position to obey; first and foremost, because ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ and also ignorance of prayer is ignorance of faith. In His entire public ministry Christ taught us the importance of prayer not only to nourish our soul and give us strength to do our daily work and ministry but also to be able how to discern the will of God in difficult situations. It is in the interplay of prayer and reading scripture that our heart will be disposed to do the will of God. If deep down in our heart there is a willingness to do the will of God, even if it would be difficult, God will send us even a little child to teach and help us, but if deep down in our heart there is a rebellion against His will, then, even a prophet will deceive us.

If it is true to say that if we cannot love men whom we see we cannot love God whom we do not see, it is also true to say that if we cannot obey men whom we see we cannot obey God whom we do not see, because our obedience to those in lawful authority whom we see is a test of our obedience to God whom we do not see, as Christ said: "He who hears you hears me, and he rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

However, just as a man can divorce his wife only on the ground of unchastity and if he divorced her apart from this reason he will commit adultery, so also we can lawfully disobey only when commanded things that are contrary to the commands of God. For example, if a superior of our community will command us to punch a brother on his nose, even if he commanded us in the name of God, we are not bound to obey his command because what he commanded is contrary to the law of charity. Again, if a civil government will make a decree to legalize abortion we are not bound to obey that decree. That's the time where we would boldly say, "We must obey God rather than men."

In cases where the command is not contrary to the law of God, say, for example, a work that does not appeal much to us or seems to be difficult, then, we have to express our side humbly and sincerely stating the reasons why it is hard to do what was commanded. But, if after the dialogue the superior still insists that we should give it a try, then, trusting in God's help, as St. Benedict said, we have to bend our will to his. In this case, we are never wrong to obey. The bottom line will always be the will of the superior whom we believe represents for us the concrete will of God. This is where faith comes in, because we know that our superiors are not perfect people. They are like us in all things with all our weakness, failures, and evil inclinations. However, they also have good qualities, otherwise, the still higher authority will not appoint them, or the community as a whole will not elect them.

We also have to admit that obedience is not an easy thing especially if we had a bad experience in our early childhood of those who represent the will of God for us, say, our parents or teachers or nuns or parish priests who were consciously or unconsciously abusing their authority.

Even children who came from a good family still have an inclination to disobey when confronted with a command that seems unjust or ridiculous to them. When we say a good family it doesn't mean that this family is perfect and beyond reproach because it is composed of men and women who are wounded in themselves. To obey does not mean that we should no longer have any inclination to disobey. It is an illusion to obey only those who are good and perfect superiors. No doubts that there are lots of good superiors, but none of them are perfect. If we only obey those who are good to us, what merit would that be? Even sycophants do the same that they may gain favor from their bosses. But if we obey our superiors even if they are not perfect, as long as they do not command what is contrary to the precepts of God, then we have God on our side. In this case our obedience is well grounded, for it is built upon the rock of charity and bolstered by the pillars of faith. It is not longer base on the outward appearance of those who represent God's will for us, but on the inward working of grace.

The most obvious sign that this kind of obedience comes from God is that it is willing to obey not only our superiors, but also our equals and our inferiors. In other words, we obey not only to the kind and gentle but also the overbearing. The other side of this kind of obedience is the virtue of humility. They go together. One could not exist without the other. If one is weakened or cut off the other will be in danger or die. This kind of obedience has a special kind of nourishment imported from heaven, that is, the willingness to do the will of God, as Christ said: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me," and also prayer, as Christ rises up early in the morning to begin His works with prayer. When Christ was still on earth this was His nourishment. We, too, will become strong and grow to mature manhood in the stature of the fullness of Christ when we feed ourselves with these nourishments. If we do not feed ourselves with these nourishments in no way we can obey when confronted with a difficult command. It is like a gaunt person who has no good nourishment and strength and is asked to lift up or carry a seventy pound object. In no way he can carry that object but, if he nourishes himself with a healthy food and take vitamins and minerals and will do some exercises he can eventually carry that object.

It is the same with our soul. If we are very proud we are like a gaunt person. The degree of our pride would be in proportion to our gauntness. If we are very proud we will find obedience very difficult. This doesn't mean that we no longer have any pride. All of us have pride without exception. But there is a healthy pride and there is also an unhealthy pride. Healthy pride is consist in our inherent dignity as sons and daughters of God. It is also consist in readiness to serve rather

than to be served and to consider the interest of others rather than our own. However, this healthy pride can be distorted by seeking only our own interest and be letting others felt our authority and lording it over them.

Even the angels have pride but they are not proud, for theirs is a healthy pride because they are ready to obey and to serve, as the Scripture says: "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?" Though they are continually in the presence of God beholding His face, yet they are willing to obey and to serve.

