

## Icon # 115 = The Fool: Breaking the record of the Devil

### Psalm 14 (13)

"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none that does good."

It is so funny that the fool says in his heart, "There is no God," because the devil believes in the existence of God, but shudder, and yet the fool says in his heart, "There is no God." Does this mean that the fool is trying to surpass and break the record of the devil? But we are told that a servant is not above his master. It is enough for a servant to be like his master. And yet it is very obvious that the fool is trying to be above the devil because he denies what his master believes.

We are also told that a disciple is not above his teacher. It is enough for a disciple to be like his teacher. But how come that the fool wanted to surpass his teacher? Does he think that his teacher is wrong in believing the existence of God? But how can his teacher be wrong in his belief about the existence of God when his intelligence and knowledge about God is far superior than all human beings combine together? Right from the very beginning of his teacher's existence his teacher already knew that there is God that is why in spite of his own wickedness he retains the undeniable truth that there is God, only that he denies it by his deeds.

If the fool had not a desire to surpass his master he would at least believe the existence of God, but since he denies the existence of God his foolishness remains in him. This doesn't mean that his master is free from foolishness, too, for if he had not been tainted by some sort of foolishness he would not have abandoned the place of honor and glory that God, his creator, had bestowed on him. Isn't it the most unimaginable kind of foolishness if you have all that the human heart and mind wanted to possess such as, knowledge, intelligence, riches, and beauty, and willingly lose it?

This is what his master did. He loses his knowledge of all that is good, right, and just. No wonder he uses his intelligence<sup>1</sup> in devising all kinds of wickedness. He goes so far as to arrogate to himself the ownership of the world when he attempted to give it to the One who owns it, when in fact he has nothing of his own. He was a former beauty celebrity, but now he becomes so ugly and repulsive.

What makes us wonder is that there are still millions of human beings who like to hug or kiss him or united with him. This, too, is foolishness. Where did his master get all this foolishness when he was created as a noble being? We are called to

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<sup>1</sup> As a faculty inherent to spiritual beings and human beings.

freedom, only not to use our freedom as a pretext for doing evil. Another wonder is that his master did not call his attention when he said in his heart, "There is no God."

But it should not surprise us why because greater work than his master he will do, for his master is descending to the depths of the bottomless pit. If his master couldn't deny the existence of God, at least he tolerates it in his disciples because fools understand each other. "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" Isn't this the most absurd kind of foolishness? We will take a modern example why it is foolishness to say, "There is no God."

Consider a 747 jumbo jet and all its highly sophisticated mechanical and electronic devices built into it that work in perfect harmony. Then, I will say to you, "well, I don't believe there is a mind designing it and persons building it. It just exists by accident. It flies because an aerodynamic Lift produced by the motion of an airfoil (wing) through the air. Lift gives an airplane the ability to climb into the air and holds it up during flight." Isn't this funny! I can give an explanation of how a sophisticated 747 jumbo jet flies but I deny that there's someone who designs it. If you believe me that there's no mind who designs and builds jumbo jet, and that it just exists by accident, are we not considered fools? In this case we are the only one who can understand each other.

I will strongly argue that people who say in their hearts, "There is no God" really have a faith but they put their faith in lie rather than in truth. There are lots of factors why they put their faith in lie rather than in truth. One is upbringing. Another is bad company. Still other is bad literature, especially literature that is unashamedly hostile to religion. See, in this case, they have faith because they believe what the writer of this literature say. They believe what is false and deny what is true.

Even the most ignorant of people would not deny that there is someone who designs a jumbo jet even though we could not see him.

No person in his or her right mind would ever, ever deny the existence of God (or whatever you called Him either a higher Power, a Being, or a Mind) if you will look closely at a flower or a turtle. Just look at the symmetry of the petals of a flower or the harmony of the tiny little flowers within a flower in some flowers like the Queen Anne's lace. Look at also at the symmetry of the lines of the shell of a turtle. No doubt all the rocks and stones will mock you and will cry out in unison that you are a fool if you will say that it is the flower or the turtle that designs the symmetry and harmony of their lines and petals.

Do you think a turtle can design the shape of its shell, chooses its color, and draw a perfect symmetry of its lines? Or do you think a flower can design its own

petals, its stem, and leaves? Ask a turtle and a flower who made them and they will gladly tell you if they can recognize a sincerity in your heart and that you are intent of seeking the truth. In your way to ask a turtle and a flower and you happen to meet a butterfly, look closely at his wings and ask him too who designs them. I'm pretty sure that he will not veer from his usual gentleness to tell you the truth.

Therefore, the fools who say in their hearts, "There is no God" has "no excuse whoever they are, for what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made."

If you are not contented with the above observations and you will make excuses that it is very difficult to find a turtle and that there is no Queen Anne's lace in the place where you live, so let us use another simple and accessible example. Let us go to a local store where plastic flowers are sold. Do you think that these plastic flowers just exist by itself without a mind designing that it should be arranged this way and not that way?

Even though we do not see the person designing and making it, yet the orderliness itself of its arrangement is a very veritable sign that there is a mind who designs it. If there had not been a person who made it, the first consequence is that it won't exist; the second is that it will not be in its proper order. But by the fact that it exists as it is and it is properly arranged is already an undeniable truth that someone designs and made it even though we have not seen this person.

Orderliness, then, is one of the signs and hallmarks that God designs and made the universe even though we do not see Him. Take another example – the four seasons: Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter. If there was no mind who designed and ordered that Spring would be in Spring time, Summer would be in summer time, Fall would be in fall time, and Winter would be in winter time, there would be an inevitable chaos in our weather system and the weather forecasters will certainly lost their jobs because they will lost their credibility of making a more or less accurate forecast.

For example, it is summer time. The forecaster will make a weather forecast, say, "On Monday, low in the 70's and high in the 90's," and so forth. Then suddenly, in a twinkling of an eye the temperature dropped down to 10 degrees Fahrenheit below zero on Monday and 100 degrees Fahrenheit on Tuesday. So, in this case the weather forecast is no longer reliable. The forecasters could no longer predict the weather. People will always be in a state of severe anxiety because they could no longer determine what kind of dress they have to wear,

for if they will wear a light dress because it is very warm, then, suddenly it freezes. There will be lots of accidents because people will be taken off guard while driving comfortably since the weather is faultlessly fair, and suddenly without any prior notice it will turn out to be icy. Everything will be affected from the agricultural, shipping, and airline industry.

So, you can see how much we should be grateful to God for wisely designing our weather system in such a beautiful order that won't create a paranoia among the minds of people, especially among the forecasters and the scientists. The earth, the moon, and the stars, and other planets gently follow the axis assigned to them. For billions of years the earth meekly rotates around the sun and the moon around the earth, which by their gestures teach us to do our routine duties humbly and patiently.

Just think how much confusion and turmoil if there was no mind who outlined the courses of our planet earth and the moon. Without any shadow of a doubt, if there had been no mind who designs and governs our universe, the earth would certainly be curious to visit and wander around the planet mercury, or it will wander off to Pluto – and this too would be our end, for it is very dark and cold in Pluto; and scientists tell us that there's no life there. And we believe them even though we have not been to Pluto and they, too, have not been there.

If we believe them when they tell us that this is so, how much more do we have to believe in the testimony of the Word of God Himself who became man and told us about His Father. "No man has ever seen God but the only Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known." If we believe in the authority of those who study the created things, how much more do we have to believe in the authority of Him who created all things. For "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made."

Do you think that the Scientists and all who have some knowledge about our universe will not consider me a fool if I say in my heart, "There is no Mars?" They will certainly laugh at me. On the other hand, we don't have to laugh at those who say in their hearts, "There is no God," but rather we have to pity them and love them for the sake of our own master who let His sun shine on the just and on the wicked, and send His rain on the good and on the evil; for if we only love those who believe in the existence of God, what merit can we get out of it? In other words, we have to love the fool but hate their foolishness.

It is gratifying to know that there are a growing number of scientists who believe that there's a mind behind the entire universe. I am convinced that science and religion are not opposed to each other, but rather they complement each

other. Science helps us to know the majesty, grandeur, wisdom, and knowledge of God, and His sense of beauty and orderliness. The orderliness of the universe alone already boggles our mind, for simple truth affirms that no person that is out of his mind can arrange things in such a perfect harmony.

If you have ever visited a room of a person whose mind is scattered you will see what I mean. The undeniable facts of the evidence are all before you. So also, the orderliness of the universe and the beauty and symmetry of created things such as the flowers, the butterflies, the turtles, etc. are facts that cannot be denied that there is someone, an architect, who designs all created things to its minutest details.

Take another example: the former twin towers in New York. It is an utter foolishness to say that it just existed by itself without someone planning and designing it, installing its complex electrical lines and plumbing system, the heights and sizes of its room. People in their right minds will certainly shook their heads, no matter what explanation we give, if we say there was no architect behind it.

Take again the distance of the sun from the earth. We are told that it is 93 million miles away. That distance is just perfect for the preservation of life on earth considering the tilting of the earth toward and away from the sun during the four seasons. Just this gesture of tilting at its proper time and patiently doing it without deviating from its course, not just for a month or a year but for billions of years is already something, isn't it? First and foremost, because the earth itself has no mind.

Therefore, there must be a mind who carefully and providentially designs it that should not be a little bit far or a little bit close, for that would be a colossal error because if the sun is just a bit farther from the earth our earth will be frozen, and if the sun is a bit closer to the earth our earth will become a desert. Who in their right mind can deny this?

The four seasons give witness to this when the earth gently tilts toward and away from the sun. And not only the earth but also the moon that rotates around the earth. Men of science know exactly and accurately the high tide and low tide and measure it, for the moon obediently follow the course determined by its maker because by itself the moon has no intelligence; and if we will ask her who made her, she certainly will tell us the truth that she is not the one who made herself because by its very nature she cannot make herself and by random do what she has been doing, for that would be a supreme foolishness.

Therefore, all creation testifies that there is someone who made them. Religion called Him God; Philosophy called Him Being; Science called Him Mind;

Alcoholic Anonymous called Him Higher Power; in general, by intuition, He is called Someone greater than ourselves, for it is unequivocal and clear as a noonday sun that there is someone greater than ourselves.

This Someone is Almighty, Allknowing, Allowing for He cannot be otherwise. He governs and guides all His creation with utmost love, care, and goodness and gave them food at its proper time – even His own Body and Blood to satisfy the hunger and thirst of the human souls that hanker for Him. “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

We also know that although our outward bodies are being wasted away, yet our inner self is being renewed everyday because of Him who loves us and because we had reciprocated this love, for “we know that in everything God works for good with those who love him.” If we do not have love for God and do not believe the existence of God in spite of all the evidence, then, we are corrupt, we are doing an abominable deeds and we are inculcating an impression that we wanted to surpass the devil in his wickedness, because, as the Scripture said, “Even the demons believe and shudder.” →

### **Icon # 116 = Subtle Corruption vs. Loving God**

“They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none that does good.”

There is a subtle form of corruption which is also an abomination in the sight of God, that is, when people believe in God and confess Him with their lips but deny Him by their deeds. This is like kissing and hugging God but betrayed Him. To this kind of people Scripture says, “Not every one 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.’”

We are also told by the Scripture that God wills our sanctification. Therefore, there is no guarantee of entrance into heaven even though we do not deny the existence of God if we do not respond to His will, that is, to be holy as He is holy, because not to progress in the spiritual life is to regress. Regression is a form of corruption because it leads to indifference to things that are of God. Instead of looking up to heaven and to things that are above we are entangled on this world and the things of the world. This, too, is an abominable deeds because we are giving more value to created things rather than to the Creator of all things.

If we give more value to created things rather than to the Creator of all things, then, it shows what and who we love, because where our treasure is there will our heart be also.

We often think of abominable deeds such as hijacking an airplane and ducked it in a building, suicide bombing, aborting a fetus, patricide or matricide, rape, adultery, sexual abuse of minors, etc. But how about dishonesty, debauchery, "immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like?" St. Paul warned us that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. The point is that whoever follows Christ must keep all His commands. Even if we are not guilty of adultery or murder, but if we are dishonest and selfish we are still guilty of breaking His commands, because we just couldn't pick and choose in observing His precepts.

You might reply, "This is a hard saying, who can accept it?" Yes, it is a hard saying and it is difficult to observe because of our wounded human nature which so weakened our will to respond graciously to Christ's commandments. That is why we have to cultivate our prayer life and ask for His help to be able to do what He enjoins us because left to ourselves we could not even think what is good, right, and true. Once we realize our own helplessness to fulfill the law of Christ, then, we will be grateful if we are able to do it because we know by our own experience that this is not our own doing. It is owing to His grace that comes through prayer that enables us to accomplish what He commanded us. In this case, our whole life will become a hymn of thanksgiving to God and all that is within us will praise and glorify His holy name.

All that is devoid of God's grace will certainly decline to doing abominable deeds because they will be highly susceptible to the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. It is possible that God will still be on their lips but it is certain that He is far from their hearts. This, too, is corruption.

On the other hand, if we acknowledge God with our lips and believe in Him in our hearts, doing the best we can to do His will even if in doing so we stagger we will have God's approval, for the only thing He demands of us is to reciprocate His love. We may not be able to love God in this present life as He deserve, but if we will love Him with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our strength, and with all our soul, then, we have done our best for we have given our all.

Loving God with all our heart means that we don't allow any other affections which are contrary to God to dwell in our heart, for light and darkness and Christ and Belial cannot dwell together. If we allow an affection which is contrary to God to dwell in our heart, then, it will be certain that our heart will be divided

and it will cause a certain uneasiness in our heart because our heart is designed in such a way that it will find its full satisfaction and stable equilibrium in attaching ourselves to God alone. In this case, material things will be used properly and with responsibility – never allowing ourselves to be attached to them no matter how good and useful they might be.

Loving God with all our mind means to think often of God either in His infancy when He condescended to become a man; or in His hidden life; or in His public ministry, or in His passion, death, and resurrection; or in His majesty and glory. If the thoughts about these things are in us and abound they minimize the entrance of the uninvited useless and evil thoughts. Whether we like it or not, as long as we are still in this present life we could not prevent evil or useless thought to enter our mind. Most of them find access through our senses and some of them are hiding within the dark caverns of our soul.

However, it is in our power to reject or entertain them. What is important is that once we are aware of them we have to reject them right away while still young by thinking of good thoughts because sweetness can be conquered by sweetness. This is a sign that we are heedful of the saying, "Do not be conquered with evil, but overcome evil with good." But how can a person know what is evil thought and what is good thought if his mind is not train to distinguish between good and evil? And how can a person be willing to train his mind to distinguish between good and evil thought if he has not yet been converted? Thus St. Paul says, "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Loving God with all our mind, then, entails renewal of the mind: from delighting in vices to delighting in virtues, from love of malice to love of goodness, from falsehood to truth – following the truth wherever it leads us.

Loving God with all our strength means to give all of ourselves to the works assign to us or in the simple and ordinary works that we do. God does not require us to lift up a 300 lbs object nor to roam around doing megalomaniac deeds, but only to do our duty with the strength which God supplies, in order that in everything He may be glorified through Jesus Our Lord.

Loving God with all our soul means to cultivate virtues both the theological and cardinal virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The more these virtues and gifts abound and grow in us the more the carnal sense of the palate of our heart taste flat. So, instead of being lovers of the world and the things of the world we will be lovers of God and the things of God. Our soul will be delighted more in



God than in created things no matter how good and beneficial they might be. We will also grow in trust and confidence in God that even if we have to pass many trials and tribulations we believe that they could not harm us so long as we avoid sin.

Loving with all our soul also mean that we do the best we can to keep His commandments, for this is the surest sign that we have love for Him, as Christ said: "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me...."

If you and me and people of good will do our best to love God with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our strength, and with all our soul, then, there's someone who does good, for love is already a form of doing and it is the greatest of all deeds because it will abide forever. In this case, when →

### **Icon # 117 = Searching For God**

"The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any that act wisely, that seek after God,"

He will see us even though in doing these things we do not let our left hand know what our right hand is doing and do not sound a trumpet before us because He looks at the intention of our heart and the motivation of our soul.

To seek after God is a good sign that we are acting wisely, just as to seek after evil things is an indication that we are clearly acting foolishly. The great truth is that a person will find what he is looking for, because he has already been found by the author of his intention.

We seek God because we have already been found by Him. Our seeking after God is our response to His founding us; otherwise we would not seek Him if He had not already found us. This searching and finding God when nourished and cultivated properly and has been treasured in our heart will eventually lead to intimate union with Him because whoever is united to God becomes one spirit with Him. This searching and finding God has to be nourished and cultivated properly because it is only the beginning of our conversion and it is still subject to grow cold and be lost. Faithfulness to our prayer life and acts of kindness are wholesome nourishment for this searching and finding God. They are salubrious to the soul. Just as a child who has a good and healthy nourishment will grow faster, so also our soul when nourished properly by exercising the virtues. It is unequivocal that to exercise the virtues is a wise act. It is an evidence that we are serious in our search for God.

If people no longer pray and don't exercise the virtues, then, when the Lord looks down from heaven to see if there are any that act wisely that seek after Him, →

### **Icon # 118 = Here & Now: Heaven & Earth**

"They have all gone astray, they are all alike corrupt; there is none that does good, no, not even one."

Isn't this the most terrible thing to happen? This is even worse than Sodom and Gomorrah, for when the Lord looked down from heaven to see if there are any in Sodom and Gomorrah that act wisely, that seek after Him, he saw Lot and his family, but here there is no one that does good, not even one. Isn't this an image of hell where there is none who does good and seek after God?

If this is the case, then, heaven and hell are already right here and now and people had a foretaste of it. We are experiencing heaven even while on earth when we follow the example of the citizens of heaven, that is, doing the will of God and loving Him with all our heart, mind, strength, and soul and loving in a concrete way our neighbor either through words that will arouse them to search and love God more deeply or through actions that will inspire them to obey the commandments of God or through prayers that will give them enough courage and strength to face the inevitable trials and challenges of life.

Heaven is where God is, so if God is in our heart and mind and will, we are already experiencing heaven on earth when, for example, we are offended by our brother or sister and are tempted to retaliate but we resist the temptation to repay evil for evil but overcome evil with good by giving them food when they are hungry or drinks when they are thirsty irrespective of our own feelings doing it solely for the sake of Our Lord Jesus who gave us an example that we may follow in His steps.

There are varieties of ways of experiencing heaven on earth and it boils down to living in the state of grace, because when we are in the state of grace all our thoughts, words, and actions are geared toward an encounter with God no matter how simple our thoughts, words, and actions are. In a spiritual sense, the food and drinks that we gave to those who offended us are words of kindness and gentleness and gestures of courtesy and respect.

They may or may not know what they are doing, that is to say, they may deliberately do it or not, but our Christian and monastic response must always be to forgive as the Lord has forgiven us, we too must forgive. It is important to know that we can offend each other in various ways without even knowing it either by a careless word that we utter or by our gestures in the way we walk or sit or stand or by the way we look.

Who among us is so perfect that he could no longer cause a slightest ripple of offense to anybody? No matter how good and pious are our words and actions there will still be people who will be offended by it, and we too can be offended by the words and gestures of other people. That is why we need patience and not to act out immediately our feelings, but to be more cautious of our conduct responding constructively to every situation that we are in, because whatever our response reveals what is already in our heart.

We have an example of this when Our Lord came to His own town and taught in the Synagogue. The people were astonished, and said: "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the Carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brethren James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all this? And they took offense of him."

In another occasion the Scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem came to Our Lord who were scandalized by the disciples for eating without washing their hands. In response to this objection Christ called the people to Him and said to them, "Hear and understand: not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth this defiles a man." Then the disciples came to Our Lord and said, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?"

But the Scribes and the Pharisees did not handle their feelings and emotions constructively but acted it out by contriving and putting Christ to death. On the other hand, Christ also felt a certain heartache and anger towards them and was certainly offended by them. For instance, when He entered a certain Synagogue a man was there who had a withered hand. And they watched Him closely to see whether He would heal him on the Sabbath so that they might accuse Him. And Christ said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come here." And He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. And Christ looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart. And yet, with all this struggle and tension His ultimate response was forgiveness, as He said on the cross, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."

Since all of us are subject to offend or be offended by one another, so we are to forgive each other, otherwise, we will go astray and all alike corrupt because there is no use to live together in one place if we are far apart interiorly. For this reason, St. Paul cautioned us, saying, "But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another." On the other hand, he begs us "to lead a life worthy of our calling," either it be to religious life or married life or single blessedness, "with all lowliness and meekness, with

patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.”

If these things are ours and abound in us they prevent us from going astray and decline to corruption. They are also signs that we have some knowledge of God and does not rely too much on ourselves but assiduously rely on God and constantly call upon His name, for people who lack these things have no knowledge of God. →

### **Icon # 119 = Experiential Knowledge of God & of Self**

“Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon the Lord?”

Eating, then, and biting one another are insignias that we don't have any experiential knowledge of God and does not call upon His name, because if we really have experiential knowledge of God and constantly call upon His name either to ask for help or to express one's gratitude or just to be mindful of Him, God will certainly supply us the grace necessary to be able to guide and manage properly our animal instinct. Instead of growling and devouring each other by harsh words or unkind look we will learn to be patient and understanding with one another, bearing each other's burden either of mind or body. As a consequence we will live in peace and harmony and be more free to serve God all the days of our lives in holiness and righteousness without fear of being put down or rejected when it happens that we fall or commit mistakes.

Whether we like it or not, so long as we live in community in which we are assigned various works, there will be times that we will fail to do our duty, but as long as it is not done deliberately it will cause us no harm for it will teach us humility and will deepen our self-knowledge which, in turn, will make us more forbearing and kind toward our brothers and sisters if it happens that they fail or err.

I am lead to think that this is part of God's pedagogy in teaching us about truth and charity. True self-knowledge will always lead to charity, first and foremost, because it makes us less judgmental of others, be slow to anger, and be ready to lay down ourselves for one another by our patience, for it is in our patience that we share in the suffering of Christ. Patience with ourselves or with others is one of the fruits of self-knowledge. We can discover our true self only when we had discovered Christ in our lives, because when He gave us Himself He also gave us back ourselves – to live our lives no longer for ourselves but for Christ and for one another. These are clear indications that we have knowledge of God. This knowledge of God enables us to live in concord with each other and be content with each other.

We have an example of the effect of this knowledge of God, in which different kinds of personalities are able to live together in peace and unity in the book of the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The suckling child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

You can just imagine how chaotic and anarchic it would be if people with conflicting personalities and don't have any knowledge of God will attempt to live together in community. It will not take too long for them to bite and devour one another as though they are eating bread.

In community we can easily find a brother or sister who has a lion's temperament who easily roar at a slight offense or if he/she could not get what he/she wants. We can also find someone who is like a wolf who takes delight in nagging other people. We can also find someone with a gentle attitude like that of a lamb who does not repay evil for evil, but always try to conciliate. We can also find someone who is hardworking like a cow and is devoted to his/her work. We can also find someone who is self-assertive like a leopard and take advantage of the weaker members of the community. We can also find someone who acts as though he/she is above every one else like a bear whose presence causes others to tip toe. We can also find someone who is cunning like a serpent who tries to manipulate things.

However, all these temperaments had been tempered and mellowed because of their experiential knowledge of Christ whose grace unremittingly works within them and molds them into His likeness and enables them to practice the virtues.

Notice that the word child is repeated three times: little child, sucking child, and weaned child. It is not far from the truth if we will say that this a triple affirmation of the restoration of our innocence and complete dependence on God who requires childlike simplicity and innocence as absolutely necessary for entrance into His community, as Christ said: "Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Children, by nature, are dependent on their parents. They are also innocent. Thus when we grow in the experiential knowledge of God our once lost innocence will be restored and we will be like children to what is evil and mature to what is good, as St. Paul said: "I would have you wise as to what is good and guileless as to what is evil; then the God of peace will soon crush Satan under

your feet.” The fact that a little child governs the lion and play over the hole of the asp and put his hand on the adder’s den is a concrete realization that once we grow in innocence as to what is evil and wise as to what is good we can have dominion over our evil tendency and have power to resist temptation. The asp and the lion are dangerous animals. The former reminds us of the serpent who tempts our first parents. The latter reminds us of the devil who prowls like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

That is why if people does not have any knowledge of God, and as a consequence, does not grow in maturity to what is good and guileless as to what is evil, both the serpent and the lion will devour them as though they are eating bread. →

### **Icon # 120 = In Great Terror**

“There they shall be in great terror, for God is with the generation of the righteous.”

People who obstinately deny God either by word or thought or action, who deliberately chose to do evil even though the chance to avoid it has been presented and still did it without any pressure from inside or outside them, will be in great terror because the days of reckoning will come and they will invoke the mountains and rocks, saying: “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand before it?”

For God will render to every human person according to each works. “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...,” for God is with the righteous generation. Besides, the wicked could not stand in the assembly of the just as darkness could not stand in the midst of light, for even the presence of the just alone is enough to convict the wicked of their deeds. There they shall be in great terror because their deeds will be exposed no matter whether they have done it in secret, for nothing that is hidden that will not be known or covered that will not be revealed. What has been done in darkness shall be exposed in the light. Thus it causes fear and great terror.

Take for example a wife who is unfaithful to her husband. The husband is working hard abroad to support his family. The rumor of the unfaithfulness of the wife had reached to the husband’s ears. The time came when the husband informed his wife that he will be coming home soon. Just to hear this news already causes a certain fear and anxiety on the part of the wife instead of causing it a tremendous joy that once again they will express their love for one another in a sweet intimacy of body and soul.

There are several possibilities that both of them can do. On the part of the wife, she could deny the charges against her unless proven by factual evidence; and she could caress her husband more fervently than before even though she doesn't have the intention of breaking up with her paramour just to cool down the simmering anger of her husband; or she could sincerely repent and ask for forgiveness and would break completely the illicit relationship with her forbidden moon lighting love doing her best to such an extent that if her unlawful lover will make a signal, like whistling or will call in the phone, she will never answer him and go out of the house. This is a gesture of true repentance which alone is sufficient to restore the breach of trust and to heal the wounded love of the husband.

On the part of the husband, he could have dismissed his wife right away and dragged her out of the house because of the shame and insult she brought upon him. However, in spite of his red-hot anger he would not allow it to rule over his reason. He has to gather all the information he got weighing them to be able to make a just and well informed decision knowing that it is also possible that his wife could also be innocent and the rumor was only intended to destroy the reputation of his wife and to shatter their marriage to pieces, as in the case of Susanna who was accused maliciously by the two elders.

The husband will verify this also with his wife whether the accusation is true or not. If it is true and the wife did not show any regret but contumaciously argue with him in spite of the kindness he showed to her, then he has option whether to file a petition for divorce. The Scripture had stipulated a provision for divorce only on the ground of unchastity, as the Lord said. On the other hand, if the husband does not want a divorce because he is deeply in love with her, then what he can do is to pray for her as the last recourse believing that God can remove her stony heart and gives her a heart of flesh. But he has to ask in faith without doubting, for if he doubts his passions and emotions will be in turmoil like the wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

In the same way in our relationship with God: we are the wife and God is our husband, for He has betrothed us to Himself, in holiness, righteousness, and justice to be a people peculiarly His own. Whether we will accept it or not we are or had been unfaithful to Him by pursuing another lover because we allowed ourselves to be deceived by the thought that God is far away, that He went to a far country and we do not know what happen to Him there or when He is coming back, as the people whom Moses brought out from Egypt pursued another god when Moses went up to the mountain and the people did not know what happen to Moses there or when he is coming back. But, can he who formed the eye not see?

God has all the facts and evidence before Him because nothing can be hidden from Him. All our thoughts, words, and actions and even the inmost desires of our hearts are laid bare to Him. If this is the case, our most prudent response is to cry out for mercy because if God will mark out our iniquities who can endure it? On the other hand, Our God is also full of goodness, compassion, and tenderness who forgives the sins of those who sincerely repent and return to Him, as the Scripture said: "If he turns from his sins and does what is lawful and right...and walks in the statutes of life, committing no iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him; he has done what is lawful and right, he shall surely live."

Just as Moses went up to the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments, so Christ ascended to heaven to prepare a place for us because in His Father's house there are many rooms. Just as the people below the mountain, while waiting for Moses to come down, were indulging themselves in debauchery and licentiousness, so the people in this world, while waiting for the second coming of Christ, are indulging themselves in unimaginable varieties of sinful pleasures. Notice also that Aaron the priest consented in their wild profligacy, so also there are priests from the early history of the Church down to our own time who are not free from the taint of sinful pleasures, especially the sin of sexual abuse of minors and the vulnerable adults.

However, we are also told that not all the people whom Moses brought out from Egypt were guilty of carousing, debauchery, and idolatry, for there were a remnant who did not joined the majority of the people indulging in sin. God is with them for they are the generation of the righteous.

Just imagine that Moses, who was the meekest of all men on earth, was so enraged when he came down from the mountain and threw the two tables of the testimony out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf which they had made and burnt it with fire and scattered it upon the water and made the people drink it.

Our Lord, too, who was even meeker than Moses was filled with fury when the temple of God, which is the house of His Father, was turned into a market place and a den of thieves. And making a whip of cords He drove out those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple; and He poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.

It was only after long years of patient waiting for those who are in-charge of the temple that they might realize and change their ways, but they did not, that Christ released His unrelenting anger. Christ started going to the temple when He was twelve years old, for this was the required age to make pilgrimage to



Jerusalem, at least, once a year. If Christ started His public ministry at the age of thirty, so He has been going to the temple for eighteen years and saw all these chaos and traffic within the temple.

Now, we are told that our body is the temple of God where we can worship God in spirit and truth, for neither on the mountain nor in Jerusalem will we worship the Father because God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

Our body is meant for prayer and its members as instruments for righteousness. God sees what is going on in our body: in our heart, thought, word, and action for He is within us. God comes to us not just once a year or once a month or once a week or once a day, but every now and then seeking for fruits that befit repentance. God is doing this for many years now. If you are eighty years old, God has been coming to you for eighty years; if you are seventy, God has been coming to you for seventy years, and so on.

God sees all the traffic and chaos of our life and yet He remains patient, for His kindness is meant to lead us to repentance, as He said: "You do these things, and I keep silent."

I think it is good to keep in mind that the Scribes and the Sadducees, and the Pharisees were religious people and they encouraged other people to worship God. However, the fact that they initiated a program of buying and selling of sheep and oxen and pigeons inside the temple precinct suggests that they glorify God in their lips and set Him aside in their hearts, for it is self-contradictory to do incongruous things in the same place and at the same time as Christ said that we cannot worship God and mammon.

And besides, being immersed in the buy and sell and exchanging foreign currency amidst thousands of people will inevitably snatch away the little that they have of their actual interest of the worship of God itself. It dulls their appetite for prayer, but makes their eyes wide open at the glittering coins that flow constantly from the pockets of the buyers and from those who exchanged foreign currency.

Likewise, it is the same with us. We can be religious people going to Mass every Sunday or even every day, gave donation to fund raising for Church's project but, if we still allow the sheep of attachment to the things of this world, the oxen of sensuality and craving for pleasures, and the pigeons of vanity and vain desires, and above all the money-changers of deceit and unfaithfulness to dwell in the temple of our body, then our worship is in vain because we are still doing things which are abomination in the sight of God.

On the part of God, He unremittingly showed his kindness and patience, instructing us with His words which serve as a mirror wherein we may realize the evil of our ways. He could have dragged us away out of His kingdom as He did with the man who insidiously entered the banquet hall without a wedding garment, for the wedding garment is the righteous deed of the saints. But, instead, He covered our nakedness. He let Himself be bruised and wounded so that by His wounds we will be healed and be ready for love again. He exercises prudence in listening to our accuser who accuses us day and night before His presence, for He knows us more than anybody else.

Our response, then, is to give up our moon lighting love so as to make God the sole lover of our souls. If our former lover whistles to us with his seductive allurements we have to go inside the deep chamber of our heart where Christ is and never get out from there, and snuggled in His heart saying gently in a small, still voice, "Far from us drive the foes we dread and grant us Thy true peace instead."

On the other hand, if we do not give up our former lover but secretly have a rendezvous with him, hugging and kissing with each other, and enjoying with utmost passion the fleeting pleasure of a forbidden love, then, we will be in great terror because the time will come when the mask of our lover will be removed and we will see him as a wild beast so fearsome and dreadful that the sight of him alone will cause our soul to tremble, tremble, tremble.

If the sight of God is what we call Beatific Vision wherein consists all our joy and happiness, so the sight of our former lover who disguised himself as an angel of light can be called a "Woefullic Vision." This vision brings with it sadness, distress, depression, seething anger, confusion, torment, and the like, for if in looking at God we see ourselves in God and sees God as He sees Himself and love God as God loves Himself, so also in this woefullic vision the soul will see herself in this wild beast and hates herself as this wild beast hates himself.

This woefullic vision also brings with it remembrance of the sins committed. This remembrance is also terrible because it cannot be blotted out for they are like the worms that will never die. It becomes the evidence of what they had done while still in this present life.

Repentance alone can assuage the pain of the sting of the memory of our sins or any misconduct, which is being offered and available every day so long as it is called today, as the Scripture said, "If today you hear his voice do not harden your heart."

King David had a foretaste of this woefullic vision when he committed adultery and murder. He was so haunted by the sad vision of himself that, in a woeful

voice, he cried out: "My offenses truly I know them; my sin is always before me." It was his sincere repentance alone that alleviates the pangs of the memory of his sins, as David said to the prophet Nathan: "I have sinned against the Lord."

Since the Lord does not take delight in the death of a sinner but that he may be converted and live, and that even if our sin is as red as scarlet He can make it white as wool if only we repent, so the Lord sent the prophet Nathan to David, saying: "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die." The Lord could have kicked David out from his throne for his barbaric action, but instead gave him another chance so that he may learn pity as he is being pitied, and to be merciful as he is being shown mercy.

As God deals with David, so also Christ deals with us. We resemble David in many ways for we are a king, a prophet, and a priest which God bestowed on us in our baptism. Like David we committed adultery when we allowed ourselves to hound another lover instead of God and to hug and kiss with utmost passion the things of this world and the desire for honor and prestige. We committed murder when we acted out our anger and kill the other person with our harsh words.

The person whom Christ died for and raised from the dead we kill again by our anger, as Christ 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 every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment...." Feeling angry by itself is tantamount to holding a sword. It is not yet killing. It is still in our power to thrust it or not.

Thrusting it means acting it out. The degree of our passion would be in proportion to the seriousness of the wound inflicted. If our passion is very strong it would be enough to kill the other person with one blow as Abishai prouided himself to David to pin down Saul with one stroke, saying: "God has given your enemy into your hand this day; now therefore let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice."

On the other hand, if our passion is very mild then it is equivalent to just cutting a member of the body. We have an example of this when St. Peter wanted to defend Christ and expressed it by cutting the ear of the slave of the high priest. If his passion was strong at that time he could have thrust it into the body of the slave of the high priest or at his head for these are bigger members of the body and easy to hit, but the fact that it was only the ear that he cut off gave us the impression that he did not really intent to kill the slave of the high priest.

Expressing one's anger then suggests that we want to defend ourselves. Christ too expressed His anger by making a whip of cords and drove out those who

were selling and buying in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money-changers because He wanted to defend the glory of His Father's house that have been defiled and violated. But the bottom line is that "Be angry but do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil."

