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Icon # 209 = Cry of the soul: Confession

Psalm 22 (21)

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?”

You, O Lord, will raise us up from our distress and give life to our souls. This is a trying moment for us, but we do not cease praying and hoping that adversity will be transformed into advantages for our positive growth. This is our Christian belief, O Lord, we share with one another: there are carrying of crosses, passing through many tribulations, even crucifixion, but as Christians who bear the banner of your Name, we firmly believe there is always the happy ending – resurrection. Good eventually triumphs over evil. And while we struggle with present sufferings, we steadfastly believe that you, O Lord, who loves us beyond our limitations, will sustain us through the sufferings and pains and sorrows, and one day we will experience in fullest measure joy and happiness forever.

Indeed human suffering, O Lord, along side of an all-Good God is a mystery. Why does God the Father who loves us without limit, allow us to suffer? – And let you, O Lord, His only Beloved Son suffer such a humiliating death as crucifixion? This is a mystery to us, O Lord, we continually seek to understand. However, the very fact of being in close contact with You is something we should never give up. In the midst of our affliction, may our trust in You remained firm and even increased.

Whenever we face a great challenge in our lives, and some difficult days lie ahead, help us to remember, O Lord, that within the recesses of our hearts we will find the strength to assist us through them; always mindful that in you we have a friend to lean on, a friend who really care about us. For you are our high priest, O Lord, who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses and sufferings, because you have come into our world and shared our human condition, being tempted as we are.

The only difference, O Lord, is that you did not sin, but we, as we grow in self-knowledge, are very aware that we did. If it were not for your grace to console us, we might have fallen into despair to see how often we have offended you; and if it were not your great love for us, you might have forsaken us completely. Anyhow, you do not need us to be happy, for you are sufficient in yourself.

You could have just been contented as being a God, inaccessible to our human plea, but you became a human being, like us in everything, except sin. You even wanted us to be your bride and lead us into the desert that you may speak to our hearts the assurance of your love: “I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in

mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord." Since you have betrothed us to yourself, then, nothing and no one can break this bond asunder, for it is written: "The two shall become one...and what God has joined together let no one separate."

Yes, O Lord, nothing can separate us from you, not even this mournful cry: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? →

Icon # 210 = Dark Night of the soul: Confession

"O my God, I cry by day, but thou dost not answer; and by night, but find no rest."

Yes, O Lord, it requires faith that is born of love to still trust in you and cling to you when we experienced this dark night of the soul and felt we have been forsaken by you. We believe, though, O Lord that when the days are darkest Your power and love is nearest. It is easy enough to praise you, O Lord, for your mercy when you have acted in our favor, but it is in this darkness before the dawn that faith is required.

Our brothers and sisters, O Lord, who had proceeded us in this mortal life have told us long ago that even as the stars shine brightest when the night is darkest, so you, O Lord, speak to us the most burning words when everything seems to be darkness and dismal.

Our sister in faith, St. Elizabeth of the Blessed Trinity, has this to say, O Lord: "When all was dark, when the present was so painful and the future seemed still more gloomy, I shut my eyes, and abandoned myself like a child into the arms of our Father who is in heaven." Isn't this an echo of your cry, O Lord, on the cross after you had said the six preceding words, and uttered the final-last words, like an eagle ready to take off to gaze the sun, "Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit?"

Life on earth tells, O Lord, that no one is exempted of sufferings, not even you, O Lord, Our God. But, we do believe, O Lord, that suffering or sorrow takes another meaning when it is seen in the lens of your eyes, that is, taken and accepted with faith in your goodness and mercy for us; for often when the first blow was heavy, the following brought calm and peace and loving gratitude..

One thing we can possibly do, O Lord, with the help of your grace, is to grind up all our sufferings and sorrows in the mill of patience and silence, then, to mix them with the balsam of your passion and death; and make them into a small

pill and swallow it with faith and hope, and the fire of charity will digest it. In this way, we will be spiritually healthy, O Lord, because we do not lose heart, for “though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that unseen are eternal.”

Thus even if we cry by day, O my God, but thou dost not answer; and by night, but find no rest, we can still say: →

Icon # 211 = Confession of a Soul

“Yet thou art holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In thee our fathers trusted; they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. To thee they cried, and were saved; in thee they trusted, and were not disappointed.”

Never was it known, O Lord, that anyone who implored your mercy and trusted in your kindness was left disappointed. The lives of our fathers in faith, from Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to the twelve patriarchs of old, down to the twelve apostles, to the fathers of the Western and Eastern Church: St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Gregory of Nazianzen, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Jerome, and St. Gregory the Great, certainly bore witness to this. None of these fathers both from the Old and New Testament were disappointed, not even Peter when he began to sink and cried out for help, but only Judas the son of perdition that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

We were told, O Lord, that the cause of his disappointment was his distrust in you. He disbelieve in you when you said that whoever eats your flesh and drinks your blood abides in you, and you in that person, for as the living Father sent you, and you live because of the Father, so whoever eats you will live because of you. For him this is a hard pill to swallow. He was offended by this and cast out from himself the blessing and beatitude which you promised to those who take no offense at you.

Even one of the thieves, O Lord, on the cross who trusted in you was not disappointed, for he asked only to be remembered by you when you come in your kingly power, but you promised him that, on that very day, he will be with you in paradise. Since he trusted in you, you delivered him from the fear of death and gave him the grace to accept it in peace. He cried to you, and you saved him as an instruction to future generation that no matter how sinful we are we should not despair in your mercy, for you are greater than our hearts, O

Lord. You wanted to let us know, O Lord, that our trust in you is like a lantern that guides our way on the road to salvation.

You are holy, O Lord, and worthy to be praised. You desire, O Lord, that we, too, be holy as you are holy that we may see you in everything in life and calls it a blessing; for a holy life is the most trustworthy argument for the truth. It has abundant power to stop the mouths of evil man. It needs no defender, it speaks for itself. If we are truly holy, O Lord, we can convert the whole world even without miracles. Holiness glorifies you, O Lord, more than any visible work.

You, O Lord, are the only One who is truly holy, by nature holy; we, your creatures, will be holy too, but not by nature, only by participation, and prayer.

→

Icon # 212 = Confession Continued

"But I am a worm, and no man; scorned by men, and despised by the people. All who seek me mock at me, they make mouths at me, they wag their heads; he committed his cause to the Lord; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"

Although there is an incalculable distance between the dignity of a worm and a man, yet both worm and man, O Lord, are creatures. But you, O Lord, when you became a human being you became what you are not while remaining what you are. For a man to become a worm is far less in humiliation than for a God to become human, and for a worm to become a man certainly exceeds the limit of what it can hope for.

How great, then, O Lord, is your humility in becoming a human being and how high you exalted our dignity by crowning us with your divinity, for blessed are those, O Lord, who endure trials, mockery, and are despised because of You for they will receive the crown of life which you have prepared, O Lord, to those who love you. If we are scorned and reproached, O Lord, for the sake of your Name, then, we are blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon us.

If we, O Lord, live in a country where Christians are minority or live in a Christian country where practicing Christians are minority and being scorned and despised by our fellow citizens for not doing what they like to do: living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, and carousing; and they mocked us for not joining them in the same wild profligacy, and they abused us, then, may your grace be upon us so as not to be ashamed, but under the banner of your name, as Catholics Christians, we will glorify you, O Lord, our God.

Most of the leaders of your people, O Lord, who seek you through the law, the prophets, and the Psalms, mock at you when you were hanging on the cross; they make mouths at you, they wag their heads, saying: 'You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross....He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the king of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, "I am the Son of God."

But you, O Lord, were like a deaf man who cannot hear and in whose mouth are no rebukes, for your kindness is meant to lead us all to repentance. You did not repay evil for evil, but rather open the way of blessings by interceding for our conversion when you said: "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."

Whose hearts would not be moved by these words, O Lord? Certainly, only the accuser(s) of our brethren who has been thrown down, who accuse(s) your people day and night before you; for they loved not their lives even unto death. But for the rest of humanity there is always a flicker of conversion, a change of heart, a change of allegiance. You offered us forgiveness, O Lord, that we may revere you and know that you are God, for "to err is human, but to forgive is divine."

You committed your cause to your heavenly Father while you were hanging on the cross. He did deliver you and rescue you from death, for on the third day you rose again from death as you said you would, to give us courage to face our own death when it comes and not be afraid of those who can kill our body either it be by people who have no fear of you or by any kind of sickness permitted by you, for in your divine Providence this can catapult our eternal union with you without anymore slightest danger of being separated from you, O Lord, our only good. They might still mock us, O Lord, and wag their heads for they will think that this is an affliction or punishment, and that our departure from this present life is total destruction, but our conscience tells us, O Lord, that our hope is full of immortality for in you our souls are at rest like a child in her mother's breast. →

Icon # 213 = Confession Continued

"Yet thou art he who took me from the womb; thou didst keep me safe upon my mother's breast. Upon thee I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me thou hast been my God."

I do believe, O Lord, that our life is a gift from you, and that our parents were just an instrument that we may be born in this world to see the light of day, and in the end to return back to you to be united with you forever who is the source of infinite life.

I also believe, O Lord, that you did keep us safe upon our mother's breast, that is, upon the sacraments and teachings of the Church, for she is truly our mother in faith who nourishes us with her life while we are still in the womb of this present life, just as your own beloved mother the Blessed Virgin Mary nourishes you with her own very life, flesh and blood, while you were still in her womb.

I also believe, O Lord, that upon the bosom of your Father you were cast from eternity to eternity, for you are His Word, His only begotten Son, one in divinity. I also believe with all my heart, my mind, and my soul that upon the bosom of your mother Mary, whom you desire to be also our mother, you were cast in time and space, for you are her only begotten Son, one in humanity; and since she has bore you, God, your heavenly Father, had been your God and that it is your utmost wish that He be also our Father and our God as you explicitly said when He had took you from the womb of the tomb, in your resurrection and was going to return back to His bosom: "Go, tell my brethren that I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

I do believe, my Lord, that your heavenly Father, as the supreme Being who is perfect and infinite in all His perfections, eternally generates an infinitely perfect image of Himself which is You, O Lord, His Logos, His Son. Your heavenly Father perfectly loves you, His self-image, for you are the Icon of the invisible God. No one has ever seen God, but you, O Lord, who was in His bosom, had made Him known. For this we thank you. →

Icon # 214 = Confession Continued

"Be not far from me, for trouble is near and there is none to help."

Where would we be, O Lord, if you would not be on our side when trouble begins to trouble us and there is none else to help? It is likely that we will be taken captive to the land of anxiety, and trouble will certainly oppress us until we will be depressed, but when trouble sees you, O Lord, on our side ready to

help us, trouble will make itself bearable for trouble cannot withstand you, O Lord, mighty God.

Only those who are far from you, O Lord, will trouble makes itself unbearable. Thus it is your wish, O Lord, that we should not be cowed by trouble when it is near, but rather be afraid that we shall be far from you, for if any trouble afflicts our heart and we make it known to you, the strength that we will gain from this will enable us to handle our trouble easily.

I do believe, O Lord, that it is no evil to feel things which are troublesome or capable of disturbing the heart; we must need feel them to be able to overcome them, and we will certainly overcome them when you are not far from us for by this you graciously allow us to participate in your power and strength, for in this world we will have tribulation, but you confidently said: "be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

I would rather have trouble to beset me, O Lord, so long as you are not far from me than to have no trouble at all but be far from you. And I would say with St. Bernard, "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 the bliss of paradise," for if we are truly wise our affliction brings remembrance of your passion; but if we forget you, O Lord, and be far from you, we are correspondingly saddened by it.

I do believe, O Lord, that in proportion to our true humility we are given patience in our troubles, and in proportion to our patience the pain of tribulations is made lighter and we receive comfort; and in proportion to the comfort we receive, your love increases in us; and in proportion to this love, our joy in the Holy Spirit grows. →

Icon # 215 = Confession Continued

"Many bulls encompass me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion."

St. James in his letter said: "Count it all joy, brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

I do believe, O Lord, that when your love increases within us and when joy, which is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, ripens within us we can experience certain peace even if many bulls of trials, trouble, distress, hardships, and

adversities encircled us with deadly intent opening wide their mouths like a ravening and roaring lion ready to devour, for they can do no harm to us so long as you will not abandon us; and if only we follow the impulse of the Holy Spirit, we shall be able to discover good everywhere, even of the most unlikely occasions such as being surrounded by many bulls.

When your people, O Lord, went out from Egypt; and before they reached the Promised Land, they were surrounded by their enemies, but so long as they do not forsake you by worshipping other gods they will always prevail over them. It was only when they abandoned you that you permitted their enemies to overcome them to give them a lesson that apart from you they can do nothing.

We, too, O Lord, so long as we do not worship other gods such as egotism, selfishness, and pride, but only you, O Lord, who is meek and humble of heart, slow to anger and rich in mercy, we will be able to catch these bulls by the horns.