On the other hand, the devil and his demons have pride, too, but theirs is a distorted pride, for they become very proud and arrogate to themselves what belongs exclusively to God instead of serving Him, as the Scripture says: "How you are fallen from heaven O Day star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven, above the stars of God I will set my throne on high.'" No wonder the devil says, "I will not serve." He is too proud to obey and to serve. His self-will is so ingrained that it became impossible for conversion to happen.

As human beings, our conversion is possible. At first we may have an inclination to disobey or even actually said No to a command from our superiors or equals, but we repented and do it. We have an example of this in the story of the two sons. The first son refuses the command of his father to go and work in the vineyard, but later he repented and went. Christ commended him for doing the will of his father even though he refuses at first. As we have said, obedience does not really mean the absence of the tendency to disobey. We still have it, but are not totally overcome by it. We may fail in doing it, but rises again and do what we can to do it. As long as we will not abandon our prayer life, grace can eventually penetrate into the depths of our heart. If we pray humbly acknowledging that by ourselves it is difficult for us to obey, then grace will make up what is wanting in us.

Grace will soften our heart little by little and make it more disposed to do the will of others solely out of love for Christ who came not to do His own will but the will of Him who sent Him. When I say, 'little by little,' what I mean is that we cannot overcome our self-will overnight. It will take a while for grace to do her job in us, for this is not an easy task because she will also take into account our nature. She is very prudent in dealing with our nature. She had millions of years of experience of how to deal with human nature. She knows that it will be more detrimental for us if she will do it overnight because it might only break the earthen vessel of our human nature if it is being rubbed to much.

This is for our own advantage so that we will not be discouraged if we fail to do the will of others. As long as we're not insolently contumacious, but will allow our heart to be receptive to the action of grace we will come to the realization that



obedience is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.

Just consider the case of Saul. He was very certain that he was doing the will of God even though what he did was contrary to what Samuel had told him. It is not far from reality if we will say that in this case Saul was following his conscience. Here are two people who are in the service of God. Remember also that the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon Saul after Samuel had anointed him in the name of the Lord. Both of them had the Spirit of God, and both of them were persons of authority and are influential, but Samuel checked the conviction of Saul whether it conforms to the will of God.

There will always be persons in authority to interpret for us the will of God; otherwise our own conscience will lead us astray. Our conscience need to be educated. This doesn't mean that we would not interpret the will of God in our lives and use our own conscience, but our conscience has to be educated and formed according to the values of the community or religion which we belong, otherwise, even if our body is in that community or religion our spirit is far from it.

If we belong to Christianity our conscience has to be formed according to the teaching of Christ. It is the same with people in other religions, say, the Buddhists, the Hindus, the Jews, and the Muslims. The Catholic Church in the Second Vatican Council teaches that those who belong to these religions can be saved so long as they do what is good, right, and true and follow their own conscience, which of course, has been formed according to their beliefs and traditions.

If we belong to the Catholic Church our conscience has to be formed according to the teaching and beliefs of the Catholic Church, otherwise, we don't belong to it even if our body is in it. We might belong to the other Christian denominations, say, the Lutherans, Episcopalians, Baptists, Methodists, etc. There are still hundreds and hundreds of other small Christian denominations.

In the beginning there was only one Christian Church and we can trace it by evidence that it is the Catholic Church by the undeniable fact that it is the Church of the apostles. Heresies are not foreign to the Catholic Church. Right from the beginning there were people who teach what is contrary to the teachings of the apostles. St. Paul gives a severe warning to this. But it was only since the time of Martin Luther that the Catholic Church was splintered severely. No doubt Martin Luther had a good intention of reforming the Catholic Church, but he did it outside the Church. And the effect is terrible because since that time until now the faith that had been handed down by the apostles had been ripped into hundreds and hundreds of other Christian denominations. Each one interprets the Scripture in their own way. The dynamics is as follows: if a member of a church disagrees with the teaching of his church he will establish his own

church and be the interpreter of the Bible and also the will of God for his congregation. Then another member of his congregation disagree with his teaching because he has his own interpretation of what Christ really said, so he will establish his own church and be again the interpreter of the teachings of Christ, and so on.

These people might have a good intention and follow their conscience, but it makes us wonder whether they are contributing to the building of the Christian religion or are adding more scandals to it.

For this reason it is absolutely necessary that there should be a lawful authority to interpret the Scripture and the teachings of Christ for the whole people of God. This role was played first by the apostles and handed down to their successors whom we know are the bishops, especially the popes. This does not mean that the bishops or the popes down through the ages are perfect people, far be it, they are like us in everything, but our faith tells us that it is Christ who chose them to lead His people just as Yahweh chose Moses and Aaron to lead His people. They are not put in their positions without a reason. We might have lots of reasons to criticize them and grumble against them, but we have to do it in a very constructive way not just out of petulance but out of a true love for the Church, otherwise, the serpent of pride will bit us.

