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## Icon # 595 = The Remedy of Rejection

### Psalm 60 (59)

“O God, thou hast rejected us, broken our defenses; thou hast been angry; oh, restore us.”

Truly, truly, to be rejected by God for all eternity is the most painful suffering of all. The simple reason why it is so, is that God is the Supreme Good, so to lost the Supreme God is an unbearable pain.

Even in the natural level, that is, while still in this world, to be rejected by a lover, or friends, or families, or by society, is already very painful because of the nagging feeling that we are not valued or wanted or loved. Yet, no matter how painful the rejection is there is still a glimmer of hope that it can be healed; for instance, if we meet another sweetheart, or find a friend, or locates a support group. We can also migrate to another place to start all over again. Hence, while still in this present life there is always a possibility of healing, if not in itself, at least in some other way.

But it is quite different if we will be rejected by God or by the angels, or by the heavenly society once we reached the border of this present world and the other world, because there is no more hope, even a dot of possibility, to heal the pain of rejection.

However, we may wonder why God would reject and be angry with us when He is infinite Love and infinite Mercy. There must be a reason for this. One of the reasons for this is that love demands reciprocity. But suppose that love does not find reciprocity, or suppose that love does find it only to be betrayed, repudiated, and rejected. Will love still forgive? Of course, love will always forgive, because love is mercy. When there is love there is mercy.

However, there is only one thing in the world which human love cannot forgive, and there is only one thing in eternity which divine love cannot forgive, and that is the refusal to love. Therefore, when the human soul freely and deliberately refuses to reciprocate divine love, and perseveres in this disposition till the moment of death, then the God of love and mercy, in obedience to the law of love, cries out: “Love has done all that it can, love was nailed on the Cross. I can forgive everything, endure everything, except the refusal to love.” And it is a horrible thing to be through with love, because once divine love departs at the moment of death, it will never return. And what terrible disaster in all the world is comparable to being rejected, not by the lovely but by the love which is God? However, while we are still in this present life, there’s always hope. The possibility of reconciliation with God is available all year round, seven days a week, and twenty four hours a day. We have only to repent and harden not our hearts

when we hear His voice while there is still time. Repentance has an amazing power to restore us to God; it rejoices the citizens of heaven; it mends our broken lives and opens the door of mercy.

“If we truly repent and determine not to offend Him,” says our heavenly friend, St. Teresa of Avila, “He will resume His former friendship with us and grant us the favors which He granted aforesaid, and sometimes many more, if our repentance merits it.”

Hence one thing alone can restore us to God and help to bring healing to our wounded souls, that is, to learn something about the effect of repentance, so that sure of the forgiveness of our past sins, we too may be heartened to mount the heights of virtues.

It is right to say that repentance is a powerful medicine to heal our moral insanity, because if to offend a very powerful person who can harm us physically is utter madness, to offend God who can reject our soul for all eternity without the slightest glimmer of reconciliation is pure insanity!

God's pardon makes us new. Spiritual newness comes from repentance. It is through Our Lord's mercy that we are renewed, because there was never once in our lives that we are free from sin. Thus the most profound of all spiritual things is inward repentance, for it is based on a gracefully illuminated self-knowledge. It implies a penetrating view of the sinfulness of sin. It lives in a clear vision of the perfection of God, which almost anticipates the brightness of the vision hereafter.

As we discover our complicity with evil, we progressively discover our need for a greater power than our own if we are to find the courage necessary to face and change our condition. God is more than happy to reconcile us to Him, to repair our broken moral lives, and to restore our once lost dignity.

Whether we like it or not, we need to experience, at least, a sporadic jolting and quaking up and rending of our lives before we can enter the kingdom of heaven. It is possible that there can be breaches of trust and rapture of confidence when these things happened, especially when our faith is still weak. Hence we stagger. Of course, our ultimate recourse if we do not want to sink in this tempest is to pray that God will repair these breaches. Thus it is not surprising to hear: →

## Icon # 596 = The Quaking of the Heart

"Thou hast made the land quake, thou hast rent it open; repair its breaches, for it totters. Thou hast made thy people suffer hard things; thou hast given us wine to drink that made us reel."

When tragedies rudely come into our lives, it is very likely that our hearts quake and be even split open. If it is split open, then, what is inside is revealed. In other words, tragedies have an amazing power to discover what is in the heart of people. If we truly revere God in our hearts all the days of our lives, it is very likely that we will not curse him or blaspheme Him or blame Him for allowing the tragedy to happen.

If our virtues are solid enough, it is possible that we can humbly mumble with Job: "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."

Of course, this does not happen overnight. Any virtue has to be nourished with the salubrious nutriment of prayer and comestibles of sacrifices in order for our soul to withstand the earthquake of tribulation; otherwise, our soul will totter or even collapse by the magnitude of the quake.

Part of a true and solid approach to life will always include a constant consultation of God about the happenings, activities, and problems of our daily life. We believe that we are not alone; prayer manifests that we certainly understand that we are not alone, that God is present and available to influence our thoughts and actions; it has an amazing potency to calm down the quaking of our hearts and repair the breaches of virtues.

Without prayer we in effect are trying to show off that we can take care of everything by ourselves and do not need guidance or help from God, that we can do the repair by ourselves. Of course, we have our part in doing the repair, but why should not God be involved in the restoration of its breaches? Besides using our minds, the advice of friends and counselors, why not the Lord Jesus have a say about what matters to us? Can He who is Holiness Himself not repair the breaches of our moral lives if we humbly ask His help? Never was it known that anyone who fled to His mercy was left unaided!

Accommodating our prayer to our present state renders it profitable and efficacious, for what can be more consoling and more easy than to converse with Our Lord about what we are experiencing at present? Do our moral lives totter? Then, we have to go to the Lord Jesus! Does our virtues need repair? So, we have to go to the Lord Jesus! If we allow the Lord Jesus to come close to us through the practice of regular, personal prayer, the conditions are ripe for Him

to do something in us, for instance, refurbish the rupture of our moral lives, strengthening our resolve for what is good, right, and true; resilience when hard things come our way, and have us drink the wine of the Holy Spirit to prevent us from reeling into vices. If these things are ours and abound, then the victory of attaining eternal life will glimmer on the horizon. Thus with confident trust we can hope: →

### **Icon # 597 = Banner of Victory**

“Thou hast set up a banner for those who fear thee, to rally to it from the bow. That thy beloved may be delivered, give victory by thy right hand and answer us!”

In chapter 7 of his Rule, on Humility, our father St. Benedict constructed a ladder of humility. “The first step of humility,” he said, “is that a man keeps the fear of God always before his eyes.” Of course, the kind of fear that we have to keep before our eyes is the “reverential” fear, a sense of awe, or a “filial fear,” a fear not to offend a loving father.

Certainly, religious faith is not alien to fear, but this is not the servile fear a citizen would have for a dictator in Communist state; it is the filial fear a child feels its loving father. The person of faith fears God in the sense that his reverence makes him shrink from doing anything that might wound his/her father. This kind of fear in its turn begets purity of the intellect, so that we seek to avoid all things that might damage our relationship with God.

When our devotion is integrated with reverential fear it does not nullify it, but amends it; it takes from it the anguish which it never lacks when it is servile, and render it chaste and filial. In the words of our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “I think it might be useful to add that we should approach by three steps the acquisition of salvation and grace: humility, faith, and fear. It is to the humble man that grace is given; it is with faith that he receives it, and it is with fear that he guards it.”

It is right to say that it is not servile fear but filial fear that is the Gift of the Holy Spirit and which Scripture commends. Hence, when Scripture says we should “Fear the Lord” it does not mean that we should run and hide because God is going to punish us, but rather that we should receive the gift of the Holy Spirit wherein we dread to offend God or be separated from Him.

When we speak of the fear of God or the dread of Him as being a safeguard, this certainly is not a slavish fear but a “godly fear” as the letter to the Hebrews indicated that even the Lord Jesus exercises the fear of God while still on earth:

“In the days of his flesh, 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.”

Just as there is a godly grief that produces repentance which leads to salvation and brings no regret, and there is a worldly grief that produces death, so also there is a filial or godly fear – a holy reverence for God and His commandments which draws people unto Him, and there is a servile fear which drives the evildoers away from him. We see a very clear indication of this in the words of our heavenly friend, St. John the Evangelist: “And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.”

In other words, the evildoers are exercising a “servile fear” of God. They do not want to know the will of God because it judges them. It drives them away. On the other hand, every one who does what is true comes to God, they are drawn toward God. They are exercising a “filial fear” of God, a holy reverence. This filial fear is not only natural to those who live under the Divine influence of the Holy Spirit, but it is an injunction. We are commanded to fear God with a holy reverence for Him and His will. For instance, in Matthew 10: 28, it says: “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

We are commanded to fear the Lord because we should have reverence for His almighty power. Knowing the law of consequences, that is, “we will reap whatever we sow,” should instill in us a reverence for God and His commands. This is a good indicator that our faith in God is activated.

Our faith in God is truly a banner of victory that overcomes the world, for every one who believes that the Lord Jesus is the eternal Son of God overcomes the world. Christ is amazingly victorious on the Cross when He stretched out His hands to deliver us from eternal death – a dumbfounding death which is also amazing for it does not obliterate the soul out of existence but loses its desire to live, as it is written: “In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death will fly from them” (Rev. 9: 6).

Christ is passionately desirous to share His victory with us that we may have eternal life with Him in the kingdom of heaven. “All kings, when they die,” says our heavenly friend, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, “lose along with their life, their power. But Christ though He was crucified, is worshipped by the whole world.”



We will certainly share in His victory when we attached ourselves to His cross. He wanted that we should surrender ourselves and all that we have to Him freely, and never take it back. We should try as much as possible to be detached of everything that is not of necessity. Then our hands are truly nailed to His cross, for “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

The life they live they no longer live for themselves but for Christ who loved them and gave Himself up for them. Far be it from them to glory except in the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to them, and them to the world.

In the light of His Crucifixion, they find it impossible ever to complain: “Why has God done this to me?” or to ask, “What did I do to deserve this?” Looking at the Cross on the Hill of Calvary, they know He did not ask: “What have I done to deserve this?” Through His example, they attain to patience and resignation in the momentary trial and pain, knowing that the last act of life is the one that matters.

The cross is not so much a sign of suffering and failure as the most eloquent symbol of what our world needs. This is precisely because it expresses Christ's triumph over all evil, including the last enemy which is death, the true hope that does not disappoint. This hope is resplendent in every Christian who embraces the cross and entrusts himself/herself to its astounding mystery, not abandoning one's commitment to what is right, true, honorable, and just despite the mounting wave of difficulties and misfortunes that come one's way. Hence they hear: →

### **Icon # 598 = The Almighty Lion**

“God has spoken in his sanctuary: ‘with exultation I will divide up Shechem and portion out the vale of Succoth. Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine; Ephraim is my helmet; Judah is my scepter.’”

It is engrossing to hear that God has spoken of Judah as His scepter. Judah, of course, is one of the twelve sons of Jacob; and when Jacob was about to die, he gathered his sons together and told them what shall befall them in days to come. He spoke of Judah as a lion's whelp and from the prey he has gone up. Also, that “the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the people” (Gen. 49: 10).

Notice that this passage is from the book of Genesis – the first book in the Bible. Certainly, it sheds light to another passage in Scripture, that is, the book of Revelation – the last book in the Bible.

In Chapter 5 of the book of Revelation, John narrated that he saw in the right hand of God who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals; and he saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and he wept much that no one was found worthy or to look the scroll or to look into it. Then one of the elders said to him, “Weep not; lo, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

We know without a slightest shadow of doubt that this passage is referring to the Lord Jesus the Almighty Lion – the Root of David, who conquered Death, and has delivered all who believed in Him and obeyed His commands from the other lion who is roaming around the world, by destroying the works of this lion who is also known as the devil.

Truly, we are participating in the triumph of the Lord Jesus and we are more than conqueror through Him who loves us, for no one can snatch us from His hands if we let Him be the ruler of our life. He is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, the genesis and the revelation of God's plan of salvation for the human race, “for it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come....it has been testified somewhere, ‘what is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou carest for him? Thou didst make him for a little while lower than the angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet.’ Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one.”

Christ, as God, has supreme power over all creation in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, for all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. Hence, there is no dignity, honor, and glory for us human beings than our being invested with and sharing in God's infinite glory, honor, and dignity because of the divine filiation we share with the Lord Jesus. In Him we become partakers of the divine nature and heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

Christ is not only the Creator of the world, but also one who takes responsibility for our salvation. He uncovered for a new world, a world wherein we may unfold our personality and let it grow and develop into a mature manhood in the

fullness and stature of His own humanity and divinity. He raised our fallen human nature to a new supernatural order of existence and destiny. He revealed to us the loftiest human ideal in sacrificing His life, throwing into bold relief the noblest and most all-embracing love, which expressed itself in the service of others.

Life with the Lord Jesus is really simple. It is we who complicate our existence with insignificant trivialities, with molehills turned to mountains. Out of small deviations on inner points of what are really matters of indifference we create "big" problems with our honor or our pride at stake. And this merely, because we do not know that our true honor and legitimate pride come from the love of God and from the dignity of being the adopted children of God.

Christ the Lord wanted to be for us a real and living exemplar, to give us an example of struggle and victory. He wanted to leave us a complete life's series of human actions, done by Him, so that we may ponder them in prayer, since Christ is God became man: a complete, perfect man. And through His human nature, He shows us what His divine nature is. It shows us the nature of God and beckons us to believe in the love of the God who created us and wants us to share his intimate life.

"God has spoken in his sanctuary: 'With exultation I will divide up Shechem and portion out the vale of Succoth.'" Thus when the Lord Jesus ascended on high He led a host of captives, He gave gifts to the human race. And His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, some priests and religious, some monks and nuns, some in single blessedness, and some in married life, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the Mystical Body of Christ, 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.

In all His words and actions, the Lord Jesus showed a consistent clarity of mind and firmness of judgment. In the face of temptations, He held no dialogue with them, but rejected them outright from the beginning, as for instance the devil said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread," but the Lord Jesus rebuffed it right away, saying: "Man shall not live by bread alone."

Again the devil took Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory; for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it shall be yours;" but again, the Lord Jesus rejected it outright, saying: "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'" Accordingly, →

## Icon # 599 = The Washbasin of God's Mercy and Forgiveness

"Moab is my washbasin; upon Edom I cast my shoe; over Philistia I shout in triumph."

What is obvious to our physical senses is that a washbasin is a "vessel" either for washing hands or feet or face. For instance, on the day before He suffered the Lord Jesus "knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded."

Since a washbasin is a vessel, and we are told in the second letter of our good friend St. Paul to St. Timothy that "in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and earthenware, and some for noble use, some for ignoble;" therefore, "if any one purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work."

Of course, one of the many "good works," as St. Paul continues to instruct St. Timothy, is to "shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart." This is very interesting because these things are indicative of abundant hidden treasures. In other words, we have abundant hidden treasures within us. We have only to purify ourselves from all ignoble passions and desires by not making provision for the flesh to gratify its yearnings, and then we will be a vessel for noble use, that is, living a godly life in this world.

Moreover, we have these treasures in "earthen vessel," that is, our fragile body, to show that the transcendent power to subdue our body by the power of the Holy Spirit belongs to God and not to us. We have only to cooperate and allow ourselves to be used as a "washbasin" that we may be cleansed from all our iniquities. We have to allow Our Lord Jesus to wash our feet and have them shod with the equipment of the gospel of peace that we may proclaim the wonderful deeds of God who washed us with His blood on the cross, so that we may no longer live for ourselves but for Him.

Thus we have to use the members of our body as vessels of righteousness, with the added consolation that if we fail in our Christian duty, especially that of charity toward our fellow human being, we have a washbasin of God's mercy and forgiveness to cleanse us of our transgression.

Cleansing in the washbasin of repentance will certainly renew the spirit of our mind and nourish the humility of our heart. To ignore the need to cleanse in the washbasin of repentance is likely to end up in our spiritual loss and impoverishment; our efforts to make progress in Christian living will fail to get traction or to obtain firm footing, for it shows that we are too indigent in self-knowledge.

The need to purify ourselves in the washbasin of God's mercy and pardon is like the practice of bar to which every ballet dancer, no matter how expert they become, must return each day, to do again the same basic exercises done the first day of their profession. Analogously, this act of washing presents the fundamental discipline which, deepened by experience and strengthened through habit, sharpens and improves us until we come to dance with divine providence, with God.

Truly, without any shadow of a doubt, whoever does not cleanse in the washbasin of repentance or of God's mercy and pardon, is blind and shortsighted and has forgotten that he/she was cleansed from his/her old sins. On the other hand, if we avail ourselves of this "washbasin" there will be richly provided for us an entrance into the eternal kingdom of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, for no one will be allowed to see God until they are cleansed.

"Upon Edom I cast my shoe," that is to say, allowing the Lord Jesus to have absolute dominion over our lives, for in Him we live and move and have our being.

In the ancient days, the custom of casting a shoe was used by the emperor of the Abyssines as a sign of dominion. It signifies victory and power; that he should be in Edom as at home, and there pluck off his shoe and cast it upon him; either to carry it after him, which was the work of a servant, to which St. John the Baptist alludes: "He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry;" or rather to clean it for him; for as Moab was a washbasin to wash one's hands and feet, so in Edom the shoe was made cleaner, to wipe off and remove the dirt and dust that was upon them; all of which denotes great subjection, and this was fulfilled in David, as the 2<sup>nd</sup> book of Samuel tells us: "He put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom he put garrisons, and all the Edomites became David's servants;" and in all likelihood may also refer to the spread of the Gospel in the Gentile world, and the power accompanying that to the subduing of many sinners in it, carried thither by those whose feet were shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace.

Thus over Edom, that is, over the proud and insolent Christ Jesus the Lord will have absolute dominion upon them, for He cast down the mighty from their thrones and humbled the proud, both angels and men, to the dust making them His footstool.

On the other hand, the Lord took good care to wash the disciples' feet after their preaching tour in order that He might unambiguously show them how often good works are spoiled by the dust of sin and how, in the very act by which their listeners' hearts are purified, the speakers themselves are defiled. "For it often happens to many of us," says our heavenly friend, Pope St. Gregory the Great, "when we are giving any kind of exhortation that, however slightly, we grow proud within because we have been the vehicle of the grace of repentance."

"So what did it mean to wash the disciples' feet," he goes on to say, "after the euphoria of their preaching unless he was wiping away the dust that had clung to their thoughts as they preached and purifying the feet of their hearts from interior pride?"

It is right to say that it will do us no good to know theology if all the while pride, sensuality, and selfishness are allowed their license and their anarchy in our lives. It would be a great tragedy if these things will happen. It triggers several questions: →

### **Icon # 600 = Demolishing the Fortified City of Sin**

"Who will bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom? Hast thou not rejected us, O God? Thou dost not go forth, O God, with our armies."

It is right to say that while we are still in this present life setback is always possible. So long as there is still blood in our vein, we will be deceived if we think there is nothing in us that has to be purified or, you may say, to be conquered. Pride and concupiscence are not yet completely dead. It is very likely that they will be active and bring havoc to our souls if they are not checked from time to time.

Pride and concupiscence and the other vices has a devastating power to entirely deform the conduct of our lives, because they can corrupt our will and incline us to be captivated by evil desires.

Of course, this will happen only if God will no longer go forth with our armies, that is, our virtues. It is a sign that God gave us up in the lust of our hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of our bodies, preferring falsehood than truth, and

untrustworthiness to integrity. It is not that God rejected us but we are the ones who rejected Him. We opted to have nothing to do with Him, hence He no longer assist us in our struggle against sin.

In this scenario, Edom represents Pride and insolence, and sin a fortified city surrounded by the walls of vices and evil deeds. If, however, there is still a flicker of repentance and a glimmer of humility left in our souls, then Our Lord Jesus will be more than happy to bring us to the fortified city of sin to conquer it, for God is in Christ Jesus reconciling the human race to Himself. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

As we discern our involvement with evil, we progressively notice our need for a greater and higher power than our own if we are to find the strength and courage necessary to face and change our condition – to conquer the Edom of Pride and insolence in our souls.

It must never be thought that hardening of the heart is hopeless; as long as we still have life and have flicker of humility to ask the Lord to bring us to the fortified vices in our lives that need dismantling; there is always hope for our souls. And so long as there is a broken reed that daily tries to lift itself, the Lord Jesus will eagerly provide the needed energy.

The eye of any sinner, if he/she turns it to God, can become dim with tears, and the stiff neck of Edom can bend in adoration and prayer. The proud and hardened heart may relax its defenses against the Lord at any stage, early or late, and He will enter it. "The beginning of our righteousness," says our heavenly friend, St. Bede the Venerable, "is the confession of our sins."

The deepest of human liberation – liberation from the fortified city of sin, requires the acknowledgment and confession of sins. Confession leads to forgiveness, and forgiveness leads to freedom. To overthrow sin and the evil that is so embedded in our sinning can be done only by divine power, for it is impossible and outside our competence to overthrow the fortified city of sin. To struggle, yes, to continue to fight, to inflict blows, and to receive setbacks is in our power, but to uproot, to demolish, and to conquer, however, belongs to God alone. For this reason, it is right to ask for help: →

## Icon # 601 = The Help of a Higher Power

"O grant us help against the foe, for vain is the help of man! With God we shall do valiantly; it is he who will tread down our foes."

We are told by our good friend, St. Paul, that "we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness in the heavenly places." Certainly, to triumph over this kind of struggle is beyond any human competence; therefore, "vain is the help of man!"

However, this doesn't mean that we should no longer consult any human being, especially our friends or spiritual directors, or even psychologists, because, anyhow, their help is vain, but it should enable us to realize that they can help us only to a certain point; beyond that point we need the help of a "Higher" power, that is, of God.

We will likely do well if, beside the help of other people, we also entrust ourselves to God and always rest in the consolation of divine grace when we see ourselves struggling with our foes; when we see the tempest of temptations increase exteriorly. We have to pray and hope that although we may have to experience many reversals, they may happen at different times through the wonderful providence of God, because dumped on us all at once they would possibly knock us out, but if separately they can be borne. For this reason our good friend, St. Paul, says: "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

"With God we shall do valiantly; it is he who will tread down our foes." Indeed, our merciful God who helps the brokenhearted gives our souls in the midst of our greatest difficulties an intimate assurance that we have nothing to fear provided we allow Him to come to our help and consigns ourselves entirely to Him. Every step we take under His auspices is a victory to our souls.

God understands our pains and troubles better than we do and that His dispositions of events in regards to us are for our benefits even when we do not comprehend them. The ground for this is that there is nothing so insignificant or obviously trifling that is not established or permitted by God and that God is sufficiently wise, good, powerful, and merciful to turn the most seemingly disastrous events to the good and profit of those who are recipient of His divine help.

Hence, "if God is for us, who is against us?" "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or



peril, or sword?...No, in all these we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." "For I am sure," asserted our good friend, St. Paul, "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus Our Lord."

Moreover, we should be convinced that good and favorable things are effectuated by the will of God and by His gracious help, while unfavorable things are carried out by His permission, when on account of our immorality and hardness of heart the divine assistance abandons us and allows the devil or the shameful passions of the body to control us.

Undoubtedly, it is the grace and help of God which always work good things in us, doing valiantly against our evil desires and concupiscence, that when they are missing all our endeavors will be worthless, that without God's help no eagerly pursued effort is able to tread down our foes.

Take for instance the case of the people of God in the olden times: constantly oppressed by the attacks of the enemies on every side, the Israelites would never feel that they did not need the help of God. Thus they would always ponder and meditate on God and cry out to Him for help, and they would neither lapse into sluggish inactivity nor lose their ability to fight and their training in virtue. For oftentimes security and prosperity have brought down low those whom adversities cannot overcome.

Hence, we have to put our confidence in God believing that His help fights with far greater strength on our behalf than the multitudes of our foes that struggle against us. We need always to be vigilant in prayer so that we will not be overwhelmed by temptations, for the spirit is eager but the flesh is weak. Therefore, we pray: →

### **Icon # 602 = What to do When the Heart is Faint**

#### **Psalm 61 (60)**

"Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer; from the end of the earth I call to thee, when my heart is faint."

If we are amazed how a telephone or cellphone or internet works, more so of prayer. Prayer is an important means of communication with God. Just as we can communicate with a person all over the world by a telephone or cellphone or by internet, so by prayer we can make contact with God wherever we are in the world – from one end of the earth to the other.

Thus we should begin to realize more and more that prayer is very important. We can use our time to no better advantage than to pray whenever we have an opportunity to do so, either alone or with others, while at work, while at rest, or while walking down the streets; whether our heart is happy or faint.

"All works takes time. When it becomes clear to us that prayer is a part of our daily program of work," says the Norwegian theologian Ole Hallesby, "it will also become clear to us that we must arrange our daily program in such a way that there is time also for this work, just as we set aside time for other necessary things, such as eating and dressing." He also says: "The Father 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 say, 'Just bring all those little things to me, I am most willing to help you.'"

So long as we have breath we should not abandon prayer, even for one day, under the pretext of infirmity but, on the contrary, we have to call upon the Lord when our heart is faint; thus acting we will gain much profit, and prayer will soon restore us by the operation of grace.

"The very effort we make in praying," says our heavenly friend, St. Augustine, "calms the heart, makes it clean, and render it more capable of receiving the divine gifts which are poured upon us in a spiritual manner."

It is right to say that when we will experience sorrow and distress and when our heart is faint, the best thing to do is to call upon the Lord, because if we will not call upon the Lord in this condition there would be a danger that we will become a victim of despair; it might be a dead end for us if we make an end to prayer.

Our prayer by reason of our sorrow and distress may be like to a call upon a far off friend, but our inmost faith has its quiet heart, a space to whisper to the Lord as to One who is assuredly our very present help.

Our faith's greatest triumphs are achieved in our heaviest trials and difficulties. Tribulation brings us to God, and brings God to us if we call upon Him when our heart is faint, when our heart is overwhelmed, when the huge waves of troubles sweep over us, and we are completely submerged not only as to our head, but also our heart; yet such are the best times to graciously call upon the Lord that He hear our cry and listen to our prayer.

"From the end of the earth I call to thee, when my heart is faint." It has been said that the center of affections and devotions of the pious Israelites was the "holy city, Jerusalem; whither the tribes went up, even the tribes of the Lord, to

testify unto Israel, and to give thanks unto the name of the Lord." Thus Israel of which Jerusalem was the Capital, was to the pious Jew the world; it was the world within the world; the earth within the earth; the whole globe beside was to him a waste, a place out of the world; an extraterrestrial territory, beyond the limits set up by the Lord Almighty.

Hence, the end of the earth as referred to the Psalmist would signify any place of bodily absence from the temple where God had taken up His special abode, or any place whence his spiritual affections were unable to reach the temple. In reference to us, it signifies any sensible distance from God, for as God is the source and center of life, hope, joy, and love, hence, distance from Him whatever degree is painful and sadness to the soul.