Even though, O Lord, you will allow us to be overpowered by these bulls you will not abandon us completely so long as we put our trust in you, for you know all our weaknesses. Just as a person, O Lord, knows the load that can be put on the back of a mule or an oxen, and places only what it has capacity to carry; and just as the potter knows how long he must keep his clay in the fire, for if he exposes it too long to the flames the pot will crack, and if he does not bake it long enough it will not be fit for what he intends it to be, so, you too, O Lord, will not put us to the test that is beyond our strength. If a person has a precise judgment as the weight to be loaded on his animal, how infinitely greater is your wisdom, O Lord, in determining the degree of trials and distress which our soul is able to bear! →

Icon # 216 = Suffering: A two-edged Sword

"I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax, it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; thou dost lay me in the dust of death."

It is very obvious that in this passage the soul experiences a grievous suffering. The image of all the bones disjointed, heart melted within one's breast, strength dried up like a potsherd, tongue cleaving to one's jaws, and laying in the dust of death, are like windows which allows us to see the intensity of its affliction.

This calls to mind the suffering of Job. Suffering is like a two-edged sword that pierces to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning or reveals the thoughts and intentions of the heart. It affects people in different

ways according to the state of one's heart. It is like a furnace that test metals. Fire hardens clay, but softens wax. The storm throws down the plant, but renders the tree that is well-rooted more firm. Affliction hardens the one, it softens the other. Opposition cast down some, it makes the other solid. As bitter medicines destroy the impurity of bad chemicals in the body, so grievous tribulations purify the heart from evil passions.

For us Christians it is a sharing in the Paschal mystery of the Lord Jesus. While we struggle with present sufferings, we firmly believe God who loves us beyond our limitations will sustain us through the sufferings and one day we will experience in fullest measure joy and happiness. There are carrying of crosses and even crucifixion, but we believe there is always the happy ending-resurrection.

For those who are willing to accept the cross of Christ, the cross itself will become a source of blessings, the cause of all graces, for by it we find strength in weakness, glory in shame, and life in death. The best meaning of the cross in terms of resurrection is what Our Lord says about the grain of wheat that has to fall into the ground and die. The cross reveals the mystery of the Blessed Trinity because it manifests the will of the Father, it expresses the immolation of the Son, and the giving of the Holy Spirit.

We don't have to be afraid, then, of our cross nor come down from it, for in carrying our cross we are giving a personal service to Our Lord who Himself had been laid down in the dust of death. →

Icon # 217 = Bones Intact

"Yea, dogs are round about; a company of evildoers encircle me; they have pierced my hands and feet – I can count all my bones – they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots."

After the resurrection of Our Lord Jesus, He appeared to His disciples many times. In one of those occasions He said to them: "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." Without any shadow of a doubt, then, this passage speaks clearly about the Lord Jesus, for "the Old Testament is unveiled in the New and the New Testament lies hidden in the Old."

The Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John mention this dividing of garments by casting lots; for instance St. Matthew says: "When they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots." St. John relates: "When the

soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garments and made four parts, one for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom; so they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.'

St. John continues that when the soldiers saw that Our Lord was already dead, they did not break his legs; thus His bones were all intact.

The image of bones all intact is a wholesome illustration of the truth that no matter how painful our sufferings are so long as we are united with Our Lord we will not be broken by it. However, this doesn't mean that we will be incapable of feeling the pain for this would be an illusion. We can still feel it but are not broken by it.

No matter how grueling our sufferings are, they are just a fraction of the torments Our Lord had endured for us. Crucifixion is the most ignominious and excruciating torture a person could experience. We have to realize that those nails were not smooth as the 20th century nails. Even if they were smooth, imagine the first, second, third, and fourth blows of the hammer as the nails penetrate and rub against the tissues and bones.

To give a little idea of how painful crucifixion is, take a ball pen and press it against your wrist; at other time, taped a pebble at the sole of your feet and let it be there for few days. They will serve as a little hole where you can peep into the bottomless pit of Our Lord's sufferings which He freely accepted for our redemption.

Realize also that when those big, rough, nails burrowed His hands and feet no anesthesia was applied. At that time anesthesia was not developed. A vinegar mingled with gall as a wine served as a drug to alleviate the pain of those crucified, but even this in not potent enough to deaden the senses. No wonder that those who were crucified will curse the day they were born.

It is highly probable that the Centurion, who was the leader of those soldiers who had carried out the execution of Christ, had witnessed crucifixion before because crucifixion was not unusual at His time. So, when he had witnessed the manner in which Christ manifested when He was crucified and the words that He utters, the Centurion noticed a tremendous difference, something that he has never seen before.

It is also possible that this Centurion had heard before about Christ from the other Centurion whose slave Christ healed. The former (Centurion) must have been plowing all these things in his heart and, by the grace of God, had found

a treasure of faith hidden in his heart which made him confessed: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" →

Icon # 218 = Courage to Pray: Achieving a Maximum Harmony between Our animal tendency and Our Inherent Divine Image

"But thou, O Lord, be not far off! O thou my help, hasten to my aid! Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dog! Save me from the mouth of the lion, my afflicted soul from the horns of the wild oxen!"

Here the soul is beseeching God to be delivered from: the sword, the dog, the lion, and the wild oxen. This gives us a good picture of how dangerous the situation he is in. It also shows us that there's still courage left in him – the courage to pray: "O Lord, be not far off...hasten to my aid!"

Among the three animals mentioned, the lion is the only one savage by nature but it can be tamed as we see in shows and it can be harmless when a person is a good friend of God as what happened to Daniel in the lion's den. Dog by nature is a household animal and is very helpful in guarding a house to ward off intruders. It can bark and bite. Dog can be very dangerous when it goes mad, for it has rabies. Oxen by nature are very docile, hard working, and calm, but if it goes wild it uses its horns to pierce people.

The characteristics of these animals are also reflected in the human person. By nature we belong to the household of God because we are made in His own image and likeness, but we can be very dangerous when our inordinate desires go mad by unremittingly pursuing the things of this present life because we have concupiscence in us which, if not ordered, has an effect of rabies that can be very fatal for it undermines the nerves of our soul. It causes lots of miseries in us. We desire and do not have; so we kill. We covet and cannot obtain, so we fight and wage war.

St. Paul warns us: "But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another." On the other hand, if our desires are well ordered and we keep God's commandments, then, we remain in His household. What is astonishing, and also gratifying, is that we are elevated above our "doggy" nature and become children of God, more human more divine.

When we were acting like dogs biting one another, we were acting like children of the devil, for we do not love one another and do what is right, as St. John tells us: "By this it may be seen who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil; whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother." The first letter of Peter pointed out that "the time has come

for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? And 'if a righteous man is scarcely saved, where will the impious and sinner appear?'" We have also in us a reflection of a lion when we growl if things does not turn out what we want them to be, when we are very controlling and over powering, and when we are easily move to anger even at a slight offense.

We also resemble to a wild oxen when we speak harsh words to other people, thus piercing their hearts.

No wonder Or Lord puts anger and harsh words to the same degree as killing when He says: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brothers shall be liable to the Council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire."

Thus in every human person there's a reflection of an animal and a reflection of the divine. Our goal, then, is to achieve a maximum harmony between our animal tendency and our inherent divine image.

The means that is readily available to every human person in whatever race, creed, and color; rich, poor, and middle class alike, to attain this end, is prayer because prayer enlarges the heart, strengthens the will, and deepens our knowledge of God. The more our knowledge of God grows and deepens the more unity and concord we have with one another even amidst diversity of temperaments and personalities, for prayer has power to restore our once lost innocence. To transform us is the greatest possible fulfillment of our prayer. Once we attained to this end, the doggy tendency in us, the lion, and the wild oxen are no longer harmful, but rather they work together for our good and contribute to the development of our spiritual maturity to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Knowing that this is not our own doing but owing to God's grace working in us, we will be grateful and could not help but say: →

Icon # 219 = A single act of Praise that comes from the Heart

"I will tell of thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee: You who fear the Lord, praise him! all you sons of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you sons of Israel!"

When we contemplate on what the Lord Jesus had done for us, collectively or personally, we could not help but praise Him and thank Him. A single act of praise that comes from our heart is like a dart of brilliant light that touches the heart of God and be one with His own uncreated luminous light. It is a fitting expression of one's unfeigned gratitude.

Take for example a man who is drowning and being carried away by the current, and then someone came to his rescue. No matter what the moral standing of the person who saves him, he will still be moved to praise him for his courageous and unselfish act of saving him. If this is indubitable in the sphere of natural life, how grateful then shall we be to Our Lord Jesus who risked His life to save us from eternal death and bestows on us eternal life!

This is even mind boggling because He is virtuous and sinless while we, on the other hand, are sinners and defiled, too weak to resist the current of sin that carries us away to eternal perdition.

But "while we were yet helpless," as St. Paul says, "at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man – though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows his love for us that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

Assuredly, an honest sinner has good chances of conversion than a self-righteous religious who is dishonest and flatters himself in his mind that he knows not his guilt, for "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and His word is not is us."

Besides, Christ did not come for the self-righteous but for sinners to repentance. The self-righteous is very bold to praise God with his lips but will not blink his eyes to backbite and slander his brethren. From the same mouth comes praising and backbiting and slandering. This ought not to be so, because it is detrimental to one's spiritual health and it forestalls one's inner progress.

It is also a conspicuous sign that one's heart is far from God and does not appreciate what God has done for him, because a person who is saved from drowning normally will not slander and malign those who are still drowning, or a

person who recovered from illness will not waggle his tongue against those who are still confined in the hospital, but rather be grateful to the doctor who did everything for his recovery.

Thus when we are really sincere in praising the Lord, we have to be cautious in speaking unkindly and uncharitably against our brothers or sisters. If there's a situation that warrants that we speak the truth, it has to be done in love, and to the right person, that is, our superior*¹- and not just to anybody.

This is an evidence that we have a fear, filial fear, of the Lord in our heart. We can praise Him, then, with a clear conscience and declare His wondrous deeds among our brethren, for a truthful praise is fitting for loyal heart. It is like a burnt offering pleasing to God, a declaration of our gratitude for all the marvelous things the Lord wrought for us, an expression of our faith in Him, and an indicator that we are not ashamed to acknowledge His name in this world.

In response, Our Lord Jesus will also acknowledge us before His Heavenly Father and will not be ashamed to consider us as His brethren, for He who sanctifies us and we who are sanctified have all one origin: God, Christ from eternity to all eternity, we from time to eternity. We will be perfectly united and be with them as Christ and the Father are one – light from light, true God from true God. Thus we have a fairly good reason to declare, praise, glorify, and stand in awe of Him all the days of our life. →

Icon # 220 = God's Immersion in our struggle in this Present Life

"For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; and he has not hid his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him."

During the days of His human flesh, Our Lord Jesus was also afflicted and had even a lion's share of it so that by His own experience of what it is to be a human being He will have pity on our misery and will not scorn or look down our affliction, for we have not a God who is unable to sympathize with our afflictions, but one who in every respect has been afflicted as we are, yet without falling into despair.

As Christ was being strengthened and comforted by an angel at the eve of His passion while praying in Gethsemane, to face His coming affliction, He, undoubtedly, will strengthen and comfort us too in all our affliction, "so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by Him."

¹ *A trusted friend, too, so long as he or she is not gossipy.

God immersed Himself in our struggle in this present life, so that with Him and in Him we will be able to emerge from our dreadful afflictions to His blissful consolations, for if we willingly accept our suffering and unite it with His own suffering we will also share in His blessing when His glory is revealed.

When Christ cried out on the cross: "My God, my God, why thou hast forsaken me?" Did His Father really abandon Him? Isn't it that His Father went with Him to the depths of the tomb, too? We can even say that the Holy Spirit accompanied them, too, because the Holy Spirit is the love between the Father and the Son, the bond of union between them, for where the Father and the Son is there the Holy Spirit is. It would be far easier, in a twinkling of an eye, to separate the light from the sun than to separate the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Thus the Father has not hid His face from His Son but has heard when He cried to Him, for on the third day the Son rose again from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit who is in Him. Christ, then, gives us an example that we may follow in His steps, that is, to humbly persevere in our prayer to God in times of affliction, and not to despair of God's mercy even if it seems that He has forsaken us, for in reality He hears the cries of our souls and the groaning of our hearts because the Holy Spirit who has been given to us intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And God who searches our hearts knows what is the mind of the Holy Spirit because the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit has only one will and one intelligence.

It is very natural that after we have passed through every affliction we experienced a certain relief – if the intensity of our love for God is high enough it will spontaneously emit flashes of praise from our lips, or silently from our hearts. We express this praise in many ways like brilliant rays from the sun such as actively participating in Mass, singing psalms either privately or in common, singing spiritual hymns in our hearts or audibly when occasion warrants it, spending time in private prayer, reading spiritual books especially the Scriptures or lives of the saints or other "good books" that really nourish our hearts and instruct our minds so as to support us in our spiritual journey back to our heavenly home, and be of service to our fellow human being, especially those less fortunate either in health or in wealth. God is the source of all these, because whatever is good, right, and true come from Him.