Consider also that when we entered the religious life we made our vows to God through the Church in the hands of our religious superior or the bishop. If we do not want any other authority except God alone and our own conscience, then why do we still make our vows in the hand of a human being? Why not do it directly to God without any human intermediary? Not that we could not do it or it is impossible to do it, but God had ordained it to be so, otherwise, it would not be necessary for Christ to establish the Church and told His disciples that "those who listen to you, listen to me." Another undeniable fact that there is always a lawful authority to carry out the will of God in our lives is in our baptism. When we were yet a child our parents brought us to the Church and be baptized by a priest or deacon. If there would be no other lawful authority, why not our parents baptize us in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit? Certainly, no one will question the validity of this baptism, but they brought us to someone whom they believed had received the commission that had been handed down by the apostles.

And if we are a convert to the faith we also do not baptize ourself, saying, 'I baptize myself in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.' Not that God won't accept it if we truly believe in the Trinity even if we do not fully comprehend it, and we do our best to live a good life, but we always go to someone whom our faith tells us represents the will of God. We even attend the RCIA.

Consider also Our Lord Jesus, certainly He is not obliged to be baptized by John. As a matter of fact, John protested when Christ presented Himself to be baptized by him, saying: "'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.'" So, we obey to those in lawful authorities not only that we may not give scandal; especially to the weaker members of the Church, but also that we may fulfill all righteousness. To obey is much better than to command. We only learned how to command when we had learned how to obey. If we had not learned how to obey it would be detrimental for us and for those whom we work with if we will be placed in a position of authority. We will be worse than those in the authority that we have disobeyed.

Both Christ and John gave us an example of responsible obedience. Both of them expressed what they believed is right, and yet John yielded to the request of Christ for the sake of the fulfillment of righteousness. He was able to do this because he, too, was determined not to do his own will. This is a concrete manifestation of his humility to such an extent that he could say, "He must increase and I must decrease." It shows also that it is the Spirit of Christ who teaches him to yield. This, too, is another model of obedience for those who work in the service of God. There was a dialogue. The yielding of John was certainly not a sign of defeat, but out of respect and acknowledgment of the still more higher authority of Christ and for the fulfillment of righteousness. John does not insist in his own way. And that is one of the characteristics of love.

This model can be used in the dialogue between those who demand for the ordination of women and those who are entrusted to guard the tradition of the Church and its deposits of faith. There has to be a dialogue to allow both sides to express their beliefs and convictions and also to be able to discern the movements of their spirit, because we are told that not everyone who says, "Lord, Lord" belongs to the Lord and that even the devil believe in God, but shudder.

One of the tools that can be used in discerning whether the conviction that women has to be ordained to the priesthood is obedience to those who has been entrusted the authority to guard the traditions of the Church and its deposits of faith, allowing their conviction to fall into the ground and dies, for unless their conviction falls into the ground of obedience and dies the death of silence, it remains alone and will never see the light of day, but if it allows itself to fall into the ground of obedience, and if it really comes from God, it will be vindicated and will rise again in its resplendent beauty. It doesn't mean that if they allow their conviction to fall into the ground they have to give it up, because when Christ allowed Himself to die He carried with Him to the grave His beliefs and conviction. In allowing Himself to die He submitted Himself to the judgment that He could be either right or wrong in His beliefs and conviction,

but time proves that He was right because after three days He rose again from the dead glorious and immortal.

We have several examples of these in the history of the Church. In our own century we have Karl Rahner, Henry de Lubac, and John Courtney Murray who worked in the service of the Church. These men, big as they are, submitted themselves to those who had been entrusted to guard the traditions and deposits of faith. They allow their conviction to fall into the ground of obedience and be exiled into the land of silence. No doubt it was very painful for them. You can imagine the mixed emotions that they felt. But in the end they were vindicated.

Are those who demand the ordination of women willing to let this conviction fall into the ground to be tested like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times?

We have to affirm strongly that women are not just adjunct to the Church but are constituent to it. Without women there could never be a Church just as without a woman there could never be a child, because it is by the union of the seed of the man and woman that form a child. So also it is by the union of men and women in Christ that formed the Church. Without either men or women the Church could not be a church. We can call it something else but not a Church.

Right from the very beginning Christ has women disciples and they were the ones who supported the ministry of Christ by their own means and they were the ones who remain faithful to Christ till the end. They were at the foot of the cross, whereas the other men disciples had abandoned Christ. They have a very important role in the life of the Church. In the book "The Incorruptible" you will see that there were lots of women, more numerous than that of men, whose bodies were incorrupt. So, we could not belittle the importance of women in the Church. It is absolutely really doesn't matter whether we are a man or a woman as long as we faithfully strive to respond to the universal call to holiness, as the Lord God is holy.