At first glance it seems to us that Christ's anger was very strong but to God it might be very modest because if it was very strong he could have entirely annihilated them. But the fact that He just made a whip of cords and drove out those who were selling and buying, and overthrew the tables of the money changers suggests that he did not have the intention of killing them but that they may be converted and live, for He came to call us all sinners to repentance. It is only when we deliberately harden our heart to such an extent that it became so impervious to grace, that is, the action of the Holy Spirit within us, that we will be in great terror because we freely chose by our own volition to go to the place of terror.

Christ run after us, leaving the angels in heaven, begging us not to continue on our way because there are ways which people think are good but it leads to death. Not only Christ is hounding us the apostles, too, are begging us to return to God, as the Scripture said: "So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."  
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### **Icon # 121 = Spiritual and Material Poverty: Aircraft Carrier**

"You would confound the plans of the poor, but the Lord is his refuge."

If we trace back the previous verses of this psalm we will see that the "You" here certainly includes the fool who says in his heart 'There is no God,' those who are corrupt and do abominable deeds, and all the evildoers who eat up God's people as though they were eating bread and do not call upon the Lord.

It is highly possible that the "poor" here not only includes the materially poor and the helpless but also the poor in spirit, people who do not rely much on themselves but on God, who consider God as their true riches for God alone suffices. There are poor people who are also proud and we are not referring to them.

Our Lord Jesus Himself beatified those who are poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God. Just as poor people have an inner desire to be rich materially, so also the poor in spirit have a desire to be rich in virtues and to let the words of Christ dwell in them richly. Their main plan is to enter the kingdom of heaven to see the vision of God and be with Him forever. They also plan to purify their hearts by being determined to submit themselves to the process of purifications

either through desolation or consolation, or through positive or negative experience that comes their way. They know how to be abased and how to abound. They have learned the secret of facing plenty and want, being filled or hungry. They can do all things because of Christ who strengthens them. They are rich in faith because they have found and have tapped the underground river in the depths of their hearts, as Christ said: "He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living waters.'"

No wonder why the arch fool and his followers would confound the plans of the poor because they do not want the poor to inherit the kingdom that they had rejected, for the sight of the glory of the inheritance that they had despised will add more to their misery.

But the Lord is the strong and impregnable bulwark of refuge for the poor in times not only of distress but also of bliss. They may be afflicted in every way, but they are not crushed; confounded, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in their bodies the death of Our Lord Jesus, so that the life of Our Lord Jesus may also be manifested in their bodies. Thus they do not lose heart. Though their outer nature is wasting away, their inner nature is being renewed everyday. For the slight and momentary affliction in this world is preparing for them an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

So long as we are in this present world our arch enemy will not cease to confound the plans of the poor. However, this would not dishearten us for God will provide us with every blessing in abundance so that we may always have enough of everything and be prepared to face the inevitable trials, challenges, and temptations that come our way, as the Scripture said: "My Son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation....Accept whatever is brought upon you, and in changes that humble you be patient. For gold is tested in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation. Trust in him, and he will help you; make your ways straight, and hope in him."

So long as God is with us we don't have to be afraid of those who would confound our primary plan of entering the kingdom of heaven, because God, too, will confound their own designs and bring it to naught. Moreover, if God is for us who is against us?

Our God who is within us is stronger than the One who is in the world. For this reason we have confidence that we will reach our ultimate goal, though not without struggles and difficulties, but we have the assurance that with the help of His grace and the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary we will win the victory and be crowned with eternal life which God has promised to those who conquer.

If the soldiers in an aircraft carrier are confident that even amidst the severest typhoon and gigantic waves, and the night is so dark their ship can still maintain an equilibrium, how much more we of God who governs the entire universe with an astonishing perfect harmony, and who can command to the waves and wind, saying: "Be still!" So also with us, amidst the restless gales and titanic waves of our life here on earth we can have confidence in God who is like a hen who would gather her chicks under her wings.

Just as the soldiers would never dare to go outside so as to run the risk of being taken away by the merciless typhoon but just stay inside the ship and can still see what is going on outside through their window, so also if it happens that we have to experience the relentless gales of sorrows and sufferings and the titanic waves of tribulations, tragedies, and distress, it is never safe to dare to go outside the heart of Our God because the intensity of the tragedy, sorrows, and sufferings might be beyond our capacity to endure. How many people who have lost their faith in God because of the tragedies that happen to them? They are even so bold so as to accuse and blame God for what had happened, saying: "If he is a loving God, how can he allow such things to happen?"

On the other hand, there are also lots of people whose faith in God even more deepened and strengthened when they had encountered tribulations and distress in their lives. Why? We have here two kinds of people whose responses to sufferings vary significantly. The former went outside the heart of God and exposed themselves to the wind, that is to say, they look more on the things that happened rather than looking to Christ and the example He sets because He, too, suffered for our sake. Since they averted their eyes from Christ and focused more on their own misery, naturally, they were overwhelmed by the severity of their tragedy.

We have an example of this when Peter got out of the boat to approach Christ who was walking on the water (this gesture, by the way, shows that Christ is God because only God can walk on waters, as the Psalmist said: "Thy way was through the sea, thy path through the great waters; yet thy footprints were unseen." The prophet Isaiah also said: "Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters....").

Peter was able to walk on the sea as he steadily focused his attention on Christ, but when he averted his gaze on Christ and contemplated more on the magnitude of the wind he was overwhelmed by fear and began to sink. Notice that Peter did not sink immediately but starting to sink. This is to show that acute depression or lost of faith in God does not happen in an instant no matter how great the severity of the tragedy is. It is only when we keep on brooding on the things that happened and doing it outside of Christ that we will be

overwhelmed by it, because as I said, they might be beyond our capacity to endure.

Whereas, if we stay inside the heart of Our Lord Jesus, just as the soldiers stayed inside the aircraft carrier in times of bad weather, we can still peep through the window of our soul even though we see nothing but only darkness and we will not be overwhelmed by it. We will learn to see things in the eyes of divine providence. However, this doesn't mean that we will be like the stoics who are almost devoid of human feelings.

Like all other human beings we can still feel the pain and anguish but is not vanquished by it because the love of God has impels us to look constantly and assiduously to Our Lord Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross and despised its shame, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father to intercede for us so that we, too, might have the fortitude and magnitude to sustain the pain with valor and honor. →

### **Icon # 122 = Deliverance: Restoring lost Fortunes**

“O that deliverance for Israel would come out of Zion! When the Lord restores the fortunes of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, Israel shall be glad.”

For us Christians who professed and followed Christ, our deliverance is from Him who rescued us from the tyranny of our unruly passions and evil desires so that we may declare the wonderful deeds He has done in us who called us out of the darkness of ignorance and sin into His marvelous light of peace and freedom just as Moses delivered the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt into the promise land which flows with milk and honey.

Christ delivered us from the futile influences and values of this world, not with a very cheap and perishable things such as dollar or silver or gold or even diamond, but with His precious blood like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

In doing so He restores our lost fortunes which are His image and likeness in us that had been mangled and distorted when we were taken into captivity by our vices and sins.

Christ delivered us by dying for us so that we may have life and have it to the full, for greater love has no one than this that a person lays down his life for his former enemies. Christ showed His love for us in that while we were yet sinners He died for us. This is to show the depth of His love which is unfathomable and boggles the minds of the angels.

All that the Father has belong to Christ and all that Christ has belong also to us because we are His mystical body. God the Father ratified this by sending the Spirit of Christ into our hearts, crying: "Abba! Father!" Thus through Christ we became children of God, and if we are children then an heir of His inheritance. Christ affirmed this too when He 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...."

Christ Himself acknowledged us as His brothers and sisters when He said: "...Go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and my God." When He ascended into heaven He led a host of captives and He gave gifts to human beings. In saying, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that He had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is He who also ascended far above the heavens, 'for no one has ascended into heaven but He who descended from heaven, the Son of Man,' Christ Jesus Our Lord, that He might fill all things. And He gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up his own body - the Church until we all attain 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...."

"For just as the rain and snow come down from heaven and does not return there without watering the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall the Word of the Father be that goes forth from His mouth; it shall not return to Him empty but it shall accomplish its mission and prosper in the things in which it was sent."

Christ Jesus is the Word of the Father. The Word was already with the Father even before anything was made and came into being. In the fullness of time the Word became a human being and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. He became like us in all things except sin. In the days of His flesh He spent more years in solitude and silence communing with His Father in the depth of His being. When the time was ready, He did an active ministry doing good everywhere: cleansing lepers, restoring the sight of the blinds, healing the sick and those with various illnesses, preaching good news to the poor, feeding the hungry, raising the dead, etc.

All these deeds are the rain and snow which spent sufficient time in the solitude and silence of the cloud waiting for the moment to manifest themselves. Just as lightning and thunder signaled the coming of the rain, so also the active ministry of Christ was heralded by the preaching of John the Baptist whose sermons were like lightning and thunder that penetrate the hearts and souls of people and moved them to repentance. John the Baptist prepares the way for Christ



just as the rain and snow prepare the ground for the sower to sow his seeds at the proper time.

But notice that rain and snow has different effects. They are the rise and fall of crops and vegetable garden. The rain makes the crops and vegetable garden yield a good harvest, but the snow is unwelcome to them. So also the person of Our Lord Jesus and His teaching are like rain and snow. They are the rise and fall of many people.

He is like a rain for those who believe in Him and strive to put into practice His teaching even if they stagger and fall in their attempt to do so as long as they will not give up and do not succumb to discouragement but are open to make room for improvement and be receptive to the action of the Holy Spirit within them to strengthen them and soften their hearts to receive the implanted Word, just as the natural rain softens the hard soil and makes it ready for the seed to grow.

He is also like a rain even for those who are not familiar with His teaching or do not explicitly believe in Him, but are sincere in their way of life and doing the best they could to follow their good conscience and do things justly and honestly either it be in their jobs or in their homes.

But He is like a snow for those who obstinately refused to accept Him even as a simple acquaintance, for those who are indifferent to Him both Christians and non-Christians alike, for those who find His name repulsive, for those who hear His sayings but do not keep them, for those who honor Him with their lips but whose hearts are far from Him, for those who are bold in hounding the things of this world but are cold in pursuing the things of the Lord. This is the atmosphere and temperature of the soul when the rain of grace turned into a snow of disgrace, just as rain will turn into a snow only at a certain atmosphere and temperature. The soul is cold toward the Lord.

However, the soul will still survive at this condition if she will bundle up herself with the mercy of God, as St. Benedict said at the last instruments of good works: "Never despair in the mercy of God." She needs also to go nearer to the fireplace of the love of God, that is, approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find help in times of need.

These will sustain the soul until the springtime of deliverance will come, that is, the frozen snow of indifference in her heart toward God is beginning to melt and the cold season of a life of sin is diminishing its intensity, and the flowers of affection toward God and the things of God start to blossom and the leaves of holy desires are appearing.

This is the beginning of the soul's conversion and transformation. She now begins to take delight in the Lord and savors His sweetness. By her own experience she

had seen and had tasted the goodness of the Lord. Now she longs for more like a deer that longs for the running stream. There are times that she longs for death and be with Christ for this is far better, but to remain a while in this present life is more necessary that she may declares in her life the wonderful deeds of Christ who called and delivered her out of the lament of a meaningless existence into the lambent bliss of God's presence.

For once she was held captive by the world but now she is liberated by the Lord. This is not her own doing for if it is hers she would have something to boast, but she knows that this is coming from the Lord of host.

Freedom can be considered as one of the most precious fortunes of our soul, especially the freedom to serve the Lord in the state of life He has called us either it be to the married life or to a life of single blessedness or to the religious life, and also the freedom to look not only to our own interest but also that of others, the freedom to forgive when we are offended, the freedom to say "I'm sorry" when we are the one who slay, the freedom to choose life rather than death, the freedom to do good to those who do not like us and to pray for those who annoy us, the freedom to overcome evil with good, the freedom to traverse the pathway of humility not so much in view to be exalted but solely to review our imitation of our beloved, the freedom to obey not so much as considering it as a penance to our intellect but in believing that this is the way of the elect which our father St. Benedict predilect.

Take away this kind of freedom and it will not take too long to realize that we are full of boredom. These are the fortunes which Our Lord Jesus restores to us when He delivered us from the hands of our mortal Enemy whose hostility quivered all his devotees. For Christ Himself said: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free....The slave does not continue in the house for ever; the Son continues for ever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

This freedom is a great fortune because it is the freedom of the children of God. It makes our soul rejoice and our spirit glad, for it is the treasure that we lay up in heaven. This treasure is such that even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For freedom Christ has set us free. For this reason we rejoice in the Lord always. Our soul magnifies the Lord and our spirit rejoices in God Our Savior. →

## Icon # 123 = Decisive Question

### Psalm 15 (14)

“O Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tent? Who shall dwell on thy holy hill?”

The next verses that followed this verse gave us an answer to this decisive question. The tone of this question reminds us of the basic question of our existence here on earth which, in its simplicity, determines our final destiny. “Why did God made us? What is the purpose in living in this world?” Then it gives an answer: God made us to know, to serve, and to love Him in this world and be happy with Him in the next.

This psalm then is a simple catechism teaching the way that leads to the kingdom of heaven and pointing out the route that we have to take to arrive there eventually.

Notice that in traveling we will never reach our destination even though we know all the routes leading to it if we will just be content in remaining at the place where we are. Thus we have to move and start to travel. For this reason the Psalmist begins by saying: →

## Icon # 124 = Walking With God: Elevator

“He who walks blamelessly, and does what is right, and speaks truth from his heart.”

Mark also that the Psalmist says, “Walks blamelessly,” and not jogs or runs, or even ride. Walking suggests a certain leisure where there is no pressure and in which we are at peace with our pace. In walking, too, we are exposed to the beauty of nature which nurtures our souls. We can easily assimilate the delicate exquisite of God’s creation which gives us consolation.

Since heavenly values and priorities are so lofty like a high mountain, walking is the ordinary way to reach the summit. Riding is, perhaps, the best but this is only for the elderly people who had been walking up and down this mountain for a long time and now they are at a certain age where riding is the most appropriate means for them to arrive at the top, that is to say, when we grow in maturity in our prayer life and had been practicing virtues we will be in a condition where contemplation is the most suitable means to arrive at the summit of union with God.

St. Therese called it an “elevator.” Our Lord Jesus is our elevator who lifts us up to God.

Maturity and intimacy does not happen overnight. It has to grow and develop with time by means of communications and contacts. Prayer alongside with the exercise of virtues are our means of communications with the Divine.

Once the soul is strengthened by prayer and the exercise of virtues, just as the body become strong by some forms of exercises, it is now in a condition to be able also to run as St. Benedict said that as we make progress in the Contemplative life our hearts will expand and we shall run with unspeakable sweetness in the path of God's commandments.

But for us who are still beginners and yet wish to arrive at the height of union with God, our most prudent and appropriate means is to walk knowing that walking is a good exercise too. For us beginners, this is only what the Lord asks of us: "To act justly, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God." If we keep on walking justly, kindly, and humbly, according to our pace, we will eventually arrive at our ultimate end which is the vision of God.

Note that it says, "To walk humbly with our God." This is clear as a noontday sun that in our walking we need to have God as our companion, otherwise, how can we learn humility, how can we act justly to one another, and how can we offer a gesture of kindness if God is not with us?

The Scripture also says that woe to a person who is alone, for if he falls there is no one to raise him up. We know by our own experience that in our walking in the path of God's commandments we stumble and fall from time to time, but the advantage is that even if we fall seven times a day we still have the stamina to rise because we have a friend to help us and encourage us to go on even slowly but steadily.

Christ walks with us in our joys and sorrows, consolations and desolations, and in our positive and negative experiences. Christ walks with us as a friend, as a teacher, and as a lover. As a friend because He laid down His life for us and has revealed to us what He has heard from the Father, as He said: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."

As a teacher because in Him we can learn His two most favorite subjects: Humility and meekness, as He said, "Learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." 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."

He also said that a student is not above his teacher but it would be enough for a student to be like his teacher. Thus in Christ as our teacher we will learn how to die to our false self and to gain sufficient strength and courage to carry our cross daily.

As a lover because as the Father has loved Him, so He has loved us. He has loved us with the same love that the Father has loved Him. God is love, and everyone who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. We love because He first loved us.

As a lover because He forgives us our sins, as the Scripture said: "Love covers multitude of sins." His only desire is that we reciprocate His love so that by doing so we will be like Him because love makes the lover equal to the object of his or her love. There is no inequality in love.

As a lover because God loved us so much that He condescended to become a human being like us to gain our love.

Suppose there was a king who loved a humble and lowly maiden. This king was very powerful that no one dared breathe a word against him, for he had the strength to crush all enemies. And yet this king was melted by love for this humble maiden.

How could he declare his love for her? In an odd sort of way, his kingliness tied his hands. If he brought her to the palace and crowned her head with jewels and clothed her in royal robes, she would surely not resist but, would she love him?

If he rode to her house in his royal carriage escorted with armies, that too would overwhelm her. And yet he did not want a cringing subject. He wanted a lover, and equal.

He wanted her to forget that he was a king and she a humble maiden and to let shared love cross over the gulf between them. For it is only love that the unequal can be made equal.

The king, convinced that he could not elevate the maiden without crushing her freedom, resolved to descend. He clothed himself very simply and become one of the ordinary people. He renounced the throne to win her hand.

This is the pure essence of His love. This is what the Incarnation is all about. St. Athanasius said that "God became a human being in order that we, human beings, might become God." What God is by nature we will be by grace.

This is a marvelous exchange of love! Our God has become like us in all things and shares our consolations and desolations, our joys and sorrows so that we, too, be made sharers in His divinity who humbled Himself to share our humanity.

In Christ Jesus, born in a barn and laid in a feeding trough, He found at last a mode of approach that humanity need not fear. The king cast off His robes.

The deepest longings we feel on earth, as parent, as religious, as friends, and as lovers, are mere flickers of the hungering love God feels for us. It is a desire that cost Him the Incarnation.

The fact that love does not operate according to the rules of power may help explain why God sometimes seems shy to use His power.

One of the great functions of the Incarnation was to bring to the human family the knowledge that God is a lover. Some people thought of a passionless God who has nothing to do with our joy and sorrow, who is so aloft and doesn't want to walk with us. Some thought of a demanding God who is a Law centered and ready to judge, but Christ came to tell the world that God is love, and in a staggered amazement people could only say, "We never knew that God was like that!"

Through Christ we are enabled to walk in the ways that lead to everything that means life, and no longer to all that means death. By this we may be sure that we are in Him: anyone who says he abides in Christ ought to walk in the same way in which Christ walked, because if we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light as He is in the light we have fellowship with one another. For once we were darkness but now we are light in the Lord, so we have to walk as children of light.

To walk blamelessly in the paths of God's commandments does not mean that we are already exempted from sin because if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. Sts. Elizabeth and Zechariah were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless, but this does not exempt them from sin which is inherent to our wounded fallen nature.

To walk blamelessly is to do the best we can, with the help of God's grace, to conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in quarrelling and jealousy, but to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and to make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires. It means to walk by the Spirit and have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, and no envy of one another. It means also to walk by faith and not by sight or feeling, because feeling just come and go and sight is susceptible to dimness especially when we have to pass through the dark night of the soul.

All of the above suggest that we are already moving toward our final destination which is the kingdom of heaven.

Just in travelling there are routes that we should take which indicate that we are in the right direction, so the Psalmist marked out some attitudes which point out that the road we are taking is the pathway of God.

One of the routes is that **“We do what is right,”** for everyone who does right is righteous as God is righteous. Even people in other religions who do what is right and in good conscience is considered walking on the correct direction.

The other routes are: →

### **Icon # 125 = Routes to God's Kingdom**

“He speaks truth from his heart; who does not slander with his tongue, and does no evil to his friend, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor.”

The first route that we have to take is called highway **“T”** which means we have to speak truth from our heart. We will learn to speak truth from our heart if we constantly abide in Christ because Christ is the Truth and He is also the Way. No wonder that the first Christians who speak truth from their hearts were considered followers of the new Way. If we continue to abide in the words of Christ we will know the truth, and the truth will make us free.

It is much better to speak the truth clumsily than to wax eloquent with a lie. To cling to truth, to serve its interest alone without thought or fear of consequences, to follow blindly its steady gleam, in no way influenced by personal advantage or professions of friendship or loyalty even to a falling cause, to attack falsehood even when it is an inaccurate statement by one's side, end surely, by the very essence of the courage which it requires, in true freedom of soul.

The next highway is called **“NST”**, that is to say, “Not to slander with our tongue,” because we are Christ's disciples and have put on the new person created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. By putting away falsehood we are to put away all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander, as the Scripture said.

We are forbidden to slander with our tongue because slander is an offense against the truth. Respect for the reputation of other people prohibits attitude and word that would likely to cause them unjust injury. We will be guilty of detraction if we, without objectively valid reason, reveal another's faults and failings to persons who did not know them. We will also be guilty of slander if we, by remarks antagonistic to the truth, harm the reputation of others and give occasion for false judgments concerning them.

Detraction and slander destroy the reputation and honor of other people. Honor is the social witness given to human dignity and every person enjoys a natural right to the honor of his or her name and reputation and to respect. Thus, detraction and slander offend against the virtues of justice and charity.

The third route is **“NEF”** which means “Does no evil to his friend.” If we are forbidden to do evil to an enemy, or to anyone who offends us, how much more to a friend. The Scripture constantly reminds us, saying: “Do not repay evil for evil, but overcome evil with good.” If our enemy is hungry and approach us for food and we have it, out of love for God and obedience to His command: “Love your enemies,” we have to give it and not to say to him or her: “Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it,” when we have it with us. If he or she is thirsty we are also to give him or her drink not so much for the sole purpose of heaping burning coals upon his/her head so as to make him ashamed, but in imitation of Our Father in heaven who makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.

If we will deliberately do evil to a friend, then we are acting like Judas who did evil to Our Lord by betraying Him and handing Him over to death, as the Scripture said: “Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.”

On the other hand, even if we are already asleep at night and our friend will come to us in the middle of the night to ask some bread to offer it his other friend who arrived from a journey because he run out of bread, we have to rise out of solidarity with our friend, for necessity is the only true test of friendship.

The flowering of friendship in our life make us more fully human, since true friendship springs from the high estate of our being and our heart’s longing. If we shut out friendship, we shut out the sunlight of human life, and we no longer will our own good.

Friendship has love for its principle. The harmony of the human will with the divine is the remedy for the discord caused by sin: spiritual friendship is the way to God. With St. Aelred of Rievaulx we are convinced that “outside Christ true friendship is impossible. Spiritual friendship begins in Christ, perseveres only if Christ is its norm, and look to Christ for its perfection and efficacy.”

The essence of friendship is fidelity; in a friend one can put one’s trust. A friend is supportive, yet challenging. A friend is generous, yet not subject to manipulation. A friend is always there when needed, always ready to lend a hand, to lend an ear, to lend a heart. We do indeed have a friend in Our Lord Jesus, a friend who is faithful, a friend we can trust.



How can we do evil in such a friend!

The fourth route is “**NRN**” which means “Not to take up a reproach against our neighbor.” A reproach is something (as a fact, matter, feature, or quality) producing disgrace or blame or shame. Since we are commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves, so we have to be very careful not to become a continual source of disgrace or shame to our brothers and sisters: in general, the whole people of God, and in particular, those whom we lived with. In other words, we do the best we can that our brothers or sisters will not be put to shame or humiliated through us. If it happens that charity demands that we have to reprimand a brother or sister we need to give it dispassionately and gently in an appeal for amendment.

If our passion is still strong at the time when our tongue is itchy to reproach or censure someone, we better have to exercise self-control because any reproach or rebuke given with passion does no good to the reproacher and the one being reproached. It will not register in the heart and mind of the person reproached because he/she will notice that it is not given in love. On the part of the reproacher it will only feed his/her ego. →

### **Icon # 126 = Routes Continued**

“In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but who honors those who fear the Lord; who swears to his own hurt and does not change.”

The reprobates here are the godless. But since Christ have revealed to us the heart and mind of the Father that He sends His rain on both the good and the wicked and let His sun shine on both the just and the unjust, so we have to love the reprobates and no longer despised them but, we have to despise their godlessness. In other words, we have to make distinction between the sinner and the sin. We have to love the sinner, including ourselves, but hate the sin, otherwise we will be accounted guilty of conniving with sin.

We can call this route “**RD**” which means, we hold the godlessness of the “Reprobates in Disdain.” Along this highway we have to make sacrifices and offer up prayers to God in the hope that the reprobates will no longer be godless but will come to their senses and become godly so that they will be with us on this journey to our heavenly home.

The next route is called “**HFL**” which means we “Honor those who Fear the Lord.” This kind of fear is not a servile fear but a filial fear. It is a fear borne out of love for one's father. It has nothing to do with the emotion of fear of something, but it is an awe and wonder of the majesty of God. The servile fear has to do with our own selfishness. We have example of this in King Herod. He is fearful of losing his earthly kingdom. The cause of this fear is one's selfishness which undercut the

integration of one's personal integrity. When we are fearful or always feel threatened it suggests some selfishness in ourselves.

The fear of the Lord means rather a willingness and a readiness to do the will of God, and this, in turn, generates a genuine feeling of security and trust.

The fear of the Lord forbids us to give our hearts to transitory things which are the true seeds of sin. The fear of the Lord is the root of happiness; it is the beginning of true joy and happiness. We honor those who fear the Lord because they are those who achieved true wisdom. We have an example of this in the lives of the saints. We honor all of them when we celebrate the solemnity of All Saints Day.

The next route is highway **"I"** which means "Integrity." In this highway one "swears to his own hurt and does not change," in other words, he keeps his pledge, come what may. This is a highway of honesty and sincerity. He does not vacillate when he wanted to make a pledge ready to say yes and no at once. He can do this because of Christ who strengthens him. It is like pronouncing the vows to the Lord. It doesn't mean that when we make vows to the Lord we are no longer subject to temptation against the vows. We are still susceptible to temptation, but with the help of God's grace which we received through prayer we are able to keep it. It is like two married people. Their marriage does not prevent them from liking or being attracted to another man or woman. Whether they like it or not they will still feel it. But by walking in the highway of Integrity they don't go off to the ditch, for they know where the boundaries of the road are. →

### **Icon # 127 = Final Routes**

"Who does not put out his money at interest, and does not take a bribe against the innocent."

These are the two last routes that we have to walk before we reach our final destination. It's still a long journey, but the body and blood of Our Lord Jesus which we eat and drink daily will sustain us and give us enough spiritual energy to arrive at our homeland, just as the prophet Elijah was sustained by the cake and water which the angel gave him till he arrived at Horeb the mount of God.

The second to the last route is called **"NMI"** which simply means "Not to Lend our Money at Interest." This is a pure imitation of God who lends us our life with no interest at all. Just imagine if we have to pay an interest of the air we breathe – that would be an enormous amount! The older you are the more interest you have to pay. But God lend it to us without any interest at all. He only enjoins us to use our life in such a way that it befits our human dignity so that at the end of our life we will return it to Him full of life and be transformed into His image and

likeness. In this way we will share fully in the glory of God, for “the glory of God is man fully alive and the glory of man is the vision of God.”

Thus the person who does not lend his money at interest resembles God closely, but if he will lend it with interest the higher the interest is the farther he resembles God.

The last and final route is called “**NBI**” which means we do “Not take Bribe against the Innocent.” It is at this route that Judas finally met a fatal accident. At route “**NEF**” Judas had already collided with Christ when he betrayed Him. That betrayal reached its sad culmination when he accepted the bribe which the chief priests and elders gave him. People who accept bribe against the innocent will certainly meet an accident in this highway because they are perverting the path of justice. They exonerated the guilty but condemned the innocent. We have an example of this when the crowd wanted the release of Barabbas who was guilty of insurrection and demanded the condemnation of Christ who was innocent. Justice is always the ultimate victim once people will begin to take bribe.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> book of Samuel chapter 8 we are told that when Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. Yet his sons did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after gain; they took bribes and perverted justice. Bribe has a subtle power to blind the person who accepted it. The person who accepted it can also be likened to a horse with coverings in his eyes. The horse’s horizon became so narrow and limited. So also the vision of the person who takes bribes becomes so narrow and confined that he could no longer see the whole truth, and even abhor him who speaks the truth. Thus they expose themselves to many transgressions. Even though they do everything they can to hide their transgressions but it cannot be hidden, for nothing can be hidden from God as Scripture says: “For I know how many are your transgression, and how great are your sins – you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate....”

All of the above routes are like a burning fire, for they purify the heart, mind, and soul of every one who walks on it. In other words, “each man’s work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done....If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only a through fire.” →

### **Icon # 128 = Arrival: House Built on Rock**

**“He who does these things shall never be moved.”**

No wonder that the person “who walks blamelessly, and does what is right, and speaks truth from his heart; who does not slander with his tongue, and does no

evil to his friend, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor; in whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but honors those who fear the Lord; who swears to his own hurt and does not change; who does not put out his money at interest, and does not take a bribe against the innocent, shall never be moved," for he is like a house built on a rock. God has certainly bore him on eagle's wing, and becomes even swifter than an eagle, for his youth is being renewed everyday.

He shall never be moved because his equilibrium is in God. Neither adversity nor prosperity moved him, that is to say, he will not be cast down by adversity nor be elated by prosperity. He has attained to such a high degree of holy indifference that he is no longer bothered by dishonor nor takes pride in honor, as St. Paul said: "I know how to be abased and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in Him who strengthens me."

Who can move such a person? →

### **Icon # 129 = Child in Parent's arm: The Value of Deeds**

#### **Psalm 16 (15)**

"Preserve me, O God, for in thee I take refuge. I say to the Lord, 'Thou art my Lord; I have no good apart from thee.'"

If God is for us, who is against us? If God is the place where we take refuge, who can harm us? However, this doesn't mean that we are no longer subject to sufferings or illnesses. We still have to pass through many trials and tribulations, but we will not succumb to despair because God's grace working within us preserves us. We might be overwhelmed by the intensity of the suffering but there is someone within us who shares our burden – and He even might have the greater share. If not, who could survive!

If we take refuge in God we will be preserved not from sufferings or illnesses but from grievous sin because God upholds us. It is like a child being carried in the arms of his parents, especially if the road is rough and stony knowing that if the child will walk on rocky road and will fall it will certainly hurt him, so the parents will carry the child in their arms to be sure that he won't be harmed. But the parents will certainly allow the child to walk on grassy ground knowing that even if the child will fall it will not hurt him. The child will inevitably cry to get the attention of the parents. In the same way, even though God is our refuge there are still times that we fall, but our cry of repentance caught the attention of God



## Icon # 130 = True Nobility: The Saints

"As for the saints in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight."

People in this world often think that Kings and Queens, Prince and Princesses, Dukes, Presidents of nations, Ambassadors, Secretary of States, CEO's of multi-billion Corporations, those who have climbed the ladder of success through good education, and all who are born with a golden spoon in their mouths, are the members of nobility but, unless these persons live a life of virtue they are really not noble at all, because true nobility is consist in living a virtuous life. Moreover, if they don't take time to examine their lives, then it is a life not worth living. True nobility, then, has nothing to do with titles. It is a matter of the soul. It's also consist in serving God in whatever state of life we are called, serving Him sincerely out of love.

The poorest among the poor who serves God wholeheartedly is more noble than the greatest king on earth unless that king also serve God.

History shows us that there were Kings and Queens, Prince and Princesses who sincerely serve God while they were still on earth. For example, St. Casimir of Poland. He was the son of King Casimir IV and Queen Elizabeth, monarchs of Poland and Lithuania. In contrast to the other members of the royal court, he was a shining example of faith, piety, humility, and chastity.

St. Aloysius Gonzaga. He was the son of the Duke of Mantua. He was remarkable for his humility and chastity, and devotedly nursed the plague-stricken.

St. Elizabeth of Portugal. She was the daughter of King Peter III of Aragon. In her married life with king Denis of Portugal she endured trials with heroism. On more than one occasion she went to considerable pains to bring about peace between her husband and her children. She showed unflinching charity toward the poor.

St. Henry II, duke of Bavaria. He was crowned emperor in 1014. He use his power to extend the kingdom of God by promoting missionary work.

St. Stephen of Hungary. He was King of Hungary. He ruled his kingdom with great wisdom and is an excellent model of justice and piety.

St. Louis of France. He was king of France. He lived a great spirit of penance and prayer. He showed great love for peace and the temporal as well as the spiritual good of his people.

St. Wenceslaus of Bohemia. He was duke of Bohemia. He suffered martyrdom at the hands of his brother after enduring many trials in governing and evangelizing his people.

St. Hedwig of Poland. She was the wife of the Duke of Poland. She led a life of piety and solicitude for the poor and the sick.

St. Margaret of Scotland. She was married to King Malcolm III of Scotland.

St. Elizabeth of Hungary. She was the daughter of the King of Hungary. She was also the aunt of St. Elizabeth of Portugal. She was a prayer mother, and devoted herself to the poor and the sick.

These people are great not because they were Kings and Queens, Prince and Princesses, but because they also served God in the persons of the poor and the sick and were interested in the welfare of the people entrusted to their care.

They put God as Number One in their lives, and heavenly values as their highest priority. Out of this relationship with God flows all their actions and sentiments toward other people. What if these people had not put God as the Number One in their lives? Their memory will certainly perish. But now the whole church throughout the world commemorates their remembrance every year. They are the true stars, for their lights shine for all eternity. It's a light that will never fade because it comes from the source of the true and eternal light of God's glory and splendor. It's a light that will just keep on shining from glory to glory for all eternity.

In this world the rich, the powerful, the influential, and the celebrities are considered the "stars" but their light is not a true light because it does not endure forever. If their light collides even with the shadow of the light of God it becomes pure darkness at all. So, anyone who delights in the bogus light and walks in this light is in darkness still.

From this comparison we can see with our inner eyes who belongs to the true nobility.

Just as those who serve the rich and powerful, and the fans of the celebrities are delighted to be with them, so also those who yearn for the kingdom of heaven are delighted to be united with the saints in heaven and with the potential saints on earth, as it is written: "How good and how pleasant it is when brothers live in unity!"

We are all called to be a saint, not so much as a canonized saint but as a simple person with a noble spirit always open to the action of grace within us to transform us, even little by little, into the image and likeness of Our Lord Jesus who is the noblest of all men in whom is all our delight. Having the eyes of our hearts enlightened, we may know what is the hope to which He has called us, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints.

Just as the men of earthly knowledge are the scientists in the various sciences and have unlocked the secret of nature of the created universe, so also the saints are the scientists in the science of knowing God's mind and will, the artists in the achievement of perfect service of God and men. They are the ones who translated and interpreted the Christian message, "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect," in the particular context and tone of a given time, language, and occasion.

The science of the saints consists in knowing how to crucify oneself in time, in order to enjoy the happiness of eternity, as St. Paul said: "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

Can we call to mind the fervor of the saints in laboring and suffering cheerfully for God, and not feel a holy ardor in our own breasts, and our souls strongly affected with their heroic sentiments of virtue? We may often think the austerities of the saints are beyond our strength; however, to imitate the guard they kept over their tongue is within the reach of us all.

The saints are the ones who have unlocked the secret of sanctity of the universe of grace, for the secret of sanctity is to do the ordinary things of life extraordinarily well for the glory of God and love of His people. If we wish to be perfect, we have nothing more to do than perform the ordinary duties of the day well.

The saints are to be compared to the telescopes of astronomers. Instruments permit us to see stars which the naked eye could never discover. Through the saints we learn to see those eternal truths which the world's common day veil from our feeble eyes.