Therefore, it is suitable and commendable to acknowledge: →

Icon # 221 = Work of God: God ultimately Praising God

"From thee comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him."

It is not only a duty, but also a nutritious privilege to us to be able to participate in praising God in the great congregation, that is, at Mass, or in choir if we make religion as our profession either we be contemplative monks and nuns or active brothers and sisters, because it is the action of the whole Christ done by His mystical Body. In other words, it is God ultimately praising God. Isn't that something!

No wonder St. Benedict calls the Divine Office as "the Work of God," and boldly stipulated in his rule "to prefer nothing to the work of God." It means that it has the highest place in the hierarchy of works. All other works flow from this "Work of God," not the other way round. In other words, all our works flow from our prayer; from the presence of God to the presence of men (or carrying out our various responsibilities) then back again to the presence of God.

Undeniably, a light from two or three candles is soothing enough when we are amidst thick darkness. How much more if there would be a hundred or thousands of those candles and we are one of them. People who had been to Lourdes or had attended big gatherings such as Eucharistic Congress or different kinds of seminars intended for spiritual development can graciously assert how powerful and nourishing such experiences are. We can always recall them to memory and have a sip of its consolation in some moments of our meditation.

Our Lord Jesus said that where two or three are gathered together in His name He is in the midst of them. How much beneficial then, at least for us, when hundreds or thousands or millions of us gathering together to praise Him for all that He has done for us. We are told that our praising him "adds nothing" to His greatness, but it is for our own good that we may grow in gratitude and appreciation of His goodness and love.

We have to uphold, too, that it is legitimate to praise God even by ourself alone in the stillness of our hearts as hermits do in the solitude of their cells, but we have always to avail of the blissful conflagration of the praises of God done in the great congregation of our fellow believers and God seekers if it is in our power to do so because if a single praise is sonorous enough and pierces the heart of God, how much more the collective praises of Christ's mystical Body!

If a single candle has power to illumine a dark room, how much more a hundred or thousand. So, our praises of God wither done privately or communally has

power to illumine the darkness of this world, and to enkindle in the heart of our human family the desire for the heavenly home, because it is a simple form of bearing witness to the majesty and love of God and to the brotherhood and sisterhood of all peoples in Christ. →

Icon # 222 = Silver drop of tears

“The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord! May your hearts live for ever!”

Many afflicted men and women who had experienced sexual abuse or who had been involved in abortion gradually found healing through the sympathetic help of friends, families, and counselors or by attending retreat such as “Project Rachel” and “Grief to Grace.” They tell us how powerful and wholesome such experiences are to the inner healing process of their wounded souls.

They had eaten the words of consolations and gestures of sympathies of the people around them; and now they are satisfied and long for more. Formerly, a good number of them were not God seekers but now they eagerly seek the Lord and had found Him. The fruits of this having found the Lord is made manifest in their learning to use their tongues in praising Him not only with their lips but above all with their new found life with Christ.

As they make progress in the inner transformation of their hearts and the renewal of their minds, they can see as in a broad day light the colossal difference between their former way of life and the one they are now living. It is not hard to imagine the silver drops of tears that trickle from their eyes as they recall the loving kindness of God in their lives.

For us who in times past had traversed the easy road that leads to destruction and had entered the wide gate of sin can humbly and graciously encourage them to persevere in their trek to true freedom of the children of God, to deepen their inchoate intimacy with Christ especially by means of ejaculatory prayer, reading spiritual books if they are literate, and by frequently receiving the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist because they are nourishment of the soul.

Hence, we can heartily wish them: “May your hearts live for ever! →

Icon # 223 = One Great Congregation

"All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations."

In the book of Revelation we are told that "a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and people and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!'"

Here we can see, as from a vantage point of view, the ultimate gathering of God's redeemed people as one great congregation coming from all the families of the nations worshipping before Him. How happy shall we be to be with them forever!

We begin this, here on earth, by deliberately participating in the gatherings of God's people, especially the Mass, for it is a cogent expression of our remembrance of the supreme sacrifice of Christ on the cross for our eternal salvation. "It is the culmination both of God's action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship of men offer to Christ and through Him to the Father in the Holy Spirit." Faithful to Christ's command the Church continues to do this in His memory until His glorious return.

We remember and turn to the Lord when we live no longer for ourselves but for Him who loves us and dies for us, when we give ourselves to one another in charity especially when we do it with the Blessed Virgin Mary because she is the spiritual mother of the family of God.

Through her, with her, and in her we can offer worthy and acceptable sacrifice to her beloved Son, Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and be at ease to worship before Him. All authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Him, thus He rules over the nations. Not over the nations only but, above all, over the hearts of every human person who are learning to be meek and humble of heart and strive to put His teaching into practice. →

Icon # 224 = Cure of Pride

"Yea, to him all the proud of the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and he who cannot keep himself alive."

Just as an iron that is placed in the fire can easily be bent, so, in the same way, if we put our pride in the fire of God's love and constantly contemplate upon the

cross and see how much God humbled Himself then, we will notice, to our amazement, that it is still possible to cure our pride while we are still on earth. Notice, too, that it is the proud of the earth that is given a chance to bow down, but not the proud of the heavenly places, Lucifer and the wicked spirits who were devoted to him, because when they made the decision to rebel against God their Creator they did it with a luminous mind without any passion that could possibly cloud their intellect; and they know the consequences of their action and that their decision is irrevocable, but still they go ahead with it.

On the other hand, the proud of the earth who are lead astray from the path of righteousness might have been freckled by the stain of their passion which muddled their vision to discern what is right from what is wrong. Thus they are given a chance for repentance which often happen through some form of sickness, suffering, or tragedy so that by this experience they may realize that they are just dust and ashes, as the liturgy of Ash Wednesday reminds us: "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return;" and that they don't have absolute power whatsoever to keep themselves alive because they are not the source of their own existence.

Having realized this, they will learn humility and start to bow down in homage to God, though they might feel awkward at first because they are not used to it but little by little, through constant practice they will eventually feel at ease in rendering to God what is His due. →

Icon # 225 a) = Grace and Free Will needed for Deliverance

"Posterity shall serve him; men shall tell of the Lord to the coming generation, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, that he has wrought it."

From time immemorial the posterities of our first parents, from one generation to the next up to our present generation, had served the Lord and had proclaimed the deliverance He had wrought, first, from the slavery in Egypt; second, from the slavery of sin and vices.

Christ proclaims this deliverance when He says: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

At a certain point in our lives we had been held captives by some forms of vices. Sad to say, some of us are still held captives. We may wonder, though, how did it start. Is it because of the "other law" at war with the law of our mind, making us captive to the law of sin which dwells in our members? We may delight in the

law of God in our inmost heart, but there is another law at war with the law of our mind – making us captive to the law of sin which dwells in the depths of our being.

The other word of this “law of sin” which takes its abode within us is libertinism. It is very treacherous because it masks itself in terms of freedom. Many are deceived by it because freedom is part and parcel of our dignity as a human person. Moreover, the Scripture says that we are all called to freedom; however, we should not use our freedom as a pretext for doing evil, to give free reign to the flesh, that is to say, to cater to whatever the body wants – even to the detriment of the soul.

Unequivocally, a person is a slave to whatever overcomes him either it be to “love” of material things or to pride or to lust of power and prestige or to jealousy and envy. This is a cruel form of slavery because it gnaws the spiritual well-being of a person and drags him down to the subterranean prison of unhappiness and discontent with its neck fastened with the iron chain of selfish desire. A person in this situation is likely cannot liberate himself. He needs someone to do so.

Christ offers Himself for our deliverance, but He does not force us if we don't want to because He respects our free-will. Our free will is like a flint needed to produce a spark of grace. Grace alone is not enough to liberate us from this cruel slavery nor free-will. Both of them has to be united just as a woman alone cannot produce a child nor man alone, but both of them has to be joined together.

Just at other times it is the woman or the man who initiates the sexual union, so at other times it is Christ who initiates to give His grace to us and at other times it is we who have to ask for it. Notice, too, that at other times both the man and the woman simultaneously desire this sexual union, so also at other times the souls feels a profound intimacy with God and union of wills that it doesn't ask for anything, because God knows what the soul needs before she asks Him.

The point is that whether the initiation of this desire comes from God or from the soul or from both, the fruit of this union is what we call “change of heart,” “renewal of the mind,” and the “strengthening of the will.” The familiar word to describe this is “conversion,” that is, the deliverance from a “sinful way of life” or an “unseemly life-style” to a “Godly life” or a “simple and modest way of life” which can also be called a “virtuous life.”

No one can ever prevaricate this, for the proclamation of this deliverance is as loud as a trumpet blast that it reaches to the ears of the people yet unborn who, in their turn, once they are born and experienced this lofty kind of deliverance

will proclaim it to the next generation, and so on, that it is primarily God who has wrought it. →

Icon # 225 b) = The Good Shepherd

Psalm 23 (22)

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures.”

The Lord is our Shepherd is positively one of the most soothing and heartening images that we can confidently ascribe to Our Lord Jesus. It certainly evokes feelings of solicitude, trust, thoughtfulness, care, responsibility, etc. Solicitude: in His concern for our welfare to be sure that we have all we need that are necessary for our eternal salvation. Thus He lets us lie down in the green pastures of His teaching and the Sacraments of His Church to nourish us with His own Body and Blood, so that our own body will become like His own Body – incorruptible, glorious, and immortal. Trust: for He proves that He is the good Shepherd by laying down His life for us to give us an example that we may follow in His steps, that is, to be shepherd to one another by laying down our lives for one another which can be concretely expressed by our patience with one another, forgiving each other if we have a grievance against each other.

This would tantamount to making each other lie down in the green pastures of peace. Thoughtfulness: because He will not deprive us of His love lest we will collapse as we trek the road of life. If we are running out of good intentions, He will eagerly multiply our meager bread of sincerity so that we may always have enough of everything that is noble, praiseworthy, and just. Care: for He is both a father and a mother to us in His affection. He cares for us more than the most caring fathers and mothers combine together, for He knows us thoroughly far beyond we can ever think or imagine.

Parents, especially mothers, through years of experience, have learned to distinguish a cry of food from a cry of attention, an earache cry from a stomachache cry, so God has resources of sensitivity far beyond those of even the wisest of mother. Therefore, everyone who has God is not wanting in anything, for God alone suffices. No wonder, then, that it's a “green (very fertile) pastures.” →

Icon # 226 = Still Waters

“He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”

Notice that God is leading us to “still waters,” that is, to interior silence, to a deeper spiritual life, to a calmness of heart and stillness of mind. These waters are still because they are deep, deep as the silence and stillness of God. He does not lead us to a shallow water which is undeniably noisy, that is, too talkative and too busy with the things of this world, only concern with too much serving without praying, but to still waters of contemplation doing our works with a gentle and quiet spirit which in God’s sight is very precious.

We scatter our energy by investing too much time in activities which bring less nourishment for our souls, but can be restored by regular assiduous prayer, for prayer is the bond of communion between the material and spiritual world.

Our Lord Jesus is our “template” for this, for it is in His moments of profound, solitary communion with His heavenly Father that He deepened this bond to give us a model or a pattern to imitate because the more we exposed ourselves to this “still waters,” that is, to assiduous prayer, the easier it will be for us to view event and issues in their proper perspective and proportion.

On the other hand, if we are not exposed to prayer we will be inclined to leave God out from the happenings of our life, and then when troubles come we will find it extremely difficult to view them otherwise than negatively.

It has been said that “when the going is good, build a relationship with God; it will stand you in good stead when things inevitably go wrong.” Thus to be in contact with the still waters of prayer and meditation is building up a healthy relationship with which leads us in and to paths of righteousness. It adds “for his name sake,” because by doing so God’s name will be honored and glorified in us. If God’s name is honored and glorified in us, then it proves that we are the sheep of the Good Shepherd, Christ Jesus the Lord. →

Icon # 227 = Valley of the Shadow of Death

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.”

Though God’s name is glorified and honored in us, and by our way of life it proves that we are His sheep, this does not grant us immunity to sorrows, pains, and sufferings in this present life for this would be like granting exemption which God did not grant even to His beloved Son and to the Blessed Virgin Mary who

He loves above all women. They are exempted from sin but not from sorrows and sufferings. As a matter of fact the prophet Isaiah describes Christ as “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

When the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to St. Bernadette, she told her that she would not promise her happiness in this world but in the next. This clearly means that so long as we are still in this present life pains, sufferings, and sorrows in any form are inevitable.

We have to pass “through” them and not to “short circuit” them, that is, avoiding them as through walking in its outskirts or periphery instead of walking through them. They are not yet death, but “shadow of death.” It is described as “valley,” because we are still in this world. The only advantage we have is that our Good Shepherd is with us and in us. He does not leave us to struggle with the inevitable challenges and vicissitudes of life alone, but He promised to be with us until the end of time.