And yet, it is very obvious like the noon day sun that none of these women were ordained to the priesthood. No doubt this is one of the reasons why those who were entrusted to preserve the traditions in the Catholic Church and its deposits of faith are very wary to grant the demand of the ordination of women in the Catholic Church, because they can only give what they have received. And since they did not receive this command they are very reluctant to grant it.

Well, we ask, "isn't it they have power to loose and bind a doctrine or teaching here on earth and it shall be loosed and bound in heaven?" Precisely, in fact Pope John Paul II said that there is no possibility of the ordination of women to the priesthood, that is to say, the issue is closed. So, in this case the Church had

bound that there will be no ordination of women to the priesthood. Considering the nature of things, it is very unlikely that the Catholic Church will loose it in the future.

In the hierarchy of possibilities it is more possible that the Catholic Church will loosen celibacy, for there had been a history that priests were married; but even this is still very unlikely until there will be a thorough study on the social, psychological, and spiritual condition of married clergy in other denominations, than for women to be ordained to the priesthood.

Are the women who were ordained to the priesthood in other denominations can be called priest? NO. They are not priest but priestess, because it is by nature that priest is for men just as pregnancy is for women. For women to demand to be a priest would be tantamount to men who will demand that they, too, should be pregnant, and will cry out: "We want to be pregnant, we want to be pregnant. We have a deep conviction and we believe it in our hearts that God is calling us to be pregnant. It is very unfair to us that only our wife or our girlfriend got pregnant!"

It would be a very extremely unique demand in the history of humankind if men will demand to be pregnant, too, because by nature it is only the women who are ordained to be pregnant even though the husbands share completely and fully in their sexual union to such an undeniable veracity that without the seed of the men no child can be born.

So, also it is an undeniable truth that without women there would be no Church and there would be no children of God to be born, and yet by its nature only men were ordained to the ministerial priesthood. It has absolutely nothing to do with inequality if only men are ordained to the priesthood just as there is no inequality if only women are ordained to be pregnant, because it is in perfect harmony with our human nature.

Just imagine if men got pregnant. Can they be called men? NO. we can call them something else but no longer men. Certainly we will call them a woman, because it is by nature that only a woman can be pregnant.

In some Greek religions there were priestess, but they are not priest because by its nature only men are called priest.

It is not an evil thing if there are some men who have a strong orientation to be like a woman as long as they will not act it out into an unlawful activity. In the same way it is not wrong for a woman if she had a strong orientation to be a priest as long as she will not act it out into being ordain to the ministerial priesthood, because in all men there is a woman inside them and also in all women there is a man inside them. It is for this reason that there was a development of doctrine about the universal priesthood of all the faithful. In our

baptism we are all priest, prophet, and king either we are men or women or children. See, even the children have a full participation in the priesthood, prophetic role, and kingship of Christ, but they are not ordained to the ministerial priesthood.

In family life, children are encouraged to have a full participation. Each one are given a task, for example, one do the dishes, another clean the table, and another sweep the floor, etc. And yet there is one act that would be unnatural for the children to do even though they are full members of the family and are encouraged to have a full and active participation, that act is to have a sexual intercourse with their parents because that act is reserved only for the husband and the wife. And we know that this happens and we consider such an action as unnatural.

So also in the Church, especially after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council, as part of the development of the doctrine of the universal priesthood of the faithful, the laity both men and women and children are encouraged to have a full and active participation in the Church. We now can see children both boys and girls serving at the altar; we now have communion ministers who are lay people, we have women giving homilies on Sundays or even in ordinary days,<sup>3</sup> or as lectors; giving catechetical instruction; there are women who hold doctorate in theology or Scripture; there are women who lead a prayer service for the faithful, etc., and yet there is one action that would be unnatural for them to do, that action is to be ordained to the ministerial priesthood, because there has never been a seed planted in the Catholic Church that women is being ordained to the priesthood. On the other hand, there was a seed planted about the universal priesthood of the faithful that is why this doctrine had developed. We can see this seed in the first letter of Peter where the writer said that we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people. Without any shadow of a doubt it is address to both women and men, which of course includes children, that is, to the whole people of God.

We have said earlier that no matter how big a tree is, for example the redwood tree, it always come from a small beginning – from a seed. Since there was no seed planted in the Catholic Church for the ordination of women to the ministerial priesthood, so it is not surprising that the Vicar of Christ on earth could not grant the demand of those who insist on the ordination of women.

Even the Blessed Virgin Mary who got pregnant without any sexual intercourse with a man has to pass through the law of small beginning, because the very

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<sup>3</sup> In 2004, the Congregation For Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacrament issued a document entitled: "Redemptionis Sacramentum: On Certain Matters to be Observed or to be Avoided Regarding the Most Holy Eucharist," prohibiting non-ordained faithful to give homily within the Mass. See # 65 & 66.

seed of God Himself was planted in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. Without that seed she won't be pregnant. This is the par excellent among the promises of God, promises that are pure, because in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children of God."