The constancy displayed by the saints in their glorious martyrdom cannot be isolated from their previous lives, but is their natural sequence. If we wish to emulate their perseverance, let us first imitate their fidelity to grace.

It needs only for a Catholic to show devotion to any saint in order to receive benefit from his/her intercession. The lives of the saints are a treasure-house in which we can find the means to overcome any enemy; they are spiritual pharmacy, furnished with every remedy to cure the sickness of our soul.

Reading the lives of the saints has an effect that we are gradually creating a society about us to which in some measure we will be moved to raise the standard of our daily lives.

To be a saint means to live in such a way that one's life would not make sense if God did not exist. →



## Icon # 131 = Other gods vs. True God

“Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their libations of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips.”

On the other hand, people who do not believe the existence of God, or those who believe God's existence but deny it in their lives are still trying to make sense of their lives by choosing another god, for in the last analysis, life loses its meaning once we don't have anymore a god/God to cling to. Even the self-proclaimed atheists, the Marxist, the communist, the Capitalist, the hedonist, etc. have their own god, too. Otherwise, no one will help them interpret the meaning of what they are doing.

The most popular of these gods, who has the greatest numbers of devotees and captivates their hearts and imaginations, is Money. She has devotees in all sector of society, among the poor, the middle class, and the rich alike. By itself this god is neutral, that is to say, she is neither good nor bad, but her devotees are head over heels in love with her that they will do all they can to have her, because it is part of their belief that once they have her they can almost do everything they want to. The poor who has her have their self-esteem raised high. Once she left they become again miserable.

The middle class who loves her will still want more because nothing is enough for a person of whom enough is too little. Among the affluent who has her there's still a gnawing desire to amass riches because she has an incredible persuasiveness to incite them to have more so that they can say to their souls, “My soul you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.”

They are like the rich man in the gospel whose land brought forth plentifully; and he thought to himself, “What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?” And he said, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my good.” But God said to him, “Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”

Thus the god called Money is powerless to defend her devotees at the hour of death. She can help in prolonging their lives by means of sophisticated modern technology, but she can never provide life without end to her devotees. This god is so subtle that those who crave for her “fall into temptation, into snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs.”

There's a story of a barber who was passing under a haunted tree when he heard a voice say, “would you like to have seven jars of gold?” He looked

around and saw no one. But his greed was aroused, so he shouted eagerly, "Yes, I certainly would." "Then go home at once," said the voice. "You will find them there."

The barber ran all the way home. Sure enough, there were the seven jars all full of gold, except for one that was only half-full. Now the barber could not bear the thought of having a jar half-filled.

He had all the jewelry of his family melted into gold coins and poured them into

The half-filled jar. But the jar remained as half-filled as before. This was exasperating! He saved and skimped and starved himself and his family. To no avail. No matter how much gold he put into the jar it remained half-filled.

Then one day, he begged the king to increase his salary. His salary was doubled. Again the fight to fill the jar was on. He even took begging. The jar devoured every gold coin thrown into it and remained stubbornly half-filled.

The king now noticed how miserable and starved the barber looked. "What is wrong with you?" he asked. "You were so happy and content when your salary was smaller. Now that it has been doubled you are so worn out and dejected. Can it be that you have the seven jars of gold with you?"

The barber was astonished, "who told you this, Your Majesty?" The king laughed. "These are obviously the symptoms of the person to whom the ghost offers the seven jars. He once offered them to me. I asked if this money could be spent or was merely to be hoarded and he just vanished without a word. That money cannot be spent. It only brings with it the compulsion to hoard. Go and give it back to the ghost this minute and you will be happy again." (De Mello)

Our Lord said that we have to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are of God. To God belong our adoration, affection, and love. The beginning of our true happiness here on earth, which will be perfected in heaven, is when we gave to God what belongs to Him. This is the most refined justice because we render to God what is His due. All that we are and all that we have are from God primarily because no human person is self-sufficient, as the Scripture says, "What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?"

Just as the beginning of our true happiness is when we render to God our affection, adoration, and love, so also, the beginning of true sadness is when we gave our affection, adoration, and love to anything that is not of God either it be money, worldly pleasures, honor, prestige, or power. Those who gave their love, affection, and adoration to these things are like a broken jar that is immersed in water. Once the jar is taken out from the water it becomes empty because it cannot hold the water. But, do you think that this water will not run

dry? So long as they are in the water they seem to be happy and content, but once they are removed from this water they become as empty and restless as they could be. They will cry out and lament like children wanting to jump back into the water but, what if the water is already dry? Isn't it a double tragedy?

Therefore, those who choose another god multiply their sorrows because their god cannot provide them everlasting happiness. God alone can provide us an eternal happiness because He is the source of all true happiness. This happiness will never run dry because it is a river of living water, as Christ said: "If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scriptures has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"

We can drink as much as we can to our heart's content of this living water. We can never exhaust this water because it is a fountain of the water of life. We can imbibe as much as we can, and yet what remains is still our inheritance.

This is what the true God will give us, as He said: "To the thirsty I will give water without price from the fountain of the water of life. He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son."

But there will be a multiplication of sorrows, wrath and fury, tribulation and distress for every human being who choose other gods, because the god they worshipped does not really loved them nor is interested of the well-being of their souls, but is more apt in seeking opportunity to devour them like a roaring lion.

Their libations of blood will not be poured out, that is to say, their offerings and sacrifices will not be accepted by God because they are still doing things contrary to the will of God and do their best to be conformed to this world. Offerings and sacrifices has no value at all if we do not give ourselves to God in the state of life He has called us. St. Paul encourages us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is our spiritual worship, and not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of our mind that we may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

This is an imitation of Christ because "when Christ came into the world, he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God, as it is written of me in the roll of the book.'"

It is presuppose that when we present our bodies as a living sacrifice we have love because if we have not love our sacrifice will be nothing, as St. Paul said: "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing."

Since God is love and those who have love have God, so those who have not love have not God. If we do not have God it would be tantamount to denying Him in our lives or not acknowledging Him. But if we deny Him, He will also deny us, as it is written: "Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven."

Thus to be denied by Christ before His Father in heaven is equivalent to saying that He will not take our names upon His lips. If Christ will not take our names upon His lips in the presence of all the angels and saints, then, what will happen to us? Isn't it terrible? We will be like goats at His left side who were told to depart from His sight.

It is not far from reality to say that among human emotions the feeling of rejection has the largest share of its pain, especially when it comes from someone who loved us and had done everything He can, even that that are beyond our human comprehension to show His love for us, and whom we are supposed to love, if at the end we will be told, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

On the other hand, when we begin to acknowledge His name in this present life not only with our lips but also with our lives, He will also take our names upon His lips when he comes in glory accompanied with all the hosts of heaven, as Christ said: "So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my "Father who is in heaven." →

### **Icon # 132 = Portion and Inheritance: God and Love**

"The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; thou holdest my Lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."

Once Our Lord Jesus acknowledged our names before His Father that would be irreversible. Thus He will be our portion. We will be like the Levites who had no other portion and inheritance but the Lord, as the Lord said to Aaron: "You shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall you have any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel."

He is also our cup, that is to say, He is our happiness because cup suggests a drink, a wine that gladdens the hearts of all who are made worthy to inherit the riches of God's glorious inheritance in the saints.

God Himself became our prize. For this reason we can say, "What else have I in heaven but you? Apart from you I want nothing on earth. My body and my heart faint for joy; God is my possession forever."

If it is a terrible thing to be possessed by the devil, what would that happiness be like to have God as our possession? We will make a simple earthly analogy in the hope that, at least, we can peep even at the shadow of this eternal bliss.

Suppose we meet a certain man/woman who is very, very, very beautiful/handsome and whose manner of speaking indicates a refinement in her/his character. Then this acquaintance developed into a friendship, and we discovered that she/he is not only very, very, very beautiful/handsome but also very, very, very kind, loving, intelligent, and respectful. She/he let us be ourselves which permeates in us the feeling that she/he has a very profound understanding of human nature.

The feeling of being at home and at peace in her/his presence evokes in us the readiness and happiness to share our own story with her/him without being ashamed that she/he might be scandalized to see the dark side of our life. At other times she/he tells us also her/his story – where she/he came from, her/his family, her/his work, her/his values, the things that please or offend her/him, and so on.

Then this friendship developed into love. Just imagine the first night when both of you expressed this love in bodily union. Love who is the Queen of all the passions is aroused to such an intensity that your heart beats so fast as though very anxious and eager to arrive at its destination. Once it arrives you experienced such an ecstasy of joy, happiness, and satisfaction and could have wish that such a state will never end. And yet your experience tells you that you cannot sustain that happiness even for five minutes. The afterglow of that joy could linger for few hours but then it will dissipate.

On the other hand, the ecstasy of joy and happiness of the soul united to God in heaven, in the beatific vision, will never end and will not be diminished even at its slightest degree, but instead, its intensity will just keep on increasing and increasing from glory to glory, from joy to joy, from happiness to happiness.

We will be fully satisfied to our hearts and souls' content because we become completely one with the source of this eternal bliss, without any fear of the possibility of being removed from it as in the case of this present life like that of an iron removed from the fire or the drop of water in the ocean sucked by the sun. But rather, no one can remove this joy from us, as Christ said: "So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. In that day you will ask nothing of me."

Our conversion story is like our acquaintance with Christ or the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is a different kind of acquaintance which we have in our early days, say, for instance, in our elementary or high school days when were taught about God, the Blessed Virgin, the saints, the Church, some prayers, etc. It is not

farfetched to say that during those times the majority of us haven't really developed a certain consciousness of God. We may have been to Mass and have a sensation of it but once we got out of the Church we forgot everything at once. We are like a person who looks at his face in a mirror and goes away and at once forgets what he was like, that is to say, we left our Christianity at the door of the Church. We behave as though we haven't met God.

But in our conversion we experience something different. We begin to think of God and the things of God more often. If we are Catholics we start receiving the Sacraments, and try our best to be consistent in our prayer life. Awareness of the presence of God becomes so tangible and palpable. His presence permeates everything. This, however, is yet the beginning or the period of acquaintance but the seed of His beauty and affection that He sowed in us grows to such an extent that it captivates our hearts and imaginations. We know that something is happening inside us that is beyond any human articulation. Our hearts expand as it were and our interior is filled with overflowing peace and sweetness.

This acquaintance developed into friendship. Then we open up a line of communication. We start dating. We speak and listen to each other. We speak to God when we pray; He listens to us. God speaks to us when we read especially the Scriptures and the lives or writings of the men and women of every generation who followed Christ more closely and loved Him more tenderly; we listen to Him.

Then knowledge of each other grows. Knowledge of ourselves reveals our own nothingness in such an absolute way that we can never forget it, and the same light makes us see God in the depths of our soul. We are nothing; God is everything. There is an abyss of misery; but there is also in us something divine.

Knowledge of God preserves us from despair, because God is full of mercy, His nature is all good, and His actions pity and pardon. Knowledge of self preserves us from pride, because nothing is more efficacious for acquiring humility than knowledge of ourselves as we really are.

This twofold knowledge assures salvation, because in its light there appears the need for an encounter between our misery and God's mercy. God knows us better than we ourselves. For our part, one of the veritable signs that we have true knowledge of God is when remembrance of God becomes part of us, because without remembrance of God knowledge cannot be true.

Our knowledge of God grows as we talk and walk with Him in the person of Our Lord Jesus.

Then this friendship developed into love. We love God because He first loved us. We reciprocate to His love for us as our most fitting response. Love has its own

knowing. It sees things that are far beyond our human understanding. It is the eye that permits us to see God, and the sharpness of its vision is in proportion to its purity.

Love tends to God because it is a gift that comes from Him and wants to return to its source. Since it is love which unites our souls to God, the more intense this love is the more deeply our souls enter into God and is centered in Him. God considers not so much the greatness of our actions nor the difficulties that accompanies them. He has no need of our works but craves only for our love.

Love gives us a concrete experience of God that tells us more about Him than all the most sublime speculations of the theologians could ever do. Love is the heart of spirituality; it communicates life and motion to all the virtues.

St. Augustine said that when one loves, there is no labor; or if there is labor, it is loved.

We use the simple analogy of human love because human love is an instrument we can use to explore the mystery of divine love. If we will experience love or have experienced it, this is the means whereby we can explore the mystery of God's love.

Love is not merely the chemistry which draws two persons together. Love is the very being of God. It is the source of divine vitality. When we experience love we are experiencing the reality of God, since God alone is the source of all love, both human and divine.

To be able to love God is an indication that we human beings are truly made in God's image, because love requires an equality between lovers; and love between the Creator and the creature is possible only on the assumption that the human person has the capacity to be raised by God to a state of equality, for love makes the lover equal to the object of his/her love.

Created in God's image we have the capacity to recognize and reciprocate love; our human affections initiate us into love and encourage us to make it our goal. Christ sent into our nature can become the object of these affections, so that by loving Him we can progressively be put into contact with the reality of God and simultaneously be ourselves transformed into his likeness.

Isn't it that to be transformed into the likeness of God, beginning in this life and be perfected in the beatific vision is more than enough to be our prize, our portion and cup, and our inheritance? Yes, because this is our ultimate goal. Our happiness consists in seeing God as He is. "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now we know in part; then we shall understand fully, as we have been fully understood. It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

Therefore, with the Psalmist we can say, "The lot marked out for me is delight: Welcome indeed the heritage that falls to me!" →

### **Icon # 133 = Counsel**

"I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me."

Once the Lord became our heritage He brings with Him seven other gifts of the Holy Spirit. One of these gifts is the spirit of Counsel. Thus the Lord becomes our counselor. He counsels us what to do and how to do it. He counsels us not to be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself; and to let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day.

This is a very strong and powerful antidote against depression because we only have to take things one day at a time. He counsels us not to take ourselves too seriously, but to take God seriously. This counsel prevents us from becoming self-centered, and instead, become God centered.

There are hundreds of things He counsels us but it boils down to whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, whatever is excellence, and whatever is worthy of praise. In other words, to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. →

### **Icon # 134 = Instruction**

"In the night also my heart instructs me."

Instruction is a part of counsel. In this case, it is done in the night to train ourselves to be prepared to pass through many tribulations before we can enter the kingdom of heaven. Night reminds us also that even if we have to walk in the valley of darkness we need not fear evil for the Lord is with us. If the Lord is for us, who is against us?

In the night Our Lord instructs us the way we should go; giving us counsel with His eyes upon us so as not to veer to the left of sinful pleasures nor to the right of worldly values, but to walk on the path of righteousness all the days of our lives.

In the night also our hearts instruct us to lead a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, for once we were darkness, but now we are light in the Lord; so we have to walk as children of light, and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.



In the night also our hearts instruct us to love the Lord Our God with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength, and to love other people and ourselves for God's sake.

If we are Catholic Christians our hearts instruct us also to love the Blessed Virgin Mary, the saints, and the angels for they belong to the household of God; and to adhere to the teachings of the Church, to learn obedience to those in lawful authority even if their words contradict their deeds so long as they don't tell us to do things against the commandments of God.

In the night also our hearts instruct us to repent and turn from all our transgressions, lest iniquity be our ruin-to cast away from us all the transgression which we have committed against the Lord, and get for ourselves a new heart and a new spirit – a heart that is made out of flesh that is meek and gentle; and a spirit that is courageous to face the inevitable trials, challenges, and sufferings in life looking always at the crucified Christ who is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now seated at the right of the throne of God. →

### **Icon # 135 = Loving Awareness of God's Presence fortifies**

"I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved."

Once the Lord becomes our consciousness we will notice that He is always before us, and the awareness of His presence becomes so tangible. This presence is such that it gives us a tremendous strength to carry our cross, consolation to enhance both our effective and affective love, patience to bear one another's weakness both mind and body, humility to acknowledge the truth about ourselves and not be discouraged by it, gentleness to endure negative remarks or even insults answering softly when there's a need for it to avoid giving scandal to the weak, and hope to long for the kingdom which has been prepared for us since the foundation of the world.

Just as a child feel confident, strong, and brave whenever he is with his father even though other kids would attempt to bully him, so also loving awareness of God's presence fortifies us with courage and forbearance when circumstances in life are not favorable to us or when we are buffeted by the wind of temptations and by our own passions. In this situation God becomes for us a refuge and strength, a helper close at hand. Therefore, we shall not be moved, that is, we will not succumb to sadness and despair, and will be able to handle our passions constructively.

Keeping the Lord always before us inspires us to keep His words, and keeping His words is like digging a solid foundation that can withstand difficulties and

adversities, as the Lord said: "Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock..."

Keeping the Lord always before us gives us peace that surpasses understanding. It is a peace that the world cannot give because the world does not keep the Lord before her, for all that is in the world such as: Lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Lord but is of the world.

So whoever makes himself a friend of the world is setting himself against the Lord. And if we set ourselves against the Lord, do we think we will not be moved? Are we stronger than He? Where are we when the universe was created? But, if we sided ourselves with the Lord we will not easily be moved either by praise or criticism. Even our own weakness becomes our strength, for His grace is sufficient for us because His power is made perfect in our weakness.

Since God is the unmoved Mover who moves everything but Himself remains unmoved, we too, once we attain union with God and keep Him always before us will not easily be moved by fear and anxiety. This doesn't mean that we will no longer feel fear and anxiety; we will still feel it in varying degrees, but is not overcome by it because of the trust and confidence that God is at our side. →

### **Icon # 136 = Characteristics of Love**

"Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure. For thou dost not give me up to Sheol, or let thy godly one see the Pit."

It is one of the characteristics of love that we are happy to be with the person we love and be always at his/her side. It evokes feelings of contentment, peace, and security. How we wish that there will be no separation from the one we love even for a single moment.

However, this is not possible in this present life because by necessity there will always be an interruption of this loving communion. Husband and wife may have different jobs, and even if they have the same job and work in the same building but still they have to work separately. More than that, the nature of their jobs may require steady concentration that likely will push aside their thoughts of each other.

But this is not the case in the resurrection of the dead in which our mortal body will be glorified like that of the glorified body of Our Lord Jesus. We will be completely united with each other in Christ without any slightest degree of separation because we are His mystical body. Just as all the members of the body will follow wherever the mind wanted to go, so also wherever Christ is we

will be with Him. This is why Our Lord said: "Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world."

We will be in ecstasy of love for one another because the love that we have for one another is the same love that Christ has for us and the same love that the Father has for Christ. Thus Christ said: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love."

In this present life we are given tools to use to keep us abide in His love. These tools are God's commandments, as Christ said: "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love....This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

Since God is love and love is the queen of all the passions, therefore, it is inevitable that when we experienced being in love our souls rejoice and our hearts are glad to such an extent that it will expand and we shall run with unspeakable sweetness in the path of God's commandments.

In the resurrection of the dead our body shall rest in safety because it is no longer subject to decay. It is sown like a seed under the ground likely to perish, but it will be raised imperishable. It is sown in dishonor due to various diseases and illnesses, but it will be raised in glory and is no longer susceptible to diseases and infirmities.

It is sown in weakness, but it will be raised in power for it shares the Omnipotent of God. It is sown a physical body that is limited to space and time, but it will be raised a spiritual body that shares all the properties of a glorified body, that is, it is no longer subject to space and time, it penetrates even the thickest wall made of iron and passed through it like Christ entering the room where the disciples gathered even though the door was locked, and it travels at a speed of thought.

Above all, our hearts are glad and our souls rejoice because we will see Him whom our souls love and will be perfectly one with Him as He and the Father are one. All our hunger and thirst for God will be fully satisfied without any shadow of diminishment.

We will receive everything from Him, and will learn everything from Him. The lower angels learned from the higher angels what God wanted to communicate to them but it is no longer the case once our bodies will be glorified because Christ will be our One Teacher. There's only one law in heaven – that law is love, because God is love. Therefore, God Himself is the law. God will put Himself within us, and will write Himself upon our hearts; and He shall be our God, and we shall be His people. Thus no longer shall each one teach his

neighbor and each his brother and sister, saying: "know the Lord, for all shall know Him from the least of them to the greatest."

Even in this present life God did not leave some of the souls of His chosen ones among the dead, nor let His beloved know decay. We have an example of this in some of the saints who are incorruptible. For instance, St. Cecilia who is incorrupt for 777 years after her death, St. Romuald for 339 years, St. Isidore the farmer for 800 years, St. Rose of Viterbo for 700 years, St. Margaret of Cortona for over 600 years, St. Clare of Montefalco for 660 years, St. Agnes of MontePulciano for over 200 years, St. Catherine of Siena for 475 years, St. Rita of Cascia for 179 years, St. Catherine of Bologna for 450 years, St. Catherine of Genoa for 450 years, St. John of God for 20 years, St. Francis Xavier for 423 years, St. Teresa of Avila for 290 years, St. Charles Borromeo for 296 years, St. John of the Cross for 364 years, St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi for 370 years, St. Camillus de Lellis for 26 years, St. Jane Frances de Chantal for 81 years, St. Anna Maria Taigi for 18 years, St. Jean-Marie Baptist Vianney for 45 years, St. Peter Julian Eymard for 9 years, St. Catherine Labouré for 56 years, St. Bernadette Soubirous for 40 years, St. Charbel Maklouf for 52 years, etc. There are still lots of the saints that are incorruptible, but this is only to name some of them to show the foretaste of the incorruptibility of our glorified bodies.

"The incorruptibility of the body of the saints were regarded as an evidence of the imperishable happiness that the soul possessed in Heaven, and also as favorable omen of the future laurels, which God would yet bestow upon the memory of His blessed servants on earth."

"How else can the existence of these relics be explained when it is considered that many of these saints died of disease and infirmities that so vigorously assaulted their bodies as to extinguish life? How else can we explain their existence when they were not embalmed and when their internal parts contained all manner of corruptible materials?

"How could some have resisted extreme dampness, which encourages dissolution, or burial without benefit of a coffin? How could they resist the countless bacteria which are attracted not only to living bodies, but, especially, to those that are devoid of living forces to challenge them?

"If living flesh is so delicate and prone to infirmities, how can these bodies, which are unable to heal or restore themselves, endure throughout the centuries' exposure to various climates, fluctuating levels of humidity and temperature, frequent reclothings, the taking of relics, and countless probing during examinations? That some bodies which are now somewhat discolored exist at all, in spite of these factors, is no less marvel. But what of those that are perfectly preserved?

“While we can conjecture about their existence, who can explain why this factor was denied to some saints and awarded to others, many of whom are less known and who would seem, ‘less worthy?’ Some of the most illustrious saints: Saint Francis of Assisi and St. Clare, St. Anthony of Padua, and St. Scholastica, to name but a few, did not escape the ravages of the tomb.

“it would be folly to weigh the holiness and merits of one saint against the good works and accomplishments of another, and it would further prove an impossibility to understand the reason of the power who ordained this privilege to some and not to others.

“Nonetheless, considering the unusual circumstances of these saintly preservations, as well as the phenomena and miracles which have surrounded many of them, we must concur with the opinion of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, who declared: ‘Even when the soul is gone, power and virtue remain in the bodies of the saints because of the righteous souls which have dwelt in them.’”

We may not have the privilege of being incorrupt in this present life, but we do believe that in our flesh we shall see God. It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when Our Lord Jesus appears we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Thus the seed of glory sown in us will flower when we see His face. →

### **Icon # 137 = Path of Life: Walking in the Garden of Eden**

“Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.”

In the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus God shows us the path of life, because Christ Himself is the Way and the Life. He is the bridge that connects heaven and earth where people can find a direct access to the heart of God. Notice that it says, “Thou dost show me the path of life,” which suggests that we have the freedom to take or walk on this path or not, for He never forces us to walk on this path against our will. He may use His alluring persuasion to convince us that this path leads to eternal life even though, along the way, we may have to pass through many trials and tribulations and have to carry our own cross. There are times that we have to walk on this path in darkness with only little glimmer of the light of faith that guide us to train ourselves to walk by faith and not by sight or feelings.

Although we are interested in the God of consolations rather than the consolations of God, yet, this path is being sprinkled with the consolations of God especially when we have the Blessed Virgin Mary with us walking at our side and even holding hands with her, because with our hands in hers we will not stumble; with her protecting us we will not be afraid; with her walking with us

we will not get tired, for it is the nature of love that we enjoy the company of our beloved; and above all, if we are in love labor is negligible and if there is labor it is loved.

Just as a person intoxicated with wine can hardly feel the hardships along the way, so also a person intoxicated with the love of God can likely be receptive to whatever befalls upon him either good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, joyful or sorrowful, pains and sufferings as coming from the hands of God and would regard this as a gift that has to be freely and gratefully accepted – trusting and believing that at the end of the road is happiness forever in the presence of Him whom our soul loves.

Our Lord Jesus encourages us to “Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

This road, that is, Christian life or religious life or, in specific, monastic life, seems too narrow and hard at the outset because our old self has not been used to it, but as we continue and make progress in conversion and holiness our hearts expand, as it were, and can run with unspeakable sweetness in the path of God's commandments.

On the other hand, there is a way which seems right and pleasant to a person, but its end is the way to death, not only death physically, but above all, death spiritually.

So there are two kinds of paths that are set before us. We are free to choose. If a person is walking on the way that leads to eternal death, repentance alone can change his direction to the way of eternal life, as the Scripture says: “If today you hear his voice do not harden your hearts.”

Pains, difficulties, and hardships could also be considered as a narrow gate and a hard road, but let us not run away from pains, difficulties, and hardships, so as to enter at last into the repose of the Lord's consolation and to obtain the repose of life immortality without end, for it is much better to walk on a hard road provided we have our Lady and Our Lord as our companions than to walk on easy road without them.

Walking with them even while on earth is already a foretaste of the fullness of joy in God's presence, because heaven is where God is. So if God is with us we are already experiencing heaven on earth.

Walking with Christ and the Blessed Virgin evokes a certain memory of the man and woman walking in the garden of Eden. They are happy to let us join with them because we are the children of the new Adam and the new Eve. The old

Adam was from the earth, a man of dust; the new Adam is from heaven. "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven." "It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

On the part of the Blessed Virgin, as Eve was deceived by the devil, so Mary heard the truth through an angel; as Eve disobeyed God, so Mary obeyed His word. Thus the human race that had been enslaved because of the Virgin Eve is released from slavery because of the Virgin Mary.

In the beginning of this reflection I said that in the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus God shows us the path of life, because Christ Himself is the Way and the Life.

One of the documents of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council called Lumen Gentium points out that the Father of mercies will that the Incarnation should be preceded by assent on the part of the predestined mother, so that just as a woman had a share in the coming of death, so also should a woman contribute to the coming of life.

Therefore, walking with the Blessed Virgin Mary and Our Lord Jesus leads to the kingdom of life eternal where, in their presence, there is fullness of joy and pleasures for evermore. →

### **Icon # 138 = Cries and Tears**

#### **Psalm 17 (16)**

"Hear a just cause, O Lord; attend to my cry! Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit!"

St. Augustine said that God is quicker to hear our tears than the movements of our lips.

In the days of His flesh, Our Lord Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard for His godly fear. Here Christ gives us an example that we may follow in His steps. Though He was in the form of God and highly deserves to be prayed to, yet He did not count equality with God but offered up prayers and supplications even with loud cries and tears. He was not ashamed to cry to teach us that tears bore witness that a man/woman had the greatest of courage, the courage to suffer.

His cause is just because He is up to the redemption of our body and soul. He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities, upon Him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with His stripes we are healed. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth, but instead, He entrusted His

cause to a just Judge who shows no partiality and renders judgment to every human person according to their deeds.

Our cause, too, is just if we train ourselves to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world; and if we are submissive to legitimate authorities, be obedient and ready for any honest work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people; and do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling but on the contrary we bless.

Although we may have to experience pain and fiery ordeal as we do our best to response to Our Lord's injunctions and put His teaching into practice, yet we will be consoled by the assurance that He attends to the sound of our cry, as the Lord said: "I have seen the affliction of my people and have heard their cry; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them and to bring them to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey."

Once we arrived in this land, Our Lord Himself will wipe away every tear from our eyes, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for these things has to pass away.

However, since we are still in this vale of tears we have to eat the bread of adversity and our drink has to be mingled with tears, so that in times of prosperity we will not be unmindful of adversity and in times of adversity we will not be forgetful of prosperity. Our Lord will surely be gracious to us at the sound of our cry; when He hears it, He will answer us, especially when it is a cry motivated by repentance or a sheer joy and love for Him.

Sin is the only evil that is cured by weeping; the forgiveness of sin is the fruit of these tears. Before we have mourned and shed tears we have no repentance, nor a true desire to change, nor fear of God in our hearts. For we have not yet become conscious of our guilt nor judged ourselves, nor has our soul had the foretaste of the last judgment and eternal torment.

For if we had judged ourselves, if we had experienced such movement of the heart, if we had such feelings, we should have shed tears forthwith. Without this the hardness of our hearts cannot be softened, nor can our souls acquire spiritual humility, nor have we ourselves the power to become humble.

Humility, then, is born of pure prayer, with tears and contrition. Humility, prayer, and contrition are like sparks that ignite tears and grow into a flaming furnace of charity which alone can soften the hardness of our hearts, like that of an iron which become pliable when heated with fire.

Tears cleanse our hearts just as fire purifies iron. It makes a person humble and thus be receptive to receive God's grace and enables us to keep our tongue



from evil and our lips from speaking deceit; departing from evil and doing good, seeking peace, and pursue it.

It is in our continuous contact with Christ that our lips will eventually be freed of deceit just as the rust in the iron is purified by its steady contact with fire, for the fire of Christ's love is such that it can soften even the iron-like hardness of our hearts which are prone to speaking deceit. The inside has to be cleansed first, that the outside may be cleanse, that is to say, our hearts has to be cleansed first so that our external actions, no matter how small and trivial they might be, might be clean as well because to the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure.

Moreover, out of the abundance of our hearts our mouths speak, for what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart. Thus the good person out of his good heart brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil heart brings forth evil, because out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander, etc. These are what defile a person.

Therefore, the heart has to be purified first. Yet, we have to be clear that this process of purification is not our own doing but it is owing to God's gracious grace, just as the iron does not purifies itself but it is the fire which does the work.

The iron though has its part to do, that is, to be submissive to the action of the fire and won't resist the person who puts it into the fire. So also with us. It is a blasting heresy to say that we can purify ourselves by our own sheer human effort, because we could not even think of what is good and virtuous unless it is has been given to us by Our Lord, for "every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

In our case, since God endowed us with a free will so we have the freedom to accept or refuse the action of the Holy Spirit within us which is often carried out not so much through megalomaniac deeds, but through the simple and ordinary events in our daily lives, through the nitty-gritty and rubbing elbows with one another, through the ideals and realities of our human condition that make us cry for joy or mercy.

If we are docile to the action of the Holy Spirit within us, little by little, our hearts will become transparent and are able to receive His light to guide us in all our ways and give meaning to our lives. We will look at things according to this light, interpret events and experiences according to this light, for whoever follow this light will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

This light shall never be extinguished so long as we constantly pour on it the oil of continual prayer, for continual prayer elevates, illumines, and transforms the soul. Illumined by the light perceived in prayer, the soul sees clearly the way of

Christ prepared and trodden by the feet of the crucified; running along this way with an expanded heart, it not only distances itself from the weighty cares of the world but rises above itself to taste divine sweetness.

Then it is set ablaze by divine fire. Thus illumined, elevated, and set ablaze, it is transformed into the God-Man. All this is achieved by gazing on the cross in continual prayer – looking at Jesus the Lord the pioneer and perfecter of our faith whose mouth speaks no guile and whose lips are freed from deceit, for when He was reviled He did not revile in return; when He suffered He did not threaten but He trusted to Him who judges justly.

Joining our voices with that of Our Lord Jesus, we cry out, saying, →

### **Icon # 139 = Vindication**

**“From thee let my vindication come! Let thy eyes see the right!”**

Christ was judged unjustly and was condemned to an ignominious death on the cross but God the Father vindicated him, for on the third day He rose again from the dead glorious and immortal, because God the Father, with drops of tears trickling from His eyes, could not let His beloved Son know decay.

Thus great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: Our Lord Jesus was manifested in the flesh in His Incarnation, vindicated in the Spirit in His resurrection, seen by angles in His unspeakable glory and majesty, preached among the nations by missionaries, believed on in the world by those who are to inherit the kingdom prepared for them since the foundation of the world, taken up in glory, glory as of the only son from the Father.

We, too, shall be vindicated by God, as we experienced trials, difficulties, challenges, and temptations, so long as we do not lose heart in praying. We have an example of this in a story about a certain judge who neither feared God nor regarded people. In that city there was also a widow who kept coming to him and saying, “Vindicate me against my adversary.” For a while he refused; but afterward he said to himself, “Though I neither fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming.”

Now if this unrighteous judge, at the end, had vindicated this poor widow, will not the righteous God vindicate His elect, who cry to Him day and night? Will He delay long over them? No, He will vindicate them speedily.

Our Lord told this parable to the effect that we ought always to pray and not lose heart. This is to encourage us to pray with faith and fervency, and to persevere therein.

This story is like the story of the Friend at Midnight. It does not liken God to an unjust judge, but rather it contrasts Him to such a person.

What Our Lord Jesus is trying to convey is that if in the end, an unjust and corrupt judge can be wearied into giving a widow justice, how much more will God, who is loving Father, give His children what they need! If this widow prevails by being importunate, much more shall God's people prevail! She came to an unjust judge; we come to a righteous God. She had no friend to speak for her, but we have an advocate with the Father, Our Lord Jesus, whoever lives to make intercession for us. She could have access to the Judge only at some certain times, but we may cry to God at all times!

Thus we ought always to pray; our every day duty requires it. But what seems particularly intended here is to teach us constancy and perseverance in requests for spiritual mercies.

Therefore, if we will not grow weary in our prayer, as the Blessed Virgin Mary did, then God will answer our prayer in His own proper time, for from Him our vindication comes! His eyes behold the right, and He will say, "It's good!" →

### **Icon # 140 = Letting Christ train Ourselves: Prayer**

"If thou triest my heart, if thou visitest me by night, if thou testest me, thou wilt find no wickedness in me; my mouth does not transgress."

It is too bold to apply these words to any human person other than Our Lord Jesus, because if we are honest with ourselves and have attained a good self-knowledge we know by our own experience that our hearts are not completely devoid of any form of wickedness which are residues of our wounded fallen human nature.

Yet, it would be imprudent on our part to use this truth as an excuse to be complacently bogged down in our own pitiable misery and would not attempt to strive to make progress in the paths of righteousness and holiness all the days of our lives.

So, what shall we do? Well, one thing we can do is to allow Our Lord Jesus to train ourselves to imitate Him, as a child often imitates the action of his/her parents. Just as Christ is holy, so we have to allow Him to train ourselves in godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

Christ trains us for our good, that we may share His holiness. For the time being all training demands discipline, and discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Once we allow ourselves to be trained by the discipline of righteousness our heart will develop some muscles and be strong enough to cope up and withstand whatever trials, difficulties, and challenges that come our way. However, this doesn't mean that our heart will be perfectly unruffled by the onslaught of difficulties, trials, and problems because, if that would be the case, we will be guilty of being more of a robot than a human person. We are still subject to feel various negative emotions, but are not overcome by them. We do not deny or repress them but rather identify and own them and allow them to surface in our consciousness that we may be able to deal constructively with them.