With Him protecting us is an encouragement to persevere in our walking in spite of the darkness of sorrows and anguish that we run into in this world. Notice that before we walk through the Valley of the shadow of death we were first led to the still water consolation that we may drink freely to our soul’s content so as to sustain us as we walk through the valley of desolation. We are like a camel, then, which has an inner reservoir of water which supplies it as it crosses the desert.

God is really very wise and caring, for He knows of what we are made. He knows our weakness and He knows the dignity of the human person – that it has enormous capacity to endure and cope up with the trials and hardships of life so long as it is sustained by His grace.

Without His grace it would be very fearsome to walk through the valley of the shadow of death. We will be in darkness and will not know where we are heading; our anxiety will soar high. But with His grace to sustain us we fear no evil because trust grows stronger every day as we give thanks to Him for all that happens to us either good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, joyful or sorrowful.

His grace will serve as a lantern in the midst of thick darkness until the day dawns, and the sun knows no setting. His grace is the working of the Holy Spirit in our whole being: heart, mind, and will. It guides us along the right path of life; thus it is referred to as “rod” and “staff,” for it comforts us from time to time so that we will not be dejected in times of distress and not become elated in times of success. →

Icon # 228 = Negotiating Table: In the Presence of one's enemies

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows."

It is fascinating to perceive how far we have made progress in our spiritual journey with Christ, Our Good Shepherd, leading us along the way. First we were made to lie down in a fertile field, then we were led to still waters of prayers and contemplation for the refreshment of our souls; then we continue walking in paths of righteousness passing through the valley of the shadow of trials and challenges. We are not fearful because the rod and staff of God's grace comfort us in spite of the fact that a table is set before us in the presence of our enemies.

In this case, the image that readily comes to mind is sitting in a negotiating table, a peace talk with our own passions for they are the enemies within ourselves. The fact that they are willing to negotiate with us is a good indication that even amidst the bustle and rush of life it is still possible to attain a relative peace, as it is written: "When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."

However, we should be very cautious because our enemies are very treacherous, that is, our passions will attempt to dominate us again if they are not forestalled at their first appearance in our consciousness. We have to set provisions that have to be respected and kept by both sides.

On our side, we have to avoid "pictures" either moving or stationary that endanger chastity but always put in our mind "pictures" that are wholesome and good for the soul such as the picture of the Holy Face of the Lord Jesus or the Blessed Virgin Mary or any of our favorite saints, for nothing goes into our imagination without passing first to our senses.

If we occupy our minds with one of the scenes of the life of Christ while on earth or where He is now in heaven, then the things of this world will less interest us. If we are weak in modesty, then we have to avoid vanity; we have also to dress cleanly, but simply. If we are weak in meekness and gentleness, then we have to avoid arguments, for arguments give rise to more arguments. Arguments do not convince others, they do not lead to peace because they do not change the heart.

On the passions' side, they demand that we should not repress them but allow them to surface in our consciousness and deal with them fairly by tracing their origin. By the time we have traced the cause, we will notice that the passion itself subside; thus there is peace.

Our enemy is the world. The world here means godlessness, a life-style which considers God as irrelevant; values that are detrimental to the inherent dignity of the human person; desires that are riveted exclusively to this present life; a life that never has any time of the day or the week to wait upon God and listen to God and would think such a time as a waste of time.

On our part, we have to respect the world out of love for God who sent His beloved Son to save the world, giving it a chance for the transformation of its values, showing it kindness in the hope that it may be led to repentance. We show our respect to the world by not conforming to the world, that is to say, not to be worldly-wise, as the Lord says: "You are in the world, but you are not of the world."

On the world's side, it demands that we be subject to the governing authorities, to every human institution whether it be to the emperors as supreme [unless they enact laws contrary to moral and divine law], or to governors and mayors. For this reason we have "to give them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, and honor to whom honor is due."

Our other enemy is the devil himself. At first sight, he seems to be very powerful, gigantic, and formidable. There is truth in this, but only so if a person is in a state of sin because it renders him weak to resist the allurements of the devil, small in overcoming temptations, and fearful in standing up to the demands of moral law. But to those in a state of grace and strive to put into practice Christ's teaching the devil is really powerless, dastard, and sissy because he is even afraid of a little child in a state of grace. The letter of St. James wisely exhorts us, saying: "Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you."

On our side, we have to rivet ourselves to Christ in humility of heart and mind and not relying on our will power alone because it can be very sandy when buffeted by the winds of tribulations if devoid of the foundation of God's grace; we have to attribute to God, not to ourselves, the good we have done, saying: "Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name give the glory," but we have to acknowledge humbly the wrong-doing we commit; we have to follow what is good and learn a lesson from what is not good, for this will prevent us from being judgmental of our brothers and sisters; we have to be very cautious in aspiring to be called holy before we really are but have to strive for holiness so that God be glorified in us when those around us see our good example.

On the devil's side, he will always remain perfidious, dubious, and treacherous. For this reason we have always to be cautious. He barks but cannot bite so long as we keep distance at him. He sows discord, hatred, and violence. He

permeates in every sector of society inspiring people to invent all kinds of evil, and governments to enact laws contrary to divine law. He was active since the beginning of time deceiving Adam and Eve, inducing Cain to kill his brother Abel, arousing the hearts of people to wickedness until the floods came, motivating the men of Sodom and Gomorrah to commit sodomy, encouraging people to sacrifice their sons and daughters to demons, prompting Jezebel to kill the prophets of the Lord, provoking Pharaoh to oppress God's people and slaughter the newly born baby boys, stirring up the jealousy of Herod to massacre the infant boys of Bethlehem, exciting the religious leaders of Christ's time to crucify the Lord of glory, embolden Nero and the other Roman emperors to persecute Christians, galvanizing Hitler, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao Tse Tung to carry out an unimaginable crime in human history, influencing Organizations and judges to promote abortion, stimulating rock stars and movie actors and actresses to inflame the cravings of both young and old people to indulge in drugs, sex, and rock in roll, etc..

These are the enemies which the Lord prepared a table before us in their presence. You can see how hazardous they are. So, is peace, then, possible? We can confidently say, yes, peace is attainable if we live a godly life even though we are beleaguered by the devil, the world, and our own passions, because by doing so the inner chamber of our hearts is made open to the Prince of Peace, Christ Jesus the Lord, where He can make His dwelling place.

When Christ lives within us the kingdom of God is made present in our midst for the transformation of the world. He brings with Him the oil of peace and gladness to anoint the head of our soul. "The kingdom of God is within you," He says. We share, then, in His kingship. Our life will be a Eucharist, a thanksgiving, a cup of communion. It overflows because its source is from the fountain of life itself, Christ Jesus the Lord.

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life," He says. Thus there will always be an ongoing tension between us, the world, the devil, and our own passions until the end of time, until the sheep and the goats, the wheat and the chaff, and the good and the bad fish are sorted out, and the angels will gather together from all the corners of the universe all causes of sin, and everyone will receive what she/he deserves according to what she/he has done in the body, for all creatures, both spirits and human, shall hear the verdict of the Son of God of whom judgment has been given.

To those who have done evil and doggedly refused to repent, those who deliberately barred access to divine Mercy and the kind whisper of the Holy Spirit, there will be soaking in the wrath and fury of God, but for those who strive goodness even though they staggered in doing so; those who uphold truthfulness even if it is flickering, those who are upright and honest, there will be

rejoicing and gladness, they will be anointed with the oil of divinity and their hearts overflow with happiness which no one will take away from them.

God will wipe away the tears from their eyes and the sweat of their brows; they shall follow the Lamb wherever He goes for they were not ashamed to confess His name on earth. Thus they are made worthy to behold His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. The goodness and mercy of God shall be with them all the days of their lives beginning in this present life and be perfected in the world to come. Their confidence and trust in God increased to such an intensity that each of them could say: →

Icon # 229 = Final Destination: Eternal Home

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

This is the final destination that the Good Shepherd leads us: to dwell in His house forever which He has prepared for us since the foundation of the world. It has been a long and arduous journey and there have been struggles along the way, but we arrived home safe and sound. The house of God is His own heart which is as wide as the universe itself, and it has many rooms where we can freely roam around to gaze His loveliness and find rest for our souls.

Even in this present life His house is already made available for occupation because He has given us His own Spirit as a guarantee for our future inheritance and which made us His sons and daughters. In His house are gathered once more His sons and daughters who were formerly scattered to the farthest ends of the earth by their sins and are united again by repentance and forgiveness.

They have seen and tasted the goodness of God which is very pleasing to their eyes and palatable to their taste. Now they long for more. They open wide their mouths and God fill them. As they grow older in maturity, they become like little children in simplicity and docility for they allowed themselves to be nourished by the pure spiritual milk of God's mercy that helps them grow to salvation.

As the palate of their soul becomes sensitive by constant tasting of the goodness and mercy of God, they developed a keen intuition of the difference between carnal pleasures and spiritual pleasures. Basing by their own experience, as they had tasted being worldly, too, they notice that carnal pleasures when they lack them arouse in them an all-consuming desire for them, but soon as they possess them and devour them their satisfaction turns into distaste.

On the other hand, they also notice that the pleasures of the spirit seem distasteful when they did not possess them at first, but once they began to be theirs, their desire awakens. The more they seek them when they have begun to enjoy them, the more they enjoy them as they hunger for them. The pleasure of the spirit increases their inner longing since the more they savor it, the more they perceive that there is something more to long for.

This spiritual pleasure which they, and we too, had experienced in this present life, as a foretaste of the life to come, will continue for all eternity, from glory to glory, pleasure to pleasure, happiness to happiness, joy to joy, beatitude to beatitude, for we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

It is worth sacrificing everything: leaving one's family, house, homeland, etc. to follow the Lamb wherever He goes and to bring Him to places where He is badly needed, to the places of our lives that need healing, to the inmost recesses of our heart where we can pray to our heavenly Father in secret, to one's work place where Christ is barely known.

This we do, not so much in words but by example and by the way we live. At the same time we are also prepared to share to anyone who calls us to account for the hope of inner transformation that we eagerly desire which is a prelude of eternal life that Christ will generously give to those who are not afraid to bear public witness to His name and His teaching.

If a person is loyal to Christ in this life, Christ will be loyal to that person in the life to come. If a person is proud to acknowledge that Christ is his/her Master, Christ will be proud to acknowledge that person as His servant. We are told by Christ that the servant does not dwell in the house forever. He also said that He will no longer call us servant, for the servant does not know what his master is doing, but He calls us friends because He has made known to us what He has heard from His Father. This is what He has heard from the Father: that we should be holy as He is holy, we should be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.

We advance farther on the path of perfection, as St. Gregory of Nyssa gently tells us, precisely insofar as we remain fixed and immovable in good. The more steadfast and unshakable we become in good, so much the more quickly will we accomplish our course. Our very stability becomes as a wing in our flight toward heaven; our heart becomes winged because of our stability in good. It is not farfetched to say that our stability in good is tantamount to having a healthy relationship with God who is the only true Good.

When we listen to St. Teresa of Avila we can hear that to "be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect" does not necessarily implies having arrived at a state of so-called perfection where there will be complete freedom from imperfection

or human foibles. Holiness consists, rather, in arriving at a relationship in love with a person, the person of the Lord Jesus; and through Him, by the action of the Holy Spirit, coming to the Father. It is like what theologians call "the already and not yet" of God's kingdom on earth.

We are confident, though, that the goodness and mercy of God shall follow us all the days of our life until we touched the threshold of our final destiny where we will be thoroughly united with Him like that of an iron in the fire or air in the light of the sun.

For the time being, His mercy and goodness act as His servants to accompany us: Goodness to propel us to act justly, to love kindness, and to walk humbly like the Blessed Virgin Mary; Mercy to prop us when we stumble and fall, something to lean on so that we will not degenerate into despair, because if God should mark our guilt who could ever stand! But with God there is forgiveness. For this we revere Him and can muster confidence to sing of His mercy.

By these paddles of God's goodness and mercy we will be convinced to arrive at the other side of the shore in spite of the vicissitudes of the sea of life. There we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever and shall inherit the Promised Land which God avowed to bestow to the meek and humble of heart. →

Icon # 230 = Unimaginable riches of God

Psalm 24 (23)

"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein; for he has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers."

How rich Our Lord is to own all the earth! Yet this is a very little thing for Him. It is just a faint glimmer of His unimaginable riches, for He owns the whole universe too with its billions and billions of galaxies and billion and billion of stars in each galaxy.

Even if each redeemed human being and each of the angel has to inherit a galaxy this is still a very little thing for Our Lord because it could not even begin to deplete the inexhaustible infinity of His riches. But out of His mind boggling love for us, He desires that everything that He has and everything that He is will be ours too: "On that day you will know," He said, "that I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you."