No wonder, then, that with Psalmist we have to cry out to God: "From the end of the earth I call to thee when my heart is faint." Also: →

### **Icon # 603 = Strong Tower**

"Lead thou me to the rock that is higher than I; for thou art my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy."

Who is this rock that is higher than we, a refuge, and strong tower against the enemy of our souls? Even with minimum catechism we have an inkling that this rock is no other than the Lord Jesus the Rock of our salvation. He is higher than us because He is Divine, our refuge because He is God, and a strong tower against the enemy of our souls because He is our Savior.

A being who is not higher than we, or but a little higher as the angels, though he might teach us, or guide us, or warn us, or console us, could never save us. Therefore, the Lord Jesus can save us because He is higher than us. As a rock of our salvation He is not only high, but also deep; He not only stands above the waves of tribulations and pains, but He fixed His foundation of humility in the bed of the ocean of life.

Here we have the humanity of Christ who is the rock, that humanity by which He was able to go down to the deeps of suffering, as well as ride triumphantly on the bosom of the waters of humiliation, the depths of our fall and degradation – that humanity in which He went down to the grave.

This is our rock, both deep and high; the rock of our salvation who desires that all people may be saved and come to the knowledge of the Son of God that they may find a place of safe standing, a refuge and strong tower. Thus when we are lead astray from the right path of life and feel the bitterness of distance from God, we have to cry out with all our heart to be led back to God. No matter

how desolate the place to which we wandered, and darkness gathered at the base of this rock of safety, but eternal sunshine of God's consolation hovers in its head.

It has been said that "experience is the nurse of faith." For instance, many times had the persecutions of Saul and the perils of battle endangered David's life, and only by a seeming miracle had he escaped, yet was he still alive and unhurt; this David remembers, hence he is full of hope. As in an impregnable fort, a strong tower, David had dwelt because surrounded by omnipotence.

It is right to say that there is a pleasant sweetness to remember the loving-kindness of God in our past experience, how He helped us, how His divine providence guided those events, and so on. Even our negative experiences played a significant role in bringing our souls closer to God, for in retrospect, we realized that "negative experience" is not necessarily a sign of a problem, but can equally be one of the signs of God's provident love.

The role of negative experience is to make us appreciate how poor life is without God, how hollow the pleasures that compensate, and how much our sense of well-being is attached to seeking God and finding Him, to be led to "the rock" that is higher than we. In other words, the pain of negative experience is not punishment, it is education. It teaches us to know what we really want in life and lays the foundation for willing it more intensely.

"Lead thou me to the rock that is higher than I..." Just as the Lord Jesus is the Good Shepherd who makes us lie down in green pastures of consolations, and leads us beside still waters of tranquility and restores our souls, and leads us in the paths of righteousness, so also He is the Way that leads us to the rock, that is, He is the Way that leads us to Himself.

What a blessing, then, if we would find ourselves upon this rock, and enjoy the realization of being so! Hence, we must be dependent upon the Lord Jesus, for He can do everything for us in our worst of times. When we are buffeted by the waves of tribulations and the winds of temptations blew up within us, when our brain is reeling and confused that we perhaps cannot think wisely, much less make persevering efforts, the Lord Jesus is there to help us. He can draw us out of the mighty waters of difficulties, and set our feet upon the rock of divine serenity.

Undoubtedly, many of us have already experienced the gracious power and amazing tenderness of the Lord Jesus. For those who have not yet experienced conversion in their lives we made this appeal: Be reconciled to God, then taste and see how good the Lord is. He is a refuge in times of distress, a strong tower

against the enemy of the soul, no other than Lucifer or Satan the prince of darkness.

Our ancient enemy, of course, maliciously desires to deprive us of the Lord's goodness, assaulting us on every side, but God only allows these temptations in His kindness, so that our mind may be the more solidly supported by the hope of His divine assistance after the appearance of the temptation, and that we may realize how weak and frail we are if deprived of God's help.

One of the many good benefits in taking refuge in God, our strong tower, is that the enemy cannot press his assault to the final defeat of our heart. Even though he often troubles the good thoughts of our mind, he cannot inflict any deadly wound on our hearts, for God is against him. He is only permitted to attack us as far as it is necessary for us to learn from the temptations and be strengthened, lest we will fall into the grave danger of attributing any good deed we did to own power, and lest we forsake our own selves in the complacency of security, neglecting the virtue of vigilance.

Indeed, we have to stay awake all the more, to watch and pray, knowing that we are always in the front line of battle against the enemy's temptations. Our minds often become proud when we give abundant evidence of virtuous living and when we succeed in maintaining our prosperity, thinking that we ourselves are responsible for the good things we have.

It is right to say that it is necessary for us to be aware that our enemy wounds us with as many arrows as he assails us with temptations. For we stand in the front line of battle every day, and every day we are shot with the darts of his temptations either in words, thoughts, and actions. On the other hand, we too throw darts at him when, for instance, we are overwhelmed with troubles and pains we handle them humbly and patiently, calling to mind our heavenly friend the blessed Job who was struck down by the loss of his possessions and the death of his children, yet he turned his pain into praise and adoration of God, saying: "God gave it and God took it back; God has done what he pleased; blessed be the name of God."

Job is truly right in saying, "God gave it, and God took it back. God has done what he pleased." Job had lost everything because of the trials inflicted by the enemy; yet, says our other heavenly friend Pope St. Gregory the Great, Job "knew that Satan would not have the power to try him unless God had permitted. Therefore he did not say, 'God gave it, and the devil took it,' but 'God gave it, and God took it back.' There would have been cause for suffering, perhaps, if the enemy had taken what the Creator had given, but since no one took it except the One who gave it, he took what was his, not what was ours. If we receive from him the things we make use of in this life, why

do we complain when his judgment ordains that we should be deprived of the things he has generously loaned us?" [from the Moralia]

St. Gregory also said that "when we suffer things in this life we do not wish, we must turn our will and desires to him who cannot will anything unjust. Indeed, there is much consolation in anything that displeases us when it is he who has arranged it for us, because nothing but justice pleases Him. Everything we suffer is justice, and we are indeed unjust if we complain at suffering what is just."

The Lord has promised Himself as a strong tower against our enemy in the day of trouble, so that we, in turn, may glorify Him, for He says: "Call on me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you, then, you shall glorify me." Where do we usually go in our day of trouble? What kind of tower provides our consolation? Is it the crumbling and ephemeral amusement of the world, seeking entertainment to distract us from pain or sorrow? Do we find solace in gossip, feeding our grief? Of course, there are multifarious diversions that call to us in the day of trouble but only one that provides true safety and consolation, no other than the Lord Jesus our refuge and "a strong tower against the enemy." For this reason, it is truly right and just to beseech Him: →

### **Icon # 604 = To Dwell in the Tent of God Forever!**

"Let me dwell in thy tent for ever! Oh to be safe under the shelter of thy wings!"

In the Incarnation of the only begotten Son of God, the eternal Word, no other than the Lord Jesus, God humbly pitched His tent and dwelt among us – full of grace and truth. Of course, this is a very humbling experience for God to live in tent.

Many of us might be interested to know that in the Old Testament the word "tent" is often used of the tabernacle. Moreover, "tents" were the only homes of the early patriarchs.

Since the word "tent" is often used of the tabernacle in the Old Testament, hence, it is appealing to appreciate that in the New Testament the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary became the tabernacle of the Son of God. It's no wonder, then, that one of her glorious titles is "tabernacle of the Most High."

The Blessed Virgin Mary is the first living tabernacle where the Father enclosed His Son, the tent where He made His dwelling, the "ark" of the new covenant where the divinity and humanity of Christ found shelter under her protection and love.

Let us see a certain parallel of how the Blessed Virgin Mary, carrying the child in her womb, is compared to the Ark of the Covenant – the site of the permanent presence of God among His people. The events, of course, are the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin to Elizabeth and the trip of the Ark toward Jerusalem and stayed at the house of Obededom.

Just as the Ark was brought to Jerusalem in David's time so the mother of God departs in the direction of the Holy City to visit Elizabeth; and as Israel honored the presence of God in the Ark during its trip toward Jerusalem, so Elizabeth recognizes at Mary's greetings that the mother of the Lord carries in herself the divine presence as is evident in her response at Mary's greetings: "Why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" And as the Ark stayed in the house of Obededom for three months, so the Blessed Virgin Mary remains with Elizabeth for three months.

And just as the house of Obededom was blessed by the presence of the Ark, so is it surprising then that the whole world and the whole creation are blessed by the Incarnation of the Son of God? Our good friend, St. Paul, had testified to this when he said: "...Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God."

It is hard for us human beings, to really understand the humility that was involved when God became a human being like us in all things, except sin, and pitching His tent among us. Take for example, and imagine, if it were possible, a human person divesting himself of his body, and then sending his soul into the body of an animal, say, a mouse.

A double humiliation would follow: 1<sup>st</sup>, accepting the limitations of a mousy organism, knowing all the while his/her mind was far superior. The 2<sup>nd</sup> humiliation would be to be forced, as a result of this "emptying of self," to live in the companions of mice. But all this is infinitely nothing compared to the "kenosis" – self emptying of God, by which He took on the form of man and accepted the limitations of humanity, such as hunger, thirst, tiredness, pain, persecution; nor was it a trivial matter for the infinite Wisdom of God to condemn itself to association with smelly poor fishermen who has no education at all.

But this humiliation which began in Nazareth when He was conceived in the womb of the stainless Virgin Mary was only the first of many to counter our human pride, for He who dwelt in a "tent" has eventually no place to lay His head: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

Of course, this is very paradoxical because although He has nowhere to lay His head, yet He owns the whole universe and He can always lay His head, for

instance, in the hearts of those who love Him just as He lets His beloved disciple to lay his head in His heart.

The human and divine lesson that we can learn from it is benevolently this: just as God humbles Himself to share in our humanity, we will also share in His divinity; and just as God pitched His tent and dwelt among us, we are also allowed to pitch our tents and dwell among the saints and angels in heaven.

Thus each one of us has the capacity and the privilege to say: "Let me dwell in thy tent for ever! Oh to be safe under the shelter of thy wings!" As though we say in other words: Let us dwell in heaven for ever that we may eternally be safe under the shelter of thy protection, without the slightest anxiety of being separated from you! For this reason, it is truly right and just to add: →

### **Icon # 605 = The Heritage of those Who Reverence the Name of the Lord**

"For thou, O God, hast heard my vows, thou hast given me the heritage of those who fear thy name."

Just as there are varieties of gifts and varieties of services, so there are also varieties of vows. If we are religious in the active Orders we take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience; and if we are religious in the contemplative Orders we take the vows of stability, obedience, and conversion of manners, which includes poverty and chastity.

A vow is simply a promise to God of doing some good hereafter. The use of vows was common in Bible times. For instance, when Jacob went into Mesopotamia he vowed to God the tenth of his estate and promised to offer it at Bethel to the honor and service of God. Here's a sample of his vow: "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that thou givest me I will the tenth to thee" (Gen. 28: 20-22).

Samuel too was vowed and consecrated to the service of the Lord, and was offered to Him, to serve in the tabernacle (cf. 1 Sam. 1: 21-22, 28). There's also the vow of the Nazarites, a person who was consecrated to God, and vowed never to cut the hair, drink wine, or touch a corpse during the period of the vow. This could be taken for a limited period, or for life.

Under the New Testament, a vow is either general to all Christians, as that which is made at baptism; or particular and special, as when we bind ourselves to a



greater endeavor, to leave some sin and improve our manner, or perform some service. A vow, as one observes, must be made deliberately, because a sudden enthusiasm makes not a vow; and we ought to vow nothing but what is in our power to perform.

The performance of solemn vows is strictly enjoined upon us in Scripture. For example, in the book of Ecclesiastes it says: "When you vow a vow to God, do not delay its fulfillment. For God has no pleasure in fools; fulfill what you have vowed. You had better not make a vow than make it and not fulfill it" (Ecc. 5: 3-5).

It is right to say that the obligation we impose on ourselves by the vow doesn't contradict our liberty; it is rather its perfect expression. The three evangelical counsels: Obedience, Poverty, and Chastity; and the two monastic counsels: Stability and Conversion of Manners are coalitions of strength; however, they ought to be understood and lived in the light of the entire gospel, and in the service of love, which is the ultimate goal.

They are the privileged means that allows for greater responsiveness to the activity of the Spirit, inscribes God's image and likeness on those who diligently and generously work on their hearts and minds, and put themselves at the favorable disposal of grace.

When we took vows we committed ourselves to the service of God. The focus of our vowed life is to nurture our spiritual life and those of our community. The vows are our fundamental apostolate. Ideally, they provide each of us, that is, we who entered religious life, in general, or monastic life in particular, with a framework in which to live our vocational commitment to God through the Church. For instance, in the Constitutions and Statutes of our Order (OCSO), it says: "By fidelity to their monastic way of life, which has its own mode of apostolic fruitfulness, monks perform a service for God's people and the whole human race" (Const. 3, #4).

"Don't regret your vows," says our heavenly friend, St. Augustine, "On the contrary, rejoice that it no longer permitted you to engage in harmful license." Thus if the vows prohibit us to engage in deleterious franchise, therefore, they are the safest means to safeguard the heritage of God's kingdom which has been prepared for us since the foundation of the world. The vows are also concrete expression that we have a "reverential fear" of the name of the Lord.

Reverential fear of the name of the Lord is one of our greatest protections against evil. We need to become acquainted with and know our own hearts and the evil inclinations we have. Then we need a reverential fear, a holy reverence for God and His holy will and His Word, because we will reap only

what we sow, that is, if we sow in wickedness, the same will return to plague us; we will reap in full measure what we sow. A holy reverence for that principle will have a tendency to protect us from doing evil.

Reverential fear of the name of the Lord is rooted in our appreciation for God's holiness. God is holy and the gift of reverential fear strikes within us a deep awareness of this holiness as well as a profound understanding that we must be made holy, for He is holy. Hence reverential fear helps us to appreciate that we do not simply walk into God's presence in the spiritual equivalent of short pant and a T-Shirt. Reverential fear inspires us to be clothed in holy attire, in fine linen, which is the righteous deeds of the saints, to get ready to meet God.

Just as we might take a shower and wear fine clothes to meet a distinguish person or a world leader, we reverence God enough to be robed in righteousness by His grace before we go to meet Him. Reverential fear of the name of the Lord makes us serious about this preparation. On the other hand, God in His solicitude and love, sealed us with the promised Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of our heritage to the praise of His glory, and to the eternal honor of His only begotten Son, no other than the Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of lords and the king of the whole universe.

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, that 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, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power in us who believe. Therefore, it is truly right and just to pray: →

### **Icon # 606 = Kingship of the Lord Jesus**

"Prolong the life of the king; may his years endure to all generations! May he be enthroned for ever before God; bid steadfast love and faithfulness watch over him!"

Christ Jesus Our Lord, by virtue of the ineffable "Hypostatic Union," that is, the union between the human nature of Christ and the second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity, is truly a king forever. The archangel Gabriel himself bore witness to this at the Annunciation, saying to the Blessed Virgin Mary: "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name 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."

Christ clarified the true nature of kingship when the Jews handed Him over to Pilate: "'My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants 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?' Jesus 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.'"

Not only does Christ's kingship stem from His very nature, but He also acquired the right to kingship "by reason of conquest," for He ransomed us by His sacrifice on Calvary, redeeming us from the slavery of sin and Satan. For this reason, our good friend, St. Paul, reminds the Christians in Corinth, and we too, that "You are not your own; you were bought with a price."

Accordingly, it was after His redeeming sacrifice and resurrection that Christ said to His apostles: "All power is given to Me in heaven and on earth;" and although the kingship that Christ exercised in our present world is of "spiritual" nature, yet by reason of His divine nature and His role as Redeemer He has a "temporal" power as well, but He did not choose to use it.

As our heavenly friend, St. Thomas Aquinas, explains that Christ did not will to have on earth the temporal administration of an earthly kingdom: "Christ, although established king by God, did not wish while living on earth to govern with temporal power an earthly kingdom; consequently He said: 'My kingdom is not of this world'" (Summa III, 59, 4 ad 1).

As Christ testified before Pilate that He is a king, but His kingdom "is not of this world." His kingdom is "in" the world, but not "of" this world, that is, He does not rely on "temporal" power as worldly kingdoms or governments do, but "spiritual" power. He governs not by physical force in the conquest of nations, but by the conquest of minds and hearts by means of divine grace.

His kingdom on earth, that is, the Church, is indeed in the world, but its purpose, its power, and its means of conquest are of spiritual order, and ordained for their final fulfillment in the world to come. Yes, it is a kingdom "not of this world" inasmuch as it establishes and prescribes principles which are folly to the world; principles quite contrary to those by which the world is governed. It is a kingdom in which citizens obey not by force but freely, out of love; yet it is a kingdom where that freedom can be abused, where the will of Christ the king can be rejected.

The Lord Jesus seeks to reign in our minds and hearts through the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love, and the cardinal virtues of Prudence, Courage, Temperance, and Justice, which find expression in the acknowledgment of His dominion, and the return of His love through obedience to His will.

The last, but not the least, let us listen to the proclamation of our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux: "Oh, if only the Lord Jesus would remember sinful me 'in the favor of His people' when He comes into His kingdom! Oh, if on that day when He is to 'deliver up the kingdom to God and the Father,' He would condescend to visit me with His salvation, that I may see the good of His chosen ones that I may rejoice in the joy of His nation, that He may be praised with His inheritance even by me! Meantime, come Lord Jesus, and remove all scandals from Thy kingdom, which is my poor soul, so that Thou who art her rightful king, may reign in her. For avarice has entered and claims me its own; vainglory desire to rule over me; pride wishes to be my king; sensuality says, 'I will reign,' ambition, envy, jealousy, and anger contend in me concerning myself, as to which of them shall have the greatest power over me. I resist them as well as I can: I struggle against them according as I am assisted by grace, I proclaim that the Lord Jesus is my only king. For Him I defend myself, because I acknowledge myself to be His subject. I adhere to Him as my Lord and my God, and I declare that I have no king but the Lord Jesus." As a consequence: →

### **Icon # 607 = Destined to live to Sing the Praises of God**

"So I will ever sing praises to thy name, as I pay my vows day after day."

Truly, it is not farfetched to assert that we who entered religious life, especially the monastic life, should really be grateful for the vast opportunity to sing praises to the name of the Lord Jesus. Our daily schedule is set up in such a favorable way that we would be able to do this constantly, making it the regular business of our lives. What a tremendous blessing to begin to do here on earth what we will be doing in heaven for all eternity.

As men and women consecrated to God, the vows we made on the day of our simple or solemn profession were constantly with us and on us, and we had pledge ourselves to serve God faithfully and steadfastly; and that we could better perform this service as we gather together at community prayers in our Liturgy.

Our way of life is geared to keeping up the performance of our daily responsibilities and duties of religion without hindrance or interruption. It is right to say that the initial response we made to the call of God in our lives is already a gracious indication of a desire to be engaged in the worship and service of God; a desire to be with Him and sing praises to His name – a confident hope that we would be permitted to enjoy His beatific presence forever.

The vocation to devote our entire lives to sing praises to God here on earth is such that the Church does not require us to do active ministry, that is to say, no matter how urgent the needs of the active apostolate we cannot be summoned to aid in various pastoral ministries.

Our vocation – to sing praises to God is no hyperbolical piece of extravagance, but such as glory and grace shall enable us to carry out this wonderful vocation all the days of our lives here on earth.

Saying prayer to God and singing His praises has to go hand in hand, that is, we ought not to be leaping in prayer, but limping in praise. Whether our prayer is answered sooner or later, we still need to offer praise to God. This attitude is truly acceptable to God. Thus there should be a parallel between our prayer of supplication and our singing praises to the name of God.

To God who gives us life and who adds days to our days we will devote all our days. Moreover, we need not desire to be better secured than under the guardianship of God's mercy and truth. And if we partake of God's grace and mercy which came to us through Our Lord Jesus in the power of Holy Spirit, then, we are very likely to praise Him whatever be our outward circumstances, for we who have a living hope in the Lord Jesus "have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory."

In Him we also, who have heard the word of truth, that is, the gospel of our salvation, and have believed in Him, were sealed, on the day of our baptism, "with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory" (cf. Eph. 1: 12-14).

More importantly, the renewed experience of God's mercy and truth towards us is the paramount elements of our trust in Him, and our praise of His holy name. We offered Him our perpetual praise, and we desire to render it all the days of our lives, going right on as the days roll on. We ask no vacation from this heavenly vocation; we would make no alteration in this sacred service. God daily performs His promises, let us daily perform our vows; He keeps His covenant with us, hence, let us not neglect ours. Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth, even for evermore. Amen. So be it.

Thus we have a fairly good reason to sing praises to the name of the Lord Jesus as we pay our vows day after day, for the Lord Jesus is Our God whom we wait, in the stillness of our hearts, for His second coming to save those who eagerly long for salvation. For this reason, it is truly right and just to utter: →

## Icon # 608 = For God alone my Soul waits in Silence

### Psalm 62 (61)

"For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation."

Why is it that for God alone our souls wait in silence? And why is it that it has to be in silence and not in talking? What is in silence that makes it more conducive for the waiting of God? And what is in God that makes Him the sole object of our waiting and not in someone else?

It is right to say that waiting can be a double-edged sword. It can cause a very healthy and great longing for someone waiting for a loved one, a pleasant desire and a delectable expectation for the coming of someone very dear, or it can cause a nagging fear, a harrying anxiety, or a tenacious apprehension for someone who did something wrong and is waiting for judgment.

Therefore, if our conscience is clear that we are in good standing with God, then we can wait for His coming in silence with a stable peace and eager expectation. However, we have to affirm that so long as we are still in this present life the stability of our peace and the inner silence of our souls and our eager expectation of God's coming are still subject to fluctuation because here on earth our "state" is not yet permanent.

Hence, there's a need for us to continually and perseveringly stir ourselves up to the effort which is needed to preserve the stability of our peace and the inner silence of our souls, for the "tear and wear" of external occupations is ever acting upon even in our religious life.

It has been said that the constant friction of the sand on Egyptian hieroglyphs removes every trace of color, and even blots out the deep-cut characters from basalt rocks. Thus the unceasing erosion of external occupations and multitudinous trifles has an inherent tendency to undermine all the bloom off our religious life and efface the remembrance of God cut on the tablets of our hearts if we do not counteract them by constant and earnest prayers. Our devotion, our faith, and our love for the things of God are only preserved by being constantly renewed.

Necessarily, it stands to reason that there's a need for us to withdraw, from time to time, into solitude and silence: there to wait for the Lord. We need it to nurture our hearts and to support our waiting. It is as important as our household duties and responsibilities or as important as our active ministry if we belong to an active order.

Solitude and silence when adopted to our circumstances and properly kept, becomes sweeter little by little, and secures multitudinous advantages; for it is the safeguard of innocence, the dwelling of peace, the place of heavenly secrets, the chosen means of divine communication, and one of the hallmarks of a wise person, as it is written: "He who restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent" (Pr. 17: 27-28).

If our circumstance is such that "physical solitude" is so minimal, then we have to make every effort to withdraw into the solitude of our heart, as our heavenly friend, St. Francis de Sales, advises to do, saying: "Remember to retire often into the solitude of your heart while you are outwardly engaged in work or with others. This spiritual solitude can be preserved no matter how many people there are about you, for they are only about your body and not about your heart, which can remain all alone with God."

Our Cistercian father, no other than the affable St. Aelred of Rievaulx, has this to say: "God loves solitary soul in the sense that He draws it into solitude and there speaks to it intimately. In solitude and silence the soul is to grow in peace and remain in joy."

For these reasons, silence is very conducive for the waiting of God. And since God is the "Supreme Being," the ultimate source and creator of all things visible and invisible, the highest and greatest of all the kings and presidents of the whole world – combined together, for He is the king of the whole universe, therefore, He is infinitely worth waiting for; and above all because He is LOVE. Thus our participation in the Love of God enables us to wait for Him in silence and peace.

From Him comes our salvation, for He laid down His life on the Cross to show His immeasurable love for us because greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for another person. One will hardly die for a righteous man – though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But the Lord Jesus shows His unlimited love for us in that while we were yet sinners He died for us.

Moreover, if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life, for Christ the Lord is not only the Creator of the whole universe but also the One who takes responsibility for our salvation. Once we are convinced of our own sinfulness, we cannot be convinced of our own righteousness, and once we are convinced that Christ has saved us from sin and eternal death, then we are graciously convinced that Christ Jesus the Lord is our sole righteousness.

However, we have to be realistic that to have accepted the Lord Jesus as our Savior and our righteousness, and to have embraced His holy faith is no guarantee of freedom from trials and difficulties. The Lord Jesus never said to His Apostles: "Be good and you will not suffer;" but He did say: "In this world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world." Unavoidably, it is truly right and just to affirm: →

### **Icon # 609 = The Lord Jesus only is our rock, our Salvation, and our Fortress**

"He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly moved."

God, who is our rock when we flee for shelter, is also our strong rock when we stand firm and defy the suggestion of the evil One to want us build on sand of worldly power and earthly pleasure.

When we really entrust ourselves and all our affairs to His will and wisdom, when we leave ourselves to all the ways of His divine providence, and patiently expect that all things will turn to our advantage if only we have love for God, then it is fair to say that the Lord Jesus solely is our rock and salvation, our solid and stable fortress.

By His grace He has supported us, and by His providence will deliver us from eternal destruction. Therefore, He only can be our Rock and our Salvation. Creatures are nothing without Him, for in Him we live and move and have our being. Trusting in God, the heart is fixed; thus we shall not be greatly moved.

Certainly, what a rock or a fortress is to one in danger so is God a refuge and protection to one in distress, for by taking shelter in God we will be able to overcome many temptations and by resting in Him we can endure the hardships and challenges in life.

Tribulations and tragedies has a tendency to shake the foundation of our trust, but we "shall not be greatly moved" because the house of our soul is built on the rock of our faith in the Lord Jesus – our fortress and our salvation; and though we might be troubled in spirit, shaken in mind, staggered in our confidence, and regress from some degree of steadfastness, yet we will not be greatly moved so as to be utterly cast down into the great deep, into the abyss or the bottomless pit to perish eternally. We shall not be greatly moved in a day of affliction.

God may not deliver us out of our troubles all at once, but He will truly bear us up under our troubles in the mean time. Can we forget that it was in the hour of Christ's profoundest tragedy, when Judas betrayed Him, when the apostles forsook Him, when the chief priests and scribes and the multitudes derided Him,



the smiles of His Father's love were withheld, that the terrible powers of the prince of darkness tried to move Him? Truly, the sorrows of death surrounded Him, but He prayed in His distress. God the Father made the earth to shake and tremble, and the rocks to cleave, and brought Him out, in His resurrection, because He trusts in His Father's love and rests in His Mother's affection.