If this would be our habitual attitude whenever we experience distress, tribulation, and suffering it is likely that we will be very careful not to utter words that would be offensive to God, that is to say, we will circumspect that our mouth does not transgress. We can express our side humbly and sincerely.

We have an example of this in the life of Job. His was a litany of sufferings and tragedies. Job, by modern standard, was a very well to do person. He had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she-asses, and very many servants. At that time he was already considered the greatest of all the people of the east.

His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each on his day; and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

Then, the litany of sufferings and tragedies began. A messenger came to Job, and said, "The oxen were ploughing and the asses feeding beside them; and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them, and slew the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you."

While he was yet speaking, there came another, and said, "The Chaldeans formed three companies, and made a raid upon the camels and took them, and slew the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you."

While he was yet speaking, there came another, and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; and I alone have escaped to tell you."

While he was yet speaking, there came another, and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house; and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness, and struck the four corners of

the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead; and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

It would be a barbaric heresy to say that Job's feelings were unruffled by these series of calamities. As a point of fact Job rent his robe and shaved his head, and fell upon the ground. But what does he did? Was he like a child who was screaming and kicking his feet and punching his hands because his toys were taken away? No. Job fell upon the ground and worshipped. And he said, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

This was already Job's attitude even before these tragedies happened, because if this was not his attitude when he was bombarded with these catastrophes he will be completely devastated like a house that was built upon a sand without any foundation and collapsed when the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat that house.

From Job's response to the trials he encountered in his life it becomes transparent how important an attitude of prayerfulness is in handling the challenges and difficulties in life that we rudely met along the way.

To be able to bless the name of the Lord in times of sufferings is possible only with those who nourish their souls with prayer, spiritual readings, and, if we are Catholics, with the sacraments.

As I said this doesn't mean that our hearts will be unruffled. We have another excellent example of this in the passion of Our Lord. At the garden of Gethsemane He began to be greatly distressed and troubled, and said to His disciples: “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death....”

The intensity of this sorrow was such that He beseeched His Father that if it were possible His impending suffering on the cross might be averted from Him; and yet, since He has cultivated the life of prayer, rising early in the morning while it is still dark and prayed, He sincerely and humbly, without denying His feelings, requested His Father saying: “Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but thou wilt.”

This is a perfect paradigm of how to approach the inevitable trials and challenges of life. Whether we like it or not there will come a time that we will be unexpectedly ambush by different kinds of sufferings either of soul and body. Some of these sufferings can be averted, but some has to be accepted.

Christ's response to His impending suffering suggests that it is highly legitimate to do all we can to alleviate our sufferings and to pray that if it is possible it can be taken away, but once we have done everything we can and it still persists, then, w can humbly say with Christ: “Yet not what I will, but thou wilt.”

By cultivating our prayer life well we are like building a home within ourselves, an inner sanctuary where we can freely go in and out to find pastures and to find rest for our tired and wearied body and soul. Prayer is not a stratagem for occasional use, a refuge to resort now and then. It is rather like an established residence for the innermost self....A soul without a regular prayer life is a soul without a home.

Weary, sobbing, the soul, after roaming through a world festering with aimlessness, falsehoods, and absurdities, seeks a moment in which to gather up its scattered life in which to call for help without being a coward. Such a home is prayer.

Even if it happens that we have a collision with our brother/sister and may have used strong words in our verbal exchange, prayer gives us enough strength and courage not to be discouraged by this seemingly failure, but our prayer, if it is well grounded on the love of God, will seek means to attain reconciliation, as the Scripture says: "If one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." Once forgiveness is being given and received, we will notice that we are a bit cautious of our use of words so that our mouth may not transgress. →

### **Icon # 141 = Avoiding the Ways of the Violent: Word of God**

"With regard to the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have avoided the ways of the violent."

It is only when the words of God sinks into our hearts, which of course is aided by the action of grace, that we are able to avoid evil ways because, if not, we will be highly susceptible to the ways of the violent, as the Scripture says, "I am for peace, but when I speak they are for fighting."

It is impossible to live a life of virtues without a profound assimilation of the Word of God or exposure to the writings of good and saintly people. By our voluntary immersion in the Word of God, we allow it to touch our awareness, enflame our desire, direct our understanding, and eventually to serve as a guide and incentive to Gospel living.

It is only, then, that we can avoid the ways of the violent and be circumspect not to bite and devour one another lest we will be consumed by one another.

From the time of Noah until now, and even until the end of time, the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence, for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.

This corruption is deeply rooted in our heart. The only remedy to this corruption is to take heed to the Word of God. From of old, in many and various ways, God spoke His Word to us through the prophets. But in the fullness of time God spoke His word to us in the very person of His Son, His own Word who was with Him before anything came into being. This Word became a human being like us to teach us how to avoid the ways of the violent and lead us on the right way, for His ways are righteousness and truth; and besides, He Himself is the Truth, the Life, and the Way that leads to eternal life.

His followers have written down His sayings for our instruction that we may follow in His footsteps and walk as He walks. For this reason there's a need for us to have a frequently/daily contact with His words and allow it to be stored in the stomach of our memory to be digested. At times it should be brought up again for habitual rumination, so that it will have the chance to seize hold of our mind and not allow it to wander aimlessly into the ways of the violent. →

### **Icon # 142 = Paths of the Lord**

**"My steps have held fast to thy paths, my feet have not slipped."**

Just as the house that was founded upon the rock did not collapse when it was buffeted by a typhoon, so also our feet is like to have a good chance not to slip in the ways of the violent and of worldly values if we hold fast to the ways/pathways of the Lord which are peace, gentleness, and kindness and anything that is good, right, true, honest, admirable, and commendable.

The pathways and byways of the world are very slippery. Take for instance power, honor, prestige and also of the unhealthy desire to amass riches, for the love of riches is the root of all evils; and it is through this craving that the feet of many people have slipped and wandered away from the paths of the Lord, and so pierced their hearts with many pangs, just as when we slipped and fell we may have a broken hips or arms or even hit our head.

Just as light travels in a straight line, and Christ is the Way that leads us straight to God, so therefore, His paths are all straight, infinitely straighter than interstate highways. Just as an interstate highway connects and brings us to one state to another and leads us to our final destination, so also the paths of the Lord connect us from virtue to virtue and lead us to our final destination which is the kingdom of heaven. We can see clearly how a virtue connects to another virtue. Take for example the virtue of kindness. A person who is kind is also a gentle person, thus the path of kindness connects to the path of gentleness.

We can travel the paths of gentleness and kindness by learning it from Our Lord Jesus who said, "Learn from me for I am lowly and gentle of heart," just as we

deliberately travel a certain route once we know its direction. Thus we will walk in the way of good people and keep to the paths of the Lord. Wisdom will come into our heart, and experiential knowledge will be pleasant to our souls. Discretion will watch over us; understanding will guard us, delivering us from the way of evil and from people who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness.

By holding fast to the paths of the Lord our trust in Him will grow and deepen and He Himself will walk with us as our faithful and loving friend. As we learn to acknowledge Him in all our ways, He in turn will make straight our paths so that we will not turn aside either to the right side of self-complacency when all things seem to work well, or to the left side of despair when all things does not work in our favor.

In this case we are building a stable foundation for our hearts so that we will not be elated by the abundance of revelations of the goodness of God that He bestowed on us and not be too downcast when we look at our inner selves and see that we are still far from our destination, that is, both purity of heart and the vision of God.

However, we will walk on our ways securely and our feet will not stumble, because we invested all our trust and confidence in Him, so much so, that even if we have to walk in the dark valley of distress and difficulties we fear no evil for He is with us, for us, and in us – encouraging us to persevere in our spiritual journey in spite of some pockets of challenges that come our ways. →

### **Icon # 143 = Call Upon God: Prayer**

"I call upon thee, for thou wilt answer me, O God; incline thy ear to me, hear my words."

To call upon God because we believe that He will answer us is a luminous sign that our lines of communications with God are freely open. This is very important in our spiritual progress, because as a creature we are not self-sufficient. To call upon God is already a form of prayer. We have to be convinced that zeal for prayer is food and strength for our soul, a protection against dangers of all kinds, and a bulwark in time of temptation. People who do not call upon God is like a hen that cannot rise into the air, and if it tries to fly falls down at once.

To pray is to acknowledge our dependence on God, and the more we think of the spiritual life, the more we think about prayer. A religious life is a poor one if prayer does not have the primacy in the mind of those who entered religion. To call upon God is not difficult when our prayer is not just confined to the mind, or to the heart, but takes in our whole being and all our activities.



And to show the great importance of the life of prayer, Pope Pius XI said: "Those who devote themselves assiduously to the ministry of prayer and penance contribute more to the development of the Church and to the salvation of mankind than those who, by their apostolic labors, till the field of the Lord."

Faith, Hope, Charity, humility, all the virtues bloom easily in prayer, and are there in turn developed. A single outburst of the heart may even express them all at one time; and is the best exercise of perfection. And when prayer is ended, for prayer is not the only duty even in the life of a monk, we remain enlightened by faith and rich in graces, which enable us to act supernaturally, to suffer with fruit, to correct our faults, to grow in virtue and to do whatever God's will; during our actions we will be in touch with God, because prayer shall have filled our mind and our heart with Him.

The only obstacle that prevents God from listening when we call upon Him is when we are adamant in persisting in doing evil things, as the Scripture said: "We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshipper of God and does his will, God listens to him."

We should not be discouraged if we do not receive an immediate answer to our prayer. God has His own hours; we need to wait for them. He wishes to be prayed, and begged and pressed so as to make us appreciate His graces.

St. Monica prayed for 30 years for St. Augustine. Only then did she reap the fruits of her prayers. She prayed with tears in such a way that her soul was in her eyes, but in the end she harvested the fruits of rejoicing. In this world she has sorrows but her sorrows turned into joy and no one, not even death, took that joy from her. She brought it with her to eternity – right at the heart of the fountain of all joy which is God Himself.

Not every matter we bring before God will necessarily require that we spend the whole night prayer over it, but why shouldn't God be involved in every detail of our life by our opening our life to God in prayer? Besides using our minds, the advice of friends and counselors, why not let God have a say about what matters to us?

Accommodating our prayer to our present state renders it profitable and efficacious, sweet and easy; what can be more consoling and more easy than to converse with Our Lord about what we are and what we are at present experiencing? On the other hand, if our prayer is not accommodated to the present state of our soul, does it not, by the very fact, lose the greater part of its attraction and utility?

Prayer is not separable from our trust and faith in God. We know God loves us and is out for the best for all creation. When we pray, we are expressing that trust. →

## Icon # 144 = The Cross: Steadfast Love of God

“Wondrously show thy steadfast love, O Savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at thy right hand.”

Without any slightest shadow of a doubt the steadfast love of God is brightly shown on the cross, because greater love has no one than this that a man lays down His life for us all. If one will hardly die for a righteous person, how much more for the ungodly. But God shows His steadfast love for us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us.

This steadfast love of Our Lord is like a strong fortress where we can seek refuge from our adversaries who are pursuing us relentlessly like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. So, we have to resist him, firm in our faith. Thus we have to take the whole armor of God that we may be able to stand against the wiles of our adversaries.

We have to gird ourselves with truth, and carry the ammunitions of righteousness, and put on the combat shoes of the gospel of peace, as it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!,” the night vision of faith with which we can see the strategic movements of the spiritual hosts of wickedness that rule this present world.

And we have to wear the bullet proof helmet of salvation, so that whether we live or die we are the Lord's; and the high powered gun of the Spirit which is the Word of God because the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword and more powerful than any kinds of guns, even missiles and nuclear bombs, for it penetrates to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrows, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Moreover, this steadfast love of Our Lord reassures our hearts before Him whenever our hearts condemn us, for God is greater than our hearts and He knows everything. Nothing is hidden from Him. Since our adversaries are also powerful, so it is possible that we will be wounded in our struggle against them.

When this happen we have to look intently at the cross to find healing for our wounded souls just as the Israelites who were bitten by the poisonous serpents were healed when they looked at the bronze serpent mounted on the pole. We have to imprint this cross in our minds and plant it in our hearts like a flag of victory that even if the whole world will be in chaos and confusion and total disarray they can only slightly ripple the placidity of this cross, because this cross is the pacific ocean of God's love and mercy which remains steadfast forever.

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## Icon # 145 = In the Shadow of God's Wing

"Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me in the shadow of thy wings, from the wicked who despoil me, my deadly enemies who surround."

What would it be like if God keeps us as the apple of His eye? It is like saying, "If God is for us who is against us!" It is also like hearing, "Thou art my beloved sons and daughters with thee I am well pleased." It is also like a longing of a mother to gather her children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.

We are confident and unafraid because we are under God's protection. He is our helper in times of distress.

There's story of a little boy who was wandering around a village when suddenly he was challenged by a brash crusty teenage rascal shouting from the edge of the bush, "Come! Let's fight and see who's stronger."

The little lad turned away in fright and the menacing one taunted, "Come on little boy. Don't be a sissy. Stand up like a man." The frightened boy dashed for cover around the back of the nearest house and bumped into his strapping rugby player brother who was on leave from the Army. He gabbled his big brother's arm and pulled him out into the open....The big brother tagged along, not knowing what it was all about.

The little boy now defiantly shouted back at his challenger, "All right, now come and fight like what you wanted to...Come on...don't be a coward; don't run away...." One look at the protective big brother was enough to make the rascal's knees weak. He took off to get a head start.

Our Lord Jesus is our big brother. One look at Him is enough to make deadly enemies fall down as the Legion of demons who had possessed the man from Gerasenes fell down before Christ when they saw Him, and cried out in a loud

voice: "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beseech you, do not torment me."

Certainly, these Legion of demons had despoiled the man of everything even the last vestige of his humanity, because he no longer wear clothes for a long time as though we was dispossessed of all the graces of God; and he lived not in a house anymore but among the tombs, that is, he no longer lived the life intended by God for him but among the values and desires that inevitably lead to death, as it is written: "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end in the way to death."

But once he encountered Christ in his life the demons inside him were alarmed and beg Christ that they may not be tormented, instead, that they should only be cast out.

We, too, have demons inside us. Our unhealthy values and desires verily take the forms of demons inside us. They possessed us, as it were, to such an extent that we no longer lived the life intended by God for us but among the tombs of worldly passions and self-indulgence, as it is written: "Anyone who is self-indulgent is already dead even though while still alive."

But once we encountered Christ in our lives the demons of unhealthy values and desires will tremble. In the depths of our being we uttered a heart-rending prayer begging Christ that these unhealthy values and desires be cast out from us because they wrought havoc in our souls and distorted the image and likeness of God within us as though despoiling us of our dignity as children of God.

Once these unhealthy desires and values be cast out from us, it has to be replaced with healthy desires and values, such as a desire for the kingdom of heaven with all our hearts, a desire to live a hidden life with all its simplicity if we are monks, a desire to reach out to the poor, the sick, the prisoners, the marginalized in society if we are in the active ministry, a desire to do our jobs wholeheartedly as though doing it for the Lord in whatever state of life we are in either married or single, and above all, a desire to please the Lord in all that we do no matter how small or insignificant it might be, in other words, whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we do all to the glory of God.

In terms of values, so long as we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content. If we can get a good education, then, we have to avail this opportunity but has to use our education to build up a good character, because knowledge without virtue is damnable. If we don't have a good education we should not be discouraged by it as long as we have love for God because love itself has its own knowing.

Everyone who loves God is smarter than those who have acquired a PH.D in various fields of knowledge unless they too have love for God, as the Scripture says, "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. If any one imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if one loves God, one is known by him."

This love makes us the apple of God's eye. He cares for us and hides us in the shadow of His wings. Thus we shall dwell in the shelter of the Most High and abide in the shade of the Almighty. Our eyes have only to look to see how the wicked spirits who seek to despoil us are repaid. God will conceal us with His pinions and under His wings we will find refuge.

We will develop such trust and confidence in Him that will embolden our courage so that we will not fear the terror of the night of desolation nor the arrow of pride that flies by day of consolation, nor the plagues of regress that prowls in the darkness of distress nor the scourge of the desire for mammon that

lays waste at noon, because Christ Our Lord keep us as the apple of His eye and hide us in the shadow of His love, “for greater love has no one than this that a man lays down his life for his friends.” →

### **Icon # 146 = Windowless Room**

“They close their hearts to pity; with their mouths they speak arrogantly. They track me down; now they surround me; they set their eyes to cast me to the ground. They are like a lion eager to tear, as a young lion lurking in ambush.”

Our Lord Jesus laid down His life because of His great love for us. In contrast, our deadly enemies are like a lion eager to tear, sometimes, lurking in ambush, and at other times, prowling around seeking someone to devour. They are like the more than forty men who bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul the man who could wish that he himself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of his brethren, his kinsmen by race.

They were lurking in ambush eager to tear Paul to pieces. Certainly, by this gesture, they close their hearts to pity. They must have forgotten that justices will be without pity to those who has shown no pity. But since Mercy is more powerful than judgment, Mercy sent forgiveness to keep on knocking at their hearts like an ambassador beseeching them to be reconciled to God.

Justice should always be eager but never hasty to allow room for inner conversion. But if they are so adamant to close their hearts to Mercy’s pleading and in return will speak arrogantly, saying, “We do not want this man to rule over us. Let his blood be on us and our children,” then justice will have to render judgment, saying, “As for these enemies of mine who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me.”

“For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? ‘If the righteous person is scarcely saved, where will the impious and sinner appear?’” To close one’s heart to pity is like a room without a window. A room without a window means that it barred itself from the natural light of the sun. To live in a room without a window and be barred from the natural light of the sun is tantamount to be living with death because there’s no access to the vital energy that sustains the body. Thus the heart that is closed to pity is barring itself from the divine light of blessedness, as it is written: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

Though it is possible to live a room without a window, as those in submarine and those dangerous prisoner under strict solitary confinement, but it requires a

colossal psychological and spiritual strength not to be broken down under this condition.

Three of our monks have a correspondence with a certain inmate\*<sup>2</sup> who is now in a special prison facility in Springfield, Missouri. This man was a former U.S. Army. He was assigned in Vietnam, and there killed his sergeant in a fight. He is imprisoned here in the U.S., and then killed again another four more guards and inmates in four different occasions.

In many ways he closes his heart to pity. He is considered as a dangerous criminal and a threat to society. He is now confined in a cell under the ground with no window at all in view that it will break him down. But contrary to the expectation of his jailers he survives for twenty years now and even finished a degree through correspondence. He is also planning to get a master's degree. He is also contemplating of becoming a priest. This latter certainly evokes whirlpool of opinions. How can it be possible when he is sentenced five life imprisonment? Is his conversion really true? What if something will trigger his deep-seated anger, which is lulled to sleep because he doesn't have to rub elbows with other people?

On the other hand, he can be the most compassionate and understanding minister because he has gained a deeper knowledge of himself, and know by experience how the mercy of God works in his life. He was like the man of the country of the Gerasenes who was possessed with demons who was so wild, but whose encounter with Christ has completely changed his life. Then he begged Christ that he might be with Him. But Christ refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."

In the same way, this inmate wanted to follow Christ in the ministerial priesthood and proclaim the good news of the kingdom to a wider audience. But since he is sentenced five life imprisonment, it is likely that, if ever he will become a priest, his ministry will be limited within the prison, within his fellow prisoners. He has to tell them how much Our Lord has done for him, and how He has had mercy on him, so that a glimmer of hope might also shine in the darkness of the heart of his fellow inmates, and that they will be encouraged to approach the throne of grace that they may receive mercy and find help in times of need, for they, too, are invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb which is now ready and the fatted calves are prepared.

But if they will not listen to his voice and will insist in closing their hearts and will speak arrogantly against him questioning his credentials, or make all kinds of excuses inferring that they are not interested in coming to the feast, and some

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\*1He died somewhat mysteriously of heart failure although he used to do some exercises.

of them will beat him and send him away empty handed, then justice will raise up its head and cries out: →

### **Icon # 147 = The Power of God's Word: Dance of Love**

"Arise, O Lord! Confront them, overthrow them! Deliver my life from the wicked by the sword, from men by the hand, O Lord, from men whose portion in life is of the world. May their belly be filled with what thou has stored up for them; may their children have more than enough; may they leave something over their babes."

When the passion, death, and resurrection of Our Lord drew near, He set His face to go to Jerusalem. And He sent messengers ahead of Him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for Him; but the people would not receive Him, because His face was set toward Jerusalem. And when James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them?" But Our Lord turned and rebuked them telling them that they do not know what kind of spirit is prompting them.

Since we are now in the new dispensation, so mercy has to soften the eagerness of justice to overthrow at once all who refused or who will refuse to accept the good news of the kingdom of heaven. The weeds and the wheat has to grow together until the end of time. This is an encouragement to be patient with those who persist in their sins, because there is no virtue at all to be impatient with the imperfection of our fellow brothers and sisters.

Not that we agree with their sins, but we do our best to be cautious so as not to fall also in sin which just take the form of "zeal." St. Benedict call this a bitter zeal which do more harm than good to the one who corrects and the one who is corrected because it separates from one another and from God.

It is far better to pray that Our Lord will confront and overthrow the vices within us first, only then we will be more compassionate and understanding toward the foibles and sinfulness of our brothers and sisters. By the grace of God, we will be in a fairly good position to help them find the way that leads to life and eternal happiness.

In other words, we are asked to take first the log that is in our eye, and only then we will learn prudence to assist other people to take the speck from their eye. This is a noble form of confrontation and a holy coup d'etat because its aim is to form a new society within our soul where we freely accept and let Our Lord Jesus be the ruler of our lives.

In this case, we are no longer our own, for we are bought with a price. We are ransomed from the futile ways inherited from our fathers, not with perishable

things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

Thus the prayer: "Deliver my life from the wicked by thy sword," is now fulfilled. Deliverance by means of a sword reminds us of the importance of the word of God for our ongoing purification and growth in holiness, because the word of God is like a mirror where we can see the state of our soul.

It has potent power to penetrate and survey all the ramifications of soul and spirit, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of our heart. It can do these because it is living and active, even sharper than any two-edged sword. It is the sword of the spirit which we need to be delivered from men whose portion in life is of the world, that is to say, we need the word of God to be delivered from worldly concerns and values which enslaved most of humanity.

Constant exposure to the word of God, nourished with the desire to put it into practice, even though in our attempt to do so we might stagger because of the intensity of its demands, will eventually elevated our status as slaves into friends of God, as Christ said: "I will no longer call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."

He goes on to say that we are His friends if we do what He commands. His words itself are His commandments. We have to acknowledge that our weak, wounded, and fallen human nature find some of His words hard to fulfill. Take for instance to love one's enemy, to bless those who curse us, to pray for those who persecute us, not to repay evil for evil, to do good to those who hate us.

All these are very hard for our weak, wounded, and fallen human nature. However, we also believe that God does not command impossible things. If He commands something which seems difficult, it is that we may ask for His help; and He will help us, so that we may be able to do what He commands. This means that left to ourselves we cannot hope to fulfill His words, but with His help nothing is impossible.

Little by little, we will experience an inner freedom to do what is right, what is true, what is just, and what is good, because the Spirit of Christ Himself will work together with our spirit to do whatever pleases Him. He will teach us how to dance with His music.

We may feel awkward though at first, because most of us are not born dancers. We may have some apprehensions that we might step on His toes, or our back might be broken by too much twisting! But this is part of learning together the dance of love, allowing ourselves to be led by His rhythm, by His Spirit, for all that are lead by the Spirit of God are children of God; and if children, then an heir, heir to His promise of life without end wherein our souls will always be young.



In the many apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary, she always appears as a young woman with an incomparable beauty. This beauty is such that once one saw her, that one would be willing to die to see her again. I do believe that the desire to look young and beautiful is being built into our human nature. This is very apparent even among the poor, among the middle class, and among the affluent in society, especially in the advent of cosmetics. Most of them won't blink their eyes as they grope in the darkness of vanity in their attempt to look young and beautiful.

Another group of people who are also found among all the strata of society and are also desirous to be young and beautiful are those who lived a virtuous lives and devotes themselves to good works either through a formal ministry such as caring for the sick, the aged, the homeless, the dying, the prisoners, the immigrants workers, etc., or just by doing simple and ordinary things with sincerity and mindfulness of God.

These are the people whose beauty is within. This is a beauty that will never turn to ashes but will increase from glory to glory, for it is derived right from the source of eternal beauty and splendor which is God Himself. →

### **Icon # 148 = What God has stored up for each one**

"May their belly be filled with what thou has stored up for them."

St. Paul tells us that no eye has seen nor ear heard nor it enters into the hearts of men what God has prepared for those who love Him. This certainly will fill not only our belly but also our hearts with unspeakable joy, a joy which no one can take away from us, for it is the very joy of God Himself. We have only to open wide our mouths and God will fill us to our hearts' content.

Just as the Blessed Virgin Mary has already conceived the Word of God in her heart even before she conceived it in her womb, so, we too, will be filled with what God has stored for us since the foundation of the world, that is, eternal joy, if our hearts are gravid with the word of God, for it is the very soul of our souls. It is the source of our knowledge of God, for in it contains all the necessary things needed for our salvation.

But we have to strive to put it into practice even though we might fail from time to time, because it would be tantamount to indigestion if what we believe is not enacted even in the ordinary event of our day to day lives. In this case, abundant knowledge of the word of God does no good if it does not sink into our hearts, just as abundant intake of food does no good to the body if it is not digested. It is even more dangerous!

Take for instance the devil. He quotes Scriptures left and right and even use it as a platform to tempt Christ, but it is to his own judgment because the word that Christ have spoken will be his judge on the last day. And even now he is already judged, as it is written: "And when he comes, he will convince the world of sin and righteousness and of judgment... of judgment, because the ruler of this world is already judged."

Thus every person's belly will be filled with what has been stored for them. To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, God 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 those who does good.

We will have more than enough of this as our actions deserve. This will certainly fill each person's belly for all eternity. →

### **Icon # 149 = Children: Vices and Virtues**

"May their children have more than enough; may they leave something over to their babes."

Vices and virtues are like children. They are the fruits of the soul, just as children are the fruits of their parents. Just as children can bring sadness or happiness to their parents, so also vices or virtues can bring misery or glory to our souls, because when we die we bring nothing with us except what we have done in this life.

Take for example the vices of jealousy, envy, vanity, gluttony, pride, acedia, lust, avarice, and etc. If the soul begets these kinds of children it is more than enough to bring misery and melancholy to her. "What causes wars, and what causes fightings among you?" asked St. James. "Is it not your passions that are at war in your members? You desire and do not have, so you kill. And you covet and cannot obtain; so you fight and wage war...."

On the other hand, if the soul begets the fruits of virtues such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, fruitfulness, humility, and self-control she will be happy and content and be at ease even in times of distress. In our world, so ravaged by wars, every human soul that is mature enough for marriage would fervently long for peace – peace that the world cannot give: Peace of mind, Peace of heart, Peace of conscience.

This peace requires that we should be willing to pay the price of patience which peace demands. Its price could be high and it requires humility. Humility is the elder brother of kindness and gentleness which are very dear to Our Lord:

“Learn from me,” He said, “for I am meek and gentle of heart.” Although He was by nature God He did not count equality with God a thing to be clung to, but He emptied Himself taking the nature of a slave. And being found in this state He still dug deeper by becoming obedient even unto death – death on a cross. Thus God the Father has highly exalted Him above every other name in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Because of the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Thus Christ sets Himself as an example that to live a virtuous life leads to the glory and happiness of heaven even though we have to pass through many trial and tribulation before acquiring it as our final inheritance. The soul will be always in ecstatic joy to see the beauty and glory of God, no one will take that joy from her.

“Count it all joy my brethren,” says St. James, “if you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness; and blessed is the person who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love Him.”

Patience, too, is a powerful strength. She is a good friend of prudence. Patience attains all things, that is, many good things come out of patience. For instance, if the other person is angry at us, for whatever reason and we are patient his/her anger will slowly died down because we don't add fuel to the fire.

When we are patient we are more than conqueror of a city, for it proves that our spirit is stronger than the other person. It gives happiness because it is tantamount to victory. In any victory there is always a feeling of joy. The same also with self-control, much more with kindness and goodness. Thus the soul who begets these virtues is happy.

In contrast, if the soul engenders even just jealousy and pride these are enough to drag her to sadness and misery. Take for example King Saul. He was so jealous of David because the women sang to one another as they made merry, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.”

Yet both of them had slain in their thousands and it was King Saul who sent David to do battle for him. He should have been happy because of the victory, but it displeased him to such an extent that he became so paranoid and raved within his house and even said to his son Jonathan that so long as David lives there will be no peace in their house. Many times Saul attempted to kill David but failed. Thus we see how far jealousy can go.

With regards to pride, the Scriptures warned us that God opposes the proud. Can we imagine if God will be our opponent, we who are just dust and ashes? What happen to Lucifer the brightest angel? He fell like a lightning from heaven

and there is no more room for him there because of pride. So, because of his pride he loses everything.

And he is so envious of man, for every time he sees man it reminds him of the former glory that he had lost and which man will inherit. Thus in his misery he became like a roaring lion seeking human beings to devour them. God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of His own eternity, but through the devil's envy man experienced misery, sadness, and even death. Those who are so proud, that is, those who belong to the devil's party experience it.

Let us pray, then, that the children that our souls beget will be that of virtue and not that of vices, for the memory of virtue is immortality because it is known both by God and by men. →

### **Icon # 150 = Awareness of God's Presence: Source of Courage and Strength**

"As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with beholding in thy form."

How beautiful it is when we wake up in the morning our thoughts are always in God or in things about God. This gives a tremendous strength throughout the day to carry out our duties and responsibilities amid the joys and sorrows of this world. Even if there are no thoughts, but just the remembrance of God or awareness of His presence is already enough. This, too, is already a form of prayer.

When this remembrance of God or awareness of His presence becomes part of us or, to say boldly but honestly, our second nature then we shall be satisfied, content, and at peace to behold God in the form He wishes to manifest Himself either it would be in the forms of consolation or desolation, happiness or sadness, challenges and changes, adversity or prosperity, perhaps in the lovely smile of a little child and that of an elderly lady who is mild.

When we remember a human person, say, our brother or sister or a friend or some acquaintances they are in our memory but they are not in us. We don't even know whether at the time we remember them if they are also thinking of us. But with God is quite different. When we remember God we affirm His presence. This does not mean that if we don't remember God He is not present in us. He is always there because He is everywhere. There is nothing in the whole universe where God is not present, because if He is not, then, that thing or we will no longer exist, for in Him we live and move and have our being.

Remembrance of God can also be called awareness of His presence. Awareness of His presence will certainly evoke different kinds of feelings to different kinds of people. For some, awareness of God's presence evokes feelings of peace, joy, reverence, respect, awe, gratitude, etc. In other words, it is a positive feeling, but for some awareness of God's presence evokes fear, uneasiness, discomfort as though their actions are being watch by a stern policeman.

I remember we have a novice here at Assumption Abbey in Ava, Missouri. He was a former helicopter pilot. One day he said that God's presence was so overwhelming that you don't have to exert an effort to search for Him because His presence pervades everywhere, and yet he left because he could no longer bear such presence.

Naturally, this triggers several questions such as: "What was in God's presence that he could no longer bear?", "How did God look at him during those times?", "What was God's presence like?", or is it his issues that started to surface and are bothering him but he doesn't want to face them because they are too much for him? It might be helpful to remember that for the prophets God's presence is the source of their courage and strength, as the Psalmist says: "I always put the Lord before me; with him at my right hand I shall not be moved."

I am very much convinced that the practice of God's presence or remembrance of God is highly beneficial for our soul, especially if it becomes part of our consciousness. In this way we don't have to exert too much effort thinking about Him because He is already in our consciousness. What we can do is only to be at peace and know that He is God. We look at Him and He looks at us. We are content with each other's presence even if we don't utter words, but only silence.

This remembrance of God reminds us that only one thing is necessary. This one thing is union with Him starting in this present life and will go on for eternity. The rest are secondary. Thus whatever happen to us in this world, so long as we are united with God, is for our benefit because all things work together for good with those who love God.

Some of the things that happen to us might be painful, and yet even this pain will evoke gratitude on our part because we have been counted worthy to share in His sufferings that we may also share in His glory.

Pain, sorrow, suffering, and heartache are part and parcel of our human condition whether we like it or not. Our human nature normally doesn't like it. No one will like or love pain and sorrow and suffering by itself, but we can learn to love them because it renders us more like to Our Lord Jesus who endured

sufferings for our sake to give us a model to follow and to heal us of our wounds, as it is written: "By his wounds you have been healed."

Since to remember God is already a form of prayer, so remembrance of God is tantamount to heeding to His command to watch and pray so that we will not enter into temptation. It is good to clarify that even though remembrance of God becomes part of our consciousness this does not exempt us from temptation. We will still be tempted, but will not fall into the trap of the temptation. If ever we fall, we have to realize that God allows it to happen, as part of His pedagogy, to make us realize by that very experience that apart from Him we can do absolutely nothing, not even to think of anything good. Thus we will realize that all is grace that we are absolutely dependent on Him more than beggars begging for bread.

However, God will never allow us to fall if He foresees that the falling is grave and can cause tremendous damage to our soul or even kill the life of the soul, in other words, He will not allow us to be tempted beyond our strength but will provide us a way to be able to endure it. If our failure or mistake teaches us a lesson, then it is a success.

When we remember God we acknowledge His presence. It is like beholding Him. The degree of our purification and love will also be the degree of our vision of Him because love is the eye that will permit us to see Him, and blessed are we when our hearts are purified for we shall see God, though in this life it will only be like a dim mirror, but when we awake from the sleep of death, then we shall be satisfied with beholding His face for we shall see Him as He is in the light of eternal glory.

Our hearts will rejoice and no one will take that joy from us, for we shall follow the Lamb wherever He goes to behold His glory. So be it. Come Lord Jesus. Do not delay. →

### **Icon # 151 = Love: Mirror; God: Rock, Fortress, Shield, Deliverer**

#### **Psalm 18 (17)**

"I love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."

It is true to say that we cannot love someone whom we do not know. The minimum requirement of this kind of knowledge is that, at least, we have heard about that person. The maximum would be when we become one with that person without losing our nature, having a concrete and intimate union with that person. A simple analogy to describe this union is that of an iron in the fire.

Once the iron is united with the fire, the iron becomes completely one with the fire without losing its nature.

There's a high possibility that hearing about a person will turn into loving that person, especially when we meet that person and develop a certain relationship with him/her. Knowing by our own experience who this person is, how he/she relates toward us will lead to the deepening of the relationship. Trust and confidence will grow. Certainly, love develops, too, and will be as close as one's breath.

We love, because God loves us first. Our love for Him is our response for His love for us. Greater love has no one than this that He laid down His life for us. We, too, are invited to lay down our life for each other. We do this when we are patient with one another for it is in our patience that we share in the sufferings of Christ. Love is like a mirror where we can look at ourselves and where virtues are reflected, as St. Paul says: "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things."

God is worthy to be loved because He is God. As His creatures, it is our duty and responsibility to give Him the honor that is His due, to praise and glorify Him.

He is our strength not only in times of prosperity but also in times of adversity. With Him at our side we will not be afraid to face the trials and challenges in life. He becomes our strength. It is like a little boy who is courageous to withstand those who would bully him when his father or brother is with him.

He is our rock, thus we will not be easily shaken when the rain of difficulties fell, the floods of distress came, and the winds of tribulations blew and beat our souls because we put all our trust in Him."