Everything that belongs to the Father belongs to the Son and everything that belongs to the Son belongs to us, too, because of the Holy Spirit who is given to us as a guarantee of our future inheritance and makes us cry out, "Abba

Father." We are heirs, then, of God's boundless treasures. Out of God's unfathomable humility He singles out the earth, which really is just like a dot in the map of the universe, to be the place where he could reveal the vastness of His wisdom and love to us little human creatures and to make us learn to practice the virtue of humility and to help us see Him in little things more than the vastness of the universe which often dazzles our mind.

"To the eyes that sees," says Caryl Houselander, "littleness reveals infinitely more than vastness. God is known more truly by a little finite creature through the contemplation of a snowdrop than through contemplation of the universe. Very soon the intellect staggers before immensity, it is used up exhausted, only the rare heart responds to it at all. But the inward eye fills with light when it contemplates a little thing, the heart can fold upon it, and so the heart expands and the mind does not wither, but puts out petal upon petal of thought." She also said: "From the universe we learn that God is infinite, that we cannot compass him at all. From such things as insects, flies, little frogs, mice and flowers we learn that to us he is something else. He is Father, brother, child, and friend!"

He humbles Himself and became one with us in all things except sin. He condescended to live on earth to teach us how to live a heavenly life here on earth. Humility comes from the word humus which means the earth, ground, soil. By becoming a human being like us Christ is so rooted in humility, and He wanted to remind us that we who are made of earth have humility as our natural habitat.

We are dislocated from it only when we began to move from place to place, that is, from vices to sin and from sin to vices, listening to the subtle voice of the serpent that we will be wise as God and be like God, knowing good and evil, if only we will eat the forbidden fruit of the tree of sinful desire. We want to be like God, to have control of everything, even without asking the help of God.

But by becoming a human being, born of the stainless humus – the humblest of all women the Blessed Virgin Mary, He shows us the way back to our natural habitat where we can unlearn our acquired worldly wisdom syndrome and relearn our once lost innocence – the wisdom from above which is first of all "pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity." To have relearned this kind of wisdom is already a foretaste of a heavenly life even while we are still on earth.

That this has founded upon the seas and established upon the rivers suggests that we are still on a journey. Christ Himself walked on the sea, and the Psalmist says: "Thy way was through the sea, thy path through the great waters, yet thy footprints were unseen." His footprints were unseen because they are hidden from unbelievers and evil doers, but to those who believe and open their hearts

to the transforming grace of God, Christ is for them “the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” He is the Way that leads to the other side of the shore of life, just as when Christ got into the disciples’ boat the sea calmed down and they arrived at the other side of the shore safely.

When our life is founded upon the person of Christ and established it upon the obedience of His will, our hope of arriving at the other side of the shore of life, to inherit the earth promised to the meek and humble of heart, will soar high in spite of the tempest of trials and troubles of life, because it is being sustained by faith made active by prayer. →

Icon # 231 = Program of Sanctity: Hill of the Lord

“Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully.”

To ascend the hill of the Lord reminds us of the book written by St. John of the Cross: “Ascent to Mt. Carmel,” which is an ascending movement of the soul to the height of holiness possible in this present life, passing through a series of purification before one can arrive at the top.

In His desire to provide necessary means of salvation for His followers, Christ ascends to a hill and laid out a program of sanctity which equals that of the angels. It is available to all people of goodwill, small and great alike, who are courageous enough to dare to ascend with Him who humbles Himself that we may follow in His steps, so as to provide us the safest way to the top, for we shall ascend by humility.

This program of sanctity which was laid out on the hill is the battle cry of the Lord Jesus: “Be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy.” It reminds us of Moses, too, who ascended to the mountain of the Lord, and there received the program of holiness for God’s people. There are two differences that are obvious, though.

The first is that, in the case of Moses, he was the receiver of the program of holiness for God’s people. Whereas, in the case of Christ, He is the giver of the program of holiness, thus proved that He is God. The second is that, in the case of Moses, it was delivered amidst thunder and lightning. There was commotion, then the people were ordered to keep at a distance, but in the case of the Lord Jesus, it was delivered in a sonorous still small voice and the people are invited to draw near: “Come to me all of you who are heavy laden and find life burdensome and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;

for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Unequivocally, Christ's yoke is His teaching which is easy and light to bear once we are used to it. It is bound, though, to be “narrow” and “hard” at first, but if we persevere, as St. Benedict tells us, “our hearts will expand and we shall run with unspeakable sweetness in the paths of God's commandments.”

Equipped, thus, with the exercises of Christ's teaching, or in other words to put it into practice, as our provision, the muscles of our soul are strengthened and are prepared to ascend the hill of sanctity and to stand in His holy place. Moreover, to ascend to the summit of this hill, there's a need for us to meditate and pray, for by meditation we glimpse what is awaiting us and by prayer we tasted what has been prepared for us since the foundation of the world. Thus “taste and see that the Lord is good.”

Then, the psalmist goes on to say: “He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully.” It is conspicuous that there are conditions for ascending the summit of sanctity such as: clean hands, which suggests honesty; a pure heart which is a luminous sincerity and single-mindedness of purpose to see the ultimate source of our being and existence; not lifting up our soul to what is false, that is, to ephemeral and fleeting pleasures of this world which is an illusion; and not to swear deceitfully, that is, saying “yes” to our promise to God with our lips but our heart and mind are far from Him wandering into things and places that are offensive to Him. These are the basic conditions to scale the height of holiness. By observing these: →

Icon # 232 = Blessings: God's Commandments

“He will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of his salvation.”

Whether we are aware of it or not, or whether we long for it or not, there's always a blessing attached to the observance of God's commandments, for we will be like a tree planted near a running stream that yield the fruits of virtue in due season, and its leaf of faith does not wither in spite of the adversities that come upon us in this present life.

“Faith in Christ Jesus, the true God,” said St. Simeon the New Theologian, gives birth to desire for eternal blessing and to fear of torment. Desire for these blessings and fear of torment lead to a strict observance of the

commandments, and a strict observance of the commandments teaches men a deep realization of their own weakness.”

So, when we realize that by ourselves we are too weak in observing God's commands, we humbly ask for His grace to help us and He will surely help us that we may be able to do His commands. Once we realize that it is not our own doing but owing to God's grace, then we become grateful and humble. This is already a precious blessing. We will gladly hear the blissful words of Our Lord: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

To make this point clearer, we can listen also to what St. Therese says: “The divine precepts do assuredly run counter to our natural inclinations, and without the help of grace it would be impossible to understand them, far less put them in practice.”

Being honest, sincere, and truthful, therefore, are tangible signs of God's blessing. If we are blessed by these we don't have to be defensive and self-assertive, because these blessings speak for themselves in our favor and vindicate us when events seem unfavorable to us at the moment.

The life of Christ on earth is a perfect paradigm for this. In spite of His sublime teaching and the innumerable good works He did, He was tormented and put to death, but He was vindicated by the Spirit and rose again from the dead for our justification.

Just as the vindication of Our Lord, that is, His resurrection was not only for Himself but for us, for our justification, so the blessing and vindication we receive are not only for our good but also for the good of those around us in particular, and also for the good of the whole mystical body of Christ in general.

Those people around us will be edified, build up, when they know by experience in their dealing with us that we are honest, sincere, and truthful. By implication it will increase thanksgiving to God and glorification of His name as the Scripture says: “Let your light shine among men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” Thus the true children of God seek for His glory as the Lord Jesus did. →

Icon # 233 = Seeking God

"Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob."

From age to age God raises up men and women who are outstanding in holiness, remarkable in virtues, and admirable in knowledge that we may be instructed by their wisdom and inspired by their virtues and be helped to find Him whom we are seeking for that is the face of the God of Jacob who is no other than the Lord Jesus – the limpid image of the invisible God.

With the most fervent longing in our heart that blazed like a wild fire, we can join with St. Anselm in crying out: "Lord, may I seek You by my desire, and desire none but You in all my quest. May I find You by loving You and love you when found."

Desire for God indicates that we appreciate the value of the precious pearl that we have found, for whoever desires God with his/her whole mind already possesses the object of his/her love because love makes the lover equal to the object of his/her love. To the extent that we allow ourselves to be governed by this desire for God we are already in heaven, a fellow citizen of the angels, only our body is on earth but our heart and mind are in heaven where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father, for where our love/treasure is there will our heart be also.

Desire is itself a first step of love, like that of a little child learning to walk in the ambience of his mother. It is the specific form which love takes while we are yet on pilgrimage. Love is the energy that gives strength to desire and is already a sort of knowledge and possession of the beloved.

When desire turns into oneness of the beloved and is now mature for love, it could hardly bear even a single moment of the absence of the beloved. It will cry out with vehement yearning: "I will rise now and go about the city, in the streets and in the squares; I will seek him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but found him not. The watchmen found me, as they went about in the city. 'Have you seen him whom my soul loves?' Scarcely had I passed them, when I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me."

The greatness of love for our beloved is gauged by the pain we felt at His absence; and the love we experienced in the presence of our beloved equals the sorrow felt at parting. No wonder, then, that the soul has to rise early in the morning, while it is still dark, to seek the presence of her beloved. Can the beloved be deaf to the longing of His beloved? Certainly not, for the beloved

Himself is also yearning for the beloved and cries out in the depths of His heart: "I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me." Is this not what Mary Magdalene did? Is this not the lovers of the Lord are doing, rising up early in the morning seeking Him in prayer and meditation and in Lectio Divina? In finding Him a surge of delight is bursting in their hearts. They sing religious hymns and chant the praises of God. This they did not just for a week or a month or a year but throughout their lives on earth.

Of course, the strength we have in seeking God ultimately comes from Him and is a sign that we already found Him, as St. Bernard of Clairvaux emphatically says: "No one has the strength to seek you unless he has already found you. For it is a fact that you will to be found in order that you may be sought and you will to be sought in order that you may be found. It is possible, therefore, to seek you and it is possible to find you...." To this we can also boldly say, Yes, it is possible to find you, O Lord, if we seek you with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind, for you yourself said: "Seek and you shall find."

To show further that this seeking has been done from generation to generation, and what manner of seeking is employed in order to find Him, let us listen to what one of our heavenly friends, St. Bonaventure, says: "If you ask how such things occur, seek the answer in God's grace, not in doctrine; in the sighs of prayer, not in research; seek the bridegroom not the teacher; God and not man; darkness not daylight; and look not to the light but rather to the raging fire that carries the soul to God with intense fervor and glowing love."

Surely, this is a gate to paradise where the king of glory lives. It is narrow at the entrance, but spacious once we get in. →

Icon # 234 = Glory

"Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors! That the king of glory may come in."

On the night before His passion and death Christ was very much aware that the hour has come when He will enter into His glory. His soul was so troubled at that moment, and He said: "And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour." Notice also that before He said this He told His disciples that whoever would serve Him must follow Him; and where He is, there shall His servant be also; and if anyone serves Him, the Father will honor him.

Then after they had celebrated the first Eucharist, and when Judas who had received sacrilegiously had gone out, Our Lord goes on to say: "Now is the Son

of man glorified, and in him God is glorified; if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and will glorify him at once.”

The glory of Christ has come; and that glory is the cross. No wonder that St. Paul could glory in nothing except in the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Here we are face to face with something which is the very warp and woof of life. The greatest glory in life is the glory which comes from sacrifice. It is the simple lesson of history that those who have made the great sacrifices have entered into the great glory.

It has to be asserted, then, that no one had entered this glory without passing through the narrow gate. It's so narrow at the entrance that the king of the universe has to humble Himself to enter it to give us a fructiferous lesson that it is only through the humility of carrying our crosses and bearing patiently our sufferings that the door of this gate be lifted up.

Why this is so is revealed by the king of glory who had entered it Himself. In other words, it is through our sharing in the sufferings of Christ that we will also share in his joy when His glory is revealed. It is a glory as of the only Son from the Father.

Christ desired and intended that this glory be ours, too, as He said: “The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them that, they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world.”

When Christ ascended to heaven the ancient door was lifted up again. It was closed by the sins of Adam and Eve, but was opened once again by the birth, passion, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ and the willing fiat of the Blessed Virgin Mary. So, now, the king of glory comes in where He was before. It is called “ancient door” because it existed before the foundation of the world.

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Icon # 235 = Christ's Kingship

“Who is the king of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle!”

Even little children who just started to mumble few words know for sure the answer to the question: “Who is this king of glory?” With unabashed innocence they shot out their answer to the highest heaven, which is more powerful than a

rocket being launched to the sky, and with just a twinkling of an eye reached to the throne of God and delighted Him who is seated on the throne: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" Certainly, they hit the nail on the head, as the saying goes on: "Like father like son."

The certainty of this answer is such that if ever a thought will attempt to traverse their imagination to withhold it, the very stones would cry out in a more eloquent voice: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord."