In our dealing with God there's always another human being involve, just as in God's dealing with us He also uses other beings either human beings or spiritual beings. For example, when He proposed to the Blessed Virgin Mary that she would become the mother of His Son, He sent an angel to the Blessed Virgin. Also in His dealings with His people Israel He also sent prophets, who are human beings like us, to communicate His will. Not that God could not directly communicate His will to us without any intermediary, but that is His normal way of dealing with us. It is the same way in our dealing with God. It is absolutely true that we can approach God directly without any intermediary, except of course of Christ who is our One mediator, in the depths of our hearts by prayer. But normally in our dealing with God there's always an intermediary.\*<sup>4</sup> That is why we make religious promises of poverty, celibacy, and obedience to God through the Church in the hands of His representatives either bishops or the religious superiors. Not that we could not do these promises between God and us alone, but that is our normal way of dealing with God, otherwise, there won't be any need for a Church and religious orders.

God's promises to us are promises that are pure because He always remain faithful even if we are unfaithful, for He cannot deny Himself. God promises that He will grant us the grace, if we pray to Him, to be able to carry out our duty and all the demands that our religious vocation entails, especially when we are commanded to do a very difficult task, for He knows that left to ourselves we cannot do it but with His help we will be able to do it. →

### **Icon # 111 = Signs: Conversion vs. Perversion**

"Do thou, O Lord, protect us, guard us over from this generation. On every side the wicked prowl, as vileness is exalted among the sons of men."

When the crowds were increasing, Christ began to say, "This generation is an evil generation; it seeks sign...." These people had already been given lots of signs, but they refused to look at it. If they will look at it they could not see it, because their hearts were hardened. Christ had performed lots of signs and wonders in their presence, but they refused to believe. They even accused Him of doing it by the power of Beelzebul the prince of demons.

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<sup>4</sup> We have to wait till we got to heaven where there's no more intermediary because we will be completely one with Christ.

No doubt signs are important too, because it can help us to reach our destination especially if we are not familiar with the place. Take for example when we travel. We are given lots of signs along the road, but our experience tells us that it is possible to miss the sign and make a wrong turn. It is one thing to make a wrong turn and come back and another thing to insist on continuing in the wrong direction and completely got lost and never reaches our destination.

The former can be called conversion and the latter can be called perversion. Our experience tells us that there were lots of times that we made a wrong turn from the road of perfection. Only after a while through the grace of God which we obtained in prayer that we realized we are in the wrong direction, and then come back. It is also true that there are lots of people who made a wrong turn from the path of perfection and still insist in doing so. One of the possible reasons for this is that there are lots of traffics in their lives and they are not on the right lane of good disposition to take an exit. But if there's a will there's also a way, because we could make a gradual change of lanes, that is to say, make a gradual change of our lifestyle which makes it more favorable to take the next exit, that is, to be disposed to conversion. In other words there's a change of heart.

Our own generation, say 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century, is not really that different from the ancient generation, say the generation of Cain or Esau or David or Saul, because human nature basically remains the same. The murder which Cain committed, the gluttony of Esau, the lust of David, and the jealousy of Saul are still roaming around on every side in our present generation like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Movie stars who live an immoral life are exalted among the sons of men. Pride and self-assertiveness are considered personal strength. Self-promotion is rampant everywhere. So, it is our prayer that God will protect and guard us from these things, because as long as we are still in this world there is always a possibility that we will succumb to them. They are in our hearts lurking and prowling on every side. That's why we have to watch and pray that we may not fall into them. →

### **Icon # 112 = Pain & Sorrow**

#### **Psalm 13 (12)**

“How long, O Lord? Wilt thou forget me for ever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?”

At a certain point in our life, at a time when we deviate ourselves from God by pursuing a life-style which is conspicuous by its less attention to God and more to ourselves and to the things of this world rather than the things of heaven, it is as though God has forgotten us and hide His face from us. We gaze at Him but



could not perceive Him, because He can only be seen by the pure of heart. Actually, He is still in us in the sense that He is present in all things, but we are not in Him because our thoughts are far from Him. Since we could not perceive Him anymore, His presence became like an absence as though He is hiding His face from us. This causes pain in our soul and sorrow in our heart because God is the true lover of our soul. Physical suffering is more bearable than the absence of God. How long does God hide His face from us? So long as we insist in our own ways and pursue things that are more harmful for our soul. In this case, the number one enemy of our soul is exalted over us. He became the ruler over us. This is painful because he is not concern for our good but for our ruin and misery. He comes only to steal and kill and destroy. Under his dominion we readily succumbed to what is evil, for we do not do the good we want, but the evil we do not want is what we do. So, if we do what we do not want, it is no longer we that do it, but sin which dwells within us. Who will deliver us from this situation? For us Christians, we believe that Christ alone can do it because He has power to bind the evil one who rules over us, for Christ came that we may have life and have it abundantly, and to proclaim release from our captivity. He came to destroy the works of the devil and to restore us to our proper dignity. For the sake of the glory of God's name, Christ came to deliver us. This is a sign of His favor that He will not forget us forever. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you," says our God.