Rock suggests images of firmness, durability, solidity, and stability. God is our rock when we keep His commandments. It is like building a house on solid foundation. The degree of our keeping His commandments is also the degree of our love for Him, for the Lord says: "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. I will love him and manifest myself to him." In this case He manifests to us as a rock, that is, He is firm in His love for us, durable in His kindness, solid in forgiveness, and stable in His mercy.

He is our fortress because in Him we can always find rest. He constantly invites us to come to Him for rest and relaxation of our souls, as He said: "Come to me, all of you who labor and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

So, it is clear that learning from Our Lord Jesus and taking His yoke upon us, which is His commandments, bring peace and rest to our souls. This is so because it makes us godly. Godly people are peaceful people. They have the luxury to be at rest even in times of distress because they know they way to the depths of their hearts, the center of their being where God is who seats there like the eye of a typhoon. On the contrary, "there is no rest for the wicked," that is, he is stranger to peace.

God is our deliverer because He delivers us from the slavery of sin, that is, from the clutches of the Evil One; and that we might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. He ransomed us from the futile ways of this world – from the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. By ourselves we cannot be delivered from these things because of the weakness of our wounded fallen nature. We are more incline to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Thus we need someone to present to us things and values which are far superior than the things of this world. This is what Our Lord Jesus had done in His Incarnation. In Christ heaven becomes available to us so that we have something to long for and to possess.

When Christ delivered us from the bondage of sin, selfishness, and greed He gave us back not only ourselves but God Himself who is our true self and our true treasure and our true life. In other words, in Christ we become true to ourselves. Who would ever learn humility if Christ had not teaches it? If humility is truth, then those who are true to themselves have, at least, a certain degree of true humility.

The closer a person is to Christ the more he will grow in humility. Of course, we have to begin by acknowledging that we are proud – grow in self-knowledge. Little by little through prayers and meditation of His life, especially His birth and passion and crucifixion and through the reception of the sacraments and the reading of the Scriptures we will make progress in humility.

Without any of these, we can boldly say: "Just forget about it!" What I mean is that it is impossible for us to live a virtuous life without divine help. Natural will power is not enough. We need someone greater, bigger, and stronger than ourselves to come to our aid and to bind the strong man of our passionate desires for worldly things and values which, in the last analysis, does not readily satisfy the needs of the human soul.

Only then can we learn, even slowly and little and by little, to be detached from material things and to use them with moderation. If there is something in our room which has been there for quite a while and we don't really use it, it is better to give it away. In this way we practice detachment and charity. It can



make our heart feel lighter because it frees us from the unnecessary burden of longing or wanting for more. It will deliver us from the vice of greed.

God is our shield if we have faith in Him. He is our protection when the loathsomeness of our conscience bothers us and we are drawn to sadness and despair. We need only to take refuge in Him and cast all our anxieties to Him for He cares for us far more than we can ever imagine.

If we only have the instinct and simplicity of a child to have the natural tendency of taking recourse to their parents we will do well in spite of all the worries and troubles that come our ways, because his power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think. To Him who is the horn, that is, power of our salvation and our stronghold be praise and glory forever and ever. Amen. →

### **Icon # 152 = Watch and Pray: Protection from one's enemies**

"I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies."

Our father St. Benedict tells us that if any unseemly thoughts, this can also be applied to our affection, come to us, we have to dash it against the rock, who is Christ, while it is still young. This is a summon to watch and pray so that we will not be lead into temptation.

Mindfulness of God's presence or remembrance of God is already a form of response to this command – in a wordless way. Thus God gives us all the means to communicate with Him to assure us that His help is always available to save us from our enemies. Enemies here are varied in forms as St. Paul says, "We are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, and the rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."

Undoubtedly these enemies are too strong for us. That is why there's a need for us to call upon the Lord and invoke His name, for whoever calls upon the name of the Lord, with reverence and sincerity, will be saved, because His spirit within us who makes us cry, 'Abba Father,' is greater than the spirit of the world.

Our other enemy is our own self. This enemy needs also a higher power in order to be conquered. Left to our own self we cannot really conquer the self. It is very subtle and demanding. It is only our constant contact with Our Lord Jesus and the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary that, little by little, we are able to tame our self and guide its desires to a right and proper direction. This is a lifelong process, and it needs a little bit of patience and humility to live in harmony with our self

Of course, our other enemies are our passions that wage war upon us. They can kill our souls if we let them dominate us, as the Scripture says, "A person who is over indulgent is already dead even while he is alive." Thus... →

### **Icon # 153 = Cords and Snares of Death**

"The cords of death encompassed me, the torrents of perdition assailed me; the cords of Sheol entangled me, the snares of death confronted me."

Can you imagine if the cords and snares of death will encompass and confront us? This is a horrible thing. It means we cannot enjoy a serene and lasting peace. Therefore, those who let loose their passions and indulge with the self and allied themselves with the hosts of wickedness are constantly assailed by the torrents of perdition and got entangled in the complexity of their lifestyle. It leads to a miserable life.

However, there is always a room for conversion and repentance if the soul is open and humble enough to receive and cooperate with God's grace, as it is written: "If today you hear his voice harden not your heart."

God is offering us a chance for renewal of our life, so that we may live "a life worthy of our calling to which we have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." If these things are in us and abound, then we are equipped with courage and fortitude to face life's difficulties in spite of the torrents of tragedies assailing us and the snares of death confronting us, as Christ said: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul, but rather fear him who has power to cast the body and the soul to gehenna," or everlasting death.

Love for comfort, love for material things, especially for religious who professed to follow Christ, can easily entangle us and prevent us from growing into the full stature of Christ. We will be likened to the seed that fell into the thorns and was prevented from bearing fruit because it was choked by the thorns itself. But if we strive to live a virtuous life, trying to put into practice the teaching of Our Lord Jesus and the saints, because they are the ones who followed Christ more closely, then even if the cords of death will encompass us and the snares of death will confront us we will not be overcome by fear because Christ will be with us to give us consolation and protect us, as the Psalmist says: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil for thou are with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

Thus as our love for Christ increases our fears also decrease, because perfect love cast out fear. We human beings certainly have lots of fears: fear of the unknown, fear of humiliation, fear of suffering, fear of sickness, fear of death, etc. Christ took all these to Himself and presented it to the Father, on our behalf, during His agony in the garden of Gethsemane, so that we might have the courage to face our own fears, especially the fear of death.

In Christ, death has no longer power over us, because He ultimately conquered death by His resurrection from the dead to deliver us from the power of death. "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" The sting of death is sin. Therefore, if we do the best we can to avoid sin, and then there is nothing to fear.

However, this does not exempt us from the negative experiences in life, but we are no longer surprised by it because life in this present world doesn't have a permanent state. Sometimes we feel happy, sometimes we feel sad and anxious. Even those in mental hospitals experience a flicker of happiness, too.

Some of them could even have a sense of humor like the patient in this story: A man was working in his garden beside a mental hospital. One of the patients was sitting on the fence watching the man closely. Finally, the patient said to him: "Hi, what are you doing?" "Oh, I'm putting manure on my strawberry," answered the man. "My goodness," said the patient, "we put sugar and cream on ours and people think we are crazy!"

On the other hand, it is also true that even those who have reached a high degree of sanctity and have served God wholeheartedly and are ready at every moment to die for Him, have their share of anxiety, too. Take for example St. Paul who was so anxious of the Churches he has founded. St. Perpetua was so anxious to have her infant child with her in prison so as to suckle him.

Above all, God, too, in His human nature experienced fear of His coming passion. He prayed that if possible this would be taken away from Him. But since His love is perfect His fear was cast out: "If this cup will not pass from me unless I drink it, then not my will but your will be done."

This is to show us that it is legitimate to experience anxiety and fear so long as it does not overpower us so as to paralyze us into doing what is proper at a given situation.

It is in these anxieties and fears that we can cry out and say: →

## Icon # 154 = Men of God: Men of Prayer

"In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears."

In the days of His flesh Christ Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save him from death, and He was heard for His godly fear. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered; and being made perfect He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him....

Our Lord Jesus gave us an example that we may follow in His steps. He pointed out to us how important prayer is to nourish the life of God in us. We are men of God only when we are men of prayer. If our work is such that we don't have anymore time to pray, either in private or in common, it is far better to resign in order to have it because if we don't have anymore time to pray it is not good for us, and if it is not good for us it is not also good for the people we come into contact with.

Any work no matter how good and noble it might be if we don't set aside a quality time for prayer in communion with God as Our Lord Jesus did, rising early in the morning while it is still dark and go to a lonely place by Himself to pray, then, eventually it will weigh down our soul. Take for example our body no matter how husky and robust it might be if we don't nourish it with food will deteriorate eventually and will no longer have the strength to carry even a pail of water.

Thus prayer is really vital to the life of our soul just as breathing is vital to the life of the body. If we don't breath our body will die, so if we don't pray our soul will die, too. Just as in breathing we don't gasp a long breath and say to ourself: "Well, this is enough for the whole day." So, in praying we need to pray always and not say to ourself that to pray once is enough to sustain us for the whole year. Not all trials and problems that we encounter require that we have to spend the whole night in prayer to God, but why not allow God to be our partner in solving our problems and facing our trials? The intensity of His desire to help us is far greater than our anxiety to find solution for our problems.

We will know by our own experience how true it is that God is ready to help us, as He said: "Before you call I answer." We need only to keep open the line of communication between us and Him, so that in times of distress we can cry out to Him for help and be grateful to Him for graces received. →

## Icon # 155 = Times that to be angry is also necessary

“Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because he was angry.”

We read that Moses was considered to be the meekest of all men of his time, and yet he, too, was angry with the people who participated in worshipping the golden calf.

Our Lord Jesus, too, told us to learn from Him because He is meek and humble of heart, but he was also angry when the house of God was turned into a market place.

There was also a time when Christ entered a synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. The Pharisees watched Him to see whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. And He said to the man who had the withered hand, “Come here.” Then He said to them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. And He looked at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart....”

There are times that to be angry is also necessary, especially when the honor of God is being violated. In this case we should not just be passive. To express one's anger is also helpful when we are unjustly treated by a brother or sister, especially if it happens not just once but many times, so that we will not become slave to that brother or sister, and it makes them cautious, too, in dealing with us.

In expressing this anger it is very necessary that there should be no resentment and grudges in our heart because it would be detrimental to ourselves if it is done with resentment, as St Paul says: “Be angry and do not sin.”

It is also good not to express our anger right away. We have to bear it first as we are able because only the fools have no control of their passion. In this way our anger is guided by our reason. We have an example of this in the life of Christ himself. He started going to the temple, at least once a year, when He was 12 years old. He started His public ministry when He was 30. If we follow the gospel of St. John, Christ cleansed the temple at the beginning of His ministry, and if we follow the synoptic gospels, He did it at the end of His ministry. Either of this is already a long time of patient waiting. Imagine for 18 or 21 years He saw all those anomalies and chaos in the temple and yet He waited for the right time. Undoubtedly His heart was grieved to see all these things. His anger is eager but never hasty. →

## Icon # 156 = Word of God and Prayer: Fire needed for Cleansing and Purification

“Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him. He bowed the heavens and came down; thick darkness was under his feet.”

The author of the letter to the Hebrews encourages us to see that we do not refuse God who speaks to us through His Son, Our Lord Jesus. For if the people of old, that is, from Esau down to the people whom Moses brought out from Egypt, did not escape when they refused Him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape if we reject Him who warns from heaven...for our God is consuming fire.

Undoubtedly, this fire will test what sort of work each one has done, for each man's work will become manifest because the Day will disclose it, for it will be revealed with fire. If the work which any of us has built on the foundation survives, we will receive a reward. The foundation here is the teaching of Our Lord Jesus which He handed down to us through the apostles. And the reward is eternal life which He promised to those who love Him.

Thus if our life while still on earth does not conform to the teaching of Christ, then, we will be purified by the fire in purgatory. We will never get out from there till we have paid the last penny, that is, till we are pure; for no one can see God till he is pure. This is in harmony with one of the beatitudes: “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.”

Purity of heart is our proximate goal. Our ultimate goal is the vision of God. We have to begin it while still in this present life. We can attain to this if we will endeavor to put into practice the teaching of Christ. We can put into practice His teaching when we invest a good amount of time in reading the Scripture and also of praying. These are reservoir of graces which give us a good supply of strength, courage, wisdom, and perseverance to do what is good, right, and true and be pleasing in God's sight.

The word of God has a tremendous power to cleanse us if we approach it with reverence, removing the sandals of our own selfish resistance, and give it a chance to work in our heart and mind in order to transform us into Christ Himself – to grow into mature manhood to the fullness of the stature of Christ.

Prayer, too, has powerful cleansing effect, especially if it is said with humility. Common sense dictates that no one would approach a king with arrogance not even the queen. How much more the ordinary people.

If our prayer is true, little by little, it will change us into a person whom God wants us to be. Prayer is like a devouring fire that consumes the rust of our weaknesses and makes it into an iron of flexible strength. It has also a power to cleanse our mouth from deceitful speech. The prophet Isaiah is a good example of this when

he said: "woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of people of unclean lips...." But one of the Seraphim flew to him, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And the Seraphim touched his lips, and said: "Behold, this has touched your mouth; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven."

St. Benedict said that our prayers are being carried by our angel to God. Thus prayer is very important for healing and cleansing of our soul, especially if the sin is not mortal, as St. John says: "If any one sees his brother committing what is not a mortal sin, he will ask, and God will give him life for those whose sin is not mortal. There is sin which is mortal; I do not say that one is to pray for that." In this case it needs a sacramental confession. →

### **Icon # 157 = God Bowed the Heavens: Humility of God**

"He bowed the heavens, and came down; thick darkness was under his feet."

In the book of revelation, John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and he heard a great voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them...."

We wonder why God has to bow the heavens and then come down. Why not just go straight down? God bowed the heavens, and then came down to show us the importance of humility. The more exalted a person is the more he has to humble himself. Heaven is glorious and exalted because it is the dwelling place of God, but God bowed it in order for it to become the eternal home of the human race. Who would be able to ascend to heaven if Christ had not descended from heaven?

He humbled Himself and came down to become a man like us in all things except sin. This is like a thick darkness under His feet because of the unfathomable depth of its mystery. We have only to enter into this thick darkness and let our faith be our light to guide us while walking in this present life, for whoever follows Him will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life because to Our Lord Jesus darkness is not dark at all and the night is as clear as day.

This thick darkness which is under His feet reminds us that all things are under His dominion: things in heaven, things on earth and under the earth. Thick darkness is also an image of sin and death, but it is under His feet because it doesn't have power over Him. He conquered death by His resurrection from the dead, and sin by extending forgiveness to repentant sinners for He did not come to call the self-righteous but sinners to repentance. →

### **Icon # 158 = Wings of the Wind: God Joy Riding**

“He rode on a cherub, and flew; he came swiftly upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness his covering around him, his canopy thick clouds dark with water.”

Nowadays, people who own a Mercedes Benz or a Rolls Royce or a Ferrari would undoubtedly feel comfortable, but none of these can fly. If they have a private plane they normally would use it for business trip or political endeavor and not just for the sake of joy riding.

Abraham, Moses, and the ancient prophets never thought of the days when man would be able to invent airplanes and rockets to explore the world and a little part of the universe. Noah, who with his genius in building ship, certainly had not toyed the idea of building a cargo plane to transport all his family and animals.

Yet, all these modern human inventions with all its sophisticated parts are as nothing compared to a single cherub who is highly honored to be the carrier of God. Even the ass which God rode in His entry to Jerusalem is more honorable and far brighter and intelligent than any Mercedes Benz or Rolls Royce primarily because the ass is created by God whereas an automobile is only created by man; secondly, no automobile or airplane will move without man using it. By itself it won't move, whereas the ass, at least, can roam around and enjoy the beauty of the meadow and eats little grass when it is hungry, can look for cool water when it is thirsty but a Mercedes Bens will just wallow in its misery even though it looks attractive to the eyes of its owner and flatters the hearts of the envious.

If an ass is far superior to any automobile on account of its being, how much more a cherub whose intelligent surpasses that all the minds of the people of this world even if they are combine together.

Cherub is an angel, so it travels in a speed of thought. In this case, the speed of rockets will be just like a turtle and that of a Rolls Royce or Mercedes Benz or Ferrari will be as non-moving. We, too, are carriers of God when we are in the state of grace because we the temple of the Holy Spirit and that God lives in us.

Just as an automobile or motorcycle or bicycle or an airplane is at the service of its owner, so we, too, are also in the service of God.

Some people use automobile as their house where they can easily travel from place to place as they desire. God makes us His home when we keep His words, for it is the surest sign that we love Him, as He 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 I will love him and manifest myself to him....If a



man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

By making us His home, God has highly exalted us to travel with Him beyond the boundary of this present life to the threshold of the other world which has been prepared for us since the foundation of the universe where we will behold the glory of our eternal home, a glory which no eye has seen, nor ear heard nor it enters into the heart of the human person what God has prepared for those who love Him. We travel with God in the wings of thoughts and desires, for where our treasure is there our heart be also. →

### **Icon # 159 = Darkness: God wrapped in Mystery**

“He made darkness his covering around him, his canopy thick cloud dark with water.”

I have not been to many places in the world but I still believe that it is a universal practice, irrespective of one's religion, nationality, race, and culture, that people use curtains or blinders in their houses.

In the other verse I said that the humility of God in humbling Himself to become man, like us in all things except sin, is like a thick darkness because of its unfathomable mystery.

In this current verse, He made darkness His covering around Him, that is, that there is something in God which will remain a mystery even in heaven where we will see Him as He is and revealed to us as we are able and capable. His canopy thick clouds dark with water. Canopy is also a form of covering. It is interesting to notice that even though this canopy is so dark yet it is with water, that is, that the mystery of God which we entered into and lived is laden with graces and blessings.

Christians, especially Catholics, believe that Jesus Christ is the Word of God made flesh. Thus in Our Lord Jesus we are laden with graces and blessings in spite of the fact that He is wrapped in mystery. For instance, the mystery of the Incarnation itself and the mystery of the Holy Eucharist. Yet these are reservoirs of an unimaginable sources of blessings that sustain us in this present till we arrive back to our true and lasting place in heaven itself.

Listen to what the prophet Isaiah says: “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent.”

So, when the Son of God came into our world He waters us with His teaching making men and women who graciously responded to His call to follow Him bring forth the fruits of sanctity: Peace, patience, joy, humility, self-control, continence, and love.

He made darkness His covering around Him, yet He also promise that who ever follows Him will not walk in the darkness of sin but will have the light of life. →

### **Icon # 160 = Brightness: Divine Self-Communication**

“Out of the brightness before him there broke through his clouds hailstones and coals of fire. The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered his voice, hailstones and coals of fire. And he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; he flashed forth lightnings, and routed them.”

Thus out of the brightness of His divine self-communication there broke through the cloud of His humanity hailstones of mercy, forgiveness, and healing and coals of fire of transformation and purification that cleanse our hearts and our lips. These coals of fire remind us of the coal that touches the lips of the prophet Isaiah and cleanses his heart by the forgiveness of his sins.

Like the prophet Isaiah we, too, need the cleansing of our lips and our hearts, so that no evil words will come out from our mouth because all these come from the heart. We are instructed that no evil word should come from our mouth but only such as edifying that it may impart grace to the hearers. The Lord also thundered in the heavens and uttered His voice saying: “Who is he who longs for life and desires to see prosperous days? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.” These are obvious signs that a person is longing for life, not just ordinary life but eternal life, a life full of prosperous and blissful days for we will see the Being, Truth, Goodness, and Beauty of our God who knows no setting.

Nowadays, many people around the world want to have a prosperous days and even to have beautiful skin, but doesn't keep the tongue from gossiping and backbiting and fabricating false stories against other people. So, instead of seeing prosperous days they ended up in experiencing miserable days because once the persons they backbite and gossiped knew about it they, in turn, will say evil words against them.

Thus they are caught in the cycle of evil and deceit. They are strangers to peace. To them the Lord also thundered in the heavens and uttered His voice saying: “how long will your hearts be closed, will you love what is futile and seek what is false?” “You do this and I keep silence. Do you think I am like you?”

But the Lord grants favors to those whom He loves, those who, not only departed from evil but also did what is good, and those who embraced peace rather than quarrel. They are the peacemakers and peace lovers. We have also to admit, though, that there are people who prefer quarrel, conflict, division, and even war than peace or negotiation towards peace, as the Psalmist says: "I am for peace, but when I speak they are for fighting."

They are warlike people who delight in war. Thus God sent out His arrows and scattered them; He flashed forth lightnings and routed them. God sent out His arrows of humility and charity and scattered them in the imagination of their hearts as though heaping up burning coals on their heads. He flashed forth lightnings of truth and justice and routed them so that no human being would boast in the presence of God. →

### **Icon # 161 = Word of God laid bare Everything Hidden**

"Then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were laid bare, at thy rebuke O Lord, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils."

In the letter to the Hebrews we are told that "the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

Just as the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were laid bare at the rebuke of the Lord, at the blast of His nostrils, so, too, the thoughts and intentions of our hearts are laid bare by the Word of God. It's the Word of God really that judges us. That is why it is very wise and prudent to strive to the best of our beings to make our life in conformity with God's Word, as Christ said: "If anyone hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day."

The Word of God, then, is like the sun that laid bare the things of this world which at night are hidden and unseen. Undoubtedly, many people in this world are enveloped in the night of sensual passion and corruption and they even prefer darkness than light because of the nature of their deeds, but it will be laid bare on the day when all people has to do a reckoning of what they have done in their bodies. We will be held accountable even of the idle words that come from our mouths, because these, too, come from the heart. We will do well if only we take time during the day or night to dig down into our hearts to see

things that need to be rectified and pardoned. Probably we can also see there things that evoke a gentle laughter.

We need nothing to fear to laid bare our hearts and souls to God. Anyhow whether we like it or not God still knows it because nothing is hidden from Him. It is to our own benefit to cultivate the good habit of being honest to God and to ourselves – be transparent. →

### **Icon # 162 = In the State of Grace: Protection against the enemies of the soul**

“He reached from on high, he took me, he drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from those who hated me; for they were too mighty for me. They came upon me in the day of my calamity; but the Lord was my support.”

The 1<sup>st</sup> letter of Peter encourages us to cast all our anxieties on God, for He cares for us. We have also to resist our strong enemy the devil, and his angels who hated us so fiercely like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Undoubtedly, they are mighty for us and by our own natural power we cannot hope to conquer them, but with the Lord as our support we are assured of victory. We can do all things through Him who strengthens us and are more than conquerors because by His victory over the three-fold temptations in the desert and by His victory over death itself He gives us his own strength to bind the strong man the devil himself so that he can do no harm to us.

When St. Therese of the child Jesus was still little she saw a demon, but when she gazed at him he ran away. St. Therese realized that demons are afraid of souls who are in the state of grace. She was around four years old at that time.

When we are in the state of grace, then, we don't have to fear what befalls on us, first and foremost, because God will not put us on trial beyond our strength to endure, and secondly, all things work together for good with those who love God.

So long as we are still in this present world we are expected to pass through many tribulations before we can enter the kingdom of heaven, but we have only to be of good cheer because Our Lord has overcome the world. Thus we have to be patient in our trials and sufferings, but at the same time we have also to rejoice in our hope.

Our Lord Jesus reached us out from heaven and drew us out of many troubles to be His own possession and He, in turn, will be our inheritance. We have a guarantee of this when He pours into our hearts His own spirit to help and guide us in all our ways. His Spirit will become in us a spring of living water welling up inexhaustively, supplying us courage on the day of our calamity, for it is when

we are in low moments that our strong enemy comes upon us trying the best he can to separate us from God. But so long as we resist him, firm in our faith, he is powerless over us. This means that he has power over us only when we allow him to do so – we freely give our consent to him.

This is paradoxical. Our enemy is strong, but he is so weak. He is powerful, but he is powerless. He is bold in his temptations and suggestions to make us do or say things which are not good, but he is so coward when we gaze at him by prayer and humility, calling upon the name of the Lord.

Thus God gives us all the means to conquer our strong and mighty enemy. Every time that we brush away his evil advances we knocked him out. We have only to be careful of complacency because he will strike back when we give him opening. Some of his blows are also strong that can knock us out too. Take for example his blow of pride. If we are hit by it that would be enough for us to fall like a log. The chief of the angels was hit by it and he fell like a lightning from heaven. Another example of his blow is lust. This blow can drive a person crazy if he is not protected by the grace of God.

There's a story in the desert fathers about a young monk who was troubled by this blow of lust. He went to an older monk for help, but the older monk reprimanded him for having this lust. The young monk was so dejected to the point of despair. He met another elder who asked him what happened. When the young monk told him what happened, he consoled the young monk. Then he prayed that the older man who was unkind to the young monk will be hit by this blow, too. Suddenly, the older monk was punched by it and almost drove him crazy. He wandered restlessly like a chicken without a head.

So, unless we are sustained by the grace of God we will easily be held hostage by our enemy. The worst tragedy would be if we deliberately handed ourselves over to him by carrying out in action what he suggested in thought.

Christ told us that our own enemies will be those in our own household, that is, our own enemies are within us. We will identify some of them so that when they appear we can recognize them. They are pride, lust, vainglory/vanity, anger, gluttony, etc. They are our official enemies. They are really plenty. Unless we exercise a serious vigilance and are faithful to our prayer life, giving priority to it over our other works, that is, to spend a quality time for it everyday and never neglect it for whatever reason, we will always be wounded in our combat with them.

We have to be watchful over our hearts to be able to detect them when they appear. Some of them are very slippery. We slide before we notice it. Take for example gossiping and backbiting and useless chatter. Even religious people are easily held captive by these enemies of the soul. For most people, these

kinds of enemies are not considered dangerous. They even made alliance with it carelessly forgetting that it will be to their disadvantage because it will end up to their ruin, as the Scripture says that there are ways which seem right to a human person but its end is death. Our Lord Jesus also said that even the idle words that come from our mouth will give account on the day of judgment.

Greed and dishonesty are also among our enemies. They are no respecter of person. They attack the rich and poor alike. The rich by wanting still to amass riches, saying to their hearts: "What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?'...'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, '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."

Dishonesty is a very dangerous enemy too, for it undermines the trust and confidence we have for one another.

All these come from the heart. However, →

### **Icon # 163 = Broad Place: Heart of God**

"He brought me forth into a broad place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me."

Our father, St. Benedict, said in his rule that the way to God is bound to be narrow at the outset but once we make progress in the spiritual life we shall run with unspeakable sweetness in the path of God's commandments with our hearts being enlarged. Enlargement of our hearts is tantamount to a broad place, a broad horizon of what is good, right, and true.

This broad place is no other than the heart of God Himself. For what is bigger and broader than the heart of God? His heart is a place where we can find mercy, healing, forgiveness, respect, freedom, courtesy, thoughtfulness, and everything lovable and wholesome that surpasses all knowledge and understanding. It is a spacious place to rest when we are tired from the drudgery of human life. "Come to me," He said, "all of you who are heavily laden and find life burdensome and I will give you rest."

He delivered us from the slavery of sin and brought us out from the seduction of the world because His delight is upon the human race. He died for us that we may live and have life abundantly. By His death He delivers us from eternal death and brings us to the broad place of heaven where we shall always be

with Him wherever he goes and behold His unspeakable glory which was His for all eternity and now He wants to give it to us because of His delight in us.

Why is it that God is so delighted in us, we who are just dust and ashes and many times have offended Him in many ways? One possible answer is that we are His handiwork, the work of His hands, the crown of all His creation, as the Psalmist says: "What is man that you are mindful of him or the son of man that you care for him? You made him little less than the angels and crown him with glory and honor and put all things under his feet." "Can a woman forget her sucking child that she would not have pity on the son of her womb? Even if she forgets," God said, "I will not forget you."

There was a young lad who grew up by the seaside. He was absolutely fascinated with boats. So he got a small block of timber and began to carve a model boat for himself. This boat was going to be just perfect, because it would represent everything beautiful that he had ever seen in boats.

When he was finished, he painted it his favorite color, and even put his own name on it. Then he rigged up tiny sails, and the labor of love was complete. But it would not be real boat, he realized, unless he put it into the water. So, down to the sea he went and watched proudly as it bobbed along on the waves. He was proud of it, and was so lost in his admiration that it was some time before he realized what was happening.

He had given the boat sails and the wind was blowing it firmly but gently farther and farther away from him. He called out to it, as if it could obey him, but it was now under another influence. He watched in horror and pain as it drifted out of sight. He was so upset that when he went home, he didn't sleep much for a few nights.

Then one day as he was passing a toy store, he was jolted out of his depression by the sight of a toy boat in the window, and yes, it was his boat! He rushed in eagerly to claim it. But the storekeeper coldly dismissed his claims, saying that it belonged to him now, and if the boy wanted it, he would have to buy it. So the boy rushed home and told his father. He asked his father how much he should pay for the boat, and his father replied: "If you really need to get that boat, you will give everything you have to get it."

So the boy emptied out all of his saving boxes and ran down to the store with every penny he had. He dumped the money on the counter without even checking how much it was, and he rushed out of the door with his beloved boat. He was so delighted, he rubbed it, hugged it, and ran back home to show his father. "Good on you!" said his father, "So the boat is yours now." "It sure is mine!" said the boy. "I made it and then I bought it back, and gave all I owned to get it. It's mine for sure, only now it's mine twice over."

We are that boat and Our Lord Jesus is that boy. He made us and we belong to Him. We are going to be just perfect, because we represent the beauty of the Father who is perfect, and besides, we are made in His own image and likeness.

He painted us with His favorite color of humility and even put His own name on our souls in the day of our baptism as an indelible mark that we are His. Then He gave us our human freedom, as our sail, that we may freely love Him as He loves us – only that we will not use our freedom as a pretext for doing evil and as an opportunity for the flesh to indulge its desires.

Then we are exposed into this world and being carried away by its spirit. We become worldly and follow the trends of the world. We are held captive by it in our hearts although we still profess to be Christians in our lips. We even invoke His name from time to time and acknowledge Him as our Lord, especially when things go well, or at other times when we are in trouble.

But this horrifies Our Lord because He knows that not everyone who says to Him: “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the harbor/kingdom of heaven.” We make friends with the world unabashed taking into little account the warning that friendship with the world is enmity with God.

But what can we do since we are carnal, sold under sin? We do not understand our own actions, we are confused. We can will what is right but cannot do it, for we do not do the good we want, but the evil we do not want is what we do. Now if we do what we do not want, it is no longer we that do it, but sin which dwells within us. We can delight in the law of God in our inmost self, but there’s also in our body another law at war with the law of our mind and making us captive to the law of sin which dwells in our members. Who can deliver us from this body of death?

Thanks be to God through Our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. He destined us in love to be His children through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished upon us. He ransomed us with His precious blood like that of a lamb without a blemish or spot, for God so loved the world that He sent His only Son not to condemn the world but that through Him the world might be saved and that whoever believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life. He delivered us because He delighted in us.



## Icon # 164 = Faith and Work: Basis of One's Righteousness

"The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his ordinances were before me, and his statutes I did not put away from me. I was blameless before him, and I kept myself from guilt. Therefore the Lord has recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight."

In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul pointed out that one's righteousness is now based on faith as in the case of Abraham. "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness....' In hope he believed against hope that he should become the father of many nations; as he had been told, 'So shall your descendants be.' He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was good as dead because he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. That is why his faith was 'reckoned to him as righteousness.'"

However, we are also told that "faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead," as St. James said. He goes on to say, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works, and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'"

There's no real contradiction between faith and work as the basis of our righteousness. In the first case, St. Paul puts a heavy accent on the importance of faith, while in the second case; St. James emphasizes the importance of both.

Taking these two cases together, we can say that our faith is the mainspring of all our works. Our works have to proceed from our faith. Work is the handmaid of faith. However, we will be judged according to what we have done in our body, as the author of the book of revelation says: "I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they have done." At the end of that book of revelation, Our Lord said, "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay everyone for what he has done." For he will render to every human person according to his works: '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 everyone who does good."

Blessed are we if we keep the ways of the Lord, for His ways are faithfulness and love. They are ways that lead us to the inner chamber of our heart where God made as His dwelling place, as Christ Himself said: "If anyone keeps my words, my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home within him."

Notice that the Psalmist, after saying: "For I have kept the ways of the Lord," goes on to say: "and have not wickedly departed from my God." Reading between lines on this passage gives us an insight of the possibility that there were times that the psalmist, for whatever reason, has departed from his God but not wickedly.

It also shows us his sound self-knowledge, that is, at least he knows that there were times that he departed from God. This makes sense especially when we realize that sin is a movement away from God, a sort of departure from God. We are told by St. John that if a person says he has no sin he lies and the truth is not in him. He himself is not exempted in this because he, too, is a human person even though he is the most beloved disciple of Our Lord.

The only exemption of this is the Blessed Virgin Mary who is pure and stainless because by special privilege she was preserved from sin right from the moment of her conception. All her movements are always toward God, not away from Him. Whereas we, there were times in our lives that we moved away from God and went to another place, a faraway place, a place of unlikeness to God.

In our baptism, we belong to the household of God, that is, we live with Him. But when we sin we moved away from Him. This departure from God varies in distances. If it is grievous or wicked, then, it's very far. That is why in the story of the prodigal son it is highlighted that he went to a very far place and squandered his inheritance with loose women. Undoubtedly, this involves fornication. Fornication is a deadly sin. Therefore, the movement is very far.

In the case of the Psalmist, it sounds that his sin is not mortal in the sense that he did not "wickedly departed" from his God. In our case, if we are honest and healthy enough, we can still notice this inclination to depart away from God. In some cases, we did depart from Him though it may not be that far, that is, not wickedly.

For instance, we moved away from God when we engaged ourselves in gossiping and backbiting, when we are disputing about words which does no good but only ruins the hearer, when we are engaged in godless chatter which only lead people into more and more ungodliness for our talks will eat its way

like a gangrene. Besides, we are told by Our Lord that every idle word that comes from our mouth will give account on the Day of Judgment.

But we wickedly departed from God when we deliberately, that is, with full knowledge and with full consent did wicked things such as murder, thief, adultery, dishonesty, greediness, vanity, and anything involving lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Certainly, the only thing that can prevent us from wickedly departing from God is to put His ordinances before us and anchor ourselves to Our Lord with love, because it's the nature of love to desire to be always with his/her beloved and not to be departed from the person we love. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him/her. →

### **Icon # 165 = Loyalty, Blameless, and Purity**

“With the loyal thou dost show thyself loyal; with the blameless man thou dost show thyself blameless; with the pure thou dost show thyself pure; and with the crooked thou dost show thyself perverse.”

St. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, says: “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the spirit will from the spirit reap eternal life.”

So, if we sow the seed of loyalty we will also harvest loyalty, that is to say, people will be likely loyal to us. However, this doesn't mean that there's no more room for betrayal from other people. We will still experience betrayals, infidelities, disloyalties but, by and large, loyalty will be close at hand because there will be someone who will remain loyal even if we are deserted by the majority. This someone is no other than Our Lord Jesus. The Blessed Virgin Mary, too, will not forsake us. She will go with us even to our little or big calvaries, just as she remains loyal to her Son, and the Son remains loyal to the Father.