Just as David was strong and mighty in battle, so the Son of David, that is, the Lord Jesus was also strong and mighty in battle. The difference, though, between David and David's Son is the manner and the place they waged their war. David carried on his battle mightily in the field of the flesh, subduing his enemies left and right; but the Lord Jesus conducts His mighty battle in the field of the spirit, in the heart of every human person: healing not only the diseases of their bodies but above all the diseases of their souls, giving and offering forgiveness to those who are willing to receive it even to those who are responsible for His execution.

When Pilate asked Christ whether He is the King of the Jews, Christ answered him: "My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servant would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world."

If the kingship of David's Son is of this world, then, He would have allowed St. Peter to fight against those who arrested Him during His passion. But since His kingdom is not of this world, He said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take by the sword will perish by the sword. Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me? Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?"

Christ was explicit of what His kingdom is all about when He says, "Behold, the kingdom of God is within you." This is where His kingship is. It is not of this world; it is a kingdom within every human person, set up in our hearts and consciences. Its riches spiritual; its power supernatural; and its glory within. The citizens of this kingdom are those that are of the truth, all who by the grace of God are rescued from the power of the father of lies, and are disposed to receive the truth, and submit to the power and influence of it, and follow its guidance like a beacon of light.

To freely subject ourselves to this king of glory will surely have a great impact in our lives, and leads us to true freedom if we continue to keep His words, as this king says: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will

know the truth, and the truth will make you free." This is the voice of conscience. Therefore, this king once more says, "Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice."

This is the manner how the Son of David, the king of glory, waged His war, and this is the place where He conducts His mighty battle. →

Icon # 236 = Pattern of Life

Psalm 25 (24)

"To thee, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in thee I trust, let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me."

Lifting up our soul to God is assuredly a cordial gesture of prayer, a gazing of God with unveiled face. To see, we must look. Lifting up our souls to God means looking at Him, contemplating Him. And when we contemplate, we become after a time similar to what we have been contemplating.

Contemplate is derived from two words: con, meaning with; and template, meaning model or pattern. When Moses went up to Mt. Sinai the Lord told him to make a sanctuary that He may dwell in the midst of His people; and that according to all that the Lord showed him concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, Moses shall make it.

Thus to contemplate is to make ourselves into the likeness of what had been shown to us. In becoming a human being like us, God made us a pattern to imitate, a perfect image of Himself, so that by imitating His life on earth, following His example, and striving to put into practice His teaching, we become like Him, that is, we will be transformed into Him whom we model our life.

This is a lifelong process though, step-by-step, each hour each day, and involves the kind of faith that trusts completely in God's way, but His patient love and wisdom are assurance we cannot lose.

To transform us into Him is the prodigious conceivable realization of our contemplation, that is, our prayer, for it makes us lowly in our own estimation and emptied us of "self." "Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus," St. Paul humbly said, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross."

This is the pattern that God shows us to copy in our life. It takes courage to do this for it means dying to our self. However, it is through assiduous prayer and devotion, too, to the Blessed Virgin Mary that we will acquire this courage. Little by little, our blessed Mother will bring us to where she was: at the foot of the cross. There we shall lift up our souls not only for the forgiveness of our sins and for inner healing, but also to drink from the fountain of life the water of His love and mercy.

Nothing is so important as to keep Christ continually before our eyes in order to contemplate Him, in our hearts in order to love Him, in our hands in order to imitate Him. By doing this, we will not be put to shame by our mortal enemies, that is, the devil and his allies.

Our Lord will not allow them to exult over us. There could be a time, though, that we will be humiliated but it is that we may learn humility and grow in self-knowledge. Thus when we learn humility and grow in self-knowledge we could not help but lift our souls to God and put our trust in Him.

Prayer is predicated on the belief that by ourselves nothing is possible, while with God nothing is impossible. It is built upon the trust that God never calls us to something without supplying the grace to do it.

So long as we keep on lifting up our souls to God and put our whole trust in Him, the demons could hardly exult over us. It is only when we stop lifting up our souls to God and distrust Him that our enemies can exult over us because we will become powerless to resist their malice.

It is unequivocal that we cannot conquer our enemies: the devil, the world, and the flesh, if God does not supply us aid, and this aid we cannot have without prayer, that is, lifting up our souls to Him; but if we watch and pray we shall assuredly have stamina to resist the devil, the seductions of the world, and the passions of the flesh, and have the strength of God who strengthens us, as St. Paul rightly says: "I can do all things through God who strengthens me."

Once we have all the strength we need, then, we have the power to bind the strongman, that is, the devil and overthrow the stronghold of his dominion in our souls. This is not our own doing, but owing to God's grace working in us, because we lift up our souls to Him and trust Him unreservedly. →

Icon # 237 = Waiting

"Yea, let none that wait for thee be put to shame; let them be shamed who are wantonly treacherous."

With confidence we can humbly say that Our Lord will not let any of those who wait for Him eagerly be put to everlasting shame, because "the Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him." Universal experience tells us that when we wait for someone we love we feel happy at his/her arrival rather than shame.

It is only when we are guilty of infidelity and has done something very offensive to him/her that we feel uneasy at his/her arrivals unless we just thicken our face. This is reminiscent to those who pretended that they were in good standing with the Lord but secretly have done mischievous deeds without a flicker of repentance and even wanted to defend themselves by saying: "Lord, Lord, did we did not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" But the Lord said to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you evil doers."

Thus only when we are wantonly treacherous that we will be put to shame, for God is no respecter of person; but will render to us what we have done in our body. If we use our body as a waiting place for the Lord's coming, then He will be glorified in our body as a worthy temple of His Holy Spirit where we can spend time in prayer and be watchful at His coming in our day to day activities, "for through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness."

In this waiting we might groan inwardly: if this groaning is so intense our soul could not help but cry out with ardent desire: "My desire is to depart and be with the Lord, for that is far better." But since our departure time has not yet arrive, what we can do while waiting for it to come is "to lead a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace."

If we do this our waiting will be fruitful and we certainly will not be put to shame, for never was it known that anyone who waits for the Lord with eager longing has been put to shame, but rather renew their strength and mounted up with wings like eagles who soared up in the skies as if wanted to reach the sun. They shall run in the paths of God's commandments with expanded heart, thus not be weary, and shall walk in the ways of the Lord, ways of righteousness and peace, thus they shall not faint and be put to shame. →

Icon # 238 = Super Highway

"Make me know thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me, for thou art the God of my salvation; for thee I wait all the day long."

From of old, the Lord has already made known His ways to His people through the prophets. These ways are God's commandments, statutes, and decrees. They are very good ways. They are pathways that lead God's people to the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

In the fullness of time, though, God made known to us an excellent way, a super highway which we can heavenly say, a king's highway. Everyone who travels on this way shall not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. If we continue on this way we will know the truth about God and about ourselves. This truth, in turn, will lead us to freedom of the children of God who walk according to the spirit and not according to the flesh.

This Super Highway is no other than the Lord Jesus who authoritatively says: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one can come to the Father, but by me." All the other ways and pathways, then, converge to this One Super Highway which is a highway of love. It is the most excellent and the greatest of all the ways and pathways to eternal salvation because it is the greatest of all the commandments. It is the commandment to love. Truth reveals Himself as love, for God is love. For this reason "those who abide in love abide in God."

To prove that this Super Highway is the most excellent way, let us listen to what St. Paul says: "I will show you a more excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing."

Then, to double check that we are in the right direction he gives us signs along this highway: "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable and resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things."

Thus if we are not patient and kind we are in the wrong direction; if we are jealous or boastful we are in the wrong direction; if we are arrogant or rude we are in the wrong direction. If we are so adamant in insisting our own way and will never yield even to the good wishes of others we are in the wrong direction; if

we are irritable, which is a sign of pride just as meekness is a sign of humility, or resentful we are in the wrong direction; if we rejoice at wrong instead of rejoicing in the right we are in the wrong direction, and so on....

This is the highway that Christ built in this world to bring us across the border of this world to His own kingdom. It is a very straight road because it is light. Christ says: "I am the light of the world." Even children who are perceptive enough can notice that light travels in a straight line. For this reason we can assuredly say that the way of the Lord Jesus is the way of perfection. It is the way of holiness. Notice also that when we are traveling on a highway there are exits along the way.

The same is true in the Highway of the Lord Jesus. There are exits, too. Exits here mean the temptations in this life to commit sin. The reason why there are exits on this super excellent Highway is that we are still on a period of probation while still in this world to test us whether we really love God or not or whether we will keep His statutes, commandments, and decrees. We will mention several of these exits so that we will be aware once we catch sight of them. One of these, of course, is pride, the other is lust, the other ones are vainglory, anger, sloth, gluttony, insincerity, infidelity, dishonesty, and so on.

So long as we do not act these out we do not "exit" into them. Notice also that when we are driving on a highway just a little distraction or a little sleepiness can waggle our car, so also even a little "entertainment" of these "exits" can disturb the serenity of our soul. The reason for this is that once we are on this Highway our soul become so sensitive and refine that we develop a "sense" of what is right and wrong. Our greatest freedom is to stay on the Highway.

Part of the mystery of evil is to use this freedom as an opportunity of the wounded side of our human nature to exit from this Super Highway. In other words, so long as we are still in this present life there is a tension within us between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the spirit.

This is very apparent in what St. Paul say: "We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members."

St. Paul accepted the wretchedness of this condition, and yet did not allow himself just to wallow in it or be stuck to it but trumpeted that Christ Jesus Our Lord has all the power to deliver us from this condition. Thus we have to give thanks to God the Father through Him.

We started traveling on this Super Highway at our baptism, but the majority of us at some points in our lives, as this mystery of evil within us shows, have “exited” from this most excellent way and entered into a place of “unlikeness,” that is, a place where God is no longer the dominant force in our life or the number One in our life, a place solely interested only in this world and the desires of the flesh.

This is exemplified in the story of the prodigal son who “exited” from his father’s house into a “very far” place, a place which is “very unlike” to where he came from.

He got lost in the intricacy of the multiplicity of his desires. As a consequence, he lost the true knowledge of himself and of his father’s house – indulging in the fleeting pleasures of that place of unlikeness until he hit rock bottom and realized the difference between the place where he came from and the place where he is at present.

His own misery and confusion tempered with memory of profusion of his father’s house plus the remembrance of his father’s inherent mercy and his mother’s benevolent humility guided him back to his true home. This is an image of conversion, a restoration of our “likeness” to God, a finding our way back to the Super Highway where we came from.

Having experienced traveling both Highways in some points in our life, we can see the colossal difference between them. The sincerity of our conversion is proved and measured by the genuineness of our forsaking the way that leads to eternal death, as the Scripture says that there are ways that seem good to a person but the end of them is death, that is, eternal death of the soul.

On the other hand, having tasted the grateful relief of finding ourselves traveling again on the Highway of life we become aware of the gentle hands of the Holy Spirit graciously eradicating vices within us and planting virtues. No longer impudently trusting ourselves, but putting all our trust in God, we let Christ sit at the driver’s seat to guide us in all our ways.

It is noteworthy to mention that in a super highway there are many lanes, too. The psalmist calls these Lanes as “ways” and “paths,” praying in the depths of his heart that the Lord will make him know His ways and teach him His paths. Since this is God’s Highway and is built by His Son the Lord Jesus, so Christ knows all the lanes of this Highway such as: integrity, sincerity, honesty, modesty, gentleness,

meekness, goodness, kindness, humility, chastity, self-control, peace, patience, inner joy, prudence, temperance, justice, mercy, forgiveness, and so on, that is, all that is good, right, and true.

Notice also that in a highway there are fast lanes, the same is true in Christ's Super Highway, namely: Faith, Hope, and Love. See, how wide and luxurious this Highway is! It is design to narrow at the outset and very hard because it goes against the grain of our wounded fallen human nature, but if we just continue no matter what it becomes wider and wider and our heart expands and our mind enlightened, our will strengthened.

Just as in driving on a highway we move from one lane to another, so also in Christ's Super Highway we move from virtue to virtue, for instance, from gentleness to meekness or from integrity to sincerity or from mercy to forgiveness or from modesty to humility, and so on.

Thus even while on earth Christ allows those who let Him be at the driver's seat to have a "taste" of what it will be like to be in our "fatherland," that is, we will move from "glory to glory," from eternal joy to eternal beauty, from unending beauty to unending majesty, to unending majesty to everlasting peace, from everlasting peace to infinite happiness, from infinite happiness to endless goodness, and so on for all eternity.

All these are one In the Beatific Vision where we are given the "light of glory" to be able to see God as He is, just as all the lanes are contain in one highway.

So long as we let Christ be at the driver's seat the gravity towards the "exits" is amazingly poised, "for what partnership has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial?" In other words, Christ will never exit into the places of sin. He came into our world. He became like us in all things except sin.

So, if we notice ourselves exiting into places of "unlikeness," we have to humble ourselves and accept that we are the one driving, that we are not yet dead to ourselves, that Christ is not yet the sole ruler of our life. The I – the ego, or the false self still wanted to control.