The enemy shall no longer be exalted over us when we do not succumb to his temptations. He will still continue to bark at us, but as long as we do not go nearer him he cannot harm us. When we were still under his dominion we yielded the members of our bodies to sin as instruments of wickedness, but now that Christ liberates us we need to yield our members to God as instruments of righteousness for sanctification.

God no longer hide His face from us, but instead He let His face to shine upon us and be gracious to us. This will temper if ever there are times that we will experience pain in our soul and sorrow in our heart because so long as we are still in this present life we will not be exempted from pain and sorrow, but in solidarity with the suffering people of God we will fill up what is wanting in the suffering His mystical body, that is, the Church.

There are several kinds of pain and sorrow. The first is the byproduct of our unbridled desires in chasing ephemeral things and for forbidden pleasures. Take for instance a married woman who begins to be unfaithful to her husband and have a relationship with another man, or vice-versa, it causes a tremendous pain and sorrow in the heart and soul in each of them. For those who entered religion unfaithfulness to our vows causes pain and sorrow in our heart and soul. There's also pain and sorrow caused by different kinds of tragedies, and also of unfulfilled desires.

The other kind of pain and sorrow is the byproduct of our participation in the sufferings of Christ, in carrying our own crosses, in our patience with the weaknesses of others both in mind and body. But this kind of pain and sorrow is very wholesome and healthy because it not only builds up our own moral and spiritual life, but it also builds up, in particular, the brothers and sisters we live with and the entire mystical body of Christ, in general. This kind of pain and sorrow, therefore, is life giving. It is blended with the goodness of God which is sweet tasting to our soul, as the Psalmist says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." We should not pray to be delivered from this kind of pain and sorrow.

The former kind of pain and sorrow is what we are praying to be delivered from lest we sleep the sleep of death. We will say then, →

### **Icon # 113 = Human help & Divine Grace**

"Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; lighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; lest my enemy say, 'I have prevailed over him;' lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken."

Unfaithfulness darkens the eyes of our soul. The longer we remain in unfaithfulness the harder will our heart be. We shall indeed see but never perceive, and we shall indeed hear but never understand, for our heart has grown dull. However, to pray that God may enlighten our eyes lest we sleep the sleep of death is a positive sign that we gained self-knowledge. We acknowledged our own blindness and our need for inner healing. We trust in His love and mercy, for He came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance and to open the eyes of the blind.

To be overwhelmed by different kinds of tragedies will eventually lead to depression which is a foretaste of sleeping in death. If we will be depressed we will be sad, and if we are sad our foes will rejoice because we are shaken and they will think that they have prevailed over us.

If we could have an access to good psychiatrist or psychologist we might avail of their skills. Human help combined with divine grace are excellent means to enable us to continue to fight a good fight so that we will not be destroyed when we are struck down, we will not be forsaken when we are persecuted, we will not be driven to despair when we are perplexed due to a series of negative experiences, and we will not be crushed when we experience affliction in every way. In this case our enemy cannot prevail over us. His gladness to see our downfall will turn into mourning when he cannot prevail over us. Even though we have to walk in the valley of darkness and have to pass many trials and tribulations and be buffeted by the wind of adversities we will not collapse so

long as Christ is on our side and we anchor ourselves in Him because He is a strong fortress where we can take refuge.

Life on earth is characterized by a continual struggle. Many people find monasteries very attractive because the atmosphere is very peaceful and it would not be hard for them to experience the sweetness of God in the depths of their hearts, and they see the monks rising up early in the morning to sing the praises of God while the majority of the people are still sleeping, but it would not take a long time for these people once they enter the monastery, especially if they are romantics and idealists, to find out that monks are not perfect people.

Oftentimes they will succumb to the movements of their hearts and will begin to criticize and grumble against the other monks. It is not far from reality to assert that these people have not yet attained a true self-knowledge, first and foremost, because they failed to realize that a monastery is a Church, a holy and Sacred, its ground with all the trees and birds that live there and those who just come and go share in the holiness of the place; yet, it is made up of people who have been stained by Adam's sin who still have an inclination towards evil but are also striving towards perfection. If they had known this they would be slow in judging the other monks. This doesn't mean that it would be unlawful for them to offer criticism. Criticism is healthy so long as it is done constructively with the welfare of the community in mind, not just out of an itchiness of the tongue which has its obvious source in the complexities of the human heart.