With the blameless God is seen as blameless. He is irreproachable. This means that they don't blame God for the unpleasant things that happen to them. They are like Job who was stricken by litanies of tragedy yet did not blame God for what befell him. Job did rend his robe, and shaved his head, and fell upon the ground, but instead of blaming God for what happened he worshipped Him, that is, he prayed. And in his prayer, he said: “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong. Even when his “unique” wife urged him to curse God, and die; Job still

hold fast to his integrity, and said: "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

When calamities befell upon the blameless people, they won't grumble but would even, say: "You have done it well, my beloved, you have done it well." If it is still going to happen they have the honesty to say, "If it is your will, let this cup pass from me, but if it will not pass unless I drink it, then, not my will but your will be done."

With the pure God shows Himself pure, that is, He is like the sun reflected in the clear water. The pure sees God being reflected in creation, in the beauty and goodness of human beings, in the innocence of little children, in the sanctity of the marriage bed, in the repentant sinner, and in the forgiving heart. He revealed Himself as pure to the pure, so that He will be a paradigm of purity to the pure. The pure are blessed because they shall see God. They may not be as pure as the Blessed Virgin Mary, but at least they are sincere and honest in their dealings with other people.

But with the wicked and crooked God shows Himself perverse. In other words, the cunning He outdo in cunning. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

To the eyes of the crooked God is perverse because God does not agree with the deeds of the crooked for it is perverse to Him. No wonder that when the crooked does not get what they want they will accuse God of many things. God became to them a reproof of their thoughts; the very thought of God is a burden to them, because God's manner of life is unlike theirs, and for them God's ways are strange. This is how God is being perceived by them, but they are led astray for their crookedness blinded them and they did not know the secret purposes of God, nor hope for the wages of holiness, nor discern the prize for blameless life. →

### **Icon # 166 = Humility: Forgiveness and Truth**

"For thou dost deliver the humble people; but the haughty eyes thou bring down."

In her Magnificat, the Blessed Virgin Mary magnifies the Lord, for He has regarded her lowliness; and with eagle's eyes she beheld that God casts down the mighty from their thrones and exalts the lowly.

When the humble prays for forgiveness God will certainly deliver him from his sins. We have an example of this in the life of King David. He had committed serious sins: that of adultery and murder, but in his humility he confesses his sins and was forgiven. He was humble enough to be honest to God and to himself

to be able to acknowledge his sins. Thus he is living in truth. Since he is living in truth he is a disciple of Him who said: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

Christ said of Himself as the good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. Sheep are humble animal. They are also gentle and graciously follow the Shepherd where he leads them. Instinctively, the Shepherd delivers them and protects them from anything that could harm them, especially the wolf.

Our Lord Jesus, undoubtedly, delivers us from the grip of sin when we received the sacrament of reconciliation, for to go to Confession to a priest who is one like us with his sinfulness, too, is a sign of humility. Even a hardened sinner who repents is considered a humble person. But the haughty eyes He brings down, that is, He casts down the arrogant, as Christ said: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."

Those who follow the Evil One will also have a share of his fall, because God opposes the proud. Proud people are so disgusting to God, because even though they are nothing they act, speak, and think that they are something, whereas God in the person of Christ Jesus humbles Himself and became obedient unto death even death on the cross.

Some people with haughty eyes have a piercing way of looking at their acquaintances. They will look from head to foot. They will even repeat it when necessary. In other words, they have a penchant of scrutinizing people outwardly whether they are of different species. But the Lord says: "Behold, I am against you, O proud one, says the Lord God of hosts; for your days has come, the time when I will punish you. The proud one shall stumble and fall, with none to raise him up, and I will kindle a fire in his cities, and it will devour all that is round about him." All these actions of God are fair enough because He opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. →

### **Icon # 167 = God lightens Darkness**

"Yea, thou dost light my lamp; the Lord my God lightens my darkness."

It has been said that no matter how great progress we made in the spiritual life we will be deceived if we think there's nothing more in us that has to be removed. It's like peeling an onion. We removed the first layer then the next, and so on, until we reached the core which is pure and bright. Thus there's a need for interior purification.

Our Lord also said that the eye is the lamp of the body. So, if our eye is sound, our whole body will be full of light; but if our eye is not sound, our whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in us is darkness, how great is the darkness!

If we think we are already something when in fact we are nothing, then we are in darkness. If we say we love God but hate our brother or sister, we are in darkness. If we confess in our lips but denying the power of it in our heart, we are in darkness still. If we do mighty deeds in God's name but at the same time we are also moon lighting in doing evil deeds, we are in darkness. Our lamp is not burning.

On the other hand, if today we hear His voice and harden not our heart, then a flicker of light starts to shine in our soul. If we share our bread with the hungry, cloth the naked, care the sick, shelter the homeless, defend the poor and the powerless, honest in our work, faithful in our commitment, then we are not walking in darkness but have the light of life.

It is a luminous sign that we are following Him who says: "I am the light of the world. Everyone who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

Following Christ means putting into practice His teachings. His teachings are brilliant lights that if we do it we will not walk in darkness. If we don't put it into practice we are in darkness still. Let us pray, then, that God may lightens our darkness, and for the grace to be able to do His will. →

### **Icon # 168 = By God and the Saints: Crushing a Troop and leaping over a wall**

**"Yea, by thee I can crush a troop; and by my God I can leap over a wall."**

No doubt that when we are in the state of grace we have a tremendous power to crush a troop of vices and leap over a wall of difficulty. This is owing to God's grace – not our own. With God at our right hand we shall not be moved by trial or adversity or distress, for He is there to uphold us, to support and strengthen us. If God is with us, who is against us?

By Our God we can leap over a wall, because He will not allow us to be tempted beyond our strength but in the time we are tempted He will provide for us a way to leap over it, that is, overcome it.

Prayer plays an important role in this crushing a troop and leaping over a difficulty, because prayer is the key that opens the treasury of God's graces. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary is of great help, because she is the Mediatrix of all graces.

All the graces we received from God we received from her and through her. In other words, it passes through her. God wills this to be so. This is very apparent when God sent His only son to the world, but He did it through the Blessed Virgin Mary through the Incarnation. Christ is the greatest gift that God the Father

gave to humanity, but this gift passes through Our Lady. So, through her we can crush all the enemies of our soul, for we are her seeds and has given power to crush the head of the serpent, that is, the Evil One. We can crush his head when we recourse to prayer and ask Christ's help or the Blessed Virgin's help. We have to put all our trust in them and then we will know by our own experience how true it is that they are more eager to help us than in our desire to ask for help.

The saints, too, who are our faithful allies, are also very willing to offer their services to us. They intercede to God for us that one day we will be with them forever. They, too, were able to crush a troop of passions while still on earth and leap over the walls of problems.

With Our Lord Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all the angels and saints in heaven to support us we are assured of our victory, for we are more than conquerors through them who love us. We have only to go placidly amidst the trials and challenges of life. →

### **Icon # 169 = God's Way is Perfect: His Promise proves True**

"This God – his way is perfect; the promise of the Lord proves true; he is a shield for all those take refuge in him."

God's way is perfect because He Himself is perfect. Is there any god like our God who would command to love our enemies instead of hating them, to pray for those who persecute us instead of inflicting vengeance? Is there any god like our God who is so meek and humble of heart who could say to His adorers, "Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you?"

Isn't this way so perfect? Yes, it's the way to perfection. Everyone who traverses this way would not walk in darkness. It's narrow at the outset, but constant doing it expands our hearts and enables us to persevere in the path of God's commandments which leads to the kingdom of heaven.

This is the kingdom which God has promised to those who love Him, as Our Lord Jesus said: "Come to me blessed of my Father and inherit the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world." This promise proves true, especially in the person of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints who are now in heaven.

Christ promises us eternal life as our everlasting inheritance, for He is the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Him, though he die, yet shall he live; and whoever lives and believes in Him shall never die. God alone can promise

eternal life, for it is His forever – without beginning and without end. He intends to divinize us, so that we participate fully in His divine life and be with Him forever. We begin participating in His divine life here and now through His Spirit He graciously bestowed on us as a guarantee of our future inheritance until we took full possession of it.

He also promises us that He will be with us till the end of time when He said: “Behold, I am with you always till the consummation of the world.” This proves true by giving Himself, body, blood, soul, humanity, and divinity in the Holy Eucharist. By giving Himself to us in the Eucharist He, not only, becomes our food and drink but, also our shield because the Eucharist is a good place to take refuge to, for it is God Himself taking a form that doesn’t dazzle our gaze. It is the heart of God Himself given for our sustenance. Thus we are refugees in the heart of God and is being nourished by His own Body and Blood.

Taking refuge in Him is equivalent to saying: “We believe in Him.” If we have faith in God it means we have a shield to protect us from despair or discouragement when things do not work out well. It can quench all the flaming darts of temptations and evil influences, as St. Paul said: “above all taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one.” “This God – his way is perfect; the promise of the Lord proves true; he is a shield for all those take refuge in him.” →

### **Icon # 170 = The Lord Jesus is God**

“For who is God, but the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God? – God who girded me with strength, and made my way safe.”

For us Christians the Lord Jesus is Our God. He is a rock where we can build the house of our faith and stand firm when the rain and floods of trials and sufferings fell upon us and the wind of calamities and difficulties assail us.

He is a rock when struck by sincere repentance cracks our hard hearts and let the tears of compunction gush forth to cleanse our dark souls. This tear is like honey from the heart of Christ, for it makes our souls sweet in its disposition, pleasant in its demeanor, and graceful in its speech. It is the mighty grace of God that works it in us, that takes the heart of stones and gives us a heart of flesh.

For who is God, but the Lord Jesus? He is the Word by whom all things in the heavens and on the earth are made. He has power to set us free from the corruption of sin and death, from dishonesty and infidelity, from greed and vanity and make us children of God, children of light.



For who is God, but the Lord Jesus who laid down His life for us? He has power to lay it down and to take it back again. This command He received from the Father of light in whom there is no variation due to change.

He is a rock where we can take refuge and have little rest in times of distress – the God who girded us with inner strength that we may be able to face squarely the challenges and problems that come our way.

A virtuous life that is built on this rock is not shaken by fear nor by discouragement when the wind of indifference of other people buffeted us, but still ready to love and wills for their good so that they, too, may travel safely on the road to freedom and love where peace that surpasses understanding is tasted like bread from a pure wheat and wine from the choicest grapes which nourishes both body and soul. He also girded us with strength to forgive, for we, too, are forgiven sinners.

He made our way safe because, aided by His grace, we are able to walk on the path of His commandments. Just as God made us in His own image and likeness, so He made our way safe like His, because He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Thus if we say we abide in Him we ought to walk in the same way in which He walked. It's a way of righteousness and love. It's a safe way, but it doesn't mean it is an easy way. On the contrary, it is a hard way. Only few find it. →

### **Icon # 171 = Hind's Feet: Secure on the Heights**

"He made my feet like hind's feet, and set me secure on the heights."

Our feet are like a hind's feet when we are fervent to attend prayer services. In the monastery we call it divine office.

One of the criterias which St. Benedict gave for vocational discernment is whether the novice is zealous for the work of God, Opus Dei. It suggests a certain eagerness. Our feet are the vehicles of our body. They carry us wherever we want to go. If we go to help other people and to be of service and comfort for them, then, our feet are like hind's feet.

We have an example of this in Our Lady. Her feet are like hind's feet because she was so eager to travel that far to be of service to her cousin Elizabeth in time of her pregnancy. Notice that it is God who made our feet like hind's feet. It means that any good thing we do is not our own doing but it is owing to God's grace working in us. It is not we who made our feet like hind's feet but God. So the glory must be attributed to God and not to ourselves, for we are only servants who did what need to be done.

Even Christ Himself attributed all His works to the Father, saying: "The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing, for whatever the Father does the Son does likewise."

Christ's feet are like hind's feet because He went to every city and town to preach the good news of the kingdom healing every kind of sickness, feeding the hungry, cleansing lepers, casting out demons, raising the dead, etc.

There are many ways, therefore, that our feet resemble that of a hind – when we are zealous of doing good works and when we give ourselves to one another in charity, especially when we do it with Mary. Again, this is owing to God's grace because this is tantamount to setting us secure on the heights, that is, if we are with God and with our Lady and pursue whatever is good, right, and true, then, we are secure. It is this time that the muscles of our souls become stronger – ready for spiritual combat. →

### **Icon # 172 = Training for War**

"He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze."

Christ trains our hands for spiritual combat, first, by inspiring us to pray; 2<sup>nd</sup>, by encouraging us to read books that help us how to live a good Christian lives; 3<sup>rd</sup>, be telling us to work because idleness is the enemy of the soul, and in the sweat of our brow we shall eat bread....

If these things are ours and abound they make our hearts and minds stable, not being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine formulated by the sophistication of men. It makes our arms able to bend our own will in favor that of the others in imitation of Christ who came not to do His own will but the will of Him who sent Him.

Finally, it makes us strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might, ready to engage in a worthy and meaningful combat against our own passions and evil desires, against worldly values that strangle the growth of our spirit preventing us to bear fruit that befits repentance.

Therefore, we have to take the whole armor of God that we may be able to withstand in the evil day of adversity, and having done all, to stand in the presence of our God, for with Him at our side we shall not be moved. We have to stand, therefore, having gird our loins with truth: truth about ourselves, truth about God, and truth about human beings.

We have also to put on the breastplate of righteousness, and shod our feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; above all taking the shield of faith with which we can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. We have also to take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God that

is living and active, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of our hearts.

To sustain us in this spiritual combat and give us more energy and strength, we have to pray at all times in the spirit, with all prayer and supplication. Having a good training and being equipped with the paraphernalia of war, we are in a fairly good position to stand against the wiles of the devil who, at other times, transformed himself into an angel of light, that is to say, he has a cunning way to make something evil appear like an apparent good. But we are not ignorant of his designs, as St. Paul says. At least our conscience can detect this. If we are really sincere in our search for God and have good will, God will not permit us to be tempted beyond our strength. →

### **Icon # 173 = Shield of Salvation: True Greatness**

“Thou hast given me the shield of thy salvation, and thy right hand supported me, and thy help made me great.”

In the paraphernalia of spiritual combat, the shield of faith is for quenching all the flaming darts, that is to say, advances or temptations, of the evil one. Since we believe in God, He has given His salvation as our shield to be sure that no one will be able to snatch us out from His hand, for if we believe that Jesus is Lord and that God raised Him from the dead, then, we shall be saved. Of course, believing here goes hand in hand with living an upright life – doing what is good and avoiding what is evil.

Our Lord does not leave us to struggle with the Christian life alone. He will support us so that we will be able to put into practice His teaching, for it is not enough to believe in Him if we do not do the will of God, which is our sanctification. It's even dangerous because not all who say to Him: “Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven but only those who do the will of my Father in heaven.”

His right hand supported us so that we will not be cast down by criticism nor elated by praise. It would be a great tragedy if His right hand does not support us, because unless the Lord builds the house those who labor on it labor in vain. But if the Lord is for us who will be against us? They will be able to kill our body, if they wish to, but they cannot kill our soul because the right hand of the Lord supported us and His help made us great.

True greatness comes from God alone. The poorest among the poor who serves God is greater than a king of this world unless that king, too, serves God. We are truly great only if we live a virtuous life. And we cannot live a virtuous life unless

we abide in God, for apart from Him we can do nothing – not even to think of good. But with His help we can do everything, for nothing is impossible to Him.

We are also great when we pray, for it is in prayer that we receive all the necessary help we need to accomplish the work assign to us, because to pray is to acknowledge our dependence on God.

We have to be convinced that zeal for prayer is food and strength for the soul, a protection against dangers of all kinds, and a bulwark in time of temptation. Let us rest assured that we can never overcome our carnal appetites if God does not give us help, and this help we cannot have without prayer, but if we pray we shall assuredly have power to resist the devil in everything, and the strength of God who strengthens us, as St. Paul says: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

Thus God's help made us great because it leads us to the kingdom of heaven where the least is greater than John the Baptist. We are also great when we learn to forgive because it is an imitation of Our Lord Himself. To err is human but to forgive is divine. →

### **Icon # 174 = Pursuing the Enemies of the Soul in the Highway of Our God**

"Thou didst give a wide place for my steps under me, and my feet did not slip. I pursued my enemies and overtook them; and did not turn back till they were consumed. I thrust them through, so that they were not able to rise; they fell under my feet. For thou didst gird me with strength for the battle; thou didst make my assailants sink under me. Thou didst make my enemies turn their backs to me, and those who hated me I destroyed."

If the ways of dishonesty, vanity, and infidelity are slippery and murky, the ways of virtues are certainly spacious and gracious. It may be narrow at the outset but once we keep on passing on it our hearts will be enlarged and what we did before with fear and awkwardness we now perform naturally and gracefully.

It is a wide place for our steps because it is the highway of Our God. It is a way of faithfulness and truth. Justice and peace walk on this way too, guiding people to the land of freedom as children of the Most High God who walk not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinner; for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

On this highway, there's a guarantee that we can fairly pursue our enemies, such as: gluttony and melancholy and overcome them by moderation and consolation never turning back till they are in subjugation. We have to thrust them through under good control, so that they will not be able to create trouble. Instead of us held captive under their grip, they are now under our feet,

for Our Lord Jesus girded us with strength for the warfare so that we will not be caught unaware.

Avarice and lust are also our assailants but Our Lord will make them sink under us if only in the general trend of our life we are honest and just. We will be tried as silver is tried but we will come out wholly purified. We have only to cooperate with God's grace and we will be amazed how gracious He is.

If only we know what is the immeasurable greatness of His power at work in us who believe we will be confident that we will receive all the necessary graces we need so as not to be deceived by the cunning of the One who tempted Eve.

If we have a good self-knowledge it would not be hard to acknowledge that there are still a good number of assailants within us. We need to keep always on guard even if at times we are haggard lest we will become a bastard.

God seeing, that our enemies will certainly rejoice over us if they are victorious, made them turned their backs to us with all their packs so as to destroy them and grant safety for the redeemed. →

### **Icon # 175 = Help Denied**

"They cried for help, but there was none to save, they cried to the Lord, but he did not answer them" -

Because they honor Him with their lips but their hearts are far from Him. These are the people who cried out, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" But not everyone who says, "Lord, Lord" shall be saved but only those who do the will of God. Thus it is not a guarantee that when we pray God will answer it, especially if we are doing something which is not proper to our way of life – as a sideline. It's even dangerous, because in the end we will hear Him say: "You do this, and I kept silent. Do you think I am like you?" "I do not know you. Depart from me you workers of iniquity."

On the other hand, if we do His will and keep His commands, even before we cry out for help He will answer us because He is very much concern for our well-being and redemption. He even died for us to save us, to give us life and have it to the full. He ransomed us from the futile ways of this world: ways of graft and corruption, prostitution, adultery, and robbery, not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with His precious blood that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

They cried for help but did not receive any help, because they asked wrongly to spend it on their passions and vices. They did not know that friendship with the

world is enmity with God, for whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

However, Our Lord is not praying that we should be taken out of the world but that we should be preserved from the evil One. This means that we should not follow the trend of the world becoming worldly ourselves, but that we should be counter cultural, that is, if the society we live in is advocating the culture of death we should be a staunch defender of the culture of life in its various stages from the moment of conception to natural death. If the society is so hedonistic as though it is the only happiness available we should practice moderation and pursue only those pleasures that are legitimate.

Otherwise we will cry for help, but there will be none to help us unless in our desperation we are humble enough to present our tragedy to the Blessed Virgin Mary, because never was it known that anyone who asked her help was left unaided. She is given to us to appease God's wrath. But if in our pride we don't want to, and would adamantly say: "I will not serve." Then, it would be hard to hear: →

### **Icon # 176 = Dust before the Wind**

"They cried for help, but there was none to save, they cried to the Lord, but he did not answer them."

This is already a dreadful saying. How much frightful it would be to hear a more stern one: "But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me."

And if we deceive ourselves by thinking that we are already His friends just because we call, "Lord, Lord," even without putting into practice His teachings, and would flatter ourselves because we are one of those invited guests who were able to enter the banquet hall for the wedding feast of the Son of God, certainly, He would be polite enough to address us as friend, for He has made known to us the will of the Father, that is, our sanctification; but since we only acknowledge Him with our lips and denied Him by our deeds, He is frank and honest enough to say to us, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?"

Undoubtedly, this will make us confuse. Then He will say to His secret agents/angels in our hearing: "Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth." That is why we have to take seriously our calling in life in whatever state we are in whether we are religious, priests, monks, nuns, single or married.

God is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond we could ever imagine or compare with anything in the whole universe; so, it would be a pity to lose it.

If we seriously would desire what God has prepared for us since the foundation of the world, we have to strive with all our energy to attain it and not to dissipate, not to waste this energy by doing things that are harmful to it; we have to strip ourselves not only of our attachments to material possessions but still more of our former affections, cares, and anxieties.

We are in the world, but we are not of the world. It is not the world that is harmful but the cares of this world; it is not riches that is harmful but the love for riches. The blame, then, should not be on the created things but on the corrupted will.

Worldly thoughts and the cares of life have the same effect on the understanding as a veil draped over our eyes, for the understanding is the eye of our soul. So long as we leave them there we cannot see. Our souls cannot truly serve God if we are too much involved in the distractions and pleasures of this world, because if our senses are constantly bombarded with worldly things, our soul becomes confused and deceived; thus easily falling into error in the discernment of what is good and what is evil.

If we go to such an extent that we would call good evil and evil good, then, at the end of this life if we will not be converted we will be beaten down as dust before the wind, we will be cast out like the mire of the streets. On the other hand, if we put our trust in the Lord and strive to do what is good, right, and true He will guide us in all our ways and even make our enemies be at peace with us. This is owing to God's grace. →

### **Icon # 177 = Humility and Obedience are One in the Restoration**

"Thou didst deliver me from strife with the people; thou didst make me the head of the nations; people whom I had not known served me. As soon as they heard of me they obeyed me; foreigners came cringing to me. Foreigners lost heart, and came trembling out of their fastnesses."

When our lifestyle pleases the Lord, He makes even our critics to be at peace with us, that is to say, we are delivered from unnecessary strife with other people. We will learn how to relate to them in a Christian way, and dealt with them justly. If they are hungry we are willing to give them food; if they will bite us in feeding them we will still do good to them; if they curse us on account of the goodness shown to them we will still pray for them and bless them. Because of the love shown to them we gained them to our side. We forgive them because we, too, have been forgiven by the same Lord.

While we are still in this world tension is inevitable, especially when we live with other people; but if we control the itch of being too self-assertive and are determined not to do our own will we will be delivered from strife with other people. Strife doesn't lead to peace because it doesn't change the heart.

We will live in harmony and peace with one another when we are willing to bear one another's burden. Exercising our little patience will eventually strengthen the bond of unity in our community, for it is in our patience that we share in the suffering of Our Lord Jesus. If we suffer with Him and for Him we will also be glorified with Him.

We share in His Kingship in our baptism, but forfeited it by our sins, and yet restored back to us by our repentance. Since Christ Jesus is the Lord of lords and King of kings, thus He is head not only of the nations but of the entire universe and of the entire heaven and earth and under the earth, so that at the name of the Lord Jesus every knee should bend and every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. He is also the head of His mystical body the church; and people whom He had not known because of their transgressions are now serving Him because of their confessions and contrition.

Confession and contrition are good signs that a person's heart has not hardened. It frees us from the shackles of slavery of sin. It makes our hearts sensitive to the call of obedience not only to legitimate authority but also to our equals. We obey one another out of love for Christ who was always obedient to the Father. If we grow in obedience we also grow in humility. Both of them go together, they are inseparable. Only humble people obey.

In the Rule of St. Benedict it says: "The first step of humility is unhesitating obedience which comes naturally to those who cherish Christ above all...they carry out the superior's order promptly as if the command came from God himself. The Lord says of men like this: 'As soon as they heard of me they obeyed me.'" Such people as these immediately put aside their own concerns, abandon their own will, and lay down whatever they have in hand, leaving it unfinished. With the ready step of obedience they follow the voice of authority in their actions.

If pride is responsible for the fall of man from grace, humility goes a long way towards restoring the original position. Just as pride and rebellion are one in the fall, "I will not serve," said Lucifer, so humility and obedience are one in the restoration, "Behold, I'm the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word," said the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Christian perfection is summed up in Christ-like obedience: "Though he was by nature God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be clung to, but he 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 the cross.” “I came not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me.”

The true lover of Christ always thinks Christ, speaks and venerates Christ, does not doubt that Christ is everywhere present to him; such a person forgets himself, for his mind and desire are wholly with Christ. To the Christ-centered soul, selflessness and obedience become first nature.

On the other hand, foreigners, that is, unrepentant sinners, came cringing to Him, for they will be told: “But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me.” They were given chance after chance after chance to renew their lives, but they despised the invitation to attend the marriage banquet of the Son of God; and not only did they refuse to enter but hinder those who want to. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, would have none of His counsel and despised all His reproof. Therefore, they shall eat the fruit of their way and be sated with their own devices. →

### **Icon # 178 = God: Rock of Salvation**

“The Lord lives; and blessed be my rock, and exalted be the God of my salvation, the God who gave me vengeance and subdued peoples under me; who delivered me from my enemies; yea, thou didst exalt me above my adversaries; thou didst deliver me from men of violence.”

There was never a time nor a moment in which the Lord did not live, for this would be contrary to what He is. He is from eternity to eternity, without beginning or end. All living things have live in Him, and all other things exist because of Him. He is life in itself and the source of all life. Nothing came to be without Him, and nothing would come to be apart from Him.

In Him is life. This life is the light of the world, that is to say, those who believe in Him and walk in His ways even though they die yet they will live forever because they will be united with Him who lives forever to make intercession for them. Thus blessed be our rock who walks with us and guide us in all our ways, so that we will not be lead astray from the right of life, from the highway of eternity.

If we are thirsty for righteousness, kindness, and goodness we have only to come to this rock and drink, for inside this rock is abundant supply of living water springing up to eternal life. He is the source of eternal salvation to all who invoke His name, for everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord in sincerity and humility will be saved.

Exalted be the God of our salvation. He is worthy to be praised, for He has delivered us from the clutches of the enemies of our soul that we may be able to serve Him without fear all the days of our life, and to walk in Holiness of life.

Before we meet Him in one of the avenues of our life we are under the dominion of our passions, walking according to the desires of our body, but now we are encouraged not to yield any member of our body to sin as instrument of wickedness, but to yield ourselves to God as persons who have been brought from death to life, and all the members of our body as instruments of righteousness.

We can do this only if we abide in Christ and He in us, for apart from Him we can just do nothing. Only then that we will be exalted above our adversaries, that is, our passions and our unhealthy desires that waged war against us, as St. James says: "What causes wars, and what causes fightings among you? Is it not your passions that are at war in your members? You desire and do not have; so you kill. And you covet and cannot obtain; so you fight and wage war."

But all this will be subdued once we grow in virtues, for virtues make us mellow and open the gateway of charity to overflow. →

### **Icon # 179 = Extolling God among the Nations: His triumphs in the heart**

"For this I will extol thee, O Lord, among the nations, and sing praises to thy name. Great triumphs he gives to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his descendants forever."

Every victory over our passion or temptation must be attributed to Our Lord and not to us. With the psalmist we have to say: "Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name give the glory." If the Lord had not been on our side when passion and temptation assail us they would have swallowed us alive and that will be the end of our vocation just because we lack attention to God's action.

For us monks and nuns and ordinary people we don't have to travel around the world to extol God among the nations and sing His praises. Certain individuals, by virtue of their office, have that physical privilege to travel abroad to bring the good news of the kingdom of God. By so doing they are extolling God and give honor to His name. An example of this would be popes, foremost is Pope John Paul II, and Mother Teresa of Calcutta who made foundations of her Order to many countries in the world, and other missionaries.

As a religious Order, we have our permanent share in extolling God among the nations because we are an international Order, we are in five continents of the world. Besides, our main task is to sing the praises of God day and night.

As a local community, our physical presence is limited to the place or country we are in, yet even this, by virtue of unity of the communities in our Order we are really extolling and singing the praises of the name of Our God among the nations.

As Christians the name of Our God is Jesus the Word of God made flesh, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the king of the whole universe. Great triumphs were given to Him, especially in His resurrection from the dead. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered; and being made perfect He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.

Millions and millions of people in the world freely gave their lives to Him. He conquered their hearts, first of all, by forgiving their sins; then He showed them steadily His kindness and gave them all the necessary graces to respond to His love.

His triumphs are in the heart of the human persons who are grateful for all that the Lord Jesus underwent for our salvation. He made them sons and daughters of the resurrection who lives their lives no longer for themselves but for Christ who loves them, died for them, and was raised for their justification.

This is the glory of the saints and the steadfast love of God which He shows to His anointed, Christ Jesus Our Lord the bridegroom of the Church, and to those who were born and to those who are yet to be born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. These are the children of God and descendants of David who are destined to sing the praises of God forever. →

### **Icon # 180 = The Heavens: Telling the Glory of God**

#### **Psalm 19 (18)**

“The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.”

One of the advantages of living away from a city is the high visibility of the stars and the moon in the night. When the night is getting darker the stars also are getting brighter.

Due to thousands and thousands of lights, most notably the street lights, neon lights of theaters and bars and stores, lights in hotels, and etc., it would never occur for a city people to think that there are still stars at night. They are so engrossed by these generated lights that they could no longer think of looking up to the heavens and see, at least once in their life time, the pristine beauty of the stars at night.

A good number of this city people are actually from the provinces, so they could justifiably reason out to themselves saying: "Well, I have already seen stars before in my province and they are still the same. Besides, I don't have any ambition to become an astronomer, so what's the use of keeping on gazing at them?"

This is a valid argument if a person is not in his right mind, because we don't have to be an astronomer to keep on gazing at the stars. David was not yet a king when he looked at the heaven, the moon and the stars which God had made. In looking at them he was filled with awe and wonder at the majesty of God. He then realized that all this is for us human beings, as he said: "What is man that thou art mindful of him and the son of man that thou dost care for him?"

If people are fascinated by the lights in the city, perhaps millions and millions of lights, how much more of those of the heavens.

Scientists tell us that we belong to one galaxy. In this case, we are like living in a city. We are also told that in one galaxy there are billions and billions of stars. In a city there are only millions of lights. There are even cities in poor countries whose lights would barely reach million. For example, in a city whose population is only 40,000 people. In every family the average is four children. In this case, there will be 10,000 houses. In a house the average number of lights is 40. It's a 3 bedroom house. In each room there are 3 bulbs. Two in the kitchen, two in the living room, several outside, etc. This means that there will be 400,000 lights in all those houses. Then the other 600,000 will be distributed in different streets, and others in department stores, etc.

In a big city, say having a population of 7 millions, the number of lights would be 800 millions. Even this is still lesser than the billions of billions of stars in just one galaxy. Can you imagine that?

Consider also the sizes of these stars compared to a light bulb. Granted that the General Electric or any other company will design a one meter diameter bulb, which so far hasn't existed yet, I think. What is one meter compared to the size of a star!

Again, we are told by Scientists, and we have good reason to believe this, even just by common sense, that our sun, which supplies our energy, is the nearest star; and the size of the sun is, at least, 5 times bigger than the earth (actually the sun is more than 5 times bigger than the earth. This is just to boggle our imagination).

Now, at least, we have formed a very little idea of the lights in our own galaxy. Imagine that there are billions and billions of that sun, even bigger than our sun, in our own galaxy! Imagine still that there are billions and billions of galaxies in

our universe. We will not include here the distance, so that we will become less crazy.

If all this is true, isn't it a bad bargain to be interested only in the things of this earth than of the things above?

Imagine also that in every country there are, we suppose, 500 cities; and in our world, we again suppose, there are 500 countries. Since there are small and big cities, we will take an average of 500 millions light bulbs/lamps generated in every city. Even this is still very small compared to the stars in one galaxy. Even if every city in the whole world has 2,500,000,000 (2 billions 500 millions) is still very small compared to the stars in the whole universe.

The point here is that every city is compared to a galaxy. If there are 500 cities in every country, and if the whole world there are 500 countries, so there will be 250,000 cities in the whole world. But what 250,000 cities compared to the billions and billions of galaxies in the universe.

No wonder the heaven are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims His handiwork. →

### **Icon # 181 = Virtuous Life: Stars that shine brightest in darkest nights**

"Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world."

Our Lord Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. His Incarnation was a broad day light for the human race, because those who dwelt in the land of the thick darkness of sin have seen a great light of a virtuous life and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned. Thus a virtuous life is already a form of speech even though there is no speech nor words nor voice, yet their sound goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world because actions speak louder than words.

Each one of us is like a galaxy. There are billions and billions of people who live and who had lived in this world. There are also billions and billions of galaxy/**galaxies** in the universe. Our virtues are like stars. That is why the Scripture says that those who live a virtuous life will shine like the stars for all eternity and their brightness will be seven times than that of the sun.

Christ teaches us how to live a virtuous and godly life, for He is the image of the invisible God and the fullness of the Deity dwells in Him. "Learn from Me," He said, "For I am meek and humble of heart...." "Take my yoke upon you...and you will find rest for your souls." "Follow me, so that you will not walk in the darkness of sin and ignorance...whoever finds me finds life...those who serve me

will reign and to know me is eternal life...Do good to those who hate you and bless those who curse you...Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good...If your enemy forces you to go one mile go with him two miles...Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due when it is in your power to do it. Do not say to your neighbor, 'Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it,' when you have it with you."

These are example of virtuous actions and attitudes that speak louder than words and whose voice extends throughout all the earth and their message to the end of the world. These are like stars that shine brightest in the darkest nights of trials. Their true characters are revealed when they are tested by adversities that enveloped upon them, but during these nights of trials and difficulties their knowledge was declared for they are the true scientists of the human soul.

They knew, because they have learned from the One Teacher, Christ Jesus the Lord, that the human soul has of infinite value – "What does it profit a man," He said, "If he gains the whole world and loses/loses his soul in the process, what can he give in return for his soul?"

"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." If our treasure is Chris, then our heart will be for Him, because He is the true bridegroom of the human soul.  
→

### **Icon # 182 = God leaves His chamber in Heaven in search for Men**

"In them he has set a tent for the sun which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and like a strong man runs its course with joy."

Our Lord Jesus is not only the word of God made flesh, but He is also the sun of justice which gives light to our hearts. St. Paul tells us that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Thus we are the dwelling place of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Just as in the galaxy God has set a tent for the sun, so also He has set a dwelling place in our hearts for His beloved Son the bridegroom of our souls. This is an honor for those who love Him and keep His commands, as He said; "If anyone loves me, he will keep my words. And my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home within him."

He left the chamber of His majesty and glory in heaven and comes to us as a bridegroom and like a strong man who runs its course with joy – with joy because He has hidden these things from the worldly and the proud and revealed them to the humble and truthful. With joy, because in Him we shall draw living waters that quench our thirst for eternal union with Him, as St. Paul said: "My desire is to depart and with Christ for that is far better."

He left His chamber in heaven and search for us because there was a time in our lives that we were laid astray from the right path of life and prefers our own will than His will. We were living in with another lover, that is, illegitimate pleasures of this world. We become corrupt and dishonest so as to feed in and support our living partner.

Therefore, He left His chamber to allure us and bring us into the wilderness and speak tenderly to us, saying: 'I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord.'