Christ allows this to happen, because He respects our freedom. He groans and gentle say: "You do this, and I keep silent. You think that I am like you." That is why our greatest freedom is to give our freedom to Christ and let Him be the sole ruler of our lives. Then we will know by our own experience what it means: "It is no longer I that lives, but Christ lives in me....The life that I now live, I no longer live for myself but for Him who loves me and died for me...and was raised for my justification."

Thus forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, let us press on toward our heavenly home which God has prepared for us since the foundation of the world. With Christ at the driver's seat of our lives we have the assurance that we shall arrive to that Promised Land in spite of all the trials and challenges along the way.

This trip back to our true home is even more delightful, peaceful, and joyful when the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit are with us. They have limitless supplies of graces to sustain us the whole trip. We know that the Blessed Virgin is the seat of Wisdom and the Holy Spirit is truth, as Christ said: "When the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...."

Thus with the Wisdom and Truth with us they will lead us in all the ways of the Lord Jesus and will teach us the excellent way where our former uncleanness and foolishness will no longer have its sway, as the Scripture says: "And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not pass over it, and fools shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come upon it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

One of the instruments of good works that St. Benedict says in his rule is to yearn for everlasting life with holy desire. If this desire is so intense, then we can say with St. Paul: "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better."

As wings are necessary to birds in order to fly, so these holy desires are necessary to our soul in order to advance in the way of perfection. This is owing to God's mercy and love, for He desires not the death of us sinners but that we may be converted and live. →

Icon # 239 = Youthful Sins Forgotten

"Be mindful of thy mercy, O Lord, and of thy steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth, or my transgression; according to thy steadfast love remember me, for thy goodness' sake, O Lord!"

Only few people have less soiled their innocence in their youth. I say "less soiled" even though these people are remarkably innocent and good, because they are the one who put themselves forward and say, "I am the greatest sinner!" – as if they are vying who is the magna cum Laude of sinners. An example of these people are: St. Therese of the Child Jesus, St. Gabriel Possenti, St. John

Berchman, St. Dominic Savio, St. Aloysius Gonzaga, St. Estanislau Kostka, St. Maria Goretti, and St. Gemma Galgani.

They acknowledge their sinfulness even though they live a saintly life. They have a very good self-knowledge. They are the true psychologist. Sinners, on the other hand, will contend that they have no sin and will unbendingly assert that the sinful things they are doing are not wrong. It helps them placates their conscience.

But in doing so they put themselves in a very dangerous position, because it makes God unmindful of His mercy and brings to His mind their transgression and the sins of their younger days, compounded by the subsequent years of unrighteous living – yielding every part of their bodies to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity as instruments of wickedness.

This is, of course, a wrong investment because its return is death, for the wages of sin is death. On the other hand, if we yield every part of our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness the return that we get is sanctification and its end eternal life. This is certainly an excellent investment. Its interest is just out of this world!

Consequently, God will no longer remember the sins of our youth, as the psalmist says: “Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin.” The prophet Isaiah, too, bore witness to this when he heard the Lord says: “I, I am He who blots out your transgression for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins...I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist....”

It is unequivocal that nothing burdens the soul and draws it down as the consciousness of sin, as David lamented in the depths of his heart, “My sins are always before me.” However, if we truly repent and try the best we can to turn away from our sins, then, according to the steadfast love of the Lord He will remember us but not remember the sins of our past, as the Lord said: “But if a wicked man turns away from all his sins which he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgression which he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness which he has done he shall live.”

We have to admit, though, that so long as we are still on earth we cannot live a completely sinless existence. We will fail from time to time, sins and faults will be committed, but the effect of these failures can be mitigated by sincere confession, penance, acts of charity, and forgiveness towards others. As the Lord has forgiven us we need also to forgive.

One of the most consoling and liberating experience in our lives is to receive and give forgiveness. "Although this business of forgiving others is so demanding and difficult for us", as St. Leo the Great says, "it is as the same time a tremendous joy to know that the Lord uses it to heal our own wounds. How often we need forgiveness ourselves for the innumerable faults we fall into! And here we are given the key. When we forgive those who offended us, the Lord forgives us, thus remembering not our sins and transgression." This is owing to the steadfast love and goodness of our God. →

Icon # 240 = Instruction: Conscience

"Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way."

One of the instructions of Our Lord to us sinners while we are still on our way either to eternal happiness with God in heaven or eternal sadness with the devil in hell is to be reconciled with His word, that is, to conform our life to His teaching.

This is so because the word that He said acts as our accuser while we are still on the way and be our judge on the day of final judgment. It is perfectly just because it knows the thoughts and intentions of every heart. It seeks to motivate, to reveal unsuspected sources of strength in our soul, to revitalize ideals, to find and encourage what seems lost.

Wherefore, if today we hear His voice we need not harden our heart, for by doing so even if our sins are like scarlet He will kindly cleanse our soul and make it white as light; and as far as the east is from the west He will remove our sins. On the other hand, after repeated instruction we still harden our heart and stopped the ears of our soul to the charming voice of the Holy Spirit, we will eventually lose the sense of sin. We will no longer hear the gentle whisper of the small still voice of God which we call conscience.

The voice of conscience will become weak by frequently "overriding" what it tells us. This is what happened to people who persist in their sins. The sin of the sinner blunts or dulls his/her understanding of the truth: truth about himself, about reality, and about God, giving him a moral view of his actions which does not properly reveal the depravity of his actions due to his conscience being "covered with the salve of sin," if we might coin a phrase to describe how sin mollifies the "prick" of conscience. "Hardened" is precisely the word fitting to express what happens to a sinner's conscience: it becomes hard like a callous, because it has been abused and misused.

The reason why mortal sinners need to defend their error is that if they do not defend it, the constant knowledge of their dire predicament of imminently falling into eternal, incomprehensible suffering and unimaginable torment should they die would be more than they could bear.

This doesn't mean, however, that there's no more hope for conversion. This conversion can be triggered by catastrophic events that fell upon them and shook the very depths of their being, a wake up call – we could say, “for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer by human passions but by the will of God.”

This kind of suffering has a wholesome meaning because it is now seen in the eyes of God, that is, taken and accepted with faith in His goodness and mercy. Moreover, in order to minimize the possibility of regressing back to one's former way of life the Lord in His goodness and uprightness provides instruction along the way, saying: “Let the time that is past suffice for doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry.”

If a person has even a flicker of humility the chances of his keeping heed to this instruction will increase, because it will provide him the light to see that this is the right thing to do and that he is now back on the way of the Lord. →

Icon # 241 = God leads the humble

“He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.”

God is so powerful, yet we have to assert that it is only the humble that He is able to lead in what is right and teach His way, because only the humble are capable of learning the way of the Lord which is a way of gentleness and humility, as the Lord says: “Learn from Me for I am meek and humble of heart.”

If we don't have any flicker of humility there's no way for us to be receptive to the teaching of the Lord. We have to acquire a little of it first before we can begin our lesson. And nothing is more efficacious in acquiring humility than knowledge of ourselves as we really are.

Humility accepts our human vulnerability and the fact that we sin. It made us realize that to remain above reproach all the time is not our fundamental task, because the thought that we should at all times be above reproach makes a mockery of repentance and forgiveness as well as love for it suggests the need to look seemingly good in the sight of other people and never be caught at fault.

Humility has nothing to do with a low self-image. Real humility brings freedom, freedom of the children of God, not guilt and resentment, for both real humility and repentance do not paralyze but free us to keep on going. Humility made it easy to repent and confess our wrongdoing and accept forgiveness because the humble person knew very well that all of us human beings, except Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary, are sinners. It has no problem believing that God loves us and will not reject us.

In the University of Love Christ teaches His students His way, that is, His commandment to love one another. If we want to learn to love our brothers or sisters, we begin first with the alphabet, that is, we begin first in little things trying to avoid harming them, refusing to gossip about them, and offering them help no matter how small it is when it is in our power to do so. Whatever good or ill we do for another person, we do for ourselves because we are joined to one another in the body of Christ which is the Church.

Very nearly the hardest temptation we struggle against is passing judgment on the actions and life of our neighbor. The Pharisee went away unjustified not because he gave thanks to God for the good things he did, for we too ought to give thanks to God when He helps us to do something good. He was condemned because he looked with contempt upon a particular tax collector's very being because of his sin. No amount of goodness can put us in a position to render judgment on another's sin. Only God can do this.

Growth in the way of Our Lord Jesus propels us increasingly into a deeper compassion for the frailty of others. Love makes us less critical as we identify with them. One of the desert fathers say, when we see someone sin: "Oh Lord, he today, I tomorrow!"

Humility is the motion of a constantly inward dying in ourselves so that Christ may live. When Christ sees this in us, then, we are now ready to learn His way. →

Icon # 242 = Paths of the Lord

"All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies."

Loving can be a difficult business. It is impossible to gnash the teeth and love, no matter how much we want to. Praying to God to make us love without any other effort on our part will not make us love. God will not change our hearts without a real participation on our parts. The one way by which we can

participate in the divine, in eternity, is to practice in this mortal life the lesson which the Lord Jesus taught and lived, the difficult law of love.

It is difficult, but not impossible because God does not command impossible things; and this is His commandment that we love one another as He loves us. God loved us first that we might love in return – not because He needed our love, but because we could not be what He created us to be except by loving Him, and by loving Him we learn also to love our neighbor.

However, love does not mean that we have to feel the same toward everyone: we are not asked to enjoy the company of all people equally. What we are asked is that we should not close our heart to those in need of our assistance if we have the means to do it and if it is in our power to do so, that is, we should not just say to them: “Go in peace, be warmed and filled without giving them the things needed for the body.” Charity, as St. Therese said, should not only be a matter of feeling it should be shown itself in deeds.

Faith, too, is an inseparable companion of love. Wherever love is faith is there. Steadfast love and faithfulness are sterling qualities of all the paths of the Lord, but they are known only to those who kept the Lord's covenant and His testimonies, to those who did not erase from their hearts, by their sins, the law of God which He wrote in their hearts; to those who bore witness in their lives that God is true, to those who are not ashamed to testifying to Christ in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation; for if we receive the testimony of men the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that He has borne witness to His Son.

And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son, for His Son gives eternal life to whomever He will. And not only this, He will also betroth us to Him forever; He will betroth us to Him in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. He will betroth us to Him in faithfulness; and we shall know the Lord. →

Icon # 243 = Forgiveness 1

“For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great.”

How terrible it would be if our guilt will no longer be blotted out and it will become like worms that will never die – and just gnawing our conscience for all eternity without any respite whatsoever even for a slightest moment and keep on feeding on the remembrance of our sins without the hope of pardon! Forever accusing us!

Certainly, King David has tasted a drop of it when he said that his sin was always before him. Undoubtedly, nothing burdens the soul and drags it down as the remembrance of sin. The beginning of our righteousness, therefore, is the confession of our sin. With King David, we have to say: "Have mercy on me, O God, in your kindness; in your compassion blot out my offense. Wash me more and more from my sin, and cleanse me from my guilt."

We have to admit that so long as we are still in this present life it is utterly impossible to live a sinless existence. Whether we like it or not we will fail from time to time, but the upshot of this sin can be mitigated by sincere confession, penance, acts of humility and charity, and forgiveness toward others. If we forgive others our heavenly Father will forgive us too; but if we don't forgive others He will not forgive ours as well. Moreover, if we are ready to forgive, we have been forgiven.

We can easily understand that by forgiving each other we can somehow make our lives easier and our prayer to God more peaceful. Just as God forgave us we need also to forgive one another. To be able to forgive does us good personally. Being forgiven raises people up. It is good for us to have the courage and humility to ask for forgiveness, and the generosity to forgive.

The deepest form of human liberation – liberation from the grip of sin and its effects – requires the acknowledgment and confession of sins. Confession leads to forgiveness, and forgiveness gives birth to peace and joy.

If God should mark our guilt, who could endure? But with Him is found forgiveness that we may revere Him, for as sin increased grace abounded all the more. →

Icon # 244 = Filial Fear 1

"Who is the man that fears the Lord? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose."
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Surely, fear of the Lord here does not mean the fear of a slave toward his master or the fear of a culprit toward the law enforcement officer, but a fear that is filial, that is, fear of displeasing the beloved – fear of separation from the beloved. It consists in the repugnance that our soul feels at thought of being separated from the Lord.

This kind of fear comes from love. It is true that perfect love casts out a certain type of fear, but there is also a fear that is the basis of love. One who loves deeply has a fear that is above all other fears – fear of parting from the beloved – fear of doing or saying what one knows offend the beloved. The Lord takes

delight to instruct a person who has this kind of fear in his heart. It has a good dosage of docility to follow the way that the Lord chooses.

Of course, the way that the Lord chooses is the way of inner tranquility, the way of wisdom. In other words, Christ's own way because He is the wisdom of God. All who are instructed in His way could no longer help but cling to Him and doesn't want to be separated from Him.