Truthfully, the Lord Jesus only is our rock, our salvation, and our fortress. He had been to us as a rock and a fortress, that is, we had derived from Him the protection which is a rock and a fortress. The word "rock" here points out to the fact that in times of danger a lofty rock would be sought as a place of safety, or that men would run to it to escape from the enemies. Such rocks abound in Palestine as we are told; and by the fact that they are elevated and difficult of access, or by the fact that those who fled to them could find shelter behind their protecting crags, or by the fact that they could find security in their deep caverns, they became places of refuge in times of danger; and protection was often found there when it could not be found in the plains below.

Sincerely, the heart of the Lord Jesus is a strong fortress where we can go when we are weary and find life burdensome. That is why He invited us to come to Him in order to find rest for our souls, for our souls will remain restless until we rest in God. The Lord Jesus Himself said: "If sinners shall come to My heart they shall find in an ocean of mercy." Peter and Paul and Mary Magdalene and Augustine, and many more, found it so, and thousands upon thousands of wounded souls since then have found peace and love and holiness in that loving heart.

The Lord Jesus says to us now and always: "Abide in My Love, for it is sturdy as a rock, stalwart as a fortress, and a safe haven of salvation. So, have courage and confidence!" Really, we shall find that loving Sacred Heart a sure refuge in the fiercest storms of temptations. Wherefore: →

### **Icon # 610 = God has permitted the Devil to wrestle with men**

"How long will you set upon a man to shatter him, all of you, like a leaning wall, a tottering fence."

In other words, how long will you all together attack a man of God to beat and break him down as though a battered and wobbling wall or a sagging and tumbling fence?

Without any slightest shadow of a doubt, all the coalitions of evils are working together to destroy and shatter us, so that we will not inherit the kingdom which they had lost. Day and night, they are scheming ways to carry out their attacks.

They even show themselves as angels of light to easily deceive us. Sometimes they charm our minds by soothing persuasion; sometimes they will draw us into sin by surprising us; sometimes they will urge us openly to the practice of vices; and sometimes they will do it under cover of their suggestions, making vices look like virtue.

Truly, sexual temptation in all its variety is one of their strong points. Either single handedly or together, they assault people, without discrimination, to shatter the walls of their chastity and breach the fence of their tottering modesty.

These evil spirits specialize in particular vices and not all of them have the same aggressiveness. They range from relatively harmless jokers to chronic liars to inveterate sexual predators to deep-seated dishonesty to customary infidelity to time-honored vanity and to murderous fiends.

However, we have to assert that the struggle to shatter a human being is often as difficult for the evil spirits as it is for the man or woman whom they are assaulting, and sometimes it is even more difficult. These evil spirits shatter human beings exclusively within the ambit of divine permission, and this is clear from the story of Job whom Satan assaulted only to the extent that God allowed.

As the story of Job tells us, God says to the devil: "Have you noticed my servant Job? There is none on earth like him. He is blameless and upright man, who fears God and avoids evil." The devil was quick to reply: "Does Job fear God fruitlessly? You have built a wall around him, his house, and all his possessions....Just reach out and touch him, and see if he does not curse you to your face!"

God in his divine providence permitted to happen what the devil in his wickedness demanded. Satan, in a rage, was fully determined to shatter Job like a wobbling wall and a tottering fence, and set up against him all the artillery of his cruel temptations, for he destroys the walls of his possessions and demolished his children. He fractured his entire body and instigated his tottering wife against him. He poked his friends to console him as though repairing the wall and mending the fence and then incited them to a bitterly vexatious diatribe, but Job did not budge for he trusted in the Lord.

Instead of cursing God, as Satan expected, Job fell upon the ground and worshipped, saying: "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" (Job 1: 22).

It is truly right and just, and wise too, that during the time of prosperity we should not be unmindful of adversity and during the time of adversity we should not be

forgetful of prosperity, for in so doing we will be able to maintain our patience. This is noticeable in the case of Job. He preserves his patience by recalling to his mind the time when he did not yet possess the things he has lost; his remembrance of the time when he did not have them alleviates his pain at losing them.

It is very intriguing to notice, too, that the devil did not demand the shattering of Job, like a leaning wall or tottering fence, before God praised Job in Satan's presence. Certainly, God would not have allowed the devil to destroy Job had He not known that he would keep his integrity. Nor would God have allowed someone to be tempted who was to fall, the one whom God had commended before he was tempted, against whom the fire of envy and the flame of jealousy had been ignited in the tempter's mind. To this kind of person the Scripture pointed out: "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor.10: 13).

Therefore, we must clearly realize that even Satan does not bestow on himself the power to demolish us as though we are a sagging wall or a staggering fence, even though his pride against the Ruler of the whole universe, the Omnipotent God, singles him out. He knows pretty well that he has no authority to do anything on his own accord, because his own very existence, as a created spirit, is not his own being.

This is clearly manifested when the demon Legion was about to be expelled from a man, it said: "If you cast us out, send us into the herd of swine." He has absolutely no power of himself to go into the herd of swine, hence it is not surprising if he could not shatter and ruin the soul of a human being without God's permission.

Our heavenly friend, St. Cyril of Jerusalem in his Catechesis VIII, pointed out that God "has permitted the devil to wrestle with men, that they who conquer him might be crowned, and after the victory, the devil might suffer greater shame for being defeated by inferiors, while men might gain great glory for having triumphed over him who was once an archangel."

We have to contend vehemently that Lucifer and the other wicked demons will successfully shatter us, like a battered wall and wobbling fence, only if we set at naught all Divine warnings, if we fail to profit by all the patient forbearance God has shown us, and in wanton disobedience is absolutely bent on rushing into occasions of sins and plugged our ears to the voice of God calling us to repentance.

Every man and woman who has had the choice between good and evil, and with complete deliberation, has chosen evil and died persisting in his/her choice will, in all probability, be shattered to pieces like a leaning wall and a tottering fence, for they surrendered their lives to the Devil and the power of darkness whose only desire is: →

### **Icon # 611 = Recovering From Our Lost Eminence**

"They only plan to thrust him down from his eminence."

As men and women created in the image and likeness of God and are called children of God by virtue of our divine filiation, we have a breathtaking dignity and a stunning eminence. No wonder that Lucifer and the other wicked angels, out of their breathless hatred, their astounding jealousy, and mind-boggling envy only plan to thrust us down from our eminence as children of God.

In other words, they only desire to debase us by doing sinful thing, thus no longer behaving as children of God in accord with our dignity. The effect, of course, is the dulling of conscience, for sin has a stupefying power to blunt our understanding of the eminence inherent to our divine filiation, presenting us moral values of our actions which does not properly manifest the depravity of our actions due to our conscience being "covered with the salve of sin." This is how sin mollifies the "prick" of conscience. The voice of conscience becomes weak by frequently "overriding" what it tells us.

However, there is always hope for every one to recover one's eminence regardless of how debase that person might be so long as he/she is still in this present life and so long as he/she still detests his/her sinful deeds.

It has been said that the worst thing in the world is not sin; it is the denial of sin by a false conscience, for that attitude makes forgiveness impossible, that is, to recover one's eminence. The unforgivable sins is the denial of sin; but until that deplorable stage is reached – despite the failure of false starts, the short breathing spells between relapses, so long as there is still a flicker of real remorse, the voice of God can still be heard, and no such case is hopeless.

There are lots of stories of "well-known" people such as John Wayne, Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day, etc. who had found again their eminence. "Between the saddle and the ground, mercy sought and mercy found."

By instigating us to commit sin, Lucifer and the other evil spirits thrust us down from our eminence, but when we go down our knees in the confessional, at that very moment, we retrieved our deleted eminence and add to our own dignity

as children of God, for no matter how heavily sins weigh on our conscience, no matter how serious we have diminished the honor of our eminence, the very act of turning again to God is an obvious indication of our special dignity, our spiritual nobility.

Lucifer and the other wicked spirits know that souls possessing sufficient courage and humility to make a simple and straightforward confession of their sins will reclaim their integrity and be greatly comforted.

Therefore, let us benefit ourselves by receiving frequently the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist; for the demons, in order to deceive us and thrust us down, are quite capable of using all their cunning to inspire us with indifference and dislike toward the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist, and other spiritual exercises such as prayer and sacred reading. Hence we must not lend any ear to such evil suggestions, for they will thrust us down from our prominence as sons and daughters of God. Moreover: →

### **Icon # 612 = Falsehood**

"They take pleasure in falsehood. They bless with their mouths, but inwardly they curse."

It is truly right and just to assert that only proud people can take pleasure in falsehood. This is not really esoteric because Christ Himself tagged the devil as a liar and the father of lies. It is also observable that liars are likewise dishonest, and it follows that a dishonest person is not trustworthy.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Church founded by Christ, "Lying is the most direct offense against the truth. To lie is to speak or act against the truth in order to lead someone into error. By injuring man's relation to truth and to his neighbor, a lie offends against the fundamental relation of man and of his word to the Lord. The gravity of a lie is measured against the nature of the truth it deforms, the circumstances, the intentions of the one who lies, and the harm suffered by its victims. If a lie in itself only constitutes a venial sin, it becomes mortal when it does grave injury to the virtues of justice and charity. By its very nature, lying is to be condemned. It is profanation of speech, whereas the purpose of speech is to communicate known truth to others. The deliberate intention of leading a neighbor into error by saying things contrary to the truth constitutes a failure of justice and charity. The culpability is greater when the intention of deceiving entails the risk of deadly consequences for those who are led astray. Since it violates the virtue of truthfulness, a lie does real violence to another. It affects his ability to know, which is a condition of every judgment and decision. It contains the seed of discord and all consequent evils. Lying is

destructive of society; it undermines trust among men and tears apart the fabric of social relationships" (#'s 2483-2486).

For this reason, it is diabolic to take pleasure in falsehood, for it reflects one's fundamental relationships with the devil – the father of lies. It is right to maintain that the devil and the other demons are extremely pleased to see congenial liars, for they are the children of the devil and brothers and sisters of the other demons.

None other than the devil and the other wicked spirits inspire falsehood, and worst – to take pleasure in it. "They bless with their mouths," that is, appearing as angels of light, "but inwardly they curse," that is, they intent to drag human beings to eternal destruction. They are deceptive when they veil themselves in the appearance of goodness. But they hate the sound of the watchman, namely, the teaching of the Church and the admonitions of the holy priests and bishops.

When Lucifer was lifted up in pride and said in his heart: "I will ascend above the height of the clouds; I will be like the Most High," he became a liar and did not stay in the truth. No doubts that the other angels, too, who were persuaded by him wanted also to become the Most High. They flatter themselves in their minds and take pleasure in falsehood. They preferred to rule over others in misery than to be subject with others to God in happiness; they chose to govern the sons and daughters of darkness rather than to share the lots of the sons and daughters of light.

Our first parents, Adam and Eve, were the first victims of their falsehood. Their leader, no other than Lucifer or Satan or the devil, as he is popularly known, blessed Adam and Eve with his mouth, that is to say, offering them to become like God if only they will eat the forbidden fruit, but inwardly he cursed because he knew that if they will succumb to his suggestion they will fall.

Our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux contemplates a classical Christological question: why is it especially fitting that the second person of the Blessed Trinity, that is, the Son – Our Lord Jesus, and not the Father or the Holy Spirit, should become a human being for our salvation? St. Bernard suggests that the answer has to do with the fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve.

He contends that our first parents, like Lucifer before them, fell through their proud attempt to purloin what belong by right to the Son, to infringe upon a certain likeness to the Most High. Lucifer envied and snatched the Son's rightful lordship over all creation, while our first parents envied and grabbed the Son's prerogative of knowledge, arrogating to themselves the right to determine what is good and evil for them.

However, there is an important difference between these two cases: whereas the devil's pride emanates solely from within him, our first parents' pride sprung from without, that is, from the devil's cunning. For this reason there remains some hope of salvation for us human beings, a hope denied the apostate angel and his followers (cf. Steps of Pride and Humility).

It is engrossing to realize that we, too, descendants of Adam and Eve, share in the pride of our first parents when we too yield to a lie, to the pleasant but misleading self-delusion that we are somehow capable of determining good and evil for ourselves through our own wills.

God created us upright, so that we might not live according to ourselves, but according to Him who made us by preferring His will to our own. Hence we subject ourselves to a "lie" or a "falsehood when we choose our own will instead of God's will, for in doing so we contradict our own created nature. When we fail to live in the way for which we are created, this is falsehood. It is precisely this lie or falsehood to be the heart of self-deception we suffer when we succumb to the wishful thinking of pride.

There's an interesting passage in the Moralia, "Moral Reflection on the Book of Job," by St. Gregory the Great wherein Pope St. Gregory commented on the Lord's question to Satan, "Where did you come from?" Pope St. Gregory goes on to say, "Why is it that the angels were never asked as they came, 'Where are you coming from?' Satan, however, is asked where he came from. For we do not ordinarily ask a question unless we do not happen to know the answer. For God to know something, however, is the same thing as to condemn it. That is why certain souls will be told at the end, 'I do not know where you come from. Get away from me, all you evildoers.' Just so truthful people are said not to know how to lie because they consider it a dishonor to fall into a lie, not because of not knowing whether they want to lie, but because for love of truth they consider it beneath them to utter falsehood. What does it mean, therefore, to say to Satan, 'where do you come from?' if not to condemn his ways as though God did not know them?"

Therefore, it is truly right and just to affirm that what is asked of us is "loyalty," and that a person who is honest is far better than a prominent person who is a liar. Since God is the source of integrity, thus it is a mark of lofty wisdom to abide in Him. Whereupon: →

## Icon # 613 = A Love of Christian Silence

"For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is in him."

It is not enigmatic to allege that, as in some kinds of deafness, a perpetual noise in our heads prevents us in hearing any other sounds. Even religious people are so busy spreading or defending their religion to the point that they have little time for quiet meditation and serene communion with God.

Newspapers, television, practical philanthropy, business, amusement, and even Christian effort, so crowd into our lives that it really needs some resolution and deliberate effort to get a clear space where we can be in silence with God.

We have to silence, too, the loud cry of harmful desires and sensual instincts that roar for their food like beasts of prey, the querulous complaints of disappointed hopes, the groans and sobs of worldly sorrows, the loud hubbub and Babel, like the noise of a great city, that each of us carries within.

We have to close the many avenues through which the noise of the world might steal in. We cannot truly say, "For God alone my soul waits in silence," if our whole being is buzzing with vanities and noisy with the din of the market-place. Unless we have something of that great silence our hearts will not be at peace.

With the "music revolution" and high frequency speakers, cable TV networks, videos and movies, etc., it is not unreasonable to say that if ever any generation needed to hear: "For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him," we need it. But the law of Holy Scripture for a noble and devout life is not altered by reason of any new circumstances.

It still remains true that a soul silently waiting for God is the condition to live a noble and devout life, without which such a life is morally impossible. As the flowers wait for the sun and silently hold up their petals to be enlarged by its shining, so also our souls must wait in silence for God in order to grow in the spiritual life. God speaks for the most part in such silence only. If our souls are full of tumult and jangling noises, His voice is little likely to be heard.

There must be silence of the mind, as well as of the heart and will. We are not contemplatives by the mere fact of living an enclosed and penitential life. We can indeed be more active, more restless and more distracted in the cloister than we would be in the active life, if we do not possess the interior cleanliness of spirit, that is, the silence and peace of soul which enable us to find God in His word, to listen to the words of the Lord Jesus, to trust in the motherly solicitude of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and to move with the breathings and impulse of the Holy Spirit within us.



A love of Christian silence is an inner evidence that we make it our chiefest delight to be occupied on God, and finds no consolation like that of conversing with Him in the stillness of our heart. Waiting for God in both silence and solitude is of paramount importance because in silence and solitude we let go of the diversions which we use to hide from the truth of ourselves and of God.

Blaise Pascal once said: "The sole cause of man's unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room. We run from silence, quiet, and privacy. We cannot stand our own company." Certainly, "God is the friend of silence," says our heavenly friend, Mother St. Teresa of Calcutta, "see how nature: trees, flower, grass, grow in silence; see the stars, the moon and sun, how they move in silence."

Silencing the memory, the imagination, the impulses of the heart, where these do not help the work of absorption in God, is a primary necessity. Such silence frees our souls for prayer and disposes us to accept the suave influence of the Holy Spirit enlightening the mind to God's demands, fortifying our wills to strong decision, molding our heart's affection after the model of the Sacred Heart of the Lord Jesus. Truly, our "hope is from Him." He is the source and giver of hope.

The hope He infused in us makes us tend toward God, toward life of eternity. Although it does not give us absolute certitude of salvation, which would require a special revelation, it has a certitude of tendency toward that goal. By infuse hope we tend surely to our last end, just as the swallow tends to its home, for truly: →

### **Icon # 614 = God only is Our Rock and Our Salvation, Our Fortress**

"He only is my rock and my salvation, for fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is God."

In Chapter 7 of the Gospel of St. Matthew the Lord Jesus 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."

There's also an intriguing passage in the book of the prophet Isaiah Ch. 26:1-6 which encourages us to "trust in the Lord for ever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock," and also "we have a strong city; he sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks."

The prophet Isaiah explains that “the Lord God is an everlasting rock.” On the other hand, the Lord Jesus says that by putting His words into practice we shall be likened to “a wise man who built his house upon the rock.” Since the Lord God is an everlasting rock and the Lord Jesus is God, therefore, we are truly wise if we anchor our lives in the Lord Jesus by keeping His words.

We need to act but always through the strength and direction of the Lord, resting ourselves thoroughly upon Him. Only when each of our actions is directed by a conscious turning to the Lord for guidance, only when a sense of the Lord’s presence accompanies us in all that we do, only then will there be an integral wholeness of our lives. When we start to live our faith, it slowly becomes a deeper and more insistent part of us.

What is true of any field of study is true of our spiritual life. Practice roots and anchors theory. Eventually, everything will fit together firmly; no action will be out of harmony with the others to disrupt the peace of our lives. Thus whether we be silent or speak, remain motionless or act, we need to be firmly rooted in the Lord.

We need to rest and build our lives upon the Lord, for truly that is a genuine hallmark that we are really a wise person, so much so, that even if the rain of calamities and distress and difficulties fell, and the floods of sorrows and sufferings came, and the winds of trials and tribulations and tragedies blew and beat upon our lives, we will not collapse and sink into depression because we built our lives upon the Lord Jesus, our rock and our salvation and our fortress.

Our father St. Benedict in the prologue of his rule points out ways how to build our lives in Christ, so that we will be strong enough to withstand the trials in life. He pointed out that while our evil thoughts are still young we have to dash them against Christ, Our rock. The reason for this is pretty obvious in the sense that if we do not dash our evil thoughts against Christ while still young, they become stronger and stronger and they will be the one who will crush us.

Hence, let us strive to put into practice the teaching of Our Lord and to dash against Him our evil thoughts, for He is our rock and our salvation, our fortress; we shall not be shaken. On Him rests our deliverance from the captivity of vices and sin; and our honor, for He raised us up to the dignity of sons and daughters of God.

Thus, as the prophet Isaiah says: “We have a strong city; he sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks.” In other words, the Lord God will surround us who have faith as He does the holy city with “walls and bulwarks.”

And the Lord Himself is that city. He is our mighty rock and impregnable refuge, that is to say, the Lord is behind and before us, all around us and within us,

supporting us from beneath, glorifying us from above. Consequently, it is right and fitting to: →

### **Icon # 615 = Trust in God at all times**

“Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.”

Why should we trust in God at all times, and pour out our heart before Him? The common venture of faith and common sense bore witness that we should trust in God at all times, and pour out our heart before Him, because He is “Truthful,” “Honest,” and “Trustworthy,” not just for one time, but all the times. Hence, we will never go wrong to trust him at all times.

It is right to say that our life will be godly and tranquil in proportion as we trust in God and abandon ourselves to Him. Without that self-abandonment there is no guarantee of progress in virtue, no sure inner repose. Food and drink will keep our body alive, but only “trust” in God and the obedience which springs from it will give vitality to our soul.

God will never forsake us if we put our trust in Him at all times, even though we may be overcome by temptations, because He is aware of all our vulnerabilities. The injury done by falling into this misdeed or that could not outweigh the benefit we will gain by trusting ourselves at all times to His goodness and the power of His grace.

The boon of this trust will certainly tilt to our favor. Moreover, when we learn to do penance for our faults and placidly allow our trust in God to pick us up again, we will provide for ourselves with a healthy and assured remedy for our past sins, and a sturdy safeguard against future evils.

“The Lord, who is ‘compassionate and merciful,’” says our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux, “does not disdain to be the hope of the miserable; He does not refuse to show Himself the Deliverer and the Protector of them that trust in Him.”

The sphere of our faith is precisely the ability to trust in God, to trust His action in our lives. Faith is synonymous with trust, that is, when we trust someone we, consequently, have faith in that person. Hence, if we truly believe in God we necessarily will also trust in Him, and very likely we will not be devoid of love.

Therefore, one of the gravest errors in the spiritual life is the dichotomy between the faith many people insist they have and the actual practice of their daily lives. In other words, “They alone know how to believe in God who love God,”

says our heavenly friend, St. Bede the Venerable, "who are Christians not only in name but also in actions and way of life, because without love faith is empty; with love it is the faith of a Christian, without love the faith of a demon."

Our trust in God is the interpreter of His actions in our lives; without the illumination which it brings, nothing can be understood of the language in which current affairs speak to us. Moreover, in the order of Divine Providence, there is nothing accidental; there is never a collision of blind forces, hurting us, at random.

There is, instead, the meeting of a Divine Will and a human will which has a perfect trust that ultimate good is meant for us, although we may not understand how until eternity.

For this reason, it is truly right and just to pour out our heart before God, for He is a refuge for us. Another name of "pour out our heart before God," is prayer. All prayer implies an act of the will, a desire for growth – to grow in the fullness of the stature of the Lord Jesus, a willingness to sacrifice on our part; for prayer is not passive, but is a very active collaboration between our soul and God.

If the will is inoperative, our prayers are merely recounting of the things we would like God to give us, without ever asking us to pay the price they cost in effort and a willingness to be changed. Prayer is certainly dynamic, but only when we cooperate with God through self-surrender.

For instance, the person who decides to pray for deliverance from the slavery of carnal pleasures must be prepared, in every part of his/her being, to utilize the strength which God will give him/her and endeavor unreservedly for a complete release from the addiction.

Everyone who says that he/she cannot pray or will never pray is stating only an opinion, held in times when no grave crisis troubles him/her. He/she is not revealing his/her basic impulses. For instance, an atomic bomb dropped on any city would make millions of people to mumble a prayer who had denied such a possibility.

Someone said: "He that will learn to pray, let him go to the sea" (George Herbert). And Abraham Lincoln said: "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go; my own wisdom and that of all around me seemed insufficient for that day."

When we feel ourselves most indisposed to prayer, we should not succumb to it, but we have to strive and endeavor to pray even when we think we cannot pray. This is the best time to pray; because this is the time we really need prayer,

a time to acknowledge that “God is a refuge for us,” a time to “pour out your heart before him.” On the other hand: →

### **Icon # 616 = Genuine High Estate**

“Men of low estate are but a breath, men of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath.”

It is intriguing to notice that either people are of low estate or high estate “they are together lighter than a breath.” In other words, we human beings are really nothing because there was a moment or a time that we did not exist. Where was humanity before the world came into existence?

Hence, we really have nothing to brag about because we will be convicted either way: if we are of low estate – we are just a breath and if we are of high estate – we are just a delusion or phantasm. We are like people dreaming, then we woke up from the sleep of death, that is, the resurrection of our bodies, and will find out what we really are in the presence of God.

If we are of low estate but live a godly life on earth, we will be happy forever, our hearts will rejoice and no one can take our joy from us; what God is by nature we will be by grace. Hence, we are raised to a dignity which is far superior even to the highest angels!

On the other hand, if we are of high estate and live a godless life on earth, not honoring God or giving thanks to Him even for the oxygen we daily breathe, becoming futile in our thinking and our senseless minds are darkened; claiming to be wise we became fools, exchanging the glory of the immortal God for the passing vanities and carnal pleasures of this temporal world, then we woke up from the sleep of death we will be unbearably confused to see the deathless worms of our guilt endlessly, without an atom of intermission, gnawing our conscience; terrified to see the indescribable ugliness of the devil and see ourselves in him, and realized that we are one in spirit with him united in the bond of so called “marriage” akin to the union of iron in the fire become one spirit with him, without the faintest hope of separation!

In this present life, if a husband and wife do not like each other anymore they can file a divorce and if a divorce is not permitted they can, at least, separate. No matter how sour their relationship is there's always a flicker of relief from other sources, such as friends or families or to just get out from the house or even take drugs and alcohol.

But to united forever with the devil like iron in the fire, and could never divert your eyes even for just one second from looking at his horrible feature – unknown animal as the three children of Fatima described him, and could not plug your ears to “unhear” his interminable shrieking even just for two seconds, and could not forestall his utmost devilic hatred at you, truly, truly, it is right to say: it is ultimately far better not to be born!

Someone might ridiculently argue that there are pain killers and psychiatric pills “there,” but it is very safe to speculate that all pharmacies and pharmaceutical companies are available only at the border between this present life and the next life. Whatever the state of the soul a person is as she/he crossed the border of this present world and the other world, that will determine whether she/he will be for all eternity, pain-filled or painless, or to be lucky enough to be temporarily pain-filled but, after paying the last penny, will be painless in the kingdom of God.

Although Our Lord Jesus was of a genuine high estate because He is God, the Word who made the universe, He became of low estate so that by His poverty we may be truly of high estate by breathing on us the Breath of the Holy Spirit who is the infinite source of true nobility.

The Holy Spirit is the ultimate “Gift” that God could give to us, because the Holy Spirit is also God. Thus in giving us the Holy Spirit, God gave Himself to us. What more can we ask for! This is the most honorable “high estate” which is not a delusion, but a beatific Vision.

Hence, the possibility of supernatural life, a very high estate, was brought to our fallen human race through the Incarnation, when we were redeemed. For equity to be done, the Redeemer of our human race had to be both God and man: He had to be a man, for otherwise He could not have acted in our name as representing us; He had also to be God, for otherwise He could not have paid the infinite debt owed to God by our human sin.

It is true to say that nothing except the human person can become less than its nature. A monkey cannot become less than a monkey; a cauliflower cannot become less than a cauliflower; an apple cannot become less than an apple; but a human being can become less than a human being, as he/she can also become more than a human being. In other words, we can become less than a human being by acting like a beast. We can also become more than a human being by becoming children of God.

Therefore, we can be demoted from our high estate if we live an atheistic way of life, living entirely for the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life; but we can also be promoted from a low estate of life to a genuine high estate of

life by conforming ourselves to the will of God, that is, our sanctification. For this reason, we should: →

### **Icon # 617 = Extortion, Robbery, and Riches**

“Put no confidence in extortion, set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, set not your heart on them.”