These words certainly encourage us to enter into the repose of God's consolation in which we can feel the heat of His love and forgiveness. →

### **Icon # 183 = Love of God: Nothing escapes from it not even Hell**

**"Its rising is from the end of them; and there is nothing hid from its heat."**

This is the nature of God's love. It is like the energy of the Sun that gives life to every living things, nothing escapes from its heat. So, the love of God is present everywhere in heaven, on earth, and under the earth; nothing escapes from it not even hell, that is, in hell the love of God is also present but its effect is ecstasy of pain, whereas in heaven it is ecstasy of joy, for love is given to everyone equally both to the righteous and to sinners, just as the Sun shines to both the unjust and the just alike. But for those who reciprocated with love and do what is good, right, and just it becomes a source of delight and blessedness in paradise, but for those who does evil and delight in wickedness it is a source of torment.

In other words, those who have become conscious that they have sinned against love suffer greater torment from this than any fear of punishment. For the sorrow caused in the heart by sin against love is more poignant than any torment, just as the natural Sun is a delight for those who have a healthy eyes, but is a cause of discomfort and suffering for those who have a diseased eye.

When the Son of God rose from the dead, His teaching spread from one end of the world to another; and there is nothing hidden from its truth for it is a powerful light set on top of a lampstand so that it will give light to all in the house, in the family, and in the whole world.

We, too, are told to let our light shine among our fellow human beings so that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. Light here means holiness of life that has to shine in every aspect of our lives and spread everywhere: in offices, in one's home, in factory site, in work area, in whatever we do, wherever we are, and with whomsoever we are so that nothing escapes

from its power to transform and renew. All this is owing to God's grace when we cooperate with it in fulfilling His commandments. For: →

### **Icon # 184 = The Lord Jesus Himself is the Law: He is bound to be the rise and fall of Humanity**

“The Law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.”

The law of the Lord is perfect because His law is love, and since God is love, therefore, His law is perfect, for God is perfect. Thus we are commanded to grow in the perfection of love. “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for love is the fulfillment of the law, because it does no wrong to his neighbor.”

The teaching of Our Lord Jesus is also the Law. It is on this teaching that we will be judged, as the Lord says: “If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects me and does not keep my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life.” It is on this teaching that we will rise or fall.

In other words, Our Lord Jesus Himself is the Law, for God speaks only one word – that word is His only begotten Son, Jesus the Lord. Since Christ Jesus is the law, so He is bound to be the rise and fall of humanity.

All who believe in Him, obey Him, and His commands He will grant eternal life, and those who love Him will be guided by His Law, for His law is so humane and reasonable. It is congenial to our nature and it calls us to the best that is in us. Though at times it may be challenging, but it is not a tyrannical burden arbitrarily imposed on us for His yoke is easy and His burden light. It is essentially an internal law, nothing else than the presence of the Holy Spirit in our heart.

The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple because it is not only He who bear witness to Himself but also the Father who sent Him bears witness to Him. Thus even the simple and uneducated people who followed Him became wise to the things that are above, that is, of heavenly things where Christ is now seated at the right hand of the Father.

The simple became wise by deepening their intimate friendship with Christ, for Christ Himself became their teacher in the school of simplicity. The educated people who are sincere in their search for truth and knowledge who are able to



say, "Not to us Lord, not to us, but to your name give the glory," became also simple as a dove in their dealing with the things of this world, and at the same time they maintained their inherent cleverness and wisdom to safeguard the Church of Christ on earth from every wind of doctrine that are fabricated by the cunning of men.

The healthy combination of their simple shrewdness and wise simplicity place them in a fairly good position to advance the cause of the reign of God on earth. One fresh example of this kind of people is Pope John Paul II who is wise and simple at the same time, and leading many simple people to Christ so that they may also become wise, for Christ is the wisdom of God.

The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart because the fulfilling of it inevitably produce joy in the heart. We have also to be aware and accept that the precepts of the Lord do assuredly run counter to our natural inclinations, and without the help of grace it would be impossible to understand them, far less put them into practice. Take for example the precept "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...."

This go against the grain of our wounded fallen nature, for we are more incline to hate our enemies and curse those who persecute or annoy us. But if we follow the inspiration of grace to will their good and to act kindly with them it brings lightness to our heart, it revives our soul, and gives joy to us, for the commandment of the Lord is pure and enlightens the eyes of our soul.

Anyone who seeks the Lord without obeying His commandments does not find Him, since the Lord is hidden in His commandments. Those who seek Him find Him in proportion to fulfilling them.

God does not command impossible things, but in commanding He counsels us both to do what we can and seek for help for what we cannot do, and He helps us that we may be able to do it. →

### **Icon # 185 = Filial Fear of the Lord: Root of true Happiness and Joy**

"The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever; the ordinances of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb."

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever because it is the beginning of wisdom and the root of immortality. It is filled with awe and wonder of the majesty of the Lord. It is the fear of a child for his loving father. It is a filial fear not a servile fear – the fear of a servant toward his master, the fear to be punished when he commits mistakes.

Since it is a filial fear, it endures forever because the Son continues in the house forever. It means a willingness and a readiness to do the will of God, and this, in turn, generates a genuine feeling of security and trust.

The fear of the Lord is the root of happiness; it is the beginning of true joy and happiness. It forbids us to give our heart to transitory things which are the true seeds of sin. It tempers our over confident of atonement that we add sin to sin, saying: "His mercy is great, he will forgive the multitude of my sins," for both mercy and wrath are with Him, and His anger rests on unrepentant sinners.

All wisdom is the fear of the Lord, and in all wisdom there is the fulfillment of the law.

The ordinances of the Lord are true, for He Himself is the Truth. They are true and righteous altogether because the performance of them lead to the kingdom of heaven. They are more to be desired than gold, even much fine gold for their true value is more precious than the whole world – "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and suffers the loss of his own soul!" They are sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb, because the fulfillment of the Lord's ordinances brings sweetness to the soul.

It is bound to be narrow at the outset, but once we persevere and make inner progress in conversion and purity of heart we shall run with unspeakable sweetness in the path of God's commandments and ordinances. They are sweeter than honey and dripping of the honeycomb, because they have power to make our enemies become our friends, they have the courage to reconcile broken relationship, to turn back the hearts of the fathers to their children and children to their parents. →

### **Icon # 186 = Varieties of Reward**

"Moreover by them is thy servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward."

Undoubtedly, our great reward in keeping God's commandments, precepts, and ordinances is God Himself, for He gave Himself to us so that we may be able to keep His commands and ordinances. The other reward is peace, because the lover of God's law has great peace. It is the natural effect in keeping His statutes and decrees. Of course, the crown of this is eternal life.

I think it is not far from reality to say that to be able to keep God's commands, precepts, and ordinances is already a reward in itself. This does not mean that we have to keep God's commands, etc. in order to get a reward for what we have done here on earth. "For he 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, 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 everyone who does good....”

Another reward in keeping God's law, statutes, and decrees is safety from unnecessary trouble. Take for example a person who commits adultery. It ruins relationships and families. Quarrel and pains are inevitable. We could have been saved from this if only we keep God's command not to commit adultery. The same is true in other cases such as theft and murder. People who commit this crime will end up in prison. So, if we have kept God's command not to steal and not to kill we will be more happy.

Another reward in keeping God's commandments, statutes, and ordinances is friendship with Him, as Christ said: “I will no longer call you servant, for the servant does not know what his master is doing. But I called you friend for I have made known to you what I have heard from my Father.”

Keeping God's commandments, then, elevates our status from a servant to a friend. It is also the most clear sign of our love for God and makes us worthy to be His dwelling place, as the Lord 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 I will love him and manifest myself to him.... If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

For these reasons, in keeping God's commandments, precepts, and decrees there is great reward, for God Himself will be our own possession, and everyone who has God lacks nothing because God alone suffices. However, this is not to say that we will be exempted from failures and errors. A person who keeps God's commandments while he/she is still in this world is still subject to any kinds of disappointments and frustration such as failures and errors, →

### **Icon # 187 = Arena of errors: Thoughts, Words, and Action**

“But who can discern his errors? Clear thou me from hidden faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.”

The three areas that we likely fall into errors are: Our words, thoughts, and actions. In words alone we already fell into many errors, especially if we are a compulsive talker because by the multitudes of words we cannot escape sin. That is why the fool who keeps silence is considered wise.

He who guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin. So, if a person keeps silence, at least, he is delivered from the error of the tongue; and if he doesn't do anything evil he is delivered from the error of action. The only battle that remains is the thought which is the most difficult, because whether we like it or not thoughts of all kinds ranging from vanity to sanctity, lust to trust, and from depravity to sincerity, etc., will enter our minds.

Unless we act these out they will remain hidden. In this case, God alone and our own spirit can discern its error, because God who searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the spirit. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him?

When a person grows deeper and makes progress in the process of conversion of life his sense perception of what is right and wrong is being sharpened and can discern his own errors which, possibly, are hidden from others. We have also to pray for the grace to be cleansed from our unknown faults. This is the case wherein our faults are more apparent to others, but hidden from us. These are our blind spots which we hope to be enlightened too.

Above all, we have to entreat the Lord that sins of presumptions may not rule over us; only then can we be blameless, and innocent of great sin. An example of presumptuous sin is to jump from a high tower thinking that nothing harm will happen to us because God will surely send His angels to uphold us lest we will be crushed to pieces when we hit the ground.

We will be guilty of a presumptuous sin if we shamelessly recourse to supernatural means when the natural means are available. In the example above, instead of jumping God Himself will prefer that we should use the stairs in going down rather than to presume that He will catch us before we reach the ground.

There's a story of a monk in the desert who jumped into an empty well presuming that God will send His angel to protect him from harm, but he died. The other desert fathers were shocked by this incident and wonder how a person who lived in the desert for many years fell into this kind of sin. Then, they emphasized the importance of discretion the mother of all virtues, which is necessary to avoid presumptuous sin. →

### **Icon # 188 = Meditation: All Belongs to One; and One Belongs to All**

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer."

If the way we speak is gracious, and in such a way that it imparts grace to the hearers; and if in every thought of our heart Christ has always a part,

undoubtedly, they will be acceptable in God's sight. Thus we have to meditate on whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, whatever is excellence, and whatever is worthy of praise."

An example of a thought that is lovely is about the kind of life that those in heaven are now enjoying. They always behold the unspeakable glory of God. They now live in an unapproachable light and don't have to sleep anymore to refresh one's body. They are no longer subject to space and time. They are lighter than a molecule and swifter than the speed of light. They no longer die, for they are sons and daughters of the resurrection. They enjoy each other's beauty, goodness, and love. **ALL BELONGS TO ONE, AND ONE BELONGS TO ALL!**

Examples of words acceptable in the sight of Our Lord are: "Thank you," "I'm sorry," "I apologize," "Forgive me," "I appreciate," etc. Another would be when we say, "May God bless you" to those who offend us instead of cursing them, or just to simply say, "May God bless you" to those whom we come into contact with as befit the occasion.

If we are priest the best words we can utter that are pleasing and acceptable in the hearing of the Lord are: "God the Father of mercy through the death and resurrection of His Son has reconciled the world to Himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins. Through the ministry of the Church may God grant you pardon and peace. And I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." →

### **Icon # 189 = God's heart is our Home**

#### **Psalm 20 (19)**

"The Lord answer you in the day of trouble! The name of the God of Jacob protect you."

This is a consoling assurance that God is always ready to help us in times of distress to unstress us so that we will not be depressed. His desire to answer us in times of trouble is far greater than our need to call for help, so much so that even before we call for help He is already there to attend to our needs. So, if the Lord is on our side there is nothing that we should be afraid of.

If ever there is that is to commit a deliberate sin. This is the only thing that we should be afraid of. When we do what is good and right, and if we are honest, sincere, and truthful even calamities that will happen to us can never really cast us down but we will always come up head first, because Our Lord answer us in the day of trouble. For who is god like Our Lord who is solicitous for our welfare than we could ever think or imagine?

If parents and friends has a natural instinct to help their children and friends who are in trouble, how much more our God who had laid down His life for us on the cross? We have only to trust Him at all times, for He will never forsake those who put their trust in Him. Trust is the younger sister of Faith. They are very good friends and always go together – almost inseparable.

Wherever trust is faith is always there and wherever faith is trust is also there. Thus when we know Him whom we believe we will not blink our eyes to put our whole trust in Him whatever happens either good or bad, positive or negative, pleasant and unpleasant. With the help of His grace we do what we can to remain faithful to Him as He is always faithful to us.

Nothing perhaps, outside of love, so defines the follower of Our Lord Jesus as faithfulness. And probably nothing is so basically heroic than day by day loyalty to our commitments, no matter what the weather or our moods are. Faithfulness to husband or wife, to obligations, to duties and responsibilities, to our work and promises, to religious practices and prayer, to daily routine, and above all to God. Faithfulness means consistency, fulfillment of what is expected of us, staying with what we have committed ourselves to despite hardship and discouragement. At this altar we are united with the God of Jacob who was faithful even to death, death on a cross.

The Lord answer us in the day of trouble, because the prayer of the just is the key to heaven; the petition ascends, and the mercy of God descends. Everyone who reposes a sure trust in God will certainly become a saint.

After a hard day scrambling to find our way around in the world, it is assuring to come home to a place we know. The God of Jacob can be equally familiar to us. With time and patience we can learn where to go for nourishment, where to ask for help, where to turn for guidance, and where to hide for protection.

Just as our earthly house is a place of refuge in times of bad weather, so God's heart is our place of refuge. It is our home where we can go in and out to find pastures to feed the divine life within us. It is a beautiful garden where the seed of immortality is cultivated and nurtured.

The God of Jacob knows that it is in our daily lives that we most easily become anxious. He knows, too, that our daily lives are made up of little things, not great things. Therefore, He encourages us in a friendly and intimate way and says, "Just bring all those little things to Me, I am most willing to help you. Cast all your anxieties upon Me, for I care about you. Look at the birds in the sky and the flowers of the field. They do not sow nor reap nor gather into barns nor toil nor spin, yet I take care of them. How much more you who are made in My own image and likeness.

“When I look at you I see Myself in you. So, have trust in Me for I will never forsake you. Can a woman forget her sucking child that she would not take pity of the child she bore in her womb? Even if she forgets I will not forget you nor forsake you.... Your helplessness and inadequacies become your prayer the moment you enter into the inner chamber of your heart and stay with Me in secret.

“You don’t have to mumble many words, for I know what you need before you ask Me. You have only to say, ‘Abba, Father, your will be done in me, on earth as it is done in heaven.’ Once you have done this, even if they persecute you, mock at you, utter all kinds of evil against you on My account, and even crucify you, I will raise you up and give you glory, honor, and immortality.

“I will give you peace that the world cannot give; a peace that surpasses all understanding for it comes from the bosom of My being. You have to be convinced that zeal for prayer is food and strength for the soul, a protection against dangers of all kinds, and a bulwark in time of temptation and trouble. Call on Me in the day of distress and I will answer you.

“I the God of Jacob look kindly upon you and be gracious to you, for you are My adoptive child. If fathers and mothers of this world know how to give good gift to their children should I not give you My own Spirit to dwell in you? He it is that unites with your spirit in crying out, ‘Abba, Father.’ You will know Him for he will be with you and within you. He will glorify Me for He will take what is mine and declare it to you.

“Therefore, let not your heart be troubled neither let it be afraid, for I will guard you in all your ways. I will give you counsel with My eye upon you. Even though you will walk in the valley of darkness of pains and sorrows you will not be cast down for I will hold you by the hand. Even if the rain of adversity and distress beat your soul you will not collapse, for you are founded on the rock of My love.

“Spread the wings of your prayer and fly into the highest heavens where the meek and the humble are sitting at the feet of the One Teacher. There you will dwell forever gazing for all eternity the beauty of the land promised to the gentle of heart. There you will be protected forever by the God of Jacob.” →

### **Icon # 190 = Help and Support from God’s Sanctuary: Prayer**

“May he send you help from the sanctuary, and give you support from Zion.”

Like the angels who were under probation before they were admitted into the Beatific Vision, so our life here on earth is also under a probationary period. Since we could not attain salvation merely by our own power and strength, so we need a help from someone who is now seated at the right hand of the Father always interceding for us so that we, too, might join with the ranks of angels who

praise Him without ceasing. We need His help, for left to ourselves we cannot hope to praise and glorify Him.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is also given to us to help us as we traverse the toilsome drudgery of this world. Those who have a great confidence in the patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary ought to be very grateful to God for it, for it is a great assurance of our salvation; and those who have it not, ought to pray that God would grant it to them, so that they, too, will know by their own experience how true it is that with Mary protecting and helping us we will not be afraid, with her leading us in this complex world into the promised land we will not get tired. Her kindness will see us through to the end, because she is such a loving Mother who is always ready to help us, for never was it known that anyone who fled to her protection, implored her help, or sought her intercession was left unaided.

So long as the line of communication, which is prayer, is not broken we can count absolutely of the help and support from God's sanctuary, because He knows that it is in our daily lives that we most easily become anxious. He knows, too, that our daily lives are made up of little things, not great things. Therefore, He beckons to us in a friendly way and says, "Just bring all those little things to me; I am willing to help you."

We need to remember that nothing in our daily life is so insignificant and so inconsequential that the Lord will not help us by answering our supplication. We have to cast ourselves at the feet of Our Lord Jesus and wait upon Him in the sure confidence that He is ready and eager to support us in our own struggles and difficulties, because He cares for us.

If we allow Him to come close to us through the practice of regular, personal prayer, the conditions are ripe for Him to do something in us, not only to supply us with abundant and benevolent help from His sanctuary, but above all He will divinize us, because "He became man that we, human beings, might be divinized." We all, beholding His glory with open face are transfigured into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.

If He had helped us while we were yet sinners, how much more now that we are one with Him!

We have to be convinced that zeal for prayer is food and strength for our soul, a protection against dangers of all kinds, and a bulwark in time of temptation. With God to help us we will learn to be content in whatever state or situation we find ourselves. We will know how to be abased and we will know how to abound; we can accept discomfort with peace and be grateful of the little comfort that comes our way; in any and all circumstances we will learn the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. We can do all things in Christ who strengthens and supports us from His sanctuary on high.



The person who has learned the need of God's help prays much and set aside a quality time for prayer. God has His own hours; we must wait for them. He wishes to be prayed and begged and pressed so as to make us appreciate His grace. The very effort we make in praying calms the heart, makes it clean, and renders it more capable of receiving divine help which are poured upon us in a spiritual manner.

We have to be convinced that without God's help we are not able to preserve and guard what He bestows upon us, but with His help we are secure. For, as the mother-bird, on observing the approach of a hawk, spread out her wings in order that her young ones may enter under them and there find a safe refuge, so does the infinite and ineffable loving-kindness of Our Lord prepare itself to shelter and support us, expanding its bosom as it were and opening wide its arms to protect and help us. →

### **Icon # 191 = Consecration of our life to God with the Blessed Virgin Mary**

"May he remember all your offerings and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices!"

As consecrated persons, all our actions, no matter how small and insignificant it might be are our offerings to God. They are as burnt sacrifices when accompanied with a humble and contrite heart. Certainly, God will not spurn these kinds of sacrifices but will regard them with favor. Even if they are defective because of our wounded and fallen human nature if only we offer them through the hands of the Blessed Virgin Mary she will purify them and offer them herself to God. God seeing that it's the Blessed Virgin Mary who offers them to Him, with all her loveliness and unspeakable beauty, will never blink His eyes in accepting them.

This is because God loves the Blessed Virgin Mary so much with all His heart, with all His mind, with all His strength, and with all His soul. He loves her as He loves Himself. Thus when we offer our body and soul to God through Our Lady He sees a reflection of Himself in us because of the luminosity of the light of love that unites them together.

Suppose a farmer wish to offer something to the king but he has nothing to offer except an apple and the worst is that the apple is rotten in part. He was such in a predicament for he doesn't want to insult the king by his offering. But since he was a good friend of the Queen, who happens to pass by, he confided his problem to her; and she, out of regard of their friendship, took the apple, removed the rotten portion, and put it on a gold plate and gave it to the king.

Now, the question is, will the king refuse the offering of the Queen knowing that the king love the Queen very much? Obviously, NO! It's the same with us, too. St.

Bernard said that if we want to offer something to God and don't want to be refused, then, we have to offer it through the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is an acknowledged truth that the most effectual means for obtaining graces from God is devotion to Mary and her intercession.

Although she doesn't put any condition on our offering, yet it would be very detrimental to us if we will keep back anything for ourself no matter how small it might be because it will become like a gangrene that will gently but subtly nibble the fervor of our soul. It doesn't happen dramatically like that of Ananias and Saphira but we will certainly suffer the consequences of it.

Surely, in her mildness, Our Lady will not boldly say to us what St. Peter says to Ananias: "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

Notice that in keeping back part of the proceeds of the land, Ananias was primarily lying to God, secondarily deceiving himself, and tertiary deluding other people. If only nobody had sold a piece of land and gave all the proceeds to the apostles, then, Ananias and Saphira could have made an excuse out of ignorance, saying: "We are sorry, brother, we do not know that we have to give everything. We thought that we still have that freedom to give only what we want. We are also thinking of providing something for ourselves, so that in case of emergency we have something to draw from."

But we are told that "as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet." And we are also told that Barnabas "sold a field which belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet."

Undoubtedly, this gesture of laying down the proceeds of lands or houses at the apostles' feet is a form of offering and a burnt sacrifice wholly pleasing to God. These men and women who offered all the proceeds to the apostles surely put their trust God to provide for their daily needs through the leaders of their community, for there was not a needy person among them because the sales of their houses and lands was distributed to each as any had need.

In the case of Ananias and Saphira, it would not be hard to imagine that they were still acting out the natural instinct of self-preservation without realizing that it would be to their own ruin, "for whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it," says the Lord.

Both Ananias and Saphira died immediately when they heard the words of St. Peter. Such words were so powerful that they serve as an invisible verdict of their

own actions. If such words had that power, what would the words of Christ be? For He says, "He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day." This tells us of the meekness of Our Lord who gives us many opportunities to reform our lives, for "if today you hear his voice do not harden your heart," He doesn't desire the death of us sinners, but that we may be converted and live. Who could ever stand if He marks our guilt?

In her kindness, too, Our Lady will graciously whisper into our ears, saying: "I beseech you, be reconciled to God." Who would not be melted by these words? Instead of lying flat dead like Ananias and Saphira we will be moved to repentance because through her we can presume upon the riches of the kindness and forbearance and patience of God, for His kindness is meant to lead us to repentance.

Before we offer our life to God in the priestly or religious life, our soul and our body certainly belong to us and we do to it whatever we want, but when we enter the religious life our body and soul no longer belong to us but to the community. So, to keep back part of it to spend on our passions or insist on our own self-will or neglecting our prayer life will certainly make us spiritually dead even though we appear to be externally alive. The only difference with that of Ananias and Saphira and ourselves is that they fell down while we are still walking, but dead men walking.

In the case of Ananias and Saphira, I do believe that they were not plunge to eternal destruction, but their deaths were certainly a correction of their actions and are written for our instruction that we may learn a lesson. They were delivered to Satan for the destruction of their flesh, that their spirits may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

What happen to Ananias and Saphira will also happen to us. So, are we going to follow in their footsteps and be delivered to the hands of our enemy for the destruction of our flesh and be tormented by our conscience because we were not behaving properly toward the Person whom we offered our whole being as a living sacrifice?

If we are poor in spirit our body and our soul are our only treasures that we offer to God in the temple of our heart. They are like the two coins which the poor woman offered to God at the temple in Jerusalem. Such offerings were pleasing in God's sight and acceptable to Him, for she out of her poverty, offered everything she has without even considering what will happen to her the next day since she doesn't have anymore money to provide for her daily sustenance.

But, do you think that God, who even feed the birds which do not sow nor reap nor gather into barn and clothe the lilies of the field which neither toil nor spin, leave desolate that poor widow who puts all her trust in Him? By no means! For never was it known that anyone who puts one's trust in God was left unaided.

So if we give ourselves wholly to God, God certainly will take care of us. He will feed us with His Body and Blood in the Eucharist that our soul may become so beautiful like His – like father like son, or like mother like daughter. By giving us His Body and Blood we become partakers of His supreme sacrifice fully pleasing to God. →

### **Icon # 192 = The Cross: Banner of Victory**

“May he grant your heart's desire, and fulfill all your plans! May we shout for joy over your victory, and in the name of our God set up our banner! May the Lord fulfill all your petitions!”

Once Our Lord regarded with favor the offerings of our body and soul, our whole lives, like burnt sacrifices, this would be tantamount to granting our heart's desire and fulfilling all our plans; for, in the first place, our desire was to enter into the Lord's service and to give our whole lives for the building up of His Body, the Church.

This is a noble desire for it is like laying up treasures in heaven, for where our treasure is there will our hearts be also. It is also like taking possession of our interior self where the spirit is in good control over our senses. At this stage all the angels and saints in heaven shout for joy over our victory, and in the name of Our God, the Lord Jesus, set up our banners!

Of course, our banner is the Cross of Christ which seems foolish to the atheists, but for us who professed it, it is the loveliest of all we can ever confess, “for the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but for us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

One dimension of the cross is that it is also use as a symbol of trials and difficulties; something that we have to carry as long as we are still in this world. And the paradox of the cross is that the more we resist it and run away from it, the more it becomes hard and heavy, but the more we accept and bear it the more it becomes easy and light.

In the cross there is salvation; in the cross there is life; in the cross there is protection; in the cross there is strength of mind. No matter how we dispose and order all according to our pleasure as it seems best to us, we will always find something we will have to suffer, either willingly or unwillingly; and so we will always find the cross.

The cross, therefore, is always ready, and waits for us in every place. We cannot escape it, wherever we run, for wherever we go we carry ourselves with us, and we will find ourselves. The cross, then, is our identity for by it we are called Christians. By this sign we shall conquer over our evil tendencies, for it is the power of God and the wisdom of God at work in us who believe. It is a great privilege to be bearer of this sign. It is our banner, our flag.

Since we enter into the Lord's service, that is, we become soldiers of Christ, we would willingly and gladly prefer to die in order to safeguard our flag than to surrender it to our enemies lest they rejoice over us and we become a cause of shame to those who put their trust in God.

In this fight we have to be watchful of complacency and curiosity. Complacency: in thinking that our enemy will no longer attack or ambush us since we already gained good control over our senses. In this case, we will be deceived. Curiosity: going out from our stronghold or from our camp, that is, from our heart in order to visit our enemy's camp because we think that they are no longer harmful. But in the end we will be humiliated.

We have an example of this in the life of Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, who by curiosity went out to visit the women of the land; and when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he seized her and lay with her and humbled her.

It's the same with our souls, too. If by curiosity we will visit the land of unchastity by watching pornographic video or movie or picture, the prince of the land, that is, the spirit of lust will certainly be enamored by us and will seize us. We will be lucky if before the spirit of lust acted out his evil intent we will cry out for help, saying: "Lord, help me I am perishing."

It's the same, too, with the lands of infidelity and dishonesty. If by our wandering desire we are enticed to visit either of this land, its king might seize us, for infidelity and dishonesty in little things are devious steps to infidelity and dishonesty in bigger things. It eventually dulls the conscience.

It is our prayer, then, not to be led by worldly curiosity and dangerous complacency, but to take up our cross daily until we arrive to our own country, that is, the kingdom of heaven. We certainly can trust that Our Lord Jesus will fulfill these petitions! →

## Icon # 193 = Victory with Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary's Help

"Now I know that the Lord will help his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with mighty victories by his right hand."

We have an assurance that Our Lord Jesus will help us through to the end of our earthly struggle when He said: "Behold, I am with you always until the end of time." With His grace to help us we, too, will be victorious over the seduction of the world because He who is with us is greater than he who is in the world, the prince of darkness who is sowing thoughts, ideas, and desires contrary to God.

We have to offer both passive and active resistance to this prince of darkness. Passively by being indifferent to the glory, honor, and power of this world, to hammer into the mind of the prince of darkness that even though we are in the world but we are not of this world, to live as though we have no dealing with this world. This may sound an asinine wisdom to him and to those who are loyal to him. They will accuse us of being mad because we no longer conform to the passions of our former ignorance, but acquiescing to the command of Our God, "Be Holy as I, the Lord your God, is holy."

Actively by striving to put into action the teaching of the Lord Jesus always begging Him for the grace to do it, for apart from Him we can do nothing. Our own will power is not sufficient. It is for this reason that we have to recourse to prayer, for as the body sinks under fatigue unless supported by food, so external works, however holy, wear out the soul which is not regularly nourished by prayer. In the most crowded day we can make time briefly and secretly to lift our soul to God and draw new strength from Him to put into effect His teaching.

We have also to invoke the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary, for she is like a hen who would gather her chicks under her wings to protect them from the insidious attacks of the birds of prey. Whatsoever graces, therefore, we desire to obtain from God we have to entrust it to the Blessed Virgin Mary, so that she may appeal to the heart of God in our favor and prove that she is truly a mother who is far ready to help us than we could ever ask or imagine.

Our Lord Jesus is now in His holy heaven sitting at the right hand of the Father. Therefore, He will answer us because He always lives to make intercession for us. Besides, we have a sure guarantee that His hands will never get tired unlike that of Moses who needed to be held up by Aaron and Hur as Joshua and the Israelites were fighting against Amalek and his people.

With Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary helping us we will win mighty victories in our struggle against evil. For instance, when we keep silent when the other shouts, when we refrain from speaking when provoked. Isn't this a mighty victory? Who can win this kind of conquest without God's grace? Will power alone is not sufficient. →

## Icon # 194 = Boasting which is safe and Beautiful

"Some boast of chariots, and some of horses; but we boast of the name of the Lord our God."

St. Paul said that "Let him who boast, boast of the Lord. For it is not the man who commends himself that is accepted, but the man whom the Lord commends."

Boasting, certainly, is not good for it is a sign of arrogance. St. Benedict in his rule pointed out that every exaltation is a form of pride. Thus the only ground for legitimate boasting is to boast of the Lord, to what He has done for us; for instance, for dying for us on the cross, for enduring the excruciating scourging that ripped His flesh so that by it we may learn to use the members of our body as instruments for doing good and no longer as instruments for doing evil; for giving us the Blessed Virgin Mary to be our Mother also whom we can run to for guidance in times of difficulty, reassurance in times of doubt, consolation in times of sorrow, and shelter in times of danger.

This kind of boasting is safe and beautiful. Safe, because it is geared toward the contemplation of the humility of God and the conquering of our pride. Beautiful, because it reflects the glory of God hidden in the depth of the human soul. Above all, it carries with it an intrinsic power to help us grow into mature manhood, into the fullness of the stature of Christ.

Of old, Pharaoh boasted of his chariots and charioteers and boldly pursued the people of God, but what happened to him and his chariots and horses and soldiers? They sank into the depths of the sea.

The Romans became a super power for about 3 centuries, but eventually collapsed. Many kingdoms of old rise and fall. Is it because their military power is limited only to chariots and horses and soldiers who wear only sandals? Military boots as the U.S. soldiers are now wearing was still unknown to them; U.S. warplanes and aircraft carrier has not yet surfaced in the horizon of their imagination.

For now, the U.S. can still boast of its military prowess, but it is tenuous. It looks like very strong in the eyes and minds of people, but in the eyes of God it is like a house built on a quagmire or a flower in a field which today blossom but on the morrow withers away.

For this reason, it is more sane to boast of the name of the Lord Our God, in Our Lord Jesus Christ for His dominion never ends and His kingdom last forever. Listen to what the archangel Gabriel said to the Blessed Virgin Mary concerning her Son, Our Lord Jesus: "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will

reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Not even the gates of hell can make a slightest ripple of this kingdom, for it cannot be shaken. Can we not, then, boast of the Lord Jesus who is the King of this kingdom? All the kingdoms of this world will, one day, be removed for it is capable of being shaken.

The Scripture tells us that even just by the voice of the Lord the earth was already shaken. This happened during the time of Moses. The Scripture goes on to say, “but now He has promised, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.’”

This phrase, ‘Yet once more,’ indicates the removal of what is shaken, as of what has been made, in order that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe....”

Thus this kind of boasting is a reverential boasting, because it is filled with awe, and it gives to God what is due to Him, that is, our spiritual worship. We boast of God the Creator of all things both visible and invisible, but not of the visible things the Creator made because... →

### **Icon # 195 = Humility vs. Pride**

“They will collapse and fall; but we shall rise and stand upright.”

The Scripture is wise in saying that “pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.” Why is this? It is because those who exalt themselves shall be humbled, but everyone who humbles himself shall be exalted. No wonder that if we humble ourselves before the Lord and before one another we shall rise and stand upright because it makes fully human who are originally designed by God to stand erect and whose mind can soar to the things that are above where Christ is now standing at the right hand of God. Souls thus given to contemplating the things of eternity experience at certain moments the truth of St. Paul’s words: “We find our true home in heaven.”

By rising above our natural tendencies and failing, and standing upright by virtuous living we can have a foretaste of the sweetness of the reality of Our Lord’s words: “the kingdom of heaven is within you.” The seed of glory, then, is sown in us which will flower when we see Him face to face.

This is an icon of resurrection. We collapse and fall by acting what the worldly people like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and gossiping, but arise and stand upright by our conversion, by transformation, by the renewal of our mind to such an extent that we can



rejoice in so far as we share Christ's suffering that we may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed.

We collapse and fall by our pride, because God opposes the proud and He knows the thoughts of the haughty from afar. Therefore, when any achievement or any good deed arouses pride in us, we have to recall our past to mind so as to check the foolish swelling of conceit.

We rise and stand upright by humility, because God gives grace to the humble. Even without deeds humility obtains forgiveness of many sins; but deeds without humility are useless. What salt is for food, this humility is for every virtue, and it can destroy the stronghold, power, chariots, and horses of many sins.

The living God, who dies in the most degrading condition on the cross, has taught the human race to despise earthly values and to esteem those virtues of humility and sacrifice which the world disdains. If we heed to His teaching we will certainly rise and stand upright to share His victory when He comes again in glory. →

### **Icon # 196 = Participation in Christ's Victory: Prayer the Natural Habitat of Virtues**

**"Give victory to the king, O Lord; answer us when we call."**

When Our Lord Jesus died on the cross Lucifer and all his die hard angels and all those who connived with them thought that they had defeated Our Lord and that His name be forgotten, but their malice recoils in their own hearts because on the third day after His death the Lord rose again from the dead, as He promised, glorious and immortal. The victim, then, becomes the victor.

As followers of Christ we share in His victory by keeping His commandments and by our faith, for this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. Faith consists not only in being baptized in to Christ, but in fulfilling His commandments. Holy Baptism is perfect and offers us perfection, but does not perfect us if we deliberately fail to fulfill His commandments, for true faith is followed by adherence to Christ's commands.

Faith is the assent of our soul to God's command. And His commandments are not burdensome, for everyone who is born of God has inherent power to do and embrace it. When we make progress in keeping His commandments they will become for us our own happiness and delight, resulting to the diminishment of our passions. The demons, then, grew feeble for they no longer find us the unhealthy passions that supported them and served them as weapons in their fight against us. Thus we share in the victory of the Lord, Our King, for this is not our own doing; it is owing to God's grace working in us which we obtain when we pray sincerely.

Prayer is the natural habitat for Faith, Hope, Charity, humility, and all the other virtues to blossom at its own proper time and are there in turn developed.

We should not abandon prayer under the pretext of infirmity even for one day so long as we have breath, for the more we pray in our infirmity the more we become strong, as St. Paul says: "When I am weak, then I am strong." It is in our weakness that God's power is made perfect, for His grace is sufficient for us. Acting thus we will gain much profit, and prayer will soon become our strength by the action of grace. Thus God answers us when we call, for "He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and will not despise their supplication."