These people may be searching for an ideal and perfect community, but they failed to realize that once they found one and entered into it that community ceases to be perfect.

What shall we do then when we are confronted with this inevitable collision between ideals and reality? The healthiest thing that we could do is to have first an ideal because our ideals are like beacons of light that will guide us to the way we should go, and at the same time we have to accept what is real: the reality of the day to day events in our community both the expected and the unexpected; the reality about ourselves and that of our brothers or sisters with all our weaknesses, sinfulness, and failures and also with our strength, our desire to grow in holiness of life, our patience with one another, and above all our effective love for one another; the reality about God – that we have a God who is so close to us than we to ourselves and is ready to answer us even before we call upon Him, a God who is gracious and merciful, full of kindness and compassion and who is rich in mercy. He is a God who invites us to come to Him when we are weary and find life burdensome that He may give us rest.

Though He is wholly Other, yet He became like us in all things except sin. Though He is beyond the created universe – very far, far, far in that unknown region in the cosmos, yet He is near us for we have only to confess Him with our lips and

believe Him in our hearts and strive to put His teachings in our deeds. We don't have to travel across the sea to find Him because He is within us and in Him we live and move and have our being. If these things are ours and abound they prevent us from being ineffective in our service of God and one another. If we lack these things our enemy can easily prevail over us and our foes will certainly rejoice. We don't want this to happen, first and foremost, because it is a very painful thing to see an enemy rejoicing over our downfall who tauntingly mocking us to scorn, saying, "He trusted in God, let God deliver him if he is His friend. Let us torment him with insult and see whether he will still put his trust in the Lord."

If God is not on our side when our enemy mocked us to scorn, who can endure it? Our natural tendency would be to repay evil for evil and get even with our enemy, but we are commanded never to avenge ourselves but to leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' We are also told not to be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good.

One of the ways to overcome evil with good is to say a prayer often, a short ejaculatory prayer, or by a remembrance of God or awareness of His presence, because prayer is already good in itself. In doing so we will heap burning coals upon the head of our enemy, and he could no longer say, "I have prevailed over him." This is a sign that God lightens our eyes and does not sleep the sleep of death, because when we are sincere in our prayer we are less susceptible to temptation, as Christ said: "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation." If, for whatever reason, we may enter into the territory of temptation, it is also prayer that will provide us a way of escape so that we will not be tempted beyond our strength and be led into the temptation. For example, Joseph was tempted by the wife of Pharaoh but he was not led into temptation. Christ was tempted by the arch-enemy of both the good angels and mankind but He was not led into temptation.

Once a person decides to follow Christ more closely all the hostile forces of the enemy will be employed to dissuade and discourage that person, but it is prayer that will give strength and courage and will sustain that person to prepare him or her to face the inevitable temptations, trials, and difficulties in life, as it is written: "My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation." Temptation is synonymous to a test. To come forward to serve the Lord is like enrolling ourselves into the school of the Lord's service. Just as students are tested of their capabilities of handling their subjects by means of exams either written or oral, so also we will be tempted in many and various ways either in thoughts, words, or actions, to test the level of our adherence to Christ and His teaching.

Just as students who study their lessons and do their homework are in a better position to answer the examination, so also if we watch and pray and do some

readings, first and foremost the Scripture, or the fathers and doctors of the Church, or any spiritual books that will nourish our soul, we will be in a good position to handle constructively the trials and examinations of life, because in times of trials there will often be some thoughts that we remember from our readings that will jump out in our memory to help us answer the test that we are facing. Just as students reviewed their lessons with other students who are good in class by asking or answering questions which will likely to come out in the examination, so also we will do well if we will observe and imitate the good brothers and sisters in our community, that is to say, we will follow what is good and learn a lesson from what is not good.

There's always goodness in every brother or sister in every community, but there are some who excel in virtue. In this way, we will be like a bee sucking honey in every flower. One of the greatest advantages of this is that it makes us less judgmental and critical towards our brothers and sisters and develops our own self-knowledge, understanding, and patience. It will not take us a long time to be disillusioned. We have to be disillusioned from our illusion that people who entered the religious life or priestly life are perfect people. However, it is unequivocal that these people have virtues in them both potential and currently practiced. The virtues that they are already practicing are what we are going to observe and follow, as St. Paul said: "Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us." Thus we watch them how they behave and response to a given situation, say for instance, in community meeting, in handling crisis, in responding to a brother or sister in need of something, in their natural interaction with their brothers and sisters or other people. This doesn't mean that we have to expect perfection from them, because if we do we will only be frustrated than edified, rather we consider them as a living icon of God's presence among us. Though we do believe that God is in our midst and that we are all His living icons, but His presence is more palpable and transparent in those who live a virtuous life. In them our enemy can never say, "I have prevailed over him." In them our common foes can never rejoice because they are shaken, for once the enemy present something in their thoughts and imaginations they will immediately dash it against Christ while it is still young. They don't rely on their own strength but rather put their trust in God who is the source of their strength. In confidence they can go on to say:  
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#### **Icon # 114 = Trust: Ephemeral vs. Eternal**

"But I have trusted in thy steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me."