St. John the Baptist described himself as the voice of one crying in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord and make His paths straight. He went into all the region about the Jordan preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

A great multitudes came to him and asked, “What then shall we do?” And he answered them, “He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.” Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Collect no more than is appointed you.” Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”

It is right to say that John’s answers to these diverse multitudes are in harmony with the exhortation of the Psalmist. Both their answers and exhortation is a call to a deeper conversion and on-going repentance. It boils down to the call of universal holiness. Their admonitions reverberate in the document of the Second Vatican Council that holiness is for all people, that each one can attain holiness in the state and condition which one finds himself/herself in.

Notice the apparent similarities of their admonitions. The Psalmist exhorts those of low and high estates, saying: “Put no confidence in extortion, set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, set not your heart on them.” While John told those who had abundance to share with those who have none. He tells the tax collectors that they must do justice between the government and the people, and not to oppress them by imposing too much, that public revenues must be applied to the public service, and not to gratify the avarice of private persons.

He told the soldiers not to be abusive, but rather be content with their wages, because those who indulge themselves in discontents expose themselves to many temptations, just as to set one’s heart on the abundance of riches are piercing their hearts with many pangs, “for the love of money is the root of all evils.”

Therefore, it is a great wisdom to make the best of that which is as our good friend, St. Paul says: "I have learned, in whatever state I am to be content. 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."

Their admonitions are certainly filled with perspicacious insight because we will only reap what we sow. If we sow in the soil of our flesh we will inevitably reap corruption, but if we sow in the soil of our spirit we will impendingly harvest eternal life.

Take for example if we put confidence in extortion. We will likely not live long or if we live longer, it is also likely that we don't live a happy and peaceful life, because extortion is a form of violence, bullying, coercing, ripping off other people to extract from them what they have either money or property. Since we will only reap what we sow, it is imminent that other people will also do it to us. Thus we will be in a cycle of misery.

On the other hand, if we will not put confidence in extortion we will be more peaceful because we will have clear conscience, we will be content with what we have, hence, we will have a good sleep. The same with robbery, too. It is a blood brother of extortion.

It's done either in private or public. Probably because of the influence of drugs, robbers nowadays are so bold to rob banks or hold people in broad daylight, but it is not implausible to say that they don't live a happy and peaceful lives. They might have sporadic pleasures when they are able to rob banks and other people, then indulge with their vices, yet they are certainly stranger to true happiness which is a by-product of a godly life.

Robbery is truly a dangerous act not only because we will be put in prison when caught, or even killed, but primarily because it is an imitation of the devil, the supreme Robber whose main intention is to kill the soul, to destroy the image and likeness of God within us, and to steal our eternal inheritance. Thus the Psalmist hit the nail on the head when he exhorts us to: "Set no vain hopes on robbery." He also added a very wise counsel: "If riches increase, set not your heart on them."

We have to affirm, from time to time, that riches by itself are neutral; they are neither good nor evil. "It is not riches that is harmful," says our heavenly friend, St. John Chrysostom, "but the love for riches. The blame is not on the created things but on the corrupted will."

The consensus of the Fathers of the Church is that wealth of itself is not a bad thing so long as it is properly used, just as poverty, pure and simple, is not virtuous



itself, as our other heavenly friend, St. Ambrose says: "For not all poverty is holy, nor are all riches criminal. The crime is not in possessing worldly goods but in not knowing how to use them." For this reason, the Psalmist hit again the nail on the head when he said: "If riches increase, set not your heart on them." Accordingly: →

### **Icon # 618 = Once God Has Spoken**

"Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God; and that to thee, O Lord, belongs steadfast love."

Once and for all, God has spoken His Word, and by so doing He has spoken everything of Himself. Christ is the hidden Word of God made manifest to us in the Incarnation. He is the divine self-revelation of the Father. This hidden Word is spoken in the minds of the chosen ones when the power and wisdom of the only begotten Son is revealed to the believers.

The hidden Word may also be understood as the communication of interior inspiration, of which our heavenly friend, St. John, also speaks, "His anointing teaches you everything." To hear the inner Word, then, is to conceive the voice of the Holy Spirit in our heart. Hence, it certainly cannot be known and heard and understood except by the one who is able to possess it.

For this reason the voice of Truth has said about this interior communication, "I will pray the Father, and he will give you another counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you."

Even a modest effort in our pursuit of true knowledge will lead us to the conviction that we are made to know Truth, as our eyes are made to see light, and that the ultimate truth is Love, for God is Love. Our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux has this to say: "There are some who long to know for the sole purpose of knowing, and that is shameful curiosity; others who long to know in order to become known, and that is shameful vanity; there are others still who long for knowledge in order to sell its fruit for money or honors, and that is shameful profiteering; others again who long to know in order to be of service, and this is charity."

As human beings, endowed with spiritual faculties, it is in our very nature to follow the guide of reason in our actions; hence, if our intellect sins our will soon follows. Thus it happens that false opinions, whose seat is in the understanding, influence our actions and pervert them. Whereas, on the other hand, if we are

of sound mind, being attentive to God, and take our stand on true and solid principles, there will result a vast amount of benefits around us.

Moreover, the conception of a good thought causes the seven virtues of the Holy Spirit to be born in us. Accordingly, the prophet Isaiah lists this interior family conceived by the mind that is fertilized by the Holy Spirit: "The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him, the spirit of Wisdom and Understanding, the spirit of Counsel and Fortitude, the spirit of Knowledge and Reverence; and he will be full of the Spirit of the Lord."

Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God; all powers belong to Him, and that to Him belongs steadfast love. However, His steadfast love and power finds itself with its hands tied, so to speak, where it does not find faith, where it does not find a heart that recognize who He is and invokes Him with all its strength that He may intervene and change its life.

We have to invite the Lord Jesus continually to become the sole Master of our life. He never imposes Himself by force because, being Love, He wants to be loved in return, and love is born only from freedom and never from coercion or obligation.

"To admit light to the eye," says our heavenly friend, Bishop Fulton Sheen, "music to the ear and food to the stomach is to perfect each of these organs; so too, to admit Truth to the mind and Power to the will is to make us more than a creature, namely, partaker of the Divine Nature."

God is Omnipotent, hence all power belongs to Him. He can do everything and anything, because nothing is impossible to Him. Undoubtedly, to other peoples, and to the unaided reason, one of the most difficult of Christian doctrines to understand is the of **creatio ex nihilo**: God's creation of the universe not out of Himself, not out of some pre-existent matter or primal chaos, but out of **nothing**; in no other doctrine is the Omnipotence of God so plainly stated.

Not only power belongs to God, but also steadfast love. He undeniably manifested His steadfast love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Therefore, if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by His life; for the love of Christ impels us, because we are convinced that He laid down His life for us all, so that we may no longer live for ourselves but for Him who for our sake was crucified and was raised.

His death and resurrection is truly a potent evidence of His boundless power and steadfast love. Unequivocally, no one can ever, ever take His life from Him, but He laid it down of His own accord. He has a lovely power to lay it down, and He

has also absolute power to take it again; this charge, of course, He had received from His Father who is the Most Powerful God. For his reason, this alone, every single human being will be held accountable of how she/he responded to the love of God, of how she/he uses her/his body, and all its parts, while still in this present world, because: →

### **Icon # 619 = What is done in the Body is done in the Temple of God**

"For thou dost requite a man according to his work."

Our good friend, St. Paul, tells us that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body." This is really amazing, because he also had indicated that our body is the temple of God, hence, everything we do in our body is done in the temple of God!

For this reason, we really have a strenuous ground to reverence our body and to employ all its part as tools for righteousness, because all the members of our body will participate in eternal ecstasy of joy or pain, as it is written: there will be wrath and fury, tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, who obeys wickedness; but glory and honor and peace for every one who does good, who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and immortality. Of course, all this has to do with our moral actions. Monkeys and cats, and all animals, will not be held accountable for what they do in their bodies because their acts are done without deliberation and freedom.

What makes us, human beings, master of our actions is our reason and will. Right reason is a practical judgment of reason, issuing a general dictate that good is to be done and evil to be avoided; it is the proximate, immediate and general standard of right moral action. Thus it is in our moral action, that is, action done with deliberation and freedom, that we will be held responsible. Morality, then, is never accidental.

The prominent Redemptorist theologian, Bernard Haring, writing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, reminds us that "the Church has defined as a dogma of faith that the children of Adam even after the fall are in possession of moral freedom and choice."

For this reason, if a person is not free to choose between good and evil, right and wrong, there can be no such thing as love or sin or responsibility or crime or punishment. He deserves neither credit nor blame, eternal joy nor eternal pain.

If God calls each one of us by name to live a life of love, we can ask two questions: First, what is meant by a life of love? Second, how does one respond to God's call. The answer to these questions is at the heart of Christian morality. The answer is basically up to us. Our response could be positive and joyful or fearful and hesitant or even selfish and negative. The answer must come from within the depth of our hearts. But always, in all of our conscious behavior, we are in fact responding in one way or another.

Our heavenly friend, the blessed John Cardinal Newman, asserts that in the Catholic Tradition, it is better for the sun and moon to drop from heaven and for the earth to fail than that one person should commit a deliberate sin.

A deliberate sin is what we called in Moral Theology as "Formal Sin." It is the act committed with the knowledge and understanding in our minds of the sinfulness of the deeds and with free consent. It involves the judgment in our minds, or the idea we have of the wrong we have committed. It is called "formal" because the word "form" refers to "idea" or "principle," i.e., the mental part of sin, that which concerns our understanding and consent to its wrongfulness. Therefore, a "formal" mortal sin is a real mortal sin; it consists of all 3 necessary elements: 1<sup>st</sup>, serious matter, 2<sup>nd</sup>, full knowledge, and 3<sup>rd</sup> full consent of the will.

A person commits a "formal sin" if in addition to doing the wrong, she/he had knowledge that it is wrong and still gives his/her consent to it. "Material Sin" is the "act" itself, the "thing" a person does, the sin considered objectively. Sometimes this is called the "matter" of sin. Material sin corresponds to the first of the 3 elements required to constitute a mortal sin.

Let us hear from our other heavenly friend, the great doctor of the Church, no other than St. Teresa of Avila, on how everything a person does in the body is done in the temple of God, and that nothing whatsoever is hidden from God. Here is what she wrote in her autobiography: "Let us say that the Godhead is like a very clear diamond, much larger than the world, or a mirror, like that which symbolized the soul in my account of an earlier vision, except that it is of a far sublime kind, to which I cannot do justice. Let us suppose, furthermore, that all we do is seen in this diamond, which is of such a kind that it contains everything within itself, because there is nothing capable of falling outside such greatness. It was a terrifying experience for me, in so short a space of time, to see so many things at once in the clear depths of that diamond, and whenever I think of it, it is a most piteous reflection, that so many foul things, like my sins, should have pictured in that clearness and purity."

She continued to write: "So, whenever I remember this, I do not know how to bear it and at that time I felt so ashamed that I did not seem to know where to hide myself. Oh, that someone could reveal this to those who commit the most

foul and dishonorable sins and could make them realize that their sins are not hidden; that, committed as they are in his Majesty's own presence, God justly grieves for them; and that we are behaving in His sight with the greatest irreverence!"

Since the Lord Jesus is the Word of God "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 bared to the eyes of him with whom we have to do," therefore, He has ultimate authority and power to execute all judgment and to requite every human person according to his/her work, to what she/he had done in the body. Whereupon, the Lord Jesus pronounced the verdict: "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment."

We hope and pray that we will be counted among those who come forth to the resurrection of life. This possibility will tilt in our favor if: →

### **Icon # 620 = Seeking, Thirsting, and Longing for God**

#### **Psalm 63 (62)**

"O God, thou art my God, I seek thee, my soul thirst for thee; my flesh faint for thee, as in a dry and weary land where no water is."

It is so amazing that we can claim God as our own. As a result, this possession engenders yearning. Thus it is with ardent longing that we seek after God whom we know to be our own: "O God, thou art my God, I seek thee, my soul thirst for thee...."

It is truly right and just to say that our seeking for God is an indication that our soul is giving a signal that it is experiencing a certain thirst for God, because we would not have seek God if we had not that thirst for him, just as a deer would not long for a running streams if it is not thirsty nor a person craves for water if he/she is gluttoned.

Hence, once our craving for the things of this world begins to be depleted our thirsting for God, likewise, begins to increase. God insinuates in us the thirst, and He also provides us the drink. Holy desires are among the most potent influences that propel our inner nature. No wonder, then, that our souls are thirsting for God. On the other hand, God Himself is the water of everlasting life poured by the Holy Spirit into our hearts to satisfy our thirsty souls.

Thirst is an insatiable yearning after that which is one of the most essential supports of life; there is no argument with it, no overcoming it by stoical indifference. Our whole being must yield to its power, even thus it is with that divine desire which the grace of God engenders in the converted men and women. Only God Himself can satisfy the craving of a soul really aroused by the Holy Spirit. Moreover, it is not only the soul that thirsts for God, but also the body longs for Him. Thus the whole person, body and soul, seeks, thirsts, and longs for God.

It is right to say that before our conversion to God, our flesh never longs after the Lord but works against the Spirit, but in our conversion to God, in the renewal of our mind wherein the spirit became ardent seeker of God and the things of God it compels the flesh to throw in what power it has upon the other side, that is, in favor of the spirit.

Amazingly, the flesh became subservient to the spirit and learned to use the members of the body as instruments of righteousness, instead of instruments of wickedness; crucifying the flesh with its passions and unhealthy desires.

Consequently, "my flesh faints for thee, as in a dry and weary land where no water is." Undoubtedly, a weary place and a weary heart make the presence of God the more desirable. The absence of outward comforts can be sustained with equal peace and serenity when we walk with God; and the most lavish proliferation of them avails nothing when He withdraws. Moreover, the lesser material things to prop us and the fewer articles and gadgets we have to feed our vainglory, the more we are swerved to the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

May all our longings, therefore, be converged into one, that is, after God – seeking first the kingdom and His righteousness, as merchants diligently seek precious stones that are of greatest value. As a result: →

### **Icon # 621 = Looking For God**

"So I have looked upon thee in the sanctuary, beholding thy power and glory."

When Our Lord Jesus was twelve years old, His parent – the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, were looking for Him for three days among their relatives and acquaintances; and not finding Him they went back to Jerusalem and there found Him in the temple sitting among the pundits of the law, listening to them and asking them questions; and all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.

Although God can be found everywhere for He is ubiquitous, but it is right to say that the best place to find Him is in the Church, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. This is not something mysterious and esoteric, because we have multiple proofs which substantiate that from time immemorial God wishes to have a place for His dwelling where His presence abides.

For instance, when Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran, he came to a certain place and stayed there that night. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and he saw the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants....Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it...How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

We have also the Ark of the Covenant or the Ark of God which accompanies God's people in their journey. We have also the tent of meeting for the tabernacle. Then there was the temple built by King Solomon. He was humble enough to acknowledge: "Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!" and was bold enough to entreat the Lord, saying: "Yet have regard to the prayer of thy servant and to his supplication, O Lord my God, hearkening to the cry and to the prayer which thy servant prays before thee this day; that thy eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which thou hast said, 'My name shall be there,' that thou mayest hearken to the prayer which thy servant offers toward this place. And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant and of thy people Israel, when they pray toward this place; yea, hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place; and when thou hearest, forgive."

As we scroll down to the New Testament we learned that God Himself built a Church which is utterly solid and lasting, for it is founded upon a rock that even the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. This Church, of course, is the Body of Christ whose members are Christians and people of good will. The devil has tried to beat this Body ever since the world began. From the soles of His feet to the top of His head he has wounded Him, beginning with the first human beings, until in his fierce wrath he even attacked the Head of the Church Himself.

All the tensions and problems ought to have dissolved this Church a long time ago, and all the analyses of political science, sociology, and group dynamics suggest that such a dissolution would be inevitable – were it not for the Vicar of Christ, were it not for what we called the papacy, the Church's bond of unity.

If the grace of God did not give us the fullness of truth, and we are looking for it, we would commence our quest by searching through the world for a Church that did not get along with the evil in the world! If that Church were accused of countless lies, reviled for its teachings, ridiculed because it refused to fit with the spirit of the present age, and hated because it declined to compromise, we would surmise that since it is loathed by the world, it therefore is good and holy; and if it is good and holy, it must be divine. And we would serenely sit down its fountain and begin to drink the waters of everlasting life, beholding the power and glory of the eternal and omnipotent God.

The Lord said that this Church would start small, like a mustard seed, but it would grow into a great tree, so that the birds of the sky may dwell under the shadow thereof. It would be a new society with other ideals, purposes and goals than the world, hence, would be hated by the world as He was hated. Its members would be so closely united to each other and in Him, that if anyone did any kind of act to any other member, for example, gives him/her food, or a drink of cold water, they would be doing it for Him. The unity between Him and it, He said would be like the unity between the vine and its branches.

If there is any human analogy for this Church, it is the human body. As the body is composed of billions of tiny cells, each living its own individual life, and yet no one able to live apart from the body, so this Church would be made up of billions of individuals who were incorporated into the Lord Jesus.

In order that He will be with us concretely until the end of the world, the Lord Jesus gave us the Blessed Sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist. We are called to be tabernacle, a dwelling place for Christ, according to our heavenly friend, St. Cyril of Alexandria, in his catechetical lectures. He wrote: "When we ingest the Eucharist, in reality we are ingesting the Godhead. This makes us a kind of tabernacle, and we are transformed. For thus we become Christ-bearers, because His body and blood are diffused through our members...and we become partaker of the divine nature." Isn't this amazing!?

Hence, we too, participate in the power and glory of God. What God is by nature, we will be by grace. No wonder, then, that our good friend, St. Paul, calls us the temple of God – our body as the temple of the Holy Spirit. This, too, is a participation in the body of Christ which is the Temple of the living God. "Destroy this temple," He said to His enemies, "and in three days I will raise it up." But He was speaking of the temple of His Body. That is why when He rose from the dead His disciples remembered that He said these things, and they believed in the Scripture and in the words which the Lord had spoken.

Archbishop Gerhard Ludwig Müller of Germany, the current prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, fittingly says that, "wherever we



celebrate the Eucharist, we share the most intimate part of our conviction and have the same communion of life with Christ, even if the culture and language are different. We feel immediately, that we are one thing, that we are members of one body and that we build together the temple of God. Where there is an altar, Christ is present; wherever you are, you are part of the great family of God; you are at home everywhere."

Of course, this is not our own doing but owing to God's grace. For this reason: →

### **Icon # 622 = Love is Better than Life**

"Because thy steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise thee."

Unmistakably, there are many reasons why we should praise God, but here it is laid out clearly, that is, because His steadfast love is better than life. We can hear an echo of this when the Lord said: "Greater love has no one than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Thus we must surely believe that the steadfast love of God is better than life, for it is as fertile in capability as it is limitless in ability. It disposes us to anchor ourselves in the Lord Jesus and not be afraid of those who can take away our life but cannot take away the soul.

Of course, it is true that life is so precious and even better than food, but it is also equally true that the steadfast love of God is better than life because the love of God is the fountainhead of life. Thus without the love of God there will be no life at all! In other words, life is a part of much larger ocean called God. This ocean is often associated with the love of God simply because God is love and those who abide in love abide in God.

If all of us acknowledge ourselves as we really are it is unambiguously assured that a day will dawn when we behold how God's steadfast love have been accomplished precisely through our weakness. Our talents and handicaps may differ greatly, but we are all equal in this, namely, each of us is born to manifest God's glory, to mirror his steadfast love according to the purpose of His will to the praise of His glorious majesty; to know, to love, and to serve Him in this present life and be happy with Him in the life to come.

There we will be inundated with the steadfast love, life, and praise of God. They will be in us for all eternity. The love of God will be our life, and our life will be for the praise of God.

The supreme happiness we know is love, but love means to love someone else. To love God is the supreme act of altruism which is rewarded by true happiness,

because the Divine Other is infinitely good, and to possess infinite good is infinite happiness.

The constant steadfast love of God for us is willed by Him to transform us all. He gave Himself completely to us right up to the last trickle of blood and water that remained in His pummeled body. He loves us to the end, so that we, in turn, will also love Him in return till the end. Thus our lives will no longer be for ourselves but for Him who loved us.

Once we abandoned ourselves with complete trust to the steadfast love of God, we had commenced to eliminate the cause of so much unrest and dissatisfaction which come from a multitude of unsatisfied desires and wants. We will learn how to simplify our spiritual life to the greatest possible extent.

“The immediate casting away of evil thought,” says our heavenly friend, St. Mark the Ascetic, “is a sure sign of love of God; for not the entrance of evil in our thoughts is the sin but the friendly converse with them. If we have no fondness of them, then why do we entertain them?” Of course, we will not be guilty of inhospitality if we will drive out evil thoughts once they gained entrance into our hearts. On the contrary, God is pleased when we will drag them out and bind them hand and foot, and cast them into the outer darkness for they barged in without the garment of righteousness.

This is not something cryptic because we were advised by our heavenly friend, the beloved John, who wrote: “If any one comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting; for he who greets him shares his wicked work.”

Therefore, it stands to reason that the casting out of evil thoughts or impure thoughts once we are aware of them “is a sure sign of love of God,” for the person who is filled with such true and noble love could not feel less; for all the gesture of love is founded in the satisfaction given by the lover to the beloved, hence he/she cannot rest, when he/she suspects that the beloved is not contented and pleased.

If these things are ours and abound, we have a good ground to: →

### **Icon # 623 = Blessing God**

“So I will bless thee as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on thy name.”

“I will lift up my hands and call on thy name” is another idiom for prayer, as it is written: “Hear the voice of my supplication, as I cry to thee for help, as I lift up my hands towards thy most holy sanctuary.”

In creating us, human beings, God put into our heart the desire to communicate with Him. Hence, there is no person on earth who is deprived of the capacity to lift one's hands to God in prayer.

The ability to connect ourselves to God in prayer and to bless Him all the days of our lives is truly one of the greatest privileges we have as human beings. Prayer is a continuous journey, an openness to God which is forever growing, and an ongoing purification of the members of our body – using them as instruments of righteousness. Prayer should bring us to a profound personal relationship with God, because religion devoid of personal prayer experience is fundamentally fruitless and perhaps even hazardous for the soul for it can lead to violence.

When we grow in the life of prayer, it will naturally follow that we will caught ourselves blessing God and thanking Him for all He has done for our salvation. There is nothing in this present life that is more really a foretaste of dwelling in the next life than when we bless God with all our heart, mind, and soul. There is nothing that stimulates our spirit, eases suffering, drives out unhealthy passions and desires, or makes sadness vanish as does blessing God.

With the Psalmist we can gladly say: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; all my being, bless his holy name. O my soul, give thanks to the Lord and never forget all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit."

Thus we have a fairly good reason to bless the Lord as long as we live. In doing so we can go in and out into our heart and find pasture for the nourishment of our soul; sometimes we explicitly bless Him while implicitly pray to Him calling His name, and at other times we explicitly pray to Him while implicitly blessing His name.

Wherefore, whether we bless the Lord for His benefits or pray to Him for the forgiveness of our sins, we need to call upon the name of the Lord – lifting up not only our hands but also our heart and mind.

We have an example in Job for someone who blesses the Lord all the days of his life, whether in prosperity or adversity. It is imperative to recognize that Lucifer and the other wicked angels injure us with many arrows as they assault us with many temptations, for we stand in the front line of battle every day, and every day we receive the punches of their temptations.

However, we too exchange punches with them when we are inundated with troubles we bless the Lord and call upon His name. Notice that Job was struck down by the loss of his possessions and the death of all his children, but he

turned his pain and suffering into praise of the Lord, saying: “God gave it and God took it back; God has done what he pleased, blessed be the name of God.”

Hence, even in times of adversity we should not deprive ourselves of blessing God. When this becomes the regular frame of our mind, then, it shows that we value the loving-kindness of God more than life. King David was in continual danger; care and fear kept his eyes awake, and gave him wearisome night, but he comforted himself with thoughts of God – calling on His name and blessing Him.

It is truly right and just to affirm that the mercies of God, when called to mind in the watches of the night, support our soul – making darkness peaceful and serene. How happy will we be at that last morning – the day about to dawn, when awaking up after the Divine likeness we shall be satisfied with all the fullness of God and bless Him all the days of our lives without end, where there is no more night, and where sorrows and sighing flee away! For this reason, it follows that: →

### **Icon # 624 = Thinking of God as we go to sleep**

“My soul is feasted as with marrow and fat, and my mouth praises with joyful lips, when I think of thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the watches of the night; for thou hast been my help, and in the shadow of thy wings I sing for joy.”

Any experience we may have of the divine goodness, while it stirs us up to the praises of God and gratitude, should at the same time, strengthen our hopes of the future, and lead us confidently to expect that God will bring to perfection the graces He has given us.

As a consequence of our profound sense of the value of God's help in our lives, we would normally praise Him “with joyful lips” rejoicing always in the Lord, in the shadow of His wings, that is, under His protection.

The steadfast determination of serving God essentially entails the elements of praise, joy, meditation, and a sense of divine guidance; and as we now praised Him with joyful lips and think of Him upon our bed and meditate on Him in the watches of the night because He has been our help, so we are determined to do so all the days of our lives on earth by proclaiming His blessedness, by ascribing blessing and honor to Him, and by giving Him the glory of all the assistance and guidance rendered to us.

If none others praise God and think of Him, yet we will, for His very nature as the ultimate source of all things visible and invisible, and as being the infinitely good God, is a sufficient apologia for our praising Him as long as we live. He destined us in love to be His children through the Lord Jesus, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved (cf. Eph. 1: 5-6).

Accordingly, we are told that there are two ways especially in which God is blest of His creatures. The first is objectively, by way of presentation; and the second is significantly, by way of publication. According to the first sense, so all the creatures bless Him, as it is written: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows forth the work of his hands" (Ps. 19:1). "Sun and moon, shining stars, fire and hail, and snow and mist" (cf. Ps. 148: 3, 7-8); all these they so praise the Lord.

But according to the second sense, He is praised only by angels and men, who are therefore to do it with greater joy, as it is written: "All thy works shall give thanks to thee, O Lord, and all thy saints shall bless thee! They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and tell of thy power" (Ps. 145: 10-11); and "Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his host" (Ps. 148: 2).

Certainly, it is right and fitting to say that it is a wholesome attitude to think of God while in bed. If our conscience is clear this habit ushers us to go to sleep easily and peacefully. This is just one of the many benefits of making it a habit of thinking God as we go to sleep. The other, of course, is that it enlightens our conscience and asks for forgiveness if there had been anything we have done or said, or have think anything contrary to God's will.

If these things are ours and abound, they assure us that we are in good standing with God. We bolster these by making it a habit, as we wake up in the early morning, to have our first thought on God or the Blessed Virgin Mary, and meditate on God in the coming hours.