"No matter what our thoughts may be," says St. Nilus, "If our mind is in a pious disposition, it is with God; nevertheless we need to drive away all evil thoughts." We have to admit, though, that the hardest battle to be fought is in the realm of thoughts because thoughts are in us. They can be our friends or enemies. They become our friends if we cultivate positive thinking and uphold sound doctrines, for they make us wise, patient, and forbearing toward our own imperfection and wickedness of other people, as St. Augustine says that if we are wise we will affirm and hold to what sound doctrines approves that we are to bear the wicked, so as not to forsake the good, rather than forsake the good so as to cut off the wicked. But we must do this only to the extent that we refrain from imitating the wicked or agreeing with them or being like them in life and conduct.

On the other hand, our thoughts become our enemies if we are suspicious of other people and readily follow every wind of doctrine, manufactured by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles which does not agree with the sound words of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching which accords with godliness. In this case the soul will never be at rest, for every act of our mind, which we call thought, produces some effect in us, and that, however heavy and slow our senses may be, they feel this effect in proportion to the intensity of our thoughts as when we are angry or sad or distrustful.

What tongue is to the mouth the thought is to the mind. In this battle in the realm of thoughts, God gives victory only to the pure of heart, to those who can bear the faults of others and not be shocked by them, to those who do not let evil thoughts linger in the consciousness but drive them at once by invoking the name of the Lord or asking the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary or that of our favorite saints; to those who are not nose-y about the affairs of other people, to those who strive to understand what is the will of the Lord, that is, our sanctification.

By doing these things we weaken the power of the devil over us. He has no power over Christ, of course, as the Lord had said, but he continually fights against us.

The devil/Lucifer did not realize that by attacking the Lord Jesus he was destroying his own power, and that if he had refrain from shedding the blood of the Lord he would not have forfeited everything that his primordial deception had gained for him; for when the Lord Jesus came to free the human race from the effects of mortal sin, He hid His divine power from the devil and confronted him with our human weakness.

For fear of losing the power he enjoyed over all the rest, the devil would have been very careful not to lay a finger on the Lord Jesus who owed him nothing whatever. However, his own malice was his undoing. He exacted a penalty from the Son of God which was to bring healing to all the children of men. He shed the blood that was to become our ransom and life-giving drink. And so his handiwork was destroyed by his own action. Thus "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" Therefore, let us give thanks to God "who gives us the victory through Our Lord Jesus Christ." We trust in His love and mercy that He answers us when we call upon His name, for He Himself said through His prophet Isaiah: "Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear." →

### **Icon # 197 = God is Our Strength**

#### **Psalm 21 (20)**

"In thy strength the king rejoices, O Lord; and in thy help how greatly he exults!"

In our baptism we share in the kingship of Christ, and in our confirmation we share in His strength to do spiritual battle for Him and to serve Him all the days of our life. If God Himself is our strength, then, we have an unequivocal reason to rejoice in Him, for who could withstand God?

If God is for us, not even the trials, difficulties, tragedies, and tribulations in life can plunge us to despair but, on the contrary, they will, in the end, work together for our good and spiritual well being because they invigorate our soul. They turned out to be of help to strengthen the muscles of our soul. We have only to rivet the eyes of our mind upon Our Lord Jesus, for so doing we constantly recall His divine presence; and we will know by our own experience that His presence will be our strength.

By ourselves we may be coward and fearful to face the challenges and distress in life, but with Our Lord to help us we will be amazed to notice the inherent strength that is within us. We have only to trust in Him and believe that He cares for us far beyond we could ever ask or imagine.

This sounds very simple, but it involves two things. First, it involves that we should be willing to take our problems and difficulties to God. One of the greatest tests of any problem or difficulty is simply to ask, "Can I take it to God and can I ask

His help?" Second, it involves that we should be ready to accept God's guidance when He gives it, for if we do take our problems and difficulties to God and are humble and brave enough to accept His guidance, there does come the power which can conquer difficulties of thoughts and action.

The Lord becomes our strength as we keep His word, for this is a sign that we reciprocate His love for us. And we have an evidence that the strength of love is stronger than anything else even than that of death. The Lord showed this to us when He delivered us from the bondage of sin and spiritual death, just as of old by the strength of the Lord He brought His people out from the house of bondage in Egypt into the promised land.

So, we have a good ground to rejoice in the strength of the Lord because by it He works wonders in our lives. First and foremost is our conversion from the life of sin to the life of grace. If we are monks and nuns of the Benedictine/Cistercian tradition, we make this conversion into a vow. We professed the vow of "Conversion of Manners" by which we promise to make progress in living out the Gospel and the Christian life to the full, and to live until death as a fervent monk/nun.

However, true monastic conversion of manners is not possible without a radical and generous disposition to accept all the sufferings and tribulations willed for us in God's divine plan, since these are a consequence of our response to His call, and therefore play an important part in our vocation.

To live faithfully and fervently to our calling in life, whatever it may be, certainly requires God's help. Our awareness of God's help makes us grateful and confident. No wonder, then, that in His help how greatly we exult! →

### **Icon # 198 = Heart's Desire granted**

"Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withheld the request of his lips."

If we take delight in the Lord, as the Psalmist pointed out in another passage, He will grant us our heart's desire. Why is this? It is because at this point the soul has attained union with God. She wills only what God wills. Her will is also what God wills. We have an example of this in the meeting of St. Benedict and his twin sister Scholastica.

St. Scholastica begged St. Benedict not to leave her that night and that they will just be talking about God till morning, but St. Benedict refused. St. Scholastica, then, clasped her hands and bowed her head. Suddenly, there was a thunderstorm and heavy rain which made St. Benedict impossible to leave. He

gently remonstrated his sister, but she retorted saying: "I begged you but you did not listen, so I asked my God and He answered me."

We are told that St. Scholastica's desire was to spend that night with her twin brother for she knew that she was going to die soon. Thus God had given her her heart's desire and had not withheld the request she uttered in the depth of her heart.

St. Therese of the child Jesus, too, said that God never refused her, because she never refused what God asked of her. Wherefore, if our will is united with that of God's, He will normally grant the desire of our heart. We can confidently say that union of our will with that of God's is the epitome of worship and make us trustful that He hears our prayer, as the blind man in John's Gospel assures us: "If anyone is a worshipper of God and does His will, God listens to him/her."

Often the Lord inspires us to pray for that which He wills to give us. He may not give at once what we pray for, but we believe that He hears us. He has His own hours; we need to wait for them. God desires to be prayed and begged and pressed so as to make us appreciate His graces.

We have to ask Him to make all earthly joy insipid, and to fill us with the constant desire of heaven. This desire will make our labor easy and our suffering light. It will make us fervent and detached, and bring us even here in this vale of tears a foretaste of that eternal joy and peace to which we are hastening.

Will God deny this kind of desire? Certainly not, because He is much eager to see our arrival than our longing to return back to our true homeland where we will be united forever with our brothers and sisters, that is, the saints and angels in heaven. Of course, we will see also the splendor and glory and majesty of our heavenly Mother the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of heaven and earth.

What would be our happiness to see Our Lord Jesus who no longer hide Himself as though in a dim mirror but as a noonday sun, crowned with all wisdom, glory, power, and might; He who is the image of the invisible God? The poverty of our words can faintly paint it, and the weakness of our imagination can hardly describe it, so we will just content ourselves with what St. Paul says: "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him."

Desire for God, then, or desire for the kingdom of heaven indicates that we appreciate the value of the precious pearl entrusted to us, for whoever desires God with his/her whole mind, heart, and soul, has already possessed the object of his /her love.

To the extent that we allow ourselves to be governed by this desire for God we are already in heaven, a fellow citizen of the angels, only our body is on earth,

as St. Elizabeth of the Blessed Trinity heartily says: "Heaven is where God is; since God is in my heart, heaven is already here."

Desire is itself a first step of love; it is the specific form which love takes while we are yet on pilgrimage. Love is the energy that gives strength to desire, and is already a sort of knowledge and possession of the beloved.

To the extent that we refuse to be dominated by lesser desires, we are under the sway of this fundamental movement of our being. We are led to regret the power of sin holds over us and to desire salvation with great ardor. As such love grows in our hearts, it begins to find expression in the way we live, in the priorities we establish, in the way we act and in the manner in which we resist temptation. It becomes a shaping force in our lives, ordering everything toward heaven and toward the God who draws us to Himself. →

### **Icon # 199 = Goodly Blessings: Soul perfectly ordered to God**

"For thou dost meet him with goodly blessings; thou dost set a crown of fine gold upon his head."

Notice that the word "blessings" is in plural, that is to say, God's blessings are abundant and multiple. If all of them have to be written down the whole world might not be enough to contain them because they are enormous and boundless as the heaven itself. So, we will just mention few of them. These are not esoteric, but are very familiar to those who seek the Lord. One of them is God's solicitude for us, that is, He cares for us and keeps us under the shadow of His protection.

Another is the awareness of God's presence in the people we live with, in the people we come into contact to, and in the people we work with; and another is in our participation in God's graciousness that we may be able to respond to anyone who calls us to account for the hope that is in us; and the other is the blessing of peace which is Christ final gift to His disciples: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give it to you."

St. Augustine has left us a celebrated definition of peace: "the tranquility of order." Spiritual peace is a harmony of the powers in unity, the simultaneous focusing of their effort on one and the same end. Its principle is God, who is loved in all things, and above all things. Theologians know that peace is one of the interior effects of charity.

For a soul to be perfectly ordered to God: that is peace. The peace which Christ brings is not a thing, or a practice, or a technique. It is God Himself in us. It is the Holy Spirit.

Undoubtedly, all people desire peace, but those alone enjoy it who are completely dead to themselves and love to bear all things for Christ. In the words of St. Therese, "It is better to let others keep their opinions and preserve the peace."

These are just some of the blessings that God bestows on us when we meet Him in our lives. These blessings enable us to bear patiently the weakness and fault of our brothers and sisters and not be shocked by them, and our own weaknesses and faults too. These blessings make us able also to endure the trials of life; then, when we had stood the test we shall receive the crown of life, more refine than gold, which God has promised to those who love Him.

These blessings are simply the echoes of the blessings which God desires to bestow on His people from of old, as the Lord said to Moses: "Say to Aaron and his sons, thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, The Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them." →

### **Icon # 200 = Death of a Faithful Soul: Eternal Life**

"He asked life of thee; thou gavest it to him, length of days for ever and ever."

With unstinting generosity Our Lord Jesus promised eternal life to all who believe in Him and put His teaching into practice. Even if these people die, for this is the lot of us all human beings that we have to pass through that narrow gate called death, yet they shall live forever.

In the Prayer of Commendation of the faithful soul who is scheduled to take off from this present life to eternal life, we hear this sweet sounding and consoling assurance: "Go forth, Christian soul, from this world in the name of God the almighty Father, who created you, in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who suffered for you, in the name of the Holy Spirit, who was poured out upon you. Go forth, faithful Christian! May you live in peace this day, may your home be with God in Zion, with Mary, the virgin Mother of God, with Joseph, and all the angels and saints.... May you return to your Creator who formed you from the dust of the earth. May holy Mary, the angels, and all the saints come to meet you as you go forth from this life.... May you see your Redeemer face to face...."

It is the teaching of our Catholic Church that those who die in God's grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live forever with Christ. They are like God forever, for they see Him as He is, face to face.

Pope Benedict XII in his encyclical *Benedictus Deus* asserted this truth, saying: "By virtue of our apostolic authority, we define the following: According to the general disposition of God, the souls of all the saints...and other faithful who died after receiving Christ's holy Baptism (provided they were not in need of purification when they died...or, if they then did need or will need some purification, when they have been purified after death,...) already before they take up their bodies again and before the general judgment – and this since the Ascension of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into heaven – have been, are and will be in heaven, in the heavenly kingdom and celestial paradise with Christ, joined the company of the holy angels. Since the Passion and death of Our Lord Jesus Christ, these souls have seen and do see the divine essence with an intuitive vision, and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature."

If we still need of purification at the moment of death, then, we have to pass through Purgatory, for no one can see God unless he/she is pure. The word purgatory simply means a state of purification. This can be accomplished even here on earth throughout our life time by keeping God's commandments; by our patience with one another, for it is in our patience that we share in the sufferings of Christ and it is also the enfleshment of love; by not doing or saying anything that we know would offend God; above all by making love as our aim, for love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law. Besides, love covers multitude of sins.

Also by bearing patiently and willingly the minor inconveniences and pinpricks that we have to experience from time to time, and the major, but seldom, calamity and tragedy that might happen to us. These are means God use to carry out our purification in this life. If we cunningly resist them while on earth, then, by necessity, we have to be purified in the other side of life.

"How much better it is for us to be purged here than in the other life!", says St. Catherine of Siena, "for he who is purged in this world, by his own free will and the grace on him, pays less than a penny in a thousand pounds." This means that the pains and sufferings we experienced here on earth are far less intense than that of purgatory.

However, the souls in purgatory are consoled by the assurance of their eternal salvation, as the Church teaches: "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven."

God, in the person of the Lord Jesus, has given us eternal life for He came that we may have life and have it abundantly. He asks for a cup of cold water, but He gives us a spring of living water welling up to eternal life that we may share His glory forever. →



## **Icon # 201 = God's own glory bestowed on Men**

"His glory is great through thy help; splendor and majesty thou dost bestow upon him."

We poor mortals can only feebly imagine and less accurately describe the glory which God has prepared for those who love Him, for it is His own glory that will be bestowed on us.

He will pour out everything of Him to us, as He pours it to His beloved Son Jesus, Our Lord. What belongs to God belongs also to us since we are members of Christ's Mystical Body, as Christ Himself said: "All that the Father has is mine...." "All mine are thine, and thine are mine...." "The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them that, they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me...."

When St. Paul was caught to the third heaven – into paradise, he was so overwhelmed by its splendor and glory which defies human words to express, so all he can say is: "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him." No wonder that he prays that the God of Our Lord Jesus, the Father of glory, may give us a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of our hearts enlightened, that we may know what is the hope to which He has called us, what are the richest of His glorious inheritance in the saints....

This is a treasure and glory that will never fade but will last forever, for no one will take it from us. How great will our glory and happiness be to be allowed to see God and inherit a kingdom He has prepared for us since the foundation of the world; to be honored with sharing the joy and felicity of salvation and eternal light with Christ Jesus Our Lord and God the fountain of Truth, Beauty, Goodness, and Love; to delight in the blissful joy of immortality in the kingdom of heaven with the righteous and God's adopted sons and daughters! →

## **Icon # 202 = Marriage: Divinity and Humanity**

"Yea, thou dost make him most blessed for ever; thou dost make him glad with the joy of thy presence."

It is natural for loves to rejoice and be glad in the presence of the beloved. Christ's divinity loves so much His humanity that when He went back to where He came from, that is, heaven, He presented her\*<sup>3</sup> to His Father and to all the angels in order that His own humanity will be glad with the joy of the presence of

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<sup>3</sup> \*I use feminine as an image of marriage.

His own divinity forever. In other words, when Christ became a human being He married His own humanity and the two became perfectly one, as it is written: "Everyone who is united with the Lord becomes one spirit with Him." He endowed His humanity with His own divinity. His humanity became His bride forever. It's marvelous for our eyes to behold.

More so when we realize that everyone who belongs to Christ is also His bride and is destined to share fully His divinity as He shares fully our humanity. Each one will be glad and will be filled with the joy of God Himself. This joy just varies according to one's capacity, or to use another words, according to one's dosage. This means, for example, that the joy of the Blessed Virgin Mary surpasses that of a converted drug pusher or a prostitute who just came out from purgatory although both of them are filled with God, because our Lady had a greater dosage of God's love while still on earth.

Christ's joy is beyond all telling. No human words can really do justice to it, because it surpasses what we can ever think or imagine. Since every individual soul who belongs to Christ is His bride, therefore, our glory is also beyond telling. As a whole, we are the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church.

Scripture tells us that the Church is the bride of Christ adorned with unspeakable beauty destined to be united with the bridegroom and to behold His glory, as Christ said: "Father I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world."

This glory is what we called the beatific vision, a vision that brings happiness and joy, a joy which no one can take from us, as Christ said: "I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you." →

### **Icon # 203 = Where Love is Trust is there**

"For the king trusts in the Lord; and through the steadfast love of the Most High he shall not be moved."

During the trial of Christ Pilate was so curious to ask Him several questions about His identity. Pilate said to Christ: "Are you the king of the Jews?" Christ answered him: "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servant would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world." Pilate said to Him, "So you are a king?" Our Lord answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice."

There are many evidences that the Lord Jesus is king. We will mention at least two of them for they are sufficient enough for the believers; whereas if we mention dozens of them the unbelievers will still not believe it. The first evidence is the Annunciation when the archangel Gabriel told the Blessed Virgin Mary that the Son she will conceive shall be called Son of the Most High....He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of His kingdom there will be no end. The second evidenced which is powerful as the first is the Ascension when Christ said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...."

As a king and Son of the Most High God, it was natural for Christ to put all His trust in His heavenly Father. As adopted sons and daughters of the Most High through grace in our baptism the Lord planted in us a seed of intrinsic trust for the development of our spiritual personality as humans made in the image and likeness of God, to be transformed into the image and likeness of Christ, to grow into mature manhood/personhood in the fullness of the stature of Christ.

This trust will grow and be strengthened if we take time to water it with prayer. Christ, in His humanity, watered this trust by setting a quality time for prayer, especially early in the morning, to commune with His heavenly Father to give us an example that if we wish to grow in our relationship with Him we have to follow in His steps. It reached its culmination on the cross.

From there He was plunged into the depths of the tomb carrying with Him the absolute trust that He will rise again on the third day. By this He encourages His followers to put all our trust in Him believing that not even death can separate us from Him, but will give life to our mortal body through His Holy Spirit which He made to dwell within us; and also to let us know that all that happen to us will turn to our own advantage.

Trust is actually the younger sister of Faith and Love. They are very close sisters. They always travel together, get together. They enjoy each other's company. Our experience tells us that if we love someone we naturally trust him/her. This is true even in the secular and material world. People who love money put their trust in riches; those who love vanity put their trust in celebrities, and so on. So, it's just a matter where love is, because where love is trust is also there. Of course, faith is also there, because she couldn't afford to be without love and trust. Again, this is lucid in those who love vanity, for they spontaneously believe what the celebrities say. I mean the celebrities that they love who catered their vanity.

It is obvious, though, that this kind of trust is dangerous, because the soul will be pregnant with sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death. No wonder that the Scripture tells us that cursed is the man who trusts in men; and it also admonishes that if riches increase we should not put our trust in them, for the love of money is the root of all evil. Christ also said that we cannot serve God

and money simultaneously, for either we will love the one and despise the other or be devoted to the one and hate the other.

But to all who put their trust in the Lord He will be a buckler to them and will remain faithful to the end. We may not be immune from disasters, trials, and sufferings in life, but the Lord assures us that He will always support, with the power of His Holy Spirit, those who strive to stabilize their fidelity in Him; and at the end of our life as at the end of time, the power of good will prove stronger than the power of evil because it is the power of God. This power, of course, is the love of God. Thus through the steadfast love of the Most High those who trust in the Lord shall not be moved, for they have entered into the heart of the Lord Jesus – a kingdom that cannot be shaken. →

### **Icon # 204 = Prayers and Sacrifices: Expression of Generosity**

“Your hand will find out all your enemies; your right hand will find out those who hate you.”

At the conclusion of the parable about a nobleman who went into a far country to receive kingly power and then return; and after calling his servants, giving them ten pounds to trade with till he comes; but his citizens hated him and sent an embassy after him, saying: “We do not want this man to reign over us;” and when he returned, having received the kingly power and having commanded the servants to give an account of how they traded with the treasure given them; and how one of the servants did nothing about it but kept it away in napkin, and even accusing the nobleman of being severe and taking up what he did not lay down and reaping what he did not sow; and when the nobleman commanded to take the pound from the servant who did nothing about it and be given to the one who gained much, Our Lord said: “I tell you, that to every one who has will more be given; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me.”

Who is this noble man? Isn't He the Lord Jesus? Who are His enemies? Aren't they the evil doers who persist in their sins and harden their hearts and resist the grace of the Holy Spirit lest they be converted and live? These are they who do not want the Lord to rule over them, because sin is a resistance against God. But St. John said that if we say we have no sin we lie and does not live according to the truth.

Does this mean that we have in us a resistance against God? Precisely, because we were born in sin. Even the grace of baptism does not completely eradicate our tendency to resist against God. By its nature this tendency does not make us an enemy of God, but can even be a means to make us God's friends by surrendering ourselves to Him in humility and love, endeavoring, by the help of

His grace, to use the members of our body and the faculties of our soul as instruments of righteousness.

Human beings who became enemies of God carried this tendency to its opposite direction using the members of their body and the faculties of their soul as instruments of wickedness, adroit in planning and inventing evil of all kinds, living solely for this world and the desires of the flesh such as licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, malice, revels, carousing, and the like.

But the Scripture tells us that “the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

Thus by living only for the flesh and for this world we make ourselves enemies of God. However, while we are still in this world and while there’s still oxygen left in our body, there’s always a flicker of conversion. You might call this “a changing of camp,” or “a change of allegiance.” It means that there’s still a will left in us to surrender ourselves to God. This conversion is very difficult, though, for persons who have no religious friends or religious members of the family to pray for them and are willing to make sacrifices for their conversion.

If a person has no religious background and have no religious friends, their only hope of conversion and salvation is the sheer mercy of God which He bestowed on them through the generosity of other souls, especially hidden souls, who are willing to offer up prayers and sacrifices for the conversion of sinners.

The Blessed Virgin Mary said that many go to hell because no one prays for them. Every time that she appears on earth she always graciously asks for prayers and sacrifices. God will use our prayers and sacrifices as means to convert sinners. It is also our participation in the oblation and sufferings of Our Lord Jesus.

For modern people, though, especially in the first world countries, this idea of offering prayers and making sacrifices for the conversion of sinners seems to be untenable, partly because of their lack of knowledge of the value of prayers and sacrifices and also because of the overwhelming grip of materialism that grips the hearts and souls of the majority of people which makes prayers insipid and sacrifices meaningless.

But for those who heed the words of the angel of Fatima to make use of the things that come to us as means of sacrifices for the love of God, for the conversion of sinners, for reparation of the sins committed against the Immaculate heart of Mary, and for the holy father, prayers and sacrifices are wholesome gestures which manifest our desire for the salvation of all people. Thus prayers and sacrifices are expressions of our love of God and neighbor. It is unequivocal that love, too, is nourished by prayers and sacrifices. They are like

little woods that we throw into the fire of love to keep it burning. If there are no more prayers and sacrifices, certainly love will die down and another kind of fire will issue, that is, the fire of vices and malice which, if continually feed, will become a blazing furnace of indifference and disgust of the things of God. →

### **Icon # 205 = Fire**

“You will make them as a blazing oven when you appear. The Lord will swallow them up in his wrath; and fire will consume them.”

In his first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul likens himself to a skilled master builder laying a foundation, and another person is building upon it. He goes on to say that each person should take care how he/she builds upon it, for no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. “Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious wood, hay, stubble – each man’s work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.”

In another passage of Scripture it says that Our God is a consuming fire. St. John the Baptist, too, speaks about fire, for example, he says: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit that befits repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

We are not far from the truth to say that the trees here refer to people in this world, and the fruit means virtue. Virtue is certainly a fruit of repentance, because without repentance there could never be a virtuous life. Thus we have to bear fruits of virtues that befit our repentance; otherwise, we will be cut down and thrown into the fire which is unquenchable, prepared for the Devil and his angels and those who connived with them in doing evil deeds.

We could not even presume that since we are Christians and invoke the name of Christ, even though we still secretly do evil things and take delight in the unlawful pleasures of this world, we are already safe and considered His friends, because Our Lord Himself said that we are His friends only if we do what He has commanded us, and that not everyone who says to Him, “Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven,” “but only those who does the will of His Father in heaven.”

Of course, these people will defend and justify themselves, saying: "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name..." did we not "ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets"? But Our Lord will declare to them, 'I never knew you and do not know where you come from; depart from me, all you workers of iniquity!'" "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels..."

What we can imagine of the impact of this verdict is truly very far less than the intensity of its reality, because if it is already very painful to be rejected by someone in this world, how much more painful and unbearable it would be to be rejected forever by God Himself who had done everything He could even going so far as to be crucified in order to save us from this eternal fire which we certainly deserved because of our innumerable deliberate serious sins?

Lawful authority gave a name of this eternal fire as hell. It is my belief that no one goes to hell against his/ her will. What I mean is that it is a free choice, because we are free beings. We were given freedom by God which He respects and will never violate. He can only admonish us not to use our freedom in saying and doing evil, yet even this we are still free to accept or reject His admonition.

It is also my belief that if we will never give up prayer, especially if it is done humbly, God will grant us the grace of repentance and will show us the path that we should walk, giving us counsel with His eyes upon us so as not to trek again in the spacious road of sinful pleasures and sins that lead to the eternal destruction of our souls.

In this dangerous pilgrimage of life God has ordained, that no one shall know for certain whether he or she is worthy of God's love or hate, for if we use our reason rightly, this uncertainty will emphatically urge us to seek with all our powers the friendship of Our Lord, especially through prayer, solitude, and silence so as to listen attentively in the depths of our hearts what He really wants of us. It would be clear as a bell that He doesn't desire the death of sinners, but that we may be converted and live.

If the soul still persists in vehemently resisting God and covers its ears to the charm of the Lord's voice which call it to repentance and say to itself: "We don't want Him to rule over us," then like Moses who was the meekest of all people of his time but was filled with wrath when he came down from the mountain and saw his own people worshipping other god, so the Lord Jesus will, in the end, will swallow them up in His wrath; and fire will consume them.

To talk about hell nowadays is certainly not very popular. Some people will even make fun of it. I remember, before I entered the monastery, a man from my

hometown, he is younger than me and had finished mechanical engineering, said that there are mechanical engineers who can install air conditioning in hell to make it cooler.

Partly responsible for the unpopularity of the doctrine of hell were those teachers of religion and those parents who threatened those poor little kids to go to hell if they misbehave in class or in home and are naughty.

Now, however, moral theology tells us that only mortal sins are deserving hell; and for a deed to be mortal sin it has to be a grievous one and is done with full knowledge and full consent without being pressured. It has to be done deliberately. Of course, all sins either mortal or venial offend God, and we don't want to deliberately offend God even in small matters not only because it is a form of craziness, but also because God is love. We normally don't want to offend someone we love.

If we consider the infinite majesty of God that is offended, and the infinite meanness of the one offending, we will understand that sin is in some sort an infinite evil. →

### **Icon # 206 = Love more potent than Death**

"You will destroy their offspring from the earth, and their children from among the sons of men."

I am lead to think that the offspring of sin are the vices which, as the letter of James said: "When it is full-grown brings forth death." No doubt that the devil is the mastermind of death, because it was through the devil's envy that death enters our world and those who belong to his party experience it; for everyone who commits sin is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning.

However, love is more potent than death, because the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. In order that we will not doubt of His love for us the Son of God destroys these works of the devil by: first, dying for us to ransom us from death and to rob death of its sting so that we will no longer be afraid of death; second, by condescending to let His Holy Spirit dwells in us so that through His Holy Spirit who dwells in us He will give life to our mortal bodies and enables us to destroy what is earthly in us, such as: evil talks, evil desires, anger and malice, for He who is with us is greater and stronger than the instigator of these things, namely, the evil One; thirdly, by giving us courage to face and cope up with the trials and hardship of life and sustains us in our daily life until we reach the promised land – the new Jerusalem, the land of peaceful tranquility prepared for the meek and the peacemaker.



We should not be surprised or discouraged, though, if we found out that these earthly offspring in us are not destroyed all at once or in a single day or a single month or in a single year, because our human nature which is deeply wounded by sin is weighed down by the cares of the body is not strong enough, at an early stage, to bear the intensity of the purifying love of the Holy Spirit within us.

We have to increase gradually our capacity for this love and have to grow in strength to bear its magnitude. The agent of this growth and strength is, of course, the Holy Spirit with an openness, on our part, to His actions within us. He will inspire us to approach frequently, according to our state of life, the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. These are very effective in destroying gradually the earthly offspring of sin and vices which are still within us.

It is not without reason that the Lord Jesus gave these sacraments to His Church, because He knows full well of the inherent weakness of our human nature; that these earthly offspring, if not checked from time to time, will blossom again and thus make our last condition worse than the first; that if we say we have no sin and are incapable of committing one because we think we are already converted – we are just deceiving ourselves; that so long as we have not arrived yet at our true homeland we are liable to fall from time to time along the way; that if we will be forced to arrive in one day at our final destination, that is, the kingdom of heaven, the other children within us, that is, the intrinsic virtues will suffer exhaustion and thus be exposed to grave danger, as Jacob said to his brother 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 flocks will die...I will lead on slowly, according to the pace of the cattle which are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir.”

In all likelihood, for most of us, these earthly offspring will reach the maximum diminishment of its vigor and potency when we become older, for what is hard for us to accomplish, even with the patient help of grace, in our younger days will be a bit easier in our old age because our body gradually loses its strength to conspire with our evil tendencies to resist against the action of the Holy Spirit in our life. →

### **Icon # 207 = To Conquer: Bringing Our Lives in Line with God's Will for us**

“If they plan evil against you, if they devise mischief, they will not succeed. For you will put them to flight; you will aim at their faces with your bows.”

These evil tendencies, I believe, will wage war against us but they are unlikely to succeed, because the bows of prayer and trust in the Lord will put them to flight

as we look at their faces, that is, identify them and name them. By doing this, their plan is thwarted and their strength diminished. Their plan to destroy us is irrevocable, but they can only succeed to a certain degree as God permits it for our own instruction to make us clearly understand that our life on earth is characterized by constant spiritual warfare; and after we have stood the test God will grant us to be strengthened with His own Spirit living in us to be able to resist them, firm in our faith, knowing that the same spiritual combat has been waged since the beginning of time and is required of us for our entry into the promised land – the land of the living.

In the days of Saul and David, it was when the Israelites fell into sin that the Lord allowed the Philistines to oppress them. And so they began to discipline themselves and to conquer the desires of the flesh in order to be able to conquer their opponents

The Israelites were attacked by human beings; we are attacked by spiritual enemies. We can conquer them by bringing our lives into line with God's will for us; then our enemies will give way before us.

It is not their power but our lack of self-discipline that makes them a threat to us, and we shall weaken them by overcoming ourselves. We need to ask God's help in this warfare, because our only means of conquering the enemy is to conquer ourselves. Thus the bow of prayer has to be aimed at the face so as to gain a healthy self-knowledge of ourselves.

It is not surprising, then, that the face is singled out to be aimed at, not the front or back of the body, or the head even though these parts are easy to hit. We have to face ourselves, for everyone who lacks self-knowledge does not penetrate the deep things of God.

When the Lord Jesus said that He came to bring not peace but a sword, He meant that He came not to solve our basic inner conflicts in this world, but to help us face our conflict so that by this purifying struggle we might first come to know ourselves, then to know other people, and to consecrate ourselves to the salvation and happiness of others as well as of ourselves.

Are we not made in the image and likeness of God, that we bear resemblance to Christ the Son of God and the image of the invisible God? So, if we wish to know who we are, we have to look not only to what we have been before our conversion, but also to what we were originally created.

Since this is not our own doing, but owing to God's grace, we can now exclaim and say: →

## Icon # 208 = Be exalted O Lord: Boldness of Love

"Be exalted , O Lord, in thy strength! We will sing and praise thy power."

We may ask, what is this strength of the Lord? Isn't it in His meekness and humility? Or isn't it in His love? The Lord said that "greater love has no one that this, that a man lays down his life for his friends..." and that when He is lifted up on the cross He will draw all people to Himself. Certainly, it requires a tremendous strength to draw all people from every race, nation, and tongue, from age to age, to oneself and make them children of God, for all who received the Lord Jesus, who believed in His name and strive to live a good Christian lives, He gave power to become children of God.

The strength and power of God are such that, without the slightest effort, He hefted the whole universe in His hand. And by becoming children of God He gave us power to know and love Him. The strength of love is such that it alone has the boldness and power to carry God.

Take for example St. Mary Magdalene early that morning at the tomb. She thought that someone had taken away the Lord, for He was no longer there. She stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb; and saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of the Lord had laid, one at the head and one at the feet.

They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Saying this, she turned round and saw the Lord Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was the Lord. The Lord Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?" Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him away."

Imagine the boldness of St. Mary Magdalene to say, "I will take him away." Is she strong enough to carry the Lord? She might not have taken her breakfast when she went to the tomb early that morning, yet she did not hesitate to say, "I will take him away."

Nowadays, there are weight lifting competitions for women, but this kind of competition was undoubtedly unknown during her time, and in all probability she was not an amazon type of woman and not one who would likely join such tournament, and yet the strength and power of love deep down in her soul is strong enough to be willing, even single handedly, to carry God.

Isn't it the Blessed Virgin Mary carried also in her womb the God who is bigger and heavier than the whole universe? This is the strength of love and the power of humility which God shares with us, human beings, in the stillness of our heart.

Thus with St. Mary Magdalene, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all who are naturally weak in their bodily constitution but strong in their holy disposition, we can rejoice and say, "Be exalted, O Lord, in thy strength! We will sing and praise thy power," for you have lifted up the lowly and from the dung heap You raises the poor who put their trust in you and let them sit in the company of the blessed ones in heaven to eat supper with You in Your Kingdom with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

This is your doing, O Lord, therefore, be exalted in Thy strength. Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give the glory, for unless You have given us Thy strength, who could have the strength to carry You and bear one another's burden! Your strength, O Lord, is also Your forgiveness, for when You say to the paralytic man: "Your sins are forgiven, take up your pallet and walk," he who once could not even have the strength to lift up his own sandal, has now the strength to take up his pallet.

For this, O Lord, be exalted in Thy strength. We will also sing and praise Thy power, for You have the authority to forgive sins. What is even more amazing, O Lord, is that through the power of the Holy Spirit You extended this authority to Your disciples after Your resurrection, and to Your lawfully ordained ministers after them, when You said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven." Thus it is just right and fitting, O Lord, that You be exalted in Thy strength, and that Your power be praised and sung from age to age.

Be exalted also, O Lord, in thy strength, for the tremendous love You showed for us that while we were yet sinners You dies for us, so that we may no longer live for ourselves but for You. Not only so, O Lord, but we also rejoice in God the Father through You, through whom we have now received our reconciliation. For us by Adam's disobedience we, his descendants, were made sinners, but by Your obedience, O Lord, You granted us the power to be made righteous.

So, be exalted, O Lord, in the highest heavens. Till the days of our lives, O Lord, we will sing and praise Thy power, for in Your sheer kindness You give us eternal life; and instill in our hearts the hope of Your love and mercy that we shall never perish, and that no one shall snatch us out of Your hand. For Your Father, O Lord, who has given us to You is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch us out of the Father's hand.

Be exalted also, O Lord, for giving us the Blessed Virgin Mary, Thy Mother, to be our Mother also, at the foot of Thy cross that we may have the courage and strength to carry our own cross all the days of our lives and ascend the Calvary of our oblation where we offer our bodies and souls in union with the of Yours, to God the Father for the salvation of the whole world.

Be exalted also, O Lord, in Thy strength, for even if we experienced dark night of the soul and cry out in sonorous voice: →