If we can trust in the love of our parents or other people, how much more in the steadfastness of the love of God which is boundless and endures forever. His steadfast love is a buckler for all those who put their trust in Him.

Trust is an essential ingredient to human development. Without it we will not grow into a mature human person. We exercise it in many different ways without even thinking about it. For example, when we ride in a bus or airplane or boat we unconsciously have put our trust in the driver or pilot. Many people have also put their trust in money because the more money they have the more they can do many things almost as varied as the imaginations of their hearts. There are also people who put their trust in their knowledge and intelligence and qualities and skills, and they feel good about it which incites them to think that this is their own doing. However, all these kinds of trusts are very shaky because the foundation itself, though it looks good, is not firm and solid. Take for instance our knowledge and intelligence. Just by one slight punch of Alzheimer we will stagger right away like drunken men, and another punch will certainly knock us down. Take also beauty. It will certainly turn to ashes in our mouth when we grow old.

Even if we will not be invaded by Alzheimer's disease or grew old, so long as we do not serve God in this present life, we will still be handed over to the judge and the judge will hand us over to the guard and the guard will put us in prison and we will not get out from this prison until we have paid the last penny, because although we knew God we did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but we became futile in our thinking and our senseless minds are darkened.

This would be the lot of those who put their trust in anything ephemeral who lay up for themselves material treasures and worldly knowledge but are not rich in God nor acquire the true wisdom of God which is hidden from the clever and worldly wise, but is revealed to those who have trusted in the steadfast love of God, whose heart rejoices in the work of redemption that Christ wrought for the human race.

Does it ever known in the history of human race that anyone who trusted in God had been confounded in their hope and expectation? Never, because the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. Even though in the eyes of the foolish of this world they seemed to have died, and their departure to the other world was thought to be an affliction, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. For though they might have suffered in this present life which triggered people to think that

they were punished, yet their hope is full of immortality. God had tested them and found them worthy of Himself. They passed the test because they did not put their trust in themselves but in God whose love endures forever.

This is a critical difference between those who put their trust in riches, power, human knowledge and intelligence, or in themselves or even in princess and kings of this world and those who put their trust in the steadfast love of God. Not that we should be devoid of trust in princess and kings or prime ministers and presidents or even in ourselves, for it will lead to paranoia. And certainly we don't like to be paranoid. We should not even be devoid of trust in riches and power or human knowledge and intelligence because riches in itself is not evil. The evil is in the corrupted will.

Therefore, if you are rich you can use your riches in helping the poor and the needy and contribute to humanitarian organizations for the welfare of those less fortunate than you are. You can also use your power or influence to help the oppressed and those who are discriminated because of race, color, and religion. If you have so much knowledge in liberal arts and different kinds of human sciences such as medicine, engineering (which includes civil, mechanical, electrical, computer, chemical, industrial, etc), psychology, history, theology, etc, you can use this, too, in a proper way for the good of the human family and not for its exploitation or destruction. And above all, you need to know that your intelligence no matter how sharp it is compared with that of the angels is only like that of a first grader. And yet God in His steadfast love had destined us not to remain as a child forever but allows us to grow into a mature manhood in the likeness of Christ. What God is by nature we will be by grace. We will share in His own knowledge and intelligence, His own power, goodness, majesty, and love. There will be a complete and perfect union between our soul and God far beyond than any profound and intimate relationship between a man and a woman in this world, because we will be one with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and the love with which they loved each other will be in us.

Our faith tells us that we began this union with God in our baptism, as though in an inchoate form. This union can be nourished and cultivated, as we grow in age, by assiduously putting our trust in the love of God. However, for most of us, our own life history verifies that we do not always put our trust in the love of God, but put it in something else. For whatever reason, we allow ourselves to deviate from God and use our freedom as an opportunity for the flesh. In spite of this

God never staggered in His patience with us because His kindness is meant to lead us to repentance. Now we are a forgiven sinner and our life is meant to live no longer for ourselves but for Him who for our sake gave His life in the salvation He wrought for us, for while we were yet sinners He died for us. We have to be grateful for this all the days of our life, rejoicing in the Lord always and be always prepared to give an account to those who ask a reason for our hope so that they, too, will join us in rejoicing and singing hymns of praise to the Lord who has done marvelous things in our life. →