It's a wholesome spiritual exercise that in our meditation we let our memory represent to us some virtue of the Heart of the Lord Jesus or the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin. Most importantly, whether we meditate or whether we contemplate, we ought to consider the mysteries of the life of the Lord Jesus as though we are present at them.

Let us listen to what our heavenly friend, St. Teresa of Avila, has to say about meditation: "By meditation," she says, "I mean much discursive reflection with the intellect in the following way: we begin to think about the favor of God granted us in giving us His only Son, and we do not stop there, but go on to the mysteries of His whole glorious life; or we begin to think about the prayer in the

garden, but the intellect doesn't stop until He is on the cross; or we take a phase of the Passion like the arrest, and we proceed with this mystery considering in detail the things there are to think of and feel about the betrayal of Judas, the flight of the apostles, and all the rest; this kind of reflection is admirable and very meritorious prayer."

She also said: "The meditation upon Christ bound to the column – it is well to reflect for a time and to think of the pains which He bore there, why He bore them, who He is that bore them and with what love He suffered them. But we must not always tire ourselves by going in search of such ideas; we must sometimes remain by His side with our minds hushed in silence. If we can, we should occupy ourselves in looking upon Him who is looking at us; keep Him in company; talk with Him; pray to Him; and remember that He never deserved to be there. Anyone who can do this, though he may be but a beginner in prayer will derive great benefit from it, for this kind of prayer brings many benefits; at least, so my soul has found."

Since this is the case, no wonder that we can say with the psalmist: "My soul is feasted with marrow and fat, and my mouth praises thee with joyful lips, when I think of thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the watches of the night; for thou hast been my help, and in the shadow of thy wings I sing for joy." Inevitably, we can add: →

### **Icon # 625 = The Soul clinging to God – God's right hand upholding the Soul**

"My soul clings to thee; thy right hand upholds me."

There are several images we can use to portray our soul's clinging to God, such as: iron in the fire; rays of the sun in the air, branches in the vine, or even barnacles on stones or floating logs. But the greatest and most profound, of course, is the union of our spirit with God, as our good friend, St. Paul, says: "he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him." He also said: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

Once the soul reached this degree of union with God, Christ shall never allow the soul to perish, and no one shall be able to snatch the soul from His hand. The reason is that the heavenly Father who has given the soul to Christ is greater than all, and no one whatsoever is able to snatch the soul out of the Father's hand. However, in order that the soul will not fall into insidious complacency God will allow the soul to fall into minor delinquency to stabilize its humility.

Our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux has this to say: "It is a necessity for men to fall occasionally, so long as they live here below; but while some are 'bruised' by

their fall, others are not, for the Lord put His hand under them. However, there is this important difference between the fall of the just man and the fall of the wicked, that the former is supported by the hand of the Lord and consequently rises again stronger than ever; whereas the latter when he is fallen 'shall rise again no more,' because he falls either into pernicious shame or into utter shamelessness. For either he will endeavor to justify what he has done, and this is the 'shame that brings sin,' or he will harden his forehead. Surely our sins 'work together unto good' for us when they render us more circumspect and humble. Is not he who falls upon humility supported in his fall by the hand of the Lord" (Sermon on Ps. 90)?

It is interesting to notice the semantic of the word "cling", such as: adhere, stick, grasp, hold, clasp, embrace, stay, remain, cleave, linger, cherish. These words are characteristics of attachment, and most of all love – either love and attachment to the world and the things of the world and to material things or love and attachment to God and the things of God, that is to say, if we love God truly we naturally adhere to him, stick to Him, grasp Him, hold Him, clasp Him, embrace Him, and cherish Him.

The same is true in relation to the world and the things of the world. However, the obvious difference is that the world and the things of the world will eventually pass away, but God and the things of God will last forever.

It is true to say that both the world and the things of the world and God and the things of God can bring a certain pleasure and happiness to the soul, but again there is a dramatic difference between the two, that is, the pleasure and happiness of the world and the things of the world are ephemeral, whereas the pleasure and happiness of God and the things of God are perennial.

Take for example the pleasure and happiness of the world and the things of the world. Notice that if we buy a new dress or a new pair of shoes or anything new, there's a feeling of elation, joy, pleasure, delight, and happiness, but if we are perceptive enough we will also notice that these feelings did not last long, not even an hour; they dissipate almost right after we got them.

Moreover, in retrospect, we cannot think of them with the same feeling as when we got them. On the other hand, the pleasure and happiness of God and the things of God are quite different. Notice, for instance, the moment of our conversion experience, there's also a feeling of elation, joy, pleasure, delight, and happiness, but if we are perceptive enough we will also notice that these feelings lasted for many hours; and not only that they did not dissipate almost right after that experience, but the peace that this experience brings lasted for so many days and months.

Moreover, in retrospect, we can recall that experience with elation, delight, and so much peace. The same is true when we attend Mass or in our private prayer. There's so much peace and a feeling of well-being. The reason for this is that God granted us to taste the peace and happiness of the life to come and to make us realized that this peace and happiness begin in this present life when our souls cling to God.

We have also to assert that it is not wrong if, once in a while, we have something new so long as it does not impaired our relationship with God, as it is written: "Seek first His kingdom, and His righteousness and all these things will be yours as well."

It is right and fitting to profess that to cling to God is superlative wisdom, because God owns all things, creates all things, and the source of all things. He is infinite power, infinite goodness, infinite beauty, infinite riches, infinite knowledge, infinite wisdom, and all that is good, right, and true. Therefore, we can never go wrong to cling ourselves to God.

God is infinitely perfect and happy in Himself, and in His sheer goodness He wants us, with utmost desire, to participate in His own perfect happiness. In other words, He wants us to cling to Him. What is so amazing is that He first clung to us so that we may cling to Him. He clung to us in His Incarnation by becoming a human being, like us in all things except sin. We cling to Him by seeking Him, knowing Him, and loving Him.

If our ultimate end is to participate in the eternal happiness and glory of God, it follows that it is just common-sense and matter-of-fact that whatever goal we may seek here on earth, there is nothing that can provide us peerless happiness than clinging to God. No wonder, then, that Lucifer and his wicked angels would seek to destroy us so that we will no longer cling to God. However, →

### **Icon # 626 = Trip to the Depths of the Earth**

"But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth."

Although we do not absolutely know for certain where in the universe hell is located, but it is intriguing to speculate that it is in the "depth of the earth." The reason for this speculation is this: In 1917 the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to the three little children of Fatima. In one of those appearances she spread her hands to the earth and rays of light issued from her hands which penetrated the earth and the three little children saw the devil and the other demons plunged



in the sea of fire shrieking in pain. They also saw the souls of human beings groaning in sorrow and despair.

The book of Revelation calls this place a bottomless pit. Just as heaven is both a place and a state, not just a state or a place, but both place and state, so also we have to affirm that hell is also both a place and a state, that is to say, it can be entered in and exited.

A question may be asked, what is the relation of those confined in the bottomless pit, that is, those who went down into the depth of the earth with those who are still on earth? Of the demons we know from Scripture that they roam around the world for the ruins of souls. In the providence of God the demons are allowed to exit the bottomless pit until the last day in order to tempt and to test human souls.

The bottomless pit will be ultimately closed only at the end of time. The devils by virtue of their higher nature as pure spirits, can come into contact with us and with the material world, and they can use this power to tempt and harm us. The fall of Adam and Eve was caused by a devil from hell; no doubt many of the last sins committed before the final closure of this bottomless pit will still be the outcome of temptations from hell.

There's no doubt that the talking points about souls and demons "going down into the depth of the earth" are unpleasant to the ears and disturbing to the heart, but it is not a compelling argument against bringing forward part of divine truth which will find souls to save, even though other may rebel.

It is truly right and just to uphold that no person ever began with making heaven, happiness with God for all eternity, a consideration of interest, who did not soon come to find it a consideration of love; and the thought of "going down into the depth of the earth," into the bottomless pit for all eternity, which began with scary fear for ourselves, ends in devotion to the sanctity of God.

On the other hand, the life of those who went down into the depths of the earth is a life, also, from which there is a total absence of sympathy and love. This is an easy thing to say, but it is not easy to penetrate into its significance.

The mind loses itself when it attempts to traverse an interminable desert of eternity, where no flowers or cacti of love, or even their similitude can grow. Shall a kind voice never speak to us anymore? Shall a kind eye never look at us again? Who can live without love? Our mind cannot think how it can be, but those who went down into the depths of the earth must live without it there. Worst than this, hatred will be with everybody. Each one will hate oneself and

ALL, and ALL will hate each one with a concentration of rage and hatred which is terrible to think of.

There is something insupportable in being hated, something maddening. Even when we are hated – though few men are really hated with genuine hatred, by only one man, and unjustly, and with love all around us, coming in from every other point of the compass, see how we run to God, and cling to Him, that He may make up to us what we are suffering, and take our part, as a just Father, against our unjust brother or sister.

But in the bottomless pit, in the depths of the earth, there's no one to run to for consolation, for everyone will be inundated with scorn and rage and hatred, and everyone shall cower in one's shame in knowing how richly a confirmed enemy of God merits even more than this.

Moreover, while they shall rave with equal scorn and rage and hatred against everyone else, yet they are being crushed by the hollow and vacant impotence of their unutterable fury.

Added to this is a threefold anguish, which may be considered as the permanent disposition of those who went down into the depths of the earth. First, there is the "anguish of impotence." Those who went down into the depths of the earth cannot use any activities which might distract them or put forth any energy which might give them occupation. They are utterly helpless in a desperate intelligent paralysis.

It seems cruel enough to drive us wild to think of, yet to this impotence we must add also a second, an "intolerable restlessness;" every nerve, every fiber of one's being vibrate with restlessness. It will peck at the heart as a vulture pecks at its prey or the worms peck the conscience. Those who went down into the depths of the earth are enraptured with unrest, with all the fiber of one's being tingle, as with burning needles because of the unbearable torture of this restlessness.

Every moment, even an immortal soul, even a deathless body, feels as if this nervous and mental agony of restlessness could no longer be borne, and yet it must be borne still, and it must be endured forever and it must be borne without its ever becoming easier to bear. Oh, that scared tumult of eternal sleeplessness, who shall endure it?

Yet a third agony adds itself to the other two, growing out of them, out of the impotence and restlessness. It is the misery of an impatience which has no hope, an impatience which can only be a spirit of blasphemy, a loathsome burning abhorrence of God, which those who went down into the depths of the earth,

the lost creatures, are obliged themselves to abhor even while they inwardly rave with the fever of it.

Its only future is the everlastingness of its intolerable present. We have sometimes a flash of pain which just darts over the limit of what is bearable, and we utter a peculiar shrieking. It is heard on the battle-field when the diaphragm is stabbed through.

It occasionally accompanies the crash of apoplexy. It is the body's uttermost cry. Yet this is the bright side of those who went down into the depths of the earth. It is the minor adjuncts of the bottomless pit – the depths of the earth; it does not yet include the crowning woe, that is, the pain of the loss of God.

“Just as the kingdom of God is greater than all we can think or imagine, greater than all report, better than all praise and panegyric of it, more manifold than all knowledge, more perfect than every conceivable glory, so the miseries of those who went down into the bottomless pit, the depths of the earth, as they truly are, no tongue can adequately tell; no mind conceive, for in reality they are far more dreadful than they are thought to be. It is so full of darkness, of discord, of hate, of folly, of unhappiness, of pain, of burning heat, of thirst, of hunger, of sorrow, of despair, of inextinguishable fire, of sadness, of unending punishment, and every indescribable evil that neither can it be told nor yet conceived by mortals” (cf. St. Patrick, Heaven and Hell, what no eye has seen and ear has heard....1Cor. 2:1-10).

Could we persistently meditate on all this, and still be what we are? Are we quite clear that this will not be our eternal destiny? Are our lives at all a sensible effort to avoid this? What is our inward repentance like? How do we stand toward our past sins in the way of penance and contrition? How are we dealing with our present temptations and occasions of sins? What effort are we taking in regard to our resolutions for the future?

Have we an attachment to any sin, however venial? Are we bargaining with God, and trying to evade morality? These are the gate and the road that lead to the bottomless pit – the depths of the earth. Moreover, →

### **Icon # 627 = The Power of the Sword**

“They shall be given over to the power of the sword, they shall be prey for jackals.”

After the Lord Jesus told a parable about a nobleman who went into a far country to receive kingly power and then return; calling ten of his servants, he

gave them money to trade until he comes; but the citizens hated him and sent an embassy after him, saying: "we do not want this man to reign over us;" when he returned, having received the kingly power, he commanded these servants to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by trading; All of them, except one, did well in trading the money; then the nobleman commanded to take the money from the one who did not trade it and be given to the one who gained 10 times more; he said that to every one who has will more be given, but from him who has not even what he has will be taken away; he then concluded the parable by saying: "But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me."

Without any slightest shadow of a doubt, the nobleman in this parable who went to a far country to receive kingly power is no other than the Lord Jesus, for He Himself had testified when he was about to ascend to heaven: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

Moreover, the servants in this parable represent all of us. We are all given gifts or talents to trade while waiting for the return of the Lord. The first and foremost of the gifts he has given to us is the gift of life. We are absolutely obligated to do business with the gift of life, that we may gain eternal life. God is not only jealous of the Spirit He has made to dwell in us, but is also divinely voracious for our salvation so much so that whoever will give a cup of water in His name will not lost his/her reward.

However, if a person complains and cries out: "This is a bad business, this is a bad business," as though giving cup of cold or plain water is tiresome to do, then even the little charity which he might have will be taken away from him/her, for whatever virtue or talent a person have is likely be lost if it is not use.

Consequently, he/she "shall be prey for jackals," that is, shall become booty for the demons because he/she is deprived of the strong defense of a virtuous life. Hence, not living a life of virtue is tantamount to not trading one's talent or one's gift. The implication of this is that we don't want the Lord Jesus to be the ruler of our lives.

If this is the case, it is very likely that we "shall be given over to the power of the sword," that is, be brought in the presence of the Lord and slayed before Him, because the "Sword of the Spirit" is the "Word of God," and the Lord Jesus is the "Word of God." Moreover, He and the Spirit are one, therefore, He is the Sword of the Spirit. No wonder that in the book of Revelation we are told that from the mouth of the "Son of Man," that is, the Lord Jesus, issued a sharp two-edged sword" (cf. Rev. 1:13-16).

We are also told in the letter to the Hebrews (cf. 4: 12-13) that the Lord Jesus, as the “Word of God,” pierces 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.

The reason for this is that as the “Word of God” the Lord Jesus is so alive and active, He is “Pure Life” and “Pure Act,” for He is one in Being with the Father who is also “Pure Life” and “Pure Act.”

Therefore, it is the height of supreme foolishness to be devoid of virtue, for we shall become an easy target of Lucifer and the other demons, and be convicted by the word of God who acts as an accuser and a sword. However, while we are still in this present life there’s always a reasonable hope of salvation if there is still left in us, even a flicker, a desire to repent; otherwise we shall be prey to Jackals.

Repentance has a very powerful component that acts as a trenchant deterrent to jackals, that is, to demons. Lucifer and the other devils are so allergic of repentance, because repentance is a gesture of humility. In other words, people who repent have a vestige of humility. Since the demons are devoid of humility, therefore, they could not repent, and since they could not repent, hence, there is no forgiveness of sins.

Thus if today we hear the voice of God calling us to repentance we should not harden our hearts, but be reconciled to Him and conformed our lives with His word. By doing so we shall not be given over to the power of the sword and shall not become prey for jackals. Accordingly: →

### **Icon # 628 = We rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God**

“But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall glory; for the mouths of liars will be stopped.”

In our baptism we are given a stupendous dignity to participate in the kingship of Christ. Thus if we are lucky enough to enter the kingdom of heaven we, too, with the Lord Jesus the eternal king, will rejoice in the glory of the Godhead, that is, in the Father through the Holy Spirit, not just for one day or one month or one year but for all eternity, infinite – without end! We shall rejoice in God and with all the angels and saints not just once in a while but always.

Thus while still even on earth “we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God.” And those who have attained the caliber of our good friend, St. Paul,

would say: "More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

As Catholic, I believe that Christ Jesus is the King of heaven and earth; I also believe that the Blessed Virgin Mary is the Queen of heaven and earth; I also believe that Christ is the father of the world to come and the Blessed Virgin Mary is the mother of the world to come. Hence, in the order of grace – in the new creation they are the new Adam and Eve; thus they are our new parents.

Since Christ as King rejoice in God and the Blessed Virgin Mary also rejoice in God, therefore, it is truly right and just to say that to rejoice in God is a veritable sign that we are children of the new Adam and Eve, in the order of grace.

We have innumerable and eternal reasons to rejoice in God, first and foremost, simply because He is God: Omnipotent, Omniscience, Omnipresent, ALL Good, ALL Loving, ALL Beauty, ALL Riches, ALL Majesty, ALL Glory, and ALL Greatest. We are invited to participate in all these attributes of God to the extent of our full capacity.

Try to imagine the happiness of a poor person who never had eaten good food, and often times have nothing to eat, who is invited to attend a wedding feast of the son of the riches family in town. Just to be there is already an astounding honor for that person, not even counting the food which had never seen before.

It's almost incredible that he was even invited to that wedding feast. It was overwhelmingly beyond his wildest expectation. If it was only a wishful thinking or a mere dream for him to be in such a banquet, certainly, that dream becomes a reality.

We, human beings, as human beings, are absolutely poor. We don't even have dress when we were born. We are just so helpless. We could not even feed ourselves, take care of ourselves. We are utterly dependent on the goodness, kindness, and generosity of other people. In this case are our parents.

Now, we are invited to attend the wedding feast of the Son of the Most High, the Most Almighty, and the Most Richest God, to participate in His divine nature. He invited us to share in His divinity. Who could ever imagine and think of this!? We who could hardly read and write will partake in the Omniscience of God; we who could hardly walk or lift our finger because of arthritis will share in the Omnipotent and Omnipresence of God; we who are afraid to look our face on the mirror will have in common with the All Beauty of God.

In other words, what God is by nature He lavishly granted us by grace. All that belongs to God belongs also to us. Isn't this something?! Truly, truly, this is overwhelmingly beyond our wildest imagining.

We shall rejoice in God forever just as God rejoices in us forever in, by, through, and with Our Lord Jesus, as it is written: "When he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the sons of men" (Prov. 8: 29-31).

God clutched in His Incarnation the heart and soul of the Lord Jesus to demonstrate to us what is essential of us, conveying to us the grandeur of His glory and majesty and enabling us to discover within our inner selves, with the sentiments of His Sacred Heart, the pathway to rejoice in God forever. He desired and ordained that we shall rejoice in Him for all eternity and He puts into our hearts the aspiration and the hope of attaining it.

Living with faith in the Lord Jesus is the ultimate way to be truly rejoicing in God even while still on earth as a foretaste of the eternal joy of the world to come. For Christ, with Christ, in Christ, by Christ, and through Christ, all His true followers reconstruct the earth into a reception room of Heaven.

In this reception room they shall rejoice and glory in God, for the mouths of liars will be stopped at the entrance to this room. The unclean has to be purified before admitted to this room; the fools who adamantly refused to become wise in the Lord shall not err therein. No violent and hateful people shall be allowed to this room, nor shall any cunning men and deceitful women be there; they shall not be found in this reception room, but the redeemed shall be there strolling around as in the restored garden of paradise; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness and shall rejoice in God forever, and sorrow and sighing and weeping shall be no more.

However, since we are still in this present life and are subjected to the assault of the wicked spirits who are determined to destroy our souls, therefore, we have to present to God our prayer and humbly say: →

## Icon # 629 = Hear my voice, O God, in my Complaint

### Psalm 64 (63)

"Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint; preserve my life from dread of the enemy."

In the prayer to the Holy Ghost there's a line which says: "Far from us drive the foes we dread and grant us thy true peace instead...." Of course, our number one enemy is the devil; and the other demons too are our enemies, but we also have other enemies that are fighting against us, namely, our passions and desires and all other vices. They are enemies within us.

Therefore, it is legitimate to complain about their presence in us, because they bring havoc to our souls. Many lives have been ruined on account of them. They destroy families and societies.

Take for instance, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The latter is more than enough to ruin everything. It's the downfall of the former highest angel of the heavenly court and of the others who followed him.

Pride is itself the home of evil, just as humility is contrawise the home of goodness. The figure of bombastic pride causes the devil and his followers to think highly of themselves. These unclean spirits that fell from heaven are now roaming around the world seeking someone to destroy.

They are all the more envious of the fact that the hearts of other men and women go up to heaven, knowing that they themselves have been thrown down from there because of the defilement of their pride.

And what about the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes? Let us listen to our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux in his sermon for Christmas Eve in which he wrote: "With regard to each of ourselves, was it not gloomy night while we were 'living without God in this world,' while we were obeying 'worldly desires,' while we were yielding our 'members as instruments of iniquity unto sin,' while we were 'serving uncleanness and iniquity unto iniquity, of which we are now ashamed' as of the works of darkness?"

It is truly right and fair to say that lust of the flesh is associated with the works of the flesh, namely: "Immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like." We have to assert that without prayer and the frequent reception of the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation it is extremely difficult to be preserved from them.



They are dreadful enemies because they have the potency to block our entrance to the kingdom of God, as our good friend, St. Paul, says: "I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

Just as a human being does not arrive all at once at sanctity, so too he/she does not arrive at once at complete perversity. Moreover, "Just as the kingdom of the devil is gained by conniving at the vices," says one of the eminent desert fathers, no other than Abba Moses in his first Conference, "So the kingdom of God is possessed in purity of heart and spiritual knowledge by practicing the virtues. And where the kingdom of God is, there without a doubt eternal life, and where the kingdom of the devil is, there – it is not to be doubted – are death and hell" [John Cassian's Conferences].

For this reason, "we should make every effort then," says one of the other prominent desert fathers, namely, Abba Paphnutius in his conference "On Three Renunciation," "so that our inner man too may reject and dispose of all the wealth of the vices that we have accumulated in our former way of life. These are our own, always clinging to our body and soul, and unless they have been rejected and cut off while we are still in this body they will remain with us after our death. For just as the virtues and love itself – which is the source – that have been pursued in this world make the one who loves them beautiful and splendid even after the end of this life, so also the vices bring to their eternal dwelling the mind which has somehow been clouded and infected by their dark shades" [cf. John Cassian's Conferences].

Abba Paphnutius also said in that same conference: "The beauty or the ugliness of the soul increases in proportion to the condition of its virtues or vices. The color that it has picked up from these makes it either so splendid that it deserves to hear from the prophet: 'The king will desire your beauty,' or so black, foul, and ugly that it acknowledges its own foul wickedness itself and says: 'My wounds stinks and are festering because of my foolishness.'"

It is right and fair to say that all vices have one root in common, namely, the disordered love of self, opposed to the love of good, and especially of the sovereign good which is God. This evil root tends to sink itself ever more deeply into the will, and from this root is born an evil tree.

The trunk of this tree is egoism, of which the central and principal branch, the continuation of the trunk, is pride, of which the lateral branches are the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes. From lust of the flesh is born gluttony and luxury. From lust of the eyes, that is, immoderate desire of external goods or material things is born avarice, and then perfidy, fraud, cheating, dishonesty, and hardening of heart. From the pride of life are born, vainglory and ambition,

disgust for spiritual things, forgetfulness of God, envy, jealousy, anger, and injuries to neighbor.

Who can be preserved from dread of these enemies!? "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through Our Lord Jesus Christ," for apart from Him we can do absolutely nothing to be preserved from dread of our enemies which are assaulting us from within and without.

Certainly, it is only when the vices of the inner person have conquered and the mind has been established in tranquility and the will is stable on what is good, will it be possible to enjoy unceasing prayer.

Necessarily, unceasing prayer is the best recourse to: →

### **Icon # 630 = Hiding from the Secret plots of the Wicked**

"Hide me from the secrets plots of the wicked, from the scheming of evildoers, who whet their tongues like swords, who aim bitter words like arrows, shooting from ambush at the blameless, shooting at him suddenly and without fear."

Our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux has this to say: "The powers of hell are mighty, but prayer is stronger than the devils." Hence, we need prayer to thwart the secret plots of the devils, from the scheming of the other demons who are bent to destroy us by all means either by injecting evil thoughts in us or sharpening our tongue against other people using "bitter words like arrows, shooting from ambush even at the innocent, shooting at him suddenly and without fear."

Accordingly, the Son of God was one of their innumerable victims. Take for instance what happened to Christ at His trial. Even Pilate the governor who also acted as judge acknowledged that Christ is blameless. Let us listen from the mouth of Pilate himself as he called together the chief priests and the rulers of the people: "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him...."

But the crowd whetted their tongues like swords, aiming bitter words like arrows, shooting from ambush at the blameless Son of God, shooting at Him suddenly and without fear, crying out: "Away with him, away with him, crucify him, crucify him!"

It's mind boggling how sharp they whetted their tongue; it has a double repercussions: as swords and arrows! What in the world would this be!? However, it is not surprising. By necessity, they have to whet their tongues and make their

words bitter; otherwise, they won't have any power and effect on Pilate who, as a judge, perverted justice and opened the opportunity for the wicked and evildoers to ambush the Lord and have Him crucified.

The minds of the wicked and evildoers do not take the trouble to notice what they have lost in whetting their tongues like swords and aiming bitter words like arrows, shooting from ambush at the blameless, shooting at them suddenly, and without fear, for in doing so, they apparently, without knowing it, lose their integrity which they originally have as human beings who were made in the image and likeness of God. Soundlessly they endure the pain of guilt, without realizing how much life and innocence they are losing.

Now let us also consider the case of Job whom God Himself commended as blameless, and see the secret plots and scheming of the devil even using the wife of Job, whetting her tongue like sword to aim bitter words at Job like arrows, shooting at him suddenly as from ambush and without fear. If we will examine carefully the stages of Job's trials, we will have an idea of the profundity of the devil's cunning. First, he organized the loss of Job's properties which were apart from human nature and apart from the body as well. Then, he snatched away his children who were part of human nature indeed, although they were apart from his own body. Finally, he assaulted his body.

However, he could not assault his mind to hurt it by means of the sores on his flesh, thus he tried to use the tongue of his wife to aim bitter words at him, shooting suddenly at the blameless Job as from ambush, saying: "Are you still going to insist on your integrity? Curse God and die!"

Our ancient enemy," says our heavenly friend, St. Gregory the Great, "customarily tempts the human race into two ways: either he subdues the courage of those of us who are brave by the use of trials, or he softens us up by the use of persuasion. Against blessed Job he furiously set to work with the use of both methods. First, he attacked the landowner Job with the loss of his property; then Job, the father of a family, was struck down by the death of his children; then still unhurt Job was wounded with stinking sores. Yet Satan saw him still whole within, though his flesh was rotting exteriorly; yes, him whom he had stripped naked externally he was unfortunate enough to see still richer within, because of the praise his Creator had bestowed on him. Thinking hard, he slyly figured that God's hero had overcome him by the very means that were used against him; when Satan was beaten; he turned his mind to the use of more subtle temptations. He went back to the tricks of his ancient artistry; remembering the means by which Adam could always be fooled, he returned to Eve. He saw blessed Job surrounded by the loss of so many possessions and struck helplessly by so many sores, yet he stood unhurt, as though in an ark made up of virtues. Indeed his mind was unmoved and remained above all this.

That was why no traps of the enemy could upset him. The adversary on that account asked himself how he could mount the steps that led to that well-protected sanctuary. Job's wife was nearby, indeed, close at hand. He held the woman's heart and discovered it was like a ladder that he could use to climb into the man's heart. He took possession of her soul as the ladder of the husband she had married. Yet he gained nothing in this way, for the holy man regarded the woman as his subject, not as his commanding officer; he spoke the truth to her to teach her whom Satan had tempted to speak evil" (from the Moralia, by St. Gregory the Great).

For this reason, it is absolutely necessary to watch and pray, so that when we are tried and tempted we will not be led into temptation. We need also to practice virtues where we can hide "from the secret plots of the wicked, from the scheming of evildoers, who whet their tongues like swords, who aim bitter words like arrows, shooting from ambush at the blameless, shooting at him suddenly and without fear."

If we do not pray and practice virtues we will be in serious danger because the devil and the other wicked spirits are so adamant in laying traps for us. Wherefore: →

### **Icon # 631 = Spiritual Blindness vs. God's Comprehensive Knowledge**

"They hold fast to their evil purpose; they talk of laying snares secretly, thinking, 'who can see us? Who can search out our crimes? We have thought out a cunningly conceived plot.'"

To hold fast to one's evil purpose and to lay snares secretly, thinking, "Who can see us? Who can search out our crimes,?" is an apparent manifestation of spiritual blindness because, "Can God who created the eyes not see?" Certainly, He sees everything for nothing is hidden from Him; or can God who searches the thoughts and intentions of the human heart, piercing to the division of soul and spirit and before whom no creature is hidden, but are plainly open and laid bare to His eyes, cannot search out one's crimes? Precisely! As the Lord said through the prophet Jeremiah: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it? 'I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doing.'"

Spiritual blindness is the "inability" to see what is good and evil. Thus the evildoers hold fast to their evil purpose, for they think nobody can see them or search out their crimes. In this case, they are just swindling themselves, becoming a victim

of their own malice, for they made themselves highly susceptible to be sports of the cunning hunters who set their snares to catch them.

“But who are these hunters?” asked our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux. “They are hunters of the greatest malice, wickedness, craft, and cruelty,” he said. “They are hunters who sound no horn, so that they may not be heard, but shoot in secret undefiled. They are ‘the rulers of the world of this darkness,’ most cunning in evil and in devilish guile, so that, in comparison with them, the most astute among mortals is only as a beast before the sportsmen” (Sermon on Psalm 90).

Let us also listen to what Aelred Graham, a Benedictine monk of England, has to say: “Those who are spectacularly evil succeed in achieving their immediate objectives, at any rate for a time; but they are not envied by anyone who chooses to think about human nature. Not that they necessarily suffer from bad conscience that is conventionally attributed to notorious wrongdoers. There is not much evidence to suggest that ruthless despots like Hitler and Stalin endured any agonies of remorse. The lesson of history appears to be that, once the ego has been encased in a coat of unscrupulousness of the required thickness, reproach and criticism are directed upon others. But, by the same token, happiness is demonstrably excluded from such lives....”

Hence, one thing is certain, that is, true happiness is so remote from those who hold fast to their evil purpose, those who “talk of laying snares secretly,” thinking that nobody can see them or search out their crimes. They may have fleeting pleasures, but not true happiness. It is obnoxious to do evil, and obstreperous to encourage ourselves and one another in it.

It is right to assert that it is an apparent indication that the heart is hardened to the greatest degree, when it is fully set to do evil. Certainly, a practical disbelief of God's comprehensive knowledge of all things is at the very core of every wickedness: “Who can see us? Who can search out our crimes? They thought.

Most people who disbelieve in God's comprehensive knowledge of all things do not do so because their reason tells them that God is so dull and ignorant. Their disbelief is rather of “dreamy thinking.” They think they would be happier if there were no God who sees their evil purpose and searches out their crimes, for then they could do as they pleased, such as: laying snares secretly” and devising out “a cunningly conceived plot.”

It is right to assert that disbelief in God's comprehensive knowledge of all things is born from the womb of bad conscience. Disbelief is born of sin, not of reason. A muddled conscience which has not yet exterminated the whisper of God, or which has not yet succumbed to those swindlers who would deny the reality of sin, has always within it a token of life, as king David's had. There is always hope

for everyone regardless of how wicked he may be so long as he/she does not burn the bridges of repentance by denying sin.

It has been said that the worst thing in the world is not sin; it is the denial of sin by a false conscience, for that attitude makes forgiveness impossible. No wonder that they think: "Who can see us? Who can search out our crimes?"

Truly, this tells us the enigma of the complexity of the inward mind and heart of every human person: →

### **Icon # 632 = The Inward Mind and Heart of a Man are deep**

**"For the inward mind and heart of a man are deep!"**

Many years ago, the National Geographic made a Video on the human brain. It says that the human brain, when fully utilized, has the capacity to digest 2 million volumes of book! What about the human heart? Since the heart is seat of love, and the fountainhead of passions and desires, both the passions and desires for evil and for God, hence it is not esoteric to say that the human heart, too, is so deep.

It's not even so mysterious to know the reason why it is so, simply because we human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. Since God is infinite and so deep which cannot be measured, and since we are made in His own image and likeness, therefore, our minds and hearts are also deep! "For what person knows a man's thought except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God..." (1 Cor. 2: 11-12).

Since it is through the external senses that ideas enter our mind, it follows that our state of mind is the result of our own choices as to what things we will allow inside. Every impression is a preparation for an expression. The basis of our ideas has entered our mind through our senses, and the basis of our actions has been absorbed in the same manner. Our Lord Jesus recommended that we avoid the future sin by barring its entrance to the mind through the senses.

Nothing ever happens in our world that does not first happen inside the mind. Hygiene is not a cure for immorality, but if the wellsprings of thought were kept clean, there would be no need to care for the effects of evil thoughts on the body. We cannot keep evil thoughts out of our mind unless we put good ones in their place. Truly, nature abhors a vacuum.

Since it is in our very nature to follow the guide of reason in our actions, hence if our intellect sins at all our will soon follows; and thus it happens that false opinions, whose seat is in our understanding, influence our actions and pervert them. Whereas, on the other hand, if we are of sound mind and take our stand on true and solid principles, there will result a vast amount of benefits for the public and private good (cf. On the Restoration of Christian Philosophy Aeterni Patris Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII promulgated on August 4, 1879).

It is also right to say that the heart is the core of the human reason, the vital center where heroism, spirit, and courage dwell; within our heart pain and joy are intermingle. From the heart springs and blossoms the love of God and God's love for us. God took in His Incarnation the heart and soul of Christ to show us what is required of us, conveying to us the grandeur of His glory and enabling us to descry within ourselves, with the sentiments of His Heart, the road to eternal happiness.

As the core of our being, the heart is a symbol of an inner domain where God and we can meet. It is the source of love which opens our eyes to the revelation of God's plan for us, that is, to become partakers of His divine nature through Our Lord Jesus, and to inherit the kingdom He prepares for us since the foundation of the world. What we only have to do is to purify our venous blood until there is no more obscure corner in us that is left unoxygenated by supernatural life.

Thus we need to identify our heart with that of the Lord Jesus if we want to be truly human in all we do. It was the Lord Jesus who opened up this new highway in our world, since the purpose of this purification is charity that issues from a pure heart, a good conscience, and unfeigned faith.

Deep down in the heart of every human person is a hidden spot which, if once touched, has an amazing power to make us receptive of God in our lives, as our heavenly friend, St. Augustine, puts it: "Thou hast made us for thyself; O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

"The heart is the secret chamber of the mind," says our other heavenly friend, St. Gregory Palamas, "and the prime physical organ of the mental power."

The deepness of the human heart is such that there is in it a hunger for the Eternal, but this hunger cannot be satisfied in the less – than spiritual level. To know what God asks of us, we have but to consult him, sound our hearts and listen to what we hear, for the heart is the interpreter of God's will according to circumstances. For the disguised divine action reveals its designs not by ideas but by instinct.

A cry confined in the depths of the heart has as much worth as a cry raised to heaven, since God perceives our most secret desires and the very inclinations of our hearts. His all-seeing eye beholds in the intentions and inclinations of our hearts every deed that we wish to do, as He beholds the ripe fruit on the trees in the mere buds of spring.

The venerable Bishop Fulton Sheen once said, "When God made your human heart, He found it so good and so lovable that he kept small sample of it in heaven. He sent the rest of it into this world to enjoy His gifts, and to use them as stepping stones back to Him, but to be ever mindful that you can never love anything in this world with your whole heart because you have not a whole heart with which to love. In order to love anyone with your whole heart, in order to be really peaceful, in order to be really whole-hearted, you must go back again to God to recover the piece he has been keeping for you from all eternity!"

It is also right and just to say that saintly people do not crave the goods of this present world; hence they are certainly not oppressed by excited thoughts of the heart. Rather they evict all their inordinate desires from the chamber of the heart with the hand of holy contemplation; since they regard all passing things with contempt, they are not troubled by the wild thoughts inspired by them. Accordingly: →

### **Icon # 633 = The Arrow of God**

**"But God will shoot his arrow at them; they will be wounded suddenly."**

If we give God a chance to work in our lives through the practice of regular prayer, it is very likely that prayer will become for us an arrow to shoot down our wild thoughts; they will be wounded suddenly, that is, they will loosen their grip in us.

Attaching ourselves in God allows us to repulse unseemly thoughts and not allow them to have residence in our hearts and settle there, because indecent thoughts settling in the heart has seductive power to revive passions and enslave the mind. Hence, as soon as we are aware that evil thought appear in our mind we have to hasten to strike them down by the arrow of prayer. In this way we cooperate with God who is far more desirous than us to remove evil from our heart.

The removal of evil thoughts and desires from our hearts is an auspicious sign that we are hit by the arrow of God and wounded suddenly by the "living flame



of love" that tenderly lacerated the deepest of our being. We can graciously call it "conversion" or "repentance."

By our conversion we strive and pray regularly to rid ourselves of the spirit of the world by altering our worldly manner of life. We put on Christ by interiorizing a new manner of life – a hallmark of being shot by His arrow and wounded by love.

Therefore, we should not be afraid of being shot by the arrow of God and be wounded suddenly, that is to say, we should never delay our conversion to a better life, because the vain hope of a youthful age would not be a guarantee against the finality of a sudden death, which in fact had snatched off people from all walks of life in its arbitrary choice.

Here are some characteristics when we are hit by the arrow of God and wounded suddenly by His love: we endeavor to avoid sin and the occasions of sin, and to keep close to God. We give prayer a room in our lives, we take pleasure in religious services, and above all in the Blessed Sacrament; Peace is gently reigning over our lives which were perhaps fretful and agitated before; self-knowledge comes upon us, yet not so as to confuse or overwhelm us; the Holy Spirit gives us the craving for an inward life, a new vocation, a vocation to a closer union with God, a finding God within.

Undoubtedly, happy the souls who are hit by this arrow of God and wounded suddenly by His love. It is a radical change of life, or, better still, a death that leads to a wholly new life, a turning to the person of the Lord Jesus, and a total self-surrender to Him as friend, lord, teacher, master, lover, king, and eternal God.

We have to humbly admit that prior to our being hit by the arrow of God, we do possess a certain self-knowledge, but only a false self-knowledge, or better a self-deception born of pride. Inflated with conceit, we are, in truth, so unlike God, a disfigured image of Him, thus in need of His healing grace, that is, to be shot by His arrow and be wounded suddenly by His love.

This self-deception assumes different forms according to the measure of the pride of our souls which effectively blinds our souls to the lamentable truth of our sinful self-disfigurement and so prevents us from seeking the divine healing we so desperately requires, that is, from seeking the Divine Hunter so as to be struck by the arrow of His mercy and be wounded by love.

Truly, it is right and just to say that we will come to know the love of God as we come to know ourselves as one being shot by His arrow and wounded by His

love, that is, as one being lovingly renewed by God in His own image and likeness.

We who once trembled to see our unlikeness to God in the mirror of the Incarnation of His Son, Our Lord Jesus, now comes to see the mercy of God in and through our own progressive likening to Christ's humility. Humbling ourselves before God and responding with love to the Lord Jesus who first loved us and humbled Himself by becoming a human being like us in all things except sin, we come to know ourselves again as a living likeness to the humble and loving Christ.

It is highly important to note that it is not we ourselves who took the initiative to be shot by the arrow of God, but it is God Himself who is hounding us to held us captive and be brought to the kingdom of heaven, as it is written: "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

Although our good friend, St. Paul, mentioned that God's 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 the body of Christ..., it is also right to say that "repentance" or "conversion" is a gift offered to us by God which we are free to accept or refuse.

Accepting it is tantamount to being shot by the arrow of God; on the other hand, refusing it is synonymous to hiding oneself from God and has nothing to do with Him, using one's tongue in saying: "We do not want this God-Man to rule over us." In this case, their own mouth convicted them. For this reason: →

### **Icon # 634 = The Tongue**

"Because of their tongue he will bring them to ruin; all who see them will wag their heads."

The tongue is really very amazing. It's so small, and yet it has tremendous power to raise a person up or cast a person down. For instance, the prophet Isaiah says: "The Lord has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary." The book of Proverbs emphatically pointed out: "The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut off." It also says: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits."

It is not esoteric to know that "Death and life are in the power of the tongue...." Take for example, if a person uses one's tongue in lying, deceiving, swindling, detraction, calumny, and expressing one's anger, then, died without repenting

these transgressions, there will be a grave danger that that person will be liable to judgment. It's even more dangerous if that person uses one's tongue in saying to one's fellow human beings: "You fool!", because that person "shall be liable to the hell of fire." Therefore, it stands to reason that "Death and life are in the power of the tongue," hence, "because of their tongue he (God) will bring them to ruin."

On the other hand, if a person uses one's tongue in singing the praises of God, blessing His holy name and blessing other people declaring the wonderful deeds He has done throughout the world, acknowledging Him before the people, saying words which edify the hearers and encouraging the weary, consoling the sorrowing, and above all upholding the truth and defending life, especially the life of the unborn children and the life of the innocent men and women, then, died upholding these values, there will be a solid contingency that the angel in –charge of that person will gladly usher him/her to the bosom of Abraham.

Of course, the ultimate basis of the Death and Life issues of the tongue is not the tongue in itself but the disposition of the human person, because the tongue, as an organ of speech, is neutral. It is how the tongue is utilized which accounts the final destiny of the human person, thus "Death and life are in the power of the tongue."

It is interesting to notice that toddlers hear a word before he/she ever utters it. His/her tongue is educated through the ears; so our soul, too, is trained through its ears, as the prophet Isaiah says: "He awakens my ear, that I may hear him as a master." Moreover, our good friend, St. Paul, says that the spirit will tell us for what things we ought to pray. Thus if one's tongue is crude in its petitions, it is because one's ears have been dull in his/her hearing of the faith.

It is appealing to know that one of the important details of the Sacrament of Baptism is the opening of the ear: the priest touches it and says, as Our Lord did to the deaf man, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." It implies that once a soul is brought into the state of Grace, the ears which were closed are open to the word of God. Once the ears of our hearts are opened and we learned how to listen, we will also know how to speak.

God dwells in a most profound silence, but when He comes in the person of Our Lord Jesus He keeps silence no longer because in the Lord Jesus, who is His Word, He speaks everything He has to say. He speaks one Word, that Word is the Lord Jesus. Our part, then, is to listen. God demands this of us, as He said: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

To listen is the capacity to receive a word – to allow ourselves to be influenced and changed by the word we received. Hearing is identical with listening but it

does involve the transformation of ourselves. Thus it is very important to hear and to listen. For instance, when we listen attentively to the Lord Jesus in the words of Scripture, in the locution of nature, and in the voice of our own experience, we will be led to see what He means.

In other words, we comprehend. We have an expression, "I see what you mean," which is another way of saying: "I understand what you say." Considering all the arguments presented here, we can establish a case that the tongue is a double-edged sword. If this sword is used for all that is good, right, true, it will bring the user to the kingdom of God, but if it is used for all that is evil, deceitful, and falsehood, it will drag the user to ruin. No wonder, then, that "all who see them will wag their heads." Consequently: →

### **Icon # 635 = Fear as a Double-Edged Sword**

"Then all men will fear; they will tell what God has wrought, and ponder what he has done."

It is fair enough to say that fear is also a double-edged sword. It can cut through the being of a person. However, it has different effects on people. Take, for example, the incident at the sepulcher on Easter Sunday. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone. His appearance was like lightning and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Lo, I have told you."

The continuation of this story tells us that the women did tell the disciples "what God has wrought, and ponder what he has done." It is also intriguing to know that the soldiers, too, after their traumatic experience, told the chief priests all that had taken place.

Again, the effects were so different, because after the chief priests had assembled and taken counsel with the elders they gave a sum of money to the soldiers and said: "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." So they took the money and did as they were directed; and this story has been spread....

Thus it is obvious that the soldiers screwed up and changed their “talking points” from what had really taken place to what the chief priests had told them to report. However, in doing so they make themselves look ridiculous and unbelievable, because no soldiers in their right mind will broadcast that they were asleep while in duty that is why the disciples of the Lord gained the upper hand to steal His body.

Take for instance, if they were asleep how do they know that the disciples of the Lord stole His body? If one or two of them were awake they could have awakened the others, hence preventing the stealing! On the other hand, if they were really asleep they would never tell it for fear that they will be executed! Take for example the soldier who guarded Sts. Paul and Silas. There was also an earthquake and the doors of the prison cells were opened. The soldier attempted to kill himself for fear that the prisoners had escaped. He, too, was sleeping at that time! It was only through the intervention of our good friend, St. Paul, that prevented him from killing himself.

What happened next was that the soldier, too, had told “what God has wrought, and ponder what he has done;” and not only he but also his household. They ponder the mighty works of God, how in His great mercy and abundant kindness He saved them and cared for them. They magnify Him for the greatness of what He has wrought.

With God's grace they joined with the countless men and women who have welcome the Lord Jesus in their lives and responded to His call to proclaim the Good News of salvation.

It is truly right and just to affirm that in sending us His Son, God the Father revealed His eternal love and mercy; He has sent to our world, as it were, a box filled with His love and mercy, a box that must be cut open in the passion that we will tell the wonderful deeds of God who called us out of the darkness of sin into His marvelous light of redemption. Therefore: →

### **Icon # 636 = Be Always Righteous**

“Let the righteous rejoice in the Lord, and take refuge in him! Let all the upright in heart glory!”

Once we are convinced that the Lord Jesus has redeemed us from the futile ways of this present world not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with His precious blood like that of a lamb without blemish or spot, then we will be convinced that the Lord Jesus is our righteousness. It is only in Him, absolutely in Him, with Him, and through Him that we will be, we are, righteous.

If we are truly righteous we will also learn humility, if we learn humility we will be humble enough never to consider ourselves to have arrived, we will never say, "It is enough," but we will always hunger and thirst for righteousness, so that even if we should never die we would always try as best as we could to be even more righteous, always try with all our strength to go from good to better.

Although we don't have a "doctorate" in theology, hence in danger of being convicted as a "quack" theologian, we will certainly be correct in presenting our diagnosis that a person has a certain degree of "righteousness" if she/he "rejoice in the Lord." In other words, to "rejoice in the Lord" is the most obvious symptom that a person is "righteous" or going to be righteous, because the devil or any wicked person may believe in the existence of God but they would never and could never "rejoice in the Lord!"

We are encouraged by our good friend, St. Paul, to "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice." In other words, we are encouraged to be always righteous. Truly, truly, this is a very good and healthy symptom because it will eventually lead us to death to our carnal desires and vices, and usher us to eternal life where we glory in the Lord and rejoice in Him

Thus we are truly righteous when we prepare ourselves for all the trials and misfortunes of this present life out of love for our heavenly fatherland. On the other hand, we will not be considered righteous if we are afraid to undergo trials and misfortunes in this present world for the sake of eternal happiness.

Our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux encourages us also, saying: "I would have you be always joyous but, in this life, never secure; always rejoicing in the Holy Spirit, yet always fearful too, and guarding yourselves against a relapse" (Sermon on Psalm 90).

However, if we relapsed, for whatever reason, we have an advocate with the Father, Our Lord Jesus the ALL righteous; and He will help us rectify our backsliding. No one is so perfect enough, except, of course, the Lord Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary, that never regresses, even slightly, for in that case he/she will no longer be in this present world; but with the relapse He will also provide us means to redress our regressions, otherwise, we might be in danger of losing the appetite of rejoicing in the Lord.

Accordingly, when we relapsed but returned back to the Lord, then, we will not cease to be righteous, thus capable of rejoicing in the Lord and praise His divine Majesty, because: →

## Icon # 637 = Praise, Vows, and Prayer

### Psalm 65 (64)

“Praise is due to thee, O God, in Zion; and to thee shall vows be performed, O thou who hearest prayer!”

Unequivocally, praise is absolutely due to God because He is the Creator of all things, seen and unseen, and doing it out of nothing; also, in Him we live and move and have our being, hence, we owe our existence from Him. There cannot be such a thing as true life without praise. Only where God is praised is there life.

Praise is always rendered in response to God's goodness, or His majesty in creation, or in His faithfulness, or in His wisdom and divine providence, or in His work of peace-making in our heart and in the heart of sinners.

It is not as if God is “destitute” for our praise, or that the human race is impoverished or diminished in dignity in the process of giving it. Rather, the giving of praise to God has an amazing power to bring about our union with Him, for everyone who is united with the Lord become one spirit with Him, hence putting us back in right relationship with God.

It is worthwhile to notice that praise is due to God in Zion, that is to say, in Jerusalem. In moral sense Jerusalem stands for the soul; in allegorical sense it stands for the Church, and in mystical sense it stands for the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, praise is due to God in the souls of the righteous, in the Church of the believers, and in the kingdom of heaven, that is, in the kingdom of the redeemed.

God will not certainly be praised in night clubs or in Casinos or in bawdy house, hence the psalmist is explicit in underscoring that praise is due to God in Zion. Of course, He is also praised by those who made vows, especially religious vows and marriage vows, and did their best to be faithful to these vows by cultivating their prayer lives.

It is right to assert that without the practice of regular prayer it would be impossible to persevere in fidelity to one's vows. We believe that God hears prayer offered to Him for the maintenance of fidelity to our vows, for He is more desirous in helping us to be faithful to our vows than we could ever think or imagine.

Not every issue we present to God will necessarily oblige us to spend the entire night praying about it, but it is certainly of paramount importance that God be

involved in every aspect of our lives to be able to uphold the dignity of our vows.

It is truly right and just to allege that we can never persevere in maintaining the fidelity of our vows if God does not subsidize us help, and this help we cannot have without prayer; but if we pray, we shall have the grace to carry out our vows, for God certainly hears this kinds of prayer, and have the strength of God who strengthens us; as our good friend, St. Paul, says: "I can do all things, through God who strengthens me."

As water is essentially necessary to prevent tree from withering, so prayer is vitally necessary to be able to comply with our vows. In the words of the illustrious Cardinal Timothy Dolan, pride of Missouri, "Prayer is predicated on the belief that by ourselves nothing is possible, while with God nothing is impossible. Prayer is built upon the trust that God never calls us to something without supplying the grace to do it."

For this reason, we should never abandon prayer for whatever explanation even for a single day, so long as there is still blood in our vein, or under the pretext of infirmity, for as our good friend, St. Paul, says: "When I am weak, then I am strong." Acting thus we will gain much benefit, and prayer will soon restore us by the action of grace.

If it ever happens that we fail in the observance of God's commandments, we will certainly not be depleted of God's grace to come back to Him asking for forgiveness, because: →

### **Icon # 638 = Repentance**

"To thee shall all flesh come on account of sins. When our transgressions prevail over us, thou dost forgive them."

Our good friend, St. Bede the Venerable, rightly says that "the beginning of our righteousness is the confession of our sins." It is also right to say that sin has to be confessed before salvation could be obtained. Conscience must be aroused.

St. Bede added that "Mankind cannot live a completely sinless existence here on earth, sins and faults, even serious ones, will be committed, but the effect of these failures can be mitigated by sincere confession, penance, and acts of charity and forgiveness towards others."

Accordingly, to uproot sin and the evil that is so embedded in our sinning can be done only by divine power, for it is impossible and outside our human competence to uproot sin; hence, we need to come to God on account of our



sins and ask Him for forgiveness. He assures us that when our transgressions prevail over us, but come to Him on account of our sins, He is infinitely willing to forgive us. His forgiveness will make us a new creation. Spiritual newness comes from repentance. It is through Our Lord's mercy that we are renewed.

The clearest indication of genuine repentance is to refrain in future from falling into grave sins, and proactively seeks at all times to correct and decrease our lightest faults. Not to proliferate our kinds of little sins, is undoubtedly, a hallmark of progress. It is progress in the sense of keeping on the road to heaven.

Moreover, once the "will" to sin is abandoned, then our soul will see that it has become acceptable to God, not because of the goodness of our soul, but because God is good. The moral crisis is ended when the Lord Jesus confronts our soul, not only as justice but also as mercy, and when we accept the invitation: "Come to me, all you who labor, and are burdened, and I will give you rest."

A conscience, burdened with guilt of past sins, is fearful of Divine Judgment, but God in His Mercy has given us two remedies for such unhappiness: One is the Sacrament of Reconciliation which blots out the past by remission of our sins and lightens the future by our hope for Divine Mercy through continued repentance, and the second is the amendment of our lives.

It is true that those who have never gone to Confession or tried to amend their lives must not be too hard on the souls who are trying; people who give in to every temptation have no idea how hard it is to resist the sins which have been committed before. If anyone wants to find out how bad he/she is, let him/her try to be good.

Unrepented and unforgiven sins are the most pervasive causes of fear and anxiety. Many neurotics, who abhor or allergic of religion, do not realize that their miseries are due to a hidden transgression.

To deny the existence of our past sins is as serious to a soul as the denial of an existing cancer is fatal to the body. The mere denial of the idea of sin does not relieve our guilt: the conscience of the human person is not bribed so easily, nor foisted with a shallow denial of the moral law which is engraved in our human nature.

The only real remedy of the anxiety and the painful gnawing of guilt, like worms that will never die, is to come to God and restore ourselves to union with Divine Righteousness through repentance and forgiveness of sins.

Repentance for sin is inseparable from love. Our hatred of sin is a measure of the deepness of love. God would not be good unless He hated evil, nor can any of us claim to value the Divine Love unless we avoid all that would wound that Love.

On the other hand, God forgives because He is Love. What the Lord Jesus said on the Cross was, "forgive them." We have to forgive the "Pilates" that came across our lives who are too weak to defend our justice; we have to forgive the "Herods" that crossed our paths who are too sensual to perceive our spirituality; we have to forgive the "Judases" among our acquaintances and our friends who think worth is to be measured in terms of silver and gold. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

In that short sentence is packed the conjoined love of Father and Son in the bond of the Holy Spirit whereby the innocent love of God encountered the transgression of sinful humanity, and remained blameless. That first word of forgiveness is the strongest evidence of Our Lord's absolute sinlessness.

The rest of us shall come to Him on account of our sins, and His word of forgiveness encourages us to approach the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and pardon of our sins. Happy will we be if this would be our destiny, because: →

### **Icon # 639 = The Citizens of Heaven**

"Blessed is he whom thou dost choose and bring near, to dwell in thy courts! We shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, thy holy temple!"

As far as we know, there are three well known vocations in the Christian life, namely: married life, single-blessedness, and priestly and religious life. Of course, these three noble vocations are boiled down into one common vocation which includes all people from all walks of life, including children, that is, the universal call to holiness. The reason for this universal call to holiness is not really mysterious and esoteric, because it is simply a calling to imitate or, we can say, reproduce the holiness of God in our lives, as the Lord says: "You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy."

In creating us in His own image and likeness, God has intrinsically given us the capacity to respond to His call to be like Him. Our part, then, is to listen and answer either it be to the married life, single-blessedness, or the priestly and religious life, which will bring us near to him and dwell in His house forever, that is, the kingdom of heaven where we shall be fully satisfied with the goodness of

God. God is the ultimate "Good," hence, to participate in the infinite goodness of God is unspeakable blessedness.

Blessed simply means happy. Thus happy are we to be with God starting in this present life and be perfected in the next life. We are also blessed if we have a chronic hunger and thirst for holiness because we will be satisfied. God willed and intended a "perfect" happiness for us and placed in our hearts the desire and the hope of achieving it.

Like the oxygen we breathe, we need an interior life and an intimate relationship with God, drawing near to Him, like taking in clean – fresh air for renewed strength, in order to fight against the concupiscence which sweeps through us. We must, if we are to know blessedness at all, arrive at the knowledge and love of God which we reach through Christ Our Lord, since in Him with so much hope goes forth in full freedom.

Since the ultimate end of union with God is eternal life with its concomitants "perfect happiness" and "infinite goodness" of the kingdom of heaven, hence, it is crystal clear common sense that blessed are all whom He chooses and brings near to Him, to dwell in heaven as their permanent residence for all eternity. They shall be utterly satisfied with God's goodness.

Those who are chosen and brought near to God in heaven, seeing God face to face without intermediary, love Him above all things, because they see with absolute certainty that God is immeasurably better than all created things, both seen and unseen, combined together.

This love will never pass away or diminish even a fraction of an atom or dwindle. Faith will give way to vision; hope will be over ridden by possession, but love will never pass away.

Thus blessed are all whom God chooses and brings near to dwell in His kingdom forever, for they shall be satisfied because in His unending kingdom there shall be life without death, truth without falsehood, and happiness without the slightest provocation of sadness and pain, in Christ Jesus Our Lord the king of the whole universe and the eternal High Priest of the new creation, who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen. So be it! So be it! Accordingly: →

## Icon # 640 = Deliverance on the Cross by the God of our salvation

"By dread deeds thou dost answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation, who are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas...."

The first letter of John, Ch, 3: 8, tells us that "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." It is also right to say that although the devil has many kinds of works, his "signature" work was to bring death to our world because it was through the devil's envy that death enters our world.

For this reason, it is truly right and just to strongly assert that the "death and resurrection" of the Lord Jesus, which are really dreadful deeds for the demons, had ultimately destroyed the "signature" work of the devil, as our good friend, St. Paul, says: "The last enemy to be destroyed is death."

Therefore, the Cross, then, is not so much a sign of suffering and failure as the unsurpassed eloquent insignia of what the world really needs. This is precisely because the cross expressed the Lord Jesus' triumph over all evil, including the last enemy which is death, the true hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas that does not disappoint.

This hope is resplendent in every practicing Christian who embraces the cross and entrusts himself/herself to its mystery, not abandoning one's commitment despite the mounting waves of trials and difficulties that come one's way.

Wherefore, all of us who have wandered away from the right path of life have to take courage, because the Lord Jesus comes with deliverance to seek and to save that which was lost. He condescended to our fallen misery, even to the point of His death for us on the cross, to reveal the truth about the God of our salvation who mercifully came to deliver us from eternal death.

In coming into our world as the God of our salvation, the Lord Jesus unveiled the eternal mercy of God. He came into our world, as it were, as a sack filled with His divine mercy, a sack that must be cut open in His Passion, so that by this dread deed He would answer us with a well calibrated redemption that the costly prize of our deliverance hidden within it might be poured to the ends of the earth and to the farthest seas of the world.

Hence, when the immensity of our sins weighed us down and we are bewildered by the loathsomeness of our conscience, when the terrifying thoughts of judgment horrifies us, and we sink into the gulf of sadness and despair, we have to raise once more the ears of our heart to the cross of Our Lord Jesus who answers us with deliverance, for He is the God of our salvation.

We must confess our weaknesses in tears, and learn to seek our deliverance not from ourselves, but from above, from the cross, turning ourselves fully to the God of our salvation, mourning our own brokenness and powerlessness before Him. And what is amazing is that before we utter anything He answers us with deliverance, for He is desirous of our salvation far more than our desire to be delivered.

“Whoever wishes to stay in a state of grace,” says the Lord Jesus to our heavenly friend, St. Angela of Foligno, “should never turn the eyes of their souls away from the cross, whether it be joy or sadness which I bestow upon them or allow to happen to them.”

It is fair to aver that our cross usually consists of daily annoyances and petty frustrations, disappointments, loneliness, and recurring disillusionment with everybody, ourselves included. We might dub it a combination of bodily aches, spiritual twinges, and mental hotfoots that go to make up everyday living.

The way of the cross maybe hard, but it remains the only road to happiness, serenity, and peace in this present life on earth; and at its end there awaits us happiness without measure, without limit, and without end, for we are more than conquerors through Christ who loves us, who is the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas: →

### **Icon # 641 = Stilling the Roaring Of The Seas**

“Who by thy strength hast established the mountains, being girded with might; who dost still the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples....”

In one of the maritime trips of the Lord Jesus, there was an incident where a great storm arose and the waves beat into the boat, so much so that the boat was already filling; but the Lord was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke Him and said to Him: “Teacher, do you not care if we perish?” He awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?” And they were filled with awe, and said to one another: “Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?”

This incident sounds very intriguing because the Lord who, supposedly, be steering the boat was asleep! No wonder that the disciples woke Him up and said: “Teacher, do you not care if we perish?” He awoke and rebuked the wind and commanded the sea to keep quiet, and they obeyed Him!

For us believers, there are several things worth noticing. This incident dramatically shows that the Lord Jesus is truly human and truly divine. The fact that He was asleep clearly shows that He is human and the fact that the wind and sea obeyed him demonstrates that He is indubitably divine. Moreover, the fact that He was asleep indicates that He shares our human weakness, and the fact that by a mere word He was able to stop the raging wind and stilled the roaring of the seas discloses His divine power.

This episode reminds us also of the incident of the prophet Jonah, where Jonah was also sleeping when they were caught in a terrible storm and the ship was at its breaking point. Like the disciples of the Lord the mariners too were afraid, and the captain said to Jonah: "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call upon your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we do not perish."

Again, it is worth noticing that what is at the peak climax in the case of the prophet Jonah was still a preliminary warm up in the case of the Lord Jesus, because Jonah has to be cast into the sea to calm down the storm, whereas the Lord Jesus just merely utter a simple word to calm down the roaring of the sea.

The peak climax in the case of the Lord Jesus, of course, would be on the boat of the cross where He would be cast into the sea of the tomb to destroy death forever and to calm down the storm of anxiety and bitterness; to still the roaring of concupiscence, the roaring of unhealthy passions and evil desires, the tumult of inordinate attachments.

In the cross is salvation; in the cross is life; in the cross is protection not only from the tumult of the people but also from the tumult of fleshly desires. In the cross is the infusion of peace which surpasses understanding; in the cross is the strength of mind, firmness of will, and the joy of spirit.

The cross is an integral part of true holiness, for in the cross we are given the power to bear our pain in conformity to God's will. If we will keep the eyes of our hearts gazed upon the cross and believe in the everlasting love of the Lord Jesus, truly, an amazing strength will be provided to us. We will be able to lift up our heads above the roaring of the waves, for Our Lord the Master of Creation will say to our troubled hearts: "Fear not, it is I." "Peace! Be still!"

Thus in the Lord Jesus it is highly possible to find rest and stillness amidst the roaring of so many things in this present world vying for our attention and focus; it is possible to be still when the world seems to be racing all around us and the peoples are in tumult, because the waves and winds still know His voice.

Our soul can be in stillness in the midst of chaos, storms and confusion because we know the Lord is on our side. We know that through the roaring of the seas of life, the roaring of their waves, and the tumult of the peoples, Our Lord remains faithful for He cares for us. The rationale behind this is: →

### **Icon # 642 = Awe at God's Prodigy**

“So that those who dwell at earth's farthest bounds are afraid at thy signs; thou makes the outgoings of the morning and the evening to shout for joy.”

Who are those who dwell at earth's farthest bounds, are filled with awe at God's wonders? Plausibly, it is not farfetched to assert that these are the monks and nuns who are separated from all but united to all because they are united to God who is in all; these are the people of good will who are in the world, but are not of the world. They are the people who dwell at the farthest corners of the earth who saw enough of the evidences of the divine presence and power to fill their minds with awe at God's prodigy, for they have learned from the Lord how to read the signs of the times.

In other words, there are ample of evidences of the Divine existence and might all over the world even at the earth's farthest bounds to fill our minds and the minds of all people with awe.

When God created the heavens and the earth, there was evening and there was morning everyday till creation was finished. And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was really very good. “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. 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,” for in the Incarnation of the Son of God, God sent His Word into our world and shall accomplish what He designs and shall not return to Him empty, because in His ascension the Son of God brought with Him our own humanity; and instructed His disciples to go out to the whole world and preach the Gospel to all creation, to those who dwell at earth's farthest bounds, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Thus whoever believes will participate in the unbounding happiness of the Most Blessed Trinity, and they will shout for joy all the days of their lives, for their happiness is founded on truth since it is of faith that the essence of their supreme joy is but the ending tide of the very happiness of God ebbing and flowing into their souls, according to the capacity of their hearts.

When God pleases, He causes us to experience a tiny sample of this joy on earth in order to draw our souls to Himself. For this reason: →

### **Icon # 643 = The Most Holy Eucharist**

“Thou visitest the earth and waterest it, thou greatly enriches it; the river of God is full of water; thou providest their grain, for so thou hast prepared it.”

When God comes to our life He brings with Him the gifts of the Holy Spirit as guarantee of our future inheritance that He may “greatly enriches” us with His blessings to lead us back to heaven, our true home. Many times happy are the people with such blessings, for they are like tree planted beside a river that yields fruits at the proper time.

They are greatly enriched because they are watered by heavenly sweetness. What is truly even more amazing is that God not only visited our planet earth but even lived on earth for a good number of years. In other words, in His Incarnation God greatly enriches our world and watered it with the river of His seven sacraments, providing the grain of wheat to become His own Body and grapes to become His precious Blood.

He has prepare these for the celebration of the Most holy Eucharist to water our souls with His graces and to enrich us with His divinity, because in receiving God in the Most Holy Eucharist we are destined to become what we received, that is, what God is by nature we will be by grace. This is not our own doing, But God Himself has prepared it from all eternity.

According to the teaching of the Church, the Most Holy Eucharist is the “source and summit of the whole Christian life.” The sublime reason is this: in the Most Holy Eucharist we have the real Body, Soul, Blood, Humanity, and Divinity of the Lord Jesus. This is, of course, a reality accessible only to the eyes of faith.

The Catholic Church teaches that what was once bread, after the words of consecration, no longer bread, but has become the real Body of Christ even though the “appearance,” that is, the taste, the smell, and the color of bread remains. What was once wine is, after the words of consecration, no longer wine but has become the real Blood of Christ even though the “appearance” of wine remains.

Hence, the Most Holy Eucharist contains the whole spiritual wealth of the Church, for in the Eucharist God greatly enriches the Church.



Our heavenly friend, the angelic doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas, who confesses in a beautiful poem that “sight, touch, and taste all fail when it comes to Christ; it is only with the ears that one safely believes,” extols this change of inner reality which is called “transubstantiation” as the greatest miracle. It really is! Imagine what marvel it would be to turn a puppy into a child! Yet what happens in the Eucharist is greater than that: bread and wine are turned into the real Body and Blood of Christ!

It would be the height of egregious asininenity and blatant idolatry to bow in reverential adoration before what looks like bread if Christ Himself had not solemnly assured us that the Eucharistic bread is truly His Body. From the beginning the Church has consistently insisted that the Eucharist was not only a symbol of Christ’s presence and sacrifice but His true bodily presence and sacrifice.

Thus the Eucharist as the mystery of faith, graciously provides the setting and attitude for responding to God in our trials and temptations, in our joys and sorrows. In the Eucharist we are not alone but united with the entire Church. In the Eucharist we give and take forgiveness, that is, we ask forgiveness of our sins and we also forgive others their offenses against us.

Above all, in the Most Holy Eucharist we confess our faith that it is the Lord Jesus who cares for us each moment of our daily life: visits and waters it, and greatly enriches it, for He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply our resources and increase the harvest of our righteousness. We will be enriched in every way for great generosity that helps us work at our salvation and the salvation of other for the glory and praise of God in Christ Jesus Our Lord. Whereupon: →

### **Icon # 644 = Abundance of Eternal Life**

“Thou waterest its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.”

It’s truly right and just to affirm that in the Most Holy Eucharist God blesses our souls abundantly, straightening out the mountains of our pride and regulates the hubris of our vanity, softening our hard hearts with His graces, and blessing the progress of our endeavor to attain eternal salvation; because in the Most Holy Eucharist “God is at work in us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure that we may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruits of righteousness which comes through Christ Jesus the Lord, to the glory and praise of God.”

If these things are ours and abound they will make us effective and fruitful in the knowledge of Our Lord Jesus Christ and there will be abundantly provided for us an entrance into the eternal kingdom of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In His eternal kingdom there will be an abundance of eternal life, for He came into our world that we may have life and have it abundantly.

The Catechism of the Catholic emphatically says: "God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength. He calls together all men, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church. To accomplish this, when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son as Redeemer and Savior. In his Son and through him, he invites men to become, in the Holy Spirit, his adopted children and thus heirs of his blessed life" (# 1).

For this reason, our love, our goodness, our sanctity, and all our deeds has tremendous value and profound meaning, for they are seeds of good or evil that blossom, to be sure, in this present life, but which are not harvested until the next.

It is an ordinance of life that things have to be worked at, the earth has to be cultivated; someone has to water them and bless their growth, somebody has to give them shape and form: they do not create themselves or happen by themselves. We have a role to search around for what has to be done and our search presupposes obstacles or difficulties that has to be overcome, implying the need for an unshakable faith, a high morale, and a firm determination to enter the kingdom of heaven; thus, inherit eternal life.

Pundits in the spiritual realm dub the acquisition of this attitude "asceticism," an exercise which liberates the spirit from anything that would impede it, or prevent it from developing or growing in accordance with its nature.

This kind of "liberation" does not reject the flesh or ordinary life, but rather subject them to reason in the light of faith, for it believes that the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can we unless we abide in Christ. Those who abide in Him, and He in them, are the ones that bear much fruits of virtues because He blesses their growth. They are deeply convinced that apart from Him they can never make progress in true Christian living. Hence, with reverential recognition and honorable appreciation, they graciously say to Him: →

## Icon # 645 = Crown of Eternal Life

"Thou crownest the year with thy bounty; the track of thy chariot drip with fatness."

That God "crownest the year" with His bounty verily indicates an endless years of bountiful glory and copious bliss of eternal happiness which He lavishes upon those He destined in love to be His sons and daughter through Our Lord Jesus Christ, according to purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace which He freely and generously bestowed on them, so that having the eyes of their hearts enlightened they may know what is the hope to which He has called them, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power in all who believe in the Lord Jesus.

At our birth we receive our natural life from that of our mother. We are liberated from her womb into our own independent existence. This is a terrific mystery, at once intimate and harsh. But here another stupendous mystery is meant: the miracle of grace, the crowning of eternal life.

In this splendid existence we are ourselves, but in Christ. He lives in us and we in Him; and this is the guarantee of our most individual personality. With masterful simplicity and grandeur, our good friend, St. Paul, boldly declares: "It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me."

Undoubtedly, this is a delicious foretaste of the promise of Christ: "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." Thus we become one with God; this is so, because everyone who is united to Christ becomes one Spirit with Him. Hence, it makes a good sense that He crownest the life of the saints with His bounty and eternal glory.

Accordingly, it follows: "the tracks of thy chariot drip with fatness." Since chariot is simply a carriage, so it is not unreasonable to say that our body is a chariot of God if we use it as a carriage of righteousness. Hence, its tracks drip the fatness of virtues which lead to eternal life.

In the ancient days chariot is also used for racing. Thus our body, too, can be use as a chariot if we race on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus the Lord; and if we win we will receive the crown of life which God unstintingly bestowed on all the victors.

So the tracks of our lives drip the fatness of eternal happiness, for we will see God as He is no longer in a dim mirror as we do on earth, but in a clear vision of His breathtaking majesty and glory. He crownest the year with His bounty, for He willed and intended a perfect happiness for us and put in our hearts the desire

and the hope of achieving it, making use the chariot of our body, that is, our humanity, to drip with fatness of His own divinity.

This, truly, is a mind boggling condescension, for in the Incarnation God crownest the year of our humanity with the bounty of His divinity, taking the heart and soul of Christ to show us what is required of us, conveying to us the grandeur of His glory and enabling us to discover within ourselves, with the sentiments of His Sacred Heart, the road to the kingdom of heaven which drips with fatness of eternal happiness. No wonder that: →

### **Icon # 646 = Pastures of Paradise**

"The pastures of the wilderness drip, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy."

It is so amazing to notice how the pastures, the hills, the meadows, and the valleys are so abundant of life and happiness. They all shout and sing together for joy! They sound like intelligent beings who know how to sing and can feel, especially for joy.

It's a good image of the kingdom of heaven where there is so abundant of life and all the inhabitants are so happy and filled with joy; death has no longer a say.

In the beginning of time, we, the human race, represented by our first parents, Adam and Eve, had been placed in the pastures of Paradise, that if we bound ourselves to obedience of our Creator by chains of love, we might one day pass on to the heavenly fatherland, the meadows of the angels. We were created immortal but in such a way that if we sinned, we could also die. We were created mortal in such a way that if we did not sin, we could also not die.

So by reason of our free will we would reach the happiness of that place in which we could neither sin nor die, but shout and sing together for joy not just for 30 minutes but for all eternity.

However, since we are still in the valley of tears, that is, in this present life, we have to keep stringent and careful watch over ourselves lest the stalking serpent attack from ambush, that is, lest the ancient enemy, hiding behind some display of virtue, deceive us and the glamor of this world turn our senses away from love of the heavenly fatherland, and the persuasive speech of the cunning serpent prevail in our hearts.

Therefore, “let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

If these things are ours and abound they will assure us of our safe arrival in the heavenly fatherland where every good multiplies and there shall be life without death, truth without murkiness of falsehood, and joy without the slightest shadow of unrest or alteration. In this blissful place the pastures of eternal happiness drip, the hills of goodness gird themselves with ineffable delight, the meadows of unending glory clothe themselves with flocks of single-minded unity, and the valleys of humility deck themselves with grain of undiminished exultation; they all shout and sing together for joy in the presence of the Lord Jesus, for they had awaited with eager longing for the revealing of the sons and daughter of God. At last, they had been set free from its bandage to decay and obtained the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Formerly, they had been groaning in travail like a woman who was about to deliver a child, but now they no longer remember the anguish as they arrive in the heavenly fatherland because they see, once again, the Lord Jesus and their heart rejoice and no one ever take their joy from them. With all the angels and the redeemed, and with all creation, they shout and sing together for joy. For this reason, they: →

### **Icon # 647 = Heavenly Noise**

#### **Psalm 66 (65)**

“Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise!”

Just as “there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one;” and there are also different kinds of “works of the flesh, such as: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like;” and there are also different kinds of “fruits of the spirit, such as: love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control,” and the like; so also there are varieties of “noise,” that is, of “music” that are either works of the flesh or the spirit.

Certainly, music that are heavily works of the flesh are plain, such as: disco, rock, Hip hop, Glitch hop, rap, wonky, snap, crunk, funk, and the like. There are so

much drugs involved in these kinds of music, and the noise produced by these truly does not redound to the glory of God, for they are ministries of the flesh.

It is right to assert that the inspiration of these kinds of music does not come from God, but from the Deceiver of the world, the Tempter who swindled our first parents by false promises. It is the same Tempter who is roaming around the world offering glory of this world to the composers and followers of these kinds of music who had vowed down and worship him.

The Lord Jesus Christ is light, and the world is darkness; and as light and darkness cannot exist together, one casts out the other, so neither can Our Lord and the world be one. When the spirit of the world with its funky and wonky noise gets entrance into one's heart, the Lord Jesus is cast out, rejected; and in proportion as the Spirit of the Lord with its gentle and joyful noise gains ground in the soul, the spirit of the world is cast out.

The spirit of the world is antithetical to the Spirit of the Lord Jesus. It is composed of those who center their happiness in earthly things with its rocky and crunky noise, Hip hop music, esteeming these as the only treasures worthy of man's ambition; pursuing them with unrelenting ardor and deliberately sacrificing their souls to uphold them.

On the other hand, there's another kind of "noise" that is recommended to us by our good friend, St. Paul, a "holy noise," that is, "addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father."

Unequivocally, this kind of noise is very pleasing to God and redounds to His greater glory. It is a foretaste of the heavenly noise which John, our brother in the Lord, the seer of Patmos, had graciously recounted: "And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of thunder; the voice I heard was like the sound of harpers playing their harps, and they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders."

He also narrated: "And I saw what happened to be a sea of glass mingled with fire and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, 'Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, O king of the ages! Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord? For thou alone art holy. All nations shall come and worship thee, for thy judgments have been revealed.'"

Truly, these are the people who “make a joyful noise to God..., sing the glory of his name, give to him glorious praise!” With John, our brother in the Lord, we will also suggest to them: →

### **Icon # 648 = The Most Terrible Deed of God: The Cross**

“Say to God, ‘How terrible thy deeds! So great is thy power that thy enemies cringe before thee’.”

It is credible to contend that the most terrible deed of God while on earth was His crucifixion. So great is the power of the cross that demons cringe before it. They would rather have cancer in their eyes and brain than to gaze on the cross.

Although the cross is folly to the demons and to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God, for “The cross of Christ is the source of every blessing, the fountain of all merit: to the faithful it gives strength from His weakness, glory from His shame, and life from His death,” says our heavenly friend, Pope St. Leo the Great.

Let us listen also to our other heavenly friend, no other than St. Teresa of Avila, and see how the devils cringes before the cross: “If this Lord is powerful as I see He is,” she says, “and know He is, and if the devils are His slaves (and of that there can be no doubt, for it is an article of Faith), what harm can they do me, who am a servant of this Lord and king? How can I fail to have fortitude enough to fight against all hell? So I took a cross in my hand and it really seemed that God was giving me courage: in a short time I was another person and I should not have been afraid to wrestle with devils, for with the aid of that cross I believed I could easily vanquish them all. ‘Come on, now, all of you,’ I said: ‘I am servant of the Lord and I want to see what you can do to me.’ It certainly seemed as if I have frightened all these devils, for I became quite calm and had no more fear of them, I lost all the fears which until then had been won’t to trouble me. Although I used sometimes to see the devils, I have hardly ever been afraid of them again – indeed, they seem to be afraid of me. I have acquired an authority over them, bestowed upon me by the Lord of all, so that they are no more trouble to me now than flies. They seem to me such cowards – as soon as they see that anyone despise them they have no strength left.”

It is right and just to say that the devils are not only utterly allergic of the cross but also intensely repugnant of it, because when they have to look at the cross they see themselves as they are. The cross serves as a markedly clear and spotless mirror; it convicts them of their pride and other vices. It also filled them with awful

envy and terrible jealousy of the human race, because on the cross they see the infinite love of God for our race by dying for us and not for them.

On the cross God offers unstinting forgiveness to all who repent of their sins, no matter how grave and plentiful they are, so long as we are still in this present world, but did not offer this same forgiveness to the devils. Is God, then, very bias in the exercise of His forgiveness? Of course, God is very bias in the exercise of His forgiveness towards the human race; that is why He died on the cross and offered forgiveness: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

So great is the power of these words for those who repent, and yet so terrible for the demons and to all who are enemies of the cross that they cringe before it. They would rather prefer to be stone-deaf or have cancer in their ears than to hear the plea of God for forgiveness. On the cross the devils see all their crimes and their utter repulsive ugliness; hence, they would not want to look at the cross.

Of course, this is not too hard for our mind to understand, because if we are unfortunate enough to be among the "not good looking" people or among the very ugly, we will develop a natural propensity to avoid looking at a mirror as much as we can, though this vary according to the degree of ugliness and the lack of self-acceptance and love of one's condition.

Since the devils are utterly devoid of love and self-acceptance, no wonder that they cringe before the cross and what it represents, but to the angels and to all the redeemed human beings who glory in the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ it is the banner of salvation and the most eloquent articulation of the ardent love and profound humility of God, for in the cross of Our Lord Jesus God was reconciling the world to Himself, making peace by the blood of His cross. In reciprocation for all that Lord Jesus had done: →

### **Icon # 649 = Humble People are likely disposed to Worship God**

"All the earth worship thee; they sing praise to thee, sing praises to thy name."

The word "humility" is derived from the Latin word "humus" which simply means "earth." Hence, it is right to say that humble people are likely disposed to worship God, because their self-knowledge bears them witness that they owe their existence from God the source and creator of all things visible and invisible.

Like the Blessed Virgin Mary, their Mother in faith, their souls magnify the Lord and their spirits rejoice in God their Savior because He has regarded their



earthiness; thus with gratitude in their hearts they sing praise to Him, sing praise to His name.

As God regarded their "earthiness," He begins to refashion them in His own divine likeness, re-creating them in the image of His only begotten Son – the Incarnate Word who humbles Himself and became like them in all things, including their "earthiness," except sin, so that together with the Son as the head of the new creation they will give perfect worship to God.

God deserves our worship not only because He is the Author of our life, hence to worship Him is His due, but also because without Him we will not become what we are created for, that is, to participate for all eternity in His divine life and be happy with Him forever and ever.

We have heard with the ears of our heart that to worship is a manifestation of the worth in which we hold another person. For instance, when a child exalts his/her father/mother either in private or public, or a husband/wife his/her husband/wife he/she is "worshipping" him/her in the sense of putting value on his/her worth. Every time a father/mother values his/her children, he/she is "worshipping" them.

Now to worship God means to acknowledge in some way His Omnipotence, His Omniscience, Omnipresence, and His love. Since God is our Creator, thus we have a compelling duty to worship Him, not because He will grouch and be deficient and melancholy if we do not, but because if we do not worship Him we will be undeveloped and unfortunate.

To refuse to worship God is to deny a dependence that makes us independent. What blooming is to a rose worship is to us. To turn down worship would be likened to a rose cutting itself off from the sun and the earth. To hold back admiration from one who deserves it is a sign of a jaundiced, cocky mind.

We have a compelling interest to worship God because He is our perfection, more than knowledge is the perfection of the mind. We have to love Him because we cannot be happy and content without Love. We have the right and duty to love Him in our heart, mind, and soul, even though we do not always succeed in loving Him in our acts.

If these things are ours and abound they will sustain us in our worship of God and would impel us to invite other people to: →

## Icon # 650 = Come and See What God has Done

"Come and see what God has done: he is terrible in his deeds among men."

Just as the two disciples of John the Baptist saw where the Lord Jesus lived when they followed Him as He invited them to "come and see" when they asked where He stayed, so also we will see how awesome and awe-inspiring, that is, terrible in His deeds the Lord is when we respond to the invitation: "Come and see what God has done."

Of course, many of His deeds, when He was still on earth, were written down in Scripture for our instruction. We will mention few of them with the understanding that it is not in our power to inscribe everything down, because if all would be jotted down even the whole world would be insufficient to contain everything.

Let us listen from the mouth of the Lord Himself, the author of these terrible deeds, when John the Baptist heard in prison about the terrible deeds of the Christ how awesome and awe-inspiring they were, and sending word by his disciples asked Him if He is the long awaited Messiah or shall they look for another. The Lord emphatically told them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind recover their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleaned and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them."

Even by medical standard these deeds are already awesome and awe-inspiring because it did not even use any of the methods and apparatus of the 21<sup>st</sup> century medical technology. Laser beam eye surgery, with its components: photorefractive keratectomy, laser keratoplasty; orthopedics, prosthetic legs or arms, transtibial prosthesis; modern medicines for leprosy such as the antibiotics dapsons, rifampicin, and clafazimie; electronic hearing aid; preferential option for the poor; and the unexplored raising up of dead people or the modest defibrillator, had not yet crossed the imagination of the ancient civilization even in their wildest dreams!

But the Lord Jesus did them simply by words. He spoke and it came to be. By doing so, He revealed Himself as the Word of God made flesh who, by the same tokens, created the whole universe. Hence, what the Lord has done are manifestations of the new era of God's kingdom on earth, a new creation, an awesome transformation of the hearts and minds of all repentant sinners. The spiritual blind who could not see the truth have regained their sight; the lame who were crippled to do good to other people or to go to Church now can walk; those who were soiled by the leprosy of sin have their skin restored like newborn children; those who were deaf to hear the word of God have their ears opened; those who were dead to mortal sin were raised to new life; and

those who were poor in spirit, both rich and poor materially, are assured that the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

In the early days of His ministry when the Lord was in Cana, Galilee, doing vocational campaign, He found Philip who was from Bethsaida the city of Andrew and Peter. Andrew, in turn, found his close friend Nathanael and told him about the Lord Jesus. Of course, the initial reaction of Nathanael was skepticism, because he could hardly see that anything good can come out of Nazareth, the town where the Lord grew up, for Nazareth at that time was very low key.

However, when Nathanael responded to the invitation: "Come and see," that is, check out by yourself so that by your own experience will confirm that the Lord Jesus is really the long awaited Messiah, he was assured by the Lord that he will see greater things beyond the power of his imagination and comprehension, for he will see the heavens open and the angels of God go up and down upon the Lord Jesus with all His infinite majesty and glory.

This is an image of the parousia and the concomitant Beatific Vision which is utterly delightful to the redeemed and inexpressibly painful to the damned. It is like a double-edged sword, thoroughly sharpened, which pierced through the deepest depths of one's being, to the division of soul and spirit, and reveals the kindness and severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but kindness to those who repented before they died: Moreover, →

### **Icon # 651 = Let not the rebellious exalt themselves**

"He turned the sea into dry land; men passed through the river on foot. There did we rejoice in him, who rules by his might for ever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations – let not the rebellious exalt themselves."

It is possible to chuckle at first reading of that first sentence: "He turned the sea into dry land; men passed through the river on foot." It's so amazing! How can this be? The sea was turned into dry land, but in a blink of an eye the people crossed the river on foot. This too is very miraculous, that is, the sudden changed of the sea into a river.

However, it seems very likely that these are two events combined together, namely, the crossing of the red sea and the crossing of the Jordan river. The former was led by Moses and the latter was led by Joshua.

Both events manifested the immense power and sublime majesty of God, His absolute dominion over creation, and how terrible and awe-inspiring He is in His

deeds among men. God can do the same thing in our lives if we allow Him to rule over us. He can dry up the sea of our vices, then, we can walk on the land of virtues till we reached the other side of life, that is, the Promised Land of the kingdom of heaven. There we will rejoice with God and in God forever.

In this kingdom there will not a single rebellious person, for all rebellion and rebellious people will be cut off entirely because in the present life they do not want God to rule their lives. They would rather have absolute dominion over their bodies and their lives than to be under the authority of a Sovereign Deity. But they will be told by the Ruler of this kingdom: "As for these enemies of mine, these rebellious people who exalt themselves in the present world and would not want me to rule over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence."

In no one has the Nihilist rebellion been more clearly expressed than in Nietzsche. In his ecstatic madness, he cried out: "God is dead." In a certain sense these words express a certain truth, not, of course, a truth of the nature of things, but a truth concerning the condition of modern people. God is dead in the hearts of modern people, and it is as true of the atheists, agnostics, and Satanists who rejoice in the fact, as it is of the unsophisticated multitudes in which the sense of the spiritual reality has simply evaporated.

Modern people have lost faith in God and in the Divine Truth that once sustained humanity; the apostasy to worldliness that has characterized the modern age since its unclean conception becomes, in Nietzsche and all rebellious people, self-assured of themselves, a bold battle cry: "God is dead," that is to say, "we have lost our faith and all our interest in God;" "there is no truth," that is to say, "we have become uncertain of everything divine and absolute." "We think, therefore, we exist." "We will not serve."

On our side, we shall be unprepared to understand the nature of this rebellion, or the existence of systematic representatives of it like Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler, if we seek its source anywhere but in the primal satanic will to rebellion. We, too, shall oppose them resolutely by boldly and publicly profess our faith in God, and ask all peoples to: →

### **Icon # 652 = In Christ Jesus Our Lord we have adequate means to bless Our God**

"Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip."

Truly, truly, we have a thousand and one reasons why we should bless Our God. First and foremost, of course, is that without Him we are absolutely nothing, for in Him we live and move and have our being. Moreover, in His Incarnation, He

became like us in all things except sin; and being found in human form, He humbles Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross, to save us from our sins. Therefore, it is truly right and just to bless Him and let the sound of His praise be heard.

We cannot fully do justice to bless God in this present life, and to let the sound of His praise be heard, simply because of the poverty and inadequacy of our words, but this should not discourage us because in Christ Jesus Our Lord, the eternal Word of God, God deigns to communicate with us in our human level. Hence, in Christ Jesus Our Lord we have adequate means to bless Our God, and let the sound of His praise be heard.

In our ultimate end, is to have been created and raised to the order of grace to give glory and bless Our God, it is but reasonable and congenial that whatever earthly goal we may seek, there is nothing that can fully satisfy our desire for happiness except God. If we will find our happiness in God, then, it necessarily follows that we will be inclined to bless Him and let the sound of His praise be heard, for praise is highly fitting for souls who are alive in God.

These are the people who walk in the newness of life, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the spirit, for all who are led by the spirit of God are sons and daughters of God. Their life, though remarkable in its perfection, shows nothing on the outside but what is common and very ordinary: they fulfill the duties of religion and of their state in life, simply blessing and praising God.

If we examine the rest of their lives we will find nothing striking or special, for they are made up of the course of events. What distinguishes them, that is, the dependence in which they live on the will of God which arranges for them, does not fall under apparent observation. That is why nothing extraordinary appears outwardly, because it is extraordinary in itself and consequently does not need the ornaments of marvels.

Under God's unceasing guidance their spirit turned without conscious effort to each new duty as it was presented to them by God each hour of the day either chanting the Divine Office blessing God or singing His praises exteriorly or singing spiritual songs inwardly in their heart. This is not totally surprising to those who are familiar with God's pedagogy and the principle of alternation, because: →

## Icon # 653 = Probationary Period

"For thou, O God had tested us; thou hast tried us as silver is tried. Thou didst bring us into the net; thou didst lay affliction on our loins; thou didst let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet thou hast brought us forth to a spacious place."

Our good friend, St. Paul, pointedly told us that "in everything God works for good with those who love him." Hence, whether we are tested or tried or afflicted, so long as we have love for God we will end up in a spacious place, because God is faithful and He will not let us be tested beyond our strength, but with the afflictions will also provide us the means to handle them constructively that we may be able to endure them.

In the words of our heavenly friend, St. Mark the Ascetic, "To an intelligent man an affliction brings remembrance of God; but if a man forgets God, he is correspondingly saddened by it."

Moreover, our other heavenly friend, no other than St. Isaac of Syria, has this to say: "In proportion to his humility a man is given patience in afflictions; in proportion to his patience the burden of afflictions is made lighter and he receives comfort; in proportion to the comfort he receives, the love of God increases in him and in proportion to this love, his joy in the Holy Spirit grows."

What more shall we say?! Do we want to listen to the testimony of Job, or St. Paul, or the cloud of witnesses? "Certainly, just as the odor of perfume cannot be carried far unless it is blown about, and as the smell of incense only grows strong when it is burnt," chip in our other heavenly friend, Pope St. Gregory the Great, "so we know only whatever virtues of the saints can be known through their trials."

In other words, just as the stars shine brightest when the night is darkest, so God seems to speak the most burning words to the heart when everything seems to be darkness and dismal, when afflictions are laid on our loins, when we are tested and tried as silver is tried, for it is often the case that when the darkness is the deepest then the dawn is about ready to break through.

To bolster our contention that "so long as we have love for God we will end up in a spacious place," let us bring forward the attestation of one of the prominent cloud of witnesses, no other than our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux: "Lord, it is good for me to be in tribulation, provided that I have Thee as my companion. Yes, it is better to be afflicted with Thee than without Thee to reign, or to feast without Thee, or without Thee to be glorified. It is better for me, O Lord, to

embrace Thee in Tribulation, better to endure with Thee the furnace of affliction, than without Thee to enjoy even the bliss of paradise" (Sermon on Psalm 90).

In the end, it is the crosses and trials and tests and afflictions that are most effective in shaping us into the kind of person we are meant to be. Crosses and afflictions and trials transform us by ripping away all the nonsense and triviality and vanity and shallowness that prop us up, and showing us the things that are truly essential, that is, the things that concern God, as our good friend, St. Paul, says: "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of the God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

It is truly right and just to say that to have accepted the Lord Jesus as our Savior and our righteousness, and to have embraced His holy faith is no guarantee of freedom from trials and afflictions. The Lord Jesus never said to His Apostles: "Be good and you will not suffer," but He did say: "In this world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Hence, a fitting image that He "hast brought us forth to a spacious place." On our part, a felicitous rejoinder entails: →

### **Icon # 654 = Carrying Out Our Promises**

"I will come into thy house with burnt offerings; I will pay thee my vows, that which my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble. I will offer thee burnt offerings of fatlings, with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams; I will make an offering of bulls and goats."

Vows are simply promises which a person pledges to keep. For instance a soldier in a fox hole, in time of war, makes a vow that if he would survive in that war he will, if he is a Catholic, enter the priesthood or the monastic life. The same thing can be said if a person is in shipwrecked. Married couples made vows to be faithful to their spouses till death.

Those who entered religious life made vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and stability if they are monks. These are godly vows. However, there is also a dark side of vows. For instance, more than forty Jews made a vow neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. This is a dangerous kind of a vow!

Historically there are recurrent instances of special vows in the Old Testament, generally under the form of offerings contingently made to God – offerings of

things, of animals, and even of persons, which might, however, be redeemed; offerings of worship, of abstinence, and of personal sacrifices.

See for instance the vow of Jacob. Jacob was on his way to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel the father of Rebecca, his mother, because he was told by Isaac, his father, not to marry a Canaanite woman, but instead to take as his wife from the daughters of Laban, Rebecca's brother.

He slept along the way and dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! When Jacob rose early in the morning he made a vow, saying: "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that thou givest me I will give the tenth to thee."

Take another example the vow of Jephthah. Jephthah was on war with the Ammonites. And he made a vow to the Lord, saying: "If thou will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whoever comes from the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the Lord's, and I will offer him up for a burnt offering." It turned out that Jephthah returned victorious. And when he came home he was met by his only daughter, so he ended up offering her as a burnt offering to fulfill his vow.

For us religious either monk or nuns or priests or married people, it would be helpful to remember that in making our vows we still remain the person we were before, with the temptations and desires that others have. However, we should also be grateful to God and even rejoice that our vows help us not to engage in detrimental freedom, that is, license to do whatever we want if it feels good.

The duty and responsibility that we impose on ourselves by our vows, of course, does not contradict our liberty, rather they are perfect expression of our liberty, because we are taking the most radical means of concentrating our free will in the good; and "the acts which proceed from a will thus fixed in the good become perfect virtue," says our heavenly friend, St. Thomas Aquinas.

Wherefore, we are in a fairly good position to beckon people to: →



## Icon # 655 = Witnessing God's actions in our lives

**"Come and hear, all who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me."**

We don't have to be too punctilious to discern that this passage is addressed to "all who fear God" not to those who do not fear God. The motive behind this intention is not really too hard to understand, because those who have fear of God are likely to be interested to learn how God works in their lives. Hence, there's a readiness to listen. Whereas, those people who have no fear of God are likely not interested at all in the things of God, especially on how God operates in the lives of people. Thus to save time and energy it is directed to "all who fear God."

However, we have to maintain that the message of salvation is addressed to all people whether they have fear of God or not. What matters most is how they respond, for their response will determine their final destiny.

Of course, we have to emphasize, too, that the "fear of God" here does not mean "servile fear" but "filial fear" – a sense of profound reverence and awe in the infinite goodness and majesty of God. We have also to affirm that God's actions in our lives can be seen from different angles, either it be from the angle of conversion or from the angle of redemption or from the angle of deliverance from a difficult situation, and etc.

First, we have to look at it from the angle of conversion, and then we will tell those who have fear of God what He has done in our lives. We who had lived a dissipated life knew by experience that when we first encountered the grace of God in our lives we felt a certain crisis, that is, we felt a profound sense of our own helplessness, on the one hand; and on the other hand, an equally undoubted conviction that God alone can supply our own inadequacy.

In other words, if there were only a sense of helplessness, there would be despair, pessimism, and a likely eventual suicide. Indeed, this is the anticipated condition of the post-Christian pagan: he or she feels the total insufficiency of his or her inner resources against the overwhelming odds of a cruel world and hence falls into insurmountable despair.

Of course, such a person has one-half the necessary condition for conversion, namely, a sense of crisis, but fails to link up his/her powerlessness with divine power who sustains and nourishes the soul. However, when this is done, paganism evaporates and gives place to what might be dubbed "creative despair;" despair, because one realizes one's own spiritual disease; creative, because one knows that only a higher power, that is, a divine physician outside oneself can bring wholeness to one's soul.

Not until this crisis or tug-of-war begins, with the soul on one end of the rope and God on the other, does true duality appear as the condition of conversion. There must be in the soul the conviction that one is in the grip of and swayed by a higher control than one's own will; that, opposing the ego, there is a "Presence" before whom one feels happy in doing good and before whom one shrinks away for having done evil.

It is relatively unimportant whether the crisis, which results in a feeling of duality, is sudden or gradual. What matters is the struggle between the soul and God, with the all-powerful and all-merciful God never destroying human freedom. This is the greatest drama of human existence.

Now let us look at God's actions in our lives from the angle of redemption, then we will tell those who have fear of God of what we have seen and what we have touched by our experience and what we have heard. First and foremost, we have to proclaim that we have seen the actions of God in our lives by the eyes of faith and the confession of our lips, because if we confess with our lips that Christ Jesus is Lord and believe in our heart that He rose from the dead, then, we will be saved, for we believe with our heart and so is justified and confess with our lips and so is saved. The Scripture says: "No one who believes in him will be put to shame."

Therefore, "take courage all of you who have wandered away," says our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux, "because Jesus comes to seek and to save that which was lost. You that are sick be of good cheer, for Christ has come to anoint the contrite of heart with the unction of His mercy. Exult and be glad, you who are ambitious of glory, since the Son of God has descended to you to make you co-heirs of his kingdom" (Sermon For Christmas Eve).

St. Bernard also said: "I think it might be useful to add that we should approach by three steps the acquisition of salvation and grace: humility, faith, and fear. It is to the humble man that grace is given, it is with faith that he receives it, and it is with fear that he guards it."

Finally, let us look at God's actions in our lives from the angle of deliverance from difficult situations. This, too, ranges from health issues, from financial difficulties, or moral problems. Take for instance a religious or a priest who is moonlighting, that is, having an affair with someone but eventually cut off the shebang. For whatever reason that leads to the termination of the affair, it is fair to say that God's intervention was behind it, for by natural means alone it would have been hard to imagine of breaking up the relationship.

“God acts towards us in ways He knows will be advantageous to us,” says our other heavenly friend, St. Isaac of Syria, “Whether by means of things that cause suffering, or by way of things that cause relief, whether they cause joy, whether they are insignificant or glorious: all are directed towards the single eternal good.”

“God is faithful,” asserted our good friend, St. Paul, “and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength. Along with the test he will give you a way out of it so that you may be able to endure it.” Thus it is very clear that God provides deliverance from trials and difficulties.

If the trials and difficulties came to us as an operation of grace, they would probably bring with them a degree of humility which would counterbalance the discouragement. In His infinite wisdom, which is far beyond our limited understanding, God determines gifts in proportion to our trials and challenges.

God tries the human hearts with fire, but He never destroys them in the flames. “Nothing that happens to us is contrary to the will of Providence,” says our heavenly friend, St. Nilus, “and everything that is sent us by God is for our good and the salvation of our soul. Even if it does not seem beneficial at the present moment, we shall understand later that it is willed by God, and not what we ourselves desires, that is useful to us. God sends trials out of His mercy, so that after we have suffered these ordeals we may be crowned by Him.”

On this ground, we are in a solid position to: →

### **Icon # 656 = Crying to God and Extolling Him**

“I cried aloud to him, and he was extolled with my tongue.”

It is fair to say that the phrase, “I cried aloud to him,” can also mean, “I prayed to Him,” and since we are delivered from a difficult situation, therefore, we extolled Him loudly with our tongue by saying aloud, for instance, “Thanks be to God!” or “Praise the Lord!”

Some people are more inclined to say their prayers silently or praise God soundlessly. There are also people who have the propensity to say their prayer audibly or extol God hearably. Either way, these types of expressing one’s prayer and praise to God are certainly honorable and worthy of commendation.

However, whatever our preference is we should be non-partisan, that is to say, we should be open either way when occasion demands it. In other words, we

should be amenable to pray and extol God silently when occasion calls for it and to pray and praise God loudly when occurrence warrants it.

In this way, we imitate our good friend, St. Paul, who has learned in whatever circumstance he was in to adapt himself. Just as he knows how to be abased and how to abound, and have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want, because of Christ who strengthens him; so also, we will learn and know how to pray and praise God silently and loudly. We can do this because of the grace of Christ working in us.

It is reasonable to say that we should not pray for life to be easy, but for ourselves to be strong. Whenever we do not feel like praying or when our head does not seem to be clear, that is the time for an act of humility. It is a good way of getting close to God. He will illuminate our mind, give strength to our will, and bring peace and serenity in our soul.

Actually, our words are superfluous, yet God does want them. They too should be modest. When we pray we have to remind ourselves that He sees better than us what we need, though He wants us to ask for it. When we cry aloud to Him in prayer, He hears us before the words are uttered, for everything in us stands open before him – even our innermost thoughts. Thus it is truly right and just to extol Him with our tongue.

Praise is rendered because in the concrete aspects of God's life with us we experience His steadfast love, His gracious and everlasting presence among us. However, extolling God does not simply mean simply conducting inflated words toward Him in heaven; the act of extolling Him involves us in His very life with us. Words and gestures of extolling God are operational; their utterance makes actual the glory of God to which they refer and which they intend.

We must extol God with a speedy and ardent praise, which, like a tree, is fastening itself deeper in the ground with its roots, while it is also climbing higher into the blue sky. God and the soul form a world by themselves; and unless we live an inward life in this inner world, we will fall short in extolling Him, thus the operations of grace will elude unnoticed.

It is God whom we should extol. Our unhappiness is not due to our lack of wealth, or high position, or fame, or sufficient vitamins; it is due not a lack of something outside us, but to a shortage of something inside us. We cannot satisfy a soul with husks! If the sun could speak, it would say that it was happy when shining; if a pen could speak, it would say it was happy when writing – for these were the purposes for which they were made.

We are made for perfect happiness, to extol and magnify Him for all eternity like what the Blessed Virgin Mary did. That is our purpose. No wonder everything sort of God disappoint us.

However, once we realize that God is our end, we are less disappointed because we put no more hope in ephemeral things; we cease seeking first rate joys where only tenth-rate pleasures are to be found.

Moreover, we look at our heart for it tells the story of why we are made. The heart is the core of our body, the emblem of an inner domain where we and God have our rendezvous. What we are to do is purify our venous blood until there is no more obscure corner in us that is left unoxygenated by uprightness, because: →

### **Icon # 657 = Truly God has Listened**

“If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has given heed to the voice of my prayer.”

It is fair to aver that iniquity is a lack of good will. Thus it is truly right and just to pray often, “deliver us from all iniquities” that we may maintain the goodness of our will. Otherwise, if we do not desire to be delivered from all iniquities but rather allow them to burgeon in our heart, that would be a veritable indication that we cherish them; and if we are cherishing them, then God would not listen to our prayer.

It is never enough to be free from the dominions of iniquities; we must also be subject to the power of good, otherwise the iniquities that had been driven out will come back again and bring with them other vices worst than them, then our condition will be worst than the first.

Whether we like it or not, so long as we are still in this present world, we will commit sin, though it will vary in numbers and seriousness, but it is one thing to fall into sin and another thing to cherish it. To fall into sin can be attributed to weakness, but to cherish it can be attributed to malice. The former is lamentable, but the latter is condemnable for it anesthetized our comprehension of the truth, giving us moral values of our actions which does not accurately manifest the sinfulness of our deeds, due to our conscience being overlayed with the ointment of sin, that is, it tranquilizes the sting of conscience.

But until that damnable stage is attained – despite the failure of false starts, the short breathing spells between relapses – so long as there is a genuine contrition, the voice of God is still being heard; hence the case is not yet hopeless. We may

be in coma to Divine Love; but in moments of turmoil we may not be dead to Divine Fear, and that can stir our consciousness again, then we realized that it is not right to cherish iniquity in our heart. But God has truly listened to our repentance and has given heed to the voice of our prayer, because He will not spurn "a humbled and contrite heart."

It must never be thought that hardening of the heart is hopeless; as long as any one has life, there is hope in his/her soul. A sinner may have led a most wicked and perverse, most voluptuous and atheistic existence, and yet if, at any moment, he/she turns to God and asks for His forgiveness, he/she will be saved, for "truly God has listened; he has given heed to the voice of my prayer." Therefore: →

**Icon # 658 = God has not rejected our prayer or removed his steadfast love from us!**

"Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!"

It is truly right to affirm that repentance for sin is inseparable from love. Our hatred for iniquity and sin is a measure of the profundity of love. God would not be good unless He hated evil, nor can any of us claim to value His steadfast love unless we avoid all that would wound that love.

We should never think that in giving glory to God, blessing Him, we are giving something without which He would be unhappy. Too many assume that God is good only when He gives us what we want. We are like children who think our parents do not love us because they do not give us a revolver, or because they make us go to school. In order to understand goodness, we must make a distinction between getting what we want and getting what we need. Is God good only when He fulfills our wishes, or when we fulfill His? Is God good only when He gives us what we want, or He is good when He gives us what we need even though we do not want it?

The goodness of God means that God gives us what we need for our sanctification, not what we want for our pleasure and sometimes for our destruction. For this reason, God has not rejected our prayer or removed His steadfast love from us! Like a well seasoned musician, whenever He finds the strings too loose on the violin of our personality, He tightens them even though it hurts, that we may better reveal our hidden harmonies.

Although God desires that every human person shall respond to the gift of self-transcendence, He nevertheless leaves each person free to reject or accept His

steadfast love, for gift cease to be gift if it is forced on us. God respects the freedom of our will; He did not even enter into our human condition without consulting a woman. So, neither does He elevate us to partake of His Divine Nature without our free consent.

To the eyes of Faith only two classes of people exist: those who say "yes" to God and those who say "no" to Him. Many know the anxiety of a bad conscience; few know the peace of a good conscience lifted to the Divine level. If God's displeasure is so terrible that it keeps the guilty awake at night, think of the joys that beckon His pleasure! If it is misery to be under His wrath, then it is ecstasy to be under His Love!

Everyone who is not in love with God is hunting for artificial paradise. Inside his/her heart is a terrible void. Every sin he/she commits is an attempt to fill that void. All lovers without God are disappointed lovers. Certainly, if we only take a quality time for the inner chamber of our heart so that we might experience in full reality the steadfast love of God what a blessedness would be ours through faith, because God would not reject our prayer. Thus let us bless God heartily as often as we pray, for the act of blessing God will draw our heart to Him and keep us engaged with Him; and since God is a person, He feels what we feel, after all we are made in His image and likeness, so it is to be expected that we would be able to communicate our deepest feelings and desires to Him. Hence, blessed be God!

Our God is not made of stone. His heart is the most sympathetic and considerate of all. No act goes unnoticed no matter how little or insignificant it might be. Like a proud mother who is thrilled to receive a wilted bouquet of flowers from her child, so God celebrates our feeble expression of blessing Him, "because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me," especially when we prayed: →