Filial fear, therefore, is the beginning of true wisdom, because in order to possess divine wisdom, we need to unite ourselves closely to the Lord that nothing can separate us from Him just as an iron cannot be separated from the fire so long as it is united to the fire. The Father who drew us to His Son is greater than all and no one can snatch us from the Father's hand.

Filial fear of the Lord has its own intrinsic power to make us humble, for it puts us in our proper place, makes us know our true value, prevents presumption, and makes us feel our own deficiency because apart from Him we can do nothing.

Being receptive of the instruction of the Lord gives us a high assurance to inherit the prosperity of His kingdom which He promised to the meek and humble of heart. Hence, fear of the Lord leads to our ultimate destiny – the kingdom of heaven, our true home. →

Icon # 245 = True Prosperity

"He himself shall abide in prosperity, and his children shall possess the land."

St. Teresa of Avila said that everyone who has God wants nothing, and that God alone suffices. Thus when we have God in our heart we shall abide in "well-being," and our children, that is, the virtues of our soul will go with us when we depart from this world to possess eternally the kingdom of heaven which God has prepared for us as our inheritance because everything that belongs to Him will be ours too, as Christ Himself said: "Come O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...."

It is not an exaggeration to say that the majority of the people in this world, if given a chance and has all the opportunities, would undoubtedly like to become rich and abide in prosperity because this will enable them to do what they want and to live in luxury even if by doing so they will put their souls in jeopardy. This is because in the human heart God put a desire for happiness.

On the other hand, there are also people who would be willing to endure, if they asked for the grace and are granted, all kinds of sufferings and afflictions

for God's sake – believing in their heart that by doing so they will share in the happiness of God forever even if, by implication, they will be atrociously humiliated.

Of course, and example of this is Christ Himself who, for the sake of the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising its shame, so is now seated at the right hand of the Father. This has been followed by His apostles and martyrs from one generation to the next. This is because God put in the human heart a desire for happiness. In other words, people in this world agree that there is in the human heart a desire to abide in prosperity. They just dissented as to where this prosperity will be found and what kind of prosperity they are seeking for.

I have to contend that the true prosperity, which last forever, can be found only when we abide in the Lord and He in us, for everyone who finds Him finds eternal life and obtains favor from Him; with Him are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity. For this reason, the poorest of the poor who abide in the Lord is far richer than the richest person in the world who despises the Lord. Thus abiding in the Lord is akin to laying up treasures in heaven which we shall possess forever. →

Icon # 246 = Friendship with God

“The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.”

We mentioned that fear of the Lord means “filial fear” not “servile fear” or a “culprit fear,” that is, fear of a felon toward a law enforcement officer. The Lord expect childlike fear and gentle love from His intimate friends, so that fear may always hold us back from sinning and love may unite us with Him in complete devotion and piety.

The author of the book of Ecclesiastes, at the near end of his life, after he had ransacked all earthly goods in pursuit of happiness, made a conclusion that all is vanity and that the most important thing in life is to fear God and keep His commandments for this is the whole duty of the human person.

Isn't that keeping the commandments of the Lord is an authentic sign of friendship with Him? This is what the Lord Jesus said: “You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”

From of old God made covenant with His chosen people that He shall be their God and they shall be His people, and He shall put His Spirit in them and write His commandments in their hearts.

In the fullness of time the Word of God, who is God Himself, who became a human being like us in all things except sin, who came not to destroy the law and the prophets but to fulfill them, established a new covenant in His blood, that is, He delivered Himself up for our salvation so that we may no longer live for ourselves but for Him who for our sake died and rose again for our justification.

He took our human flesh and made it a glorious copy of His own Body so that our own body will be a worthy dwelling place of His Spirit – the Holy Spirit. Wherefore, the Lord said: “If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” This is a friendship far excellence for it is born out of love, and love is gently feared to preserve us from breaking this covenant. →

Icon # 247 = Symptoms of Love

“My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for he will pluck my feet out of the net.”

One of the preliminary symptoms of love is when we often caught ourselves looking at someone, our heart beats eagerly than usual, then nourished by thinking about that person. Of course, time will tell whether this is just an infatuation or whether it is really love. If it is infatuation the intensity of its heat will eventually died down. If it is truly love it is transformative. Even bedraggle people who experienced real love were renewed by it. It plucks their feet out of the net of their former vices, from the passions of their former ignorance.

The same is true with those who truly love the Lord, for even though they are in the world they are not of the world. Their feet were plucked out of the seduction of the world, its allurements and empty promises. From gazing only on the things of this present life their eyes are now directed toward the Lord, looking steadily at the Lord Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith who is now at the right hand of the Father interceding on our behalf. Like the eyes of a lover toward his beloved, so their eyes are riveted on the Lord.

This is a foretaste, then, of the beatific vision where we continuously behold the breathtaking beauty of God. We participate in the life of the angels who constantly gaze upon the face of God.

Having our eyes ever toward the Lord is by itself a very powerful force to be plucked out of the net of unseemly pleasures, because all things become insipid

once we have tasted the goodness of the Lord, all beauty of this world is supreme ugliness when interfaced with the loveliness of the beauty of Christ who is the image of the invisible God.

Christ said that He is the Truth. Wherefore, having the eyes of our mind ever toward Him facilitates the plucking of our feet from what is false, from dishonesty and treachery. He also said that He is life. Ergo, having the eyes of our heart ever toward the Lord expedites the plucking of our feet from the attachment of the things of this world and from the culture of death. →

Icon # 248 = Companionship

“Turn to me, and be gracious to me; for I am lonely and afflicted.”

Having our eyes ever toward the Lord and our feet plucked out of the net of what is displeasing to Him, it is now His turn to turn to us and be gracious to us. We are lonely because our eyes were not on the Lord but on something else, we were caught by the net of our fleshly desires and our hearts are afflicted with many pangs.

However, as bitter medicines destroy the harmful elements in the body, so the grievousness of our afflictions purify our hearts from evil passions. This is owing to God's gracious kindness to us and a signal that the eyes of our soul can now look eye to eye at our Lord when He turns to us. Hence, we will no longer be lonely even though we will be by ourself because we have a companion within us. This is a sharing in the life of our Lord, as he said: “You will leave me alone, but I am not alone for the Father is with me.”

The Lord's desire to turn to us and be gracious to us is far beyond we can think or imagine, because He even left the angels in heaven and became one with us. We have only to open our hearts to Him and be receptive to His graciousness, for His heart is wide open for us.

Our loneliness and afflictions moved him to come to our aid, for we are like the distressed traveler who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and was beaten, left half dead, unable to help ourselves, for we were without strength. But then comes Our Lord Jesus; He was gracious to us and has compassion on us; He turns to us and binds up our bleeding wounds, pours in not oil and wine but His own precious blood.

He consoles us of our loneliness and takes care of our afflictions, and bids us to trust in Him and put all the expenses of our cure into His account, for He is constantly pleading at the right side of His Father on our behalf. This is a strong

and solid evidence of the graciousness of the Lord and that He has turned to us when we were lonely and afflicted. Accordingly, He: →

Icon # 249 = Forgiveness 2

“Relieve the troubles of my heart and bring me out of my distresses. Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins.”

In becoming one of us in all things except sin, Christ the Lord sets forth the kindness and love of God toward fallen humanity. He came to our rescue and relief even when He knew full well that it would expose Him to abasement and suffering.

Thus He is ready to pity and help us when we are stripped of every plea, wounded in conscience, and without hope of deliverance. The devil had robbed us, stripped us, wounded us; such is the mischief that sin had done to the human race. We have our share in this sin, and it causes trouble in our heart. Its remembrance brings anguish in our soul, for nothing burdens the soul and weighs it down as the consciousness of sin. So, it is absolutely necessary that we beseech the Lord for the forgiveness of all our sins.

He gives us a hint that He forgave, that is, when we forgive others too, because if we are ready to forgive we have already been forgiven. The heaviest chain that a human person could wear is the chain of unforgiving heart. Who could deliver us from this shackle of trouble? Unforgiving heart brings in itself all kinds of troubles and pangs of affliction. It wounds the soul.

We have all done harm and we have all sustained injuries. Forgiveness gives assurance that the Lord who enables us to be transformative forgivers towards one another has lovingly and mysteriously dressed those wounds. So, as God has forgiven us we need also to forgive one another so as not to give the devil a chance to have a good grip on us.

Once we had given and received forgiveness from one another we have to do the best we can not to spend the most of our time to be pre-occupied by our sins, for although remembrance of sin is undoubtedly necessary it should not become an endless pre-occupation, otherwise, it would drain our heart of its energy and lead us more and more to despondency. We have also to call to mind the loving-kindness of God and be grateful to Him for relieving the anguish of our heart and pulling us out of our miseries. →

Icon # 250 = Unrelenting Warfare

"Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me. Oh guard my life, and deliver me; let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in thee."

St. Paul emphatically warned us that our ultimate struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Who could ever withstand this super power of wickedness and their allies who are in the mood of engaging an unrelenting internecine warfare with those who sided themselves with God?

This warfare had been launched wickedly from the womb to the tomb. So violent are their hatred that they don't discriminate any creed. They murder the innocents in secret without any regret. Do they think that He who made the eyes cannot see and He who made the ears cannot hear? Did they not know that their crimes are climbing up to heaven and touch the apple of the eye of Him who is seated on the throne, the Son of Man of whom all authority to execute judgment has been given?

They hated us without cause simply because we are followers of Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. But they will have no excuse for their hatred, for nothing that is covered that will not be revealed nor hidden that will not be known. We are for peace, but when we speak they are for fighting. If the Lord had not been on our side the violence of their hatred would have swallowed us up, but thanks be to God through Our Lord Jesus Christ who guards our life and delivers us from their violent hatred so as not to be put to shame.

This is owing to God's grace for having taken refuge in Him. The person, then, who takes refuge in God, is like a man who built his house upon the rock who stood so firm even when buffeted by the violent hatred of the prince of darkness and his allies. We have only to be still and know that the Lord is God who guards us as a hen guarded her chicks who take refuge under her wings.

It is our foes who will stumble and fall and will be put to everlasting shame because they will be cast out from the presence of Him who sits at the right of the Father, and who said: "As for these enemies of mine who do not want me to rule over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence," and "cast them out into the outer darkness."

There they will wallow in their shame. But for those who take refuge in the Lord and do what is right and shun what is evil and all that is contrary to sound

doctrine there will be joy and gladness of heart forever, for their integrity and uprightness will never know any decay. →

Icon # 251 = Preserving One's Integrity and Uprightness

"May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for thee. Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles."

For those who know how to wait for the Lord even if He is delayed in coming, for He wanted to give each person a chance to repent before His final coming, will likely preserve their integrity and uprightness because they nurtured in their hearts, by prayers and good works, the readiness to welcome the Lord when he comes like the five wise bridesmaids who were ready for the bridegroom when He comes at last.

Readiness is, of course, living the life of the kingdom, living the quality life described in the Sermon on the Mount. Many can do this for a short while; but when the Lord is delayed, the problems arise. For instance, being a peacemaker for a day is not as demanding as being a peacemaker year after year when hostility breaks out again and again, and the Lord is delayed. Being merciful for a night can be soothingly pleasant, but being merciful for a lifetime, when the Lord is delayed, requires patient waiting.

Hence, those who wait patiently for the Lord and prepared themselves for His arrival by simply living the ordinary Christian life with its concomitant demands will preserve their integrity and uprightness. The Lord will redeem them out of all their troubles, for He did not permit trouble to trouble them beyond their strength; but in their troubles He provided a way of escape so as not to be overwhelmed by them, for the Lord wisely knows how to rescue the upright from trouble.

It has to be asserted, though, that the Lord will not grant them the exemption from trouble, but that He will provide help for their troubles. We can see this in the life of Christ Himself who was not exempted from the highest embodiment of trouble, that is – death, but passes from death to life. His integrity and uprightness was perfectly preserved as He silently await for His resurrection. Thus was ultimately delivered from all the troubles He willingly endured for our redemption.

We, too, may preserve our integrity and uprightness as we await for the Lord so long as we do not begin to beat our fellow menservants and maidservants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards and get drunk when Our Lord is delayed in coming, or to say privately in our hearts or to declare openly in the public

squares: "As for this Jesus who is alleged to have ascended to heaven, we do not know what happen to him now."

Then we begin to worship the works of our hands and to glory in technological progress and adore our scientific achievements, and unabashedly declare to the hearing of all the inhabitants of heaven and earth: "Listen O people of the world, these are the gods who deliver you from human ignorance and save you from the slavery of religion, especially the Catholic religion who fearlessly opposed embryonic cell research and unflinchingly condemned abortion and all immoral acts." Then like mad men we unabatingly indulge in our insatiable passions and desires.

If we do these things or even if we just contemplate on them in our hearts we will never be freed from all our troubles. Certainly, our integrity and uprightness will be totally distorted.

On the other hand, if we do what is right, just, and true; if we do not repay evil for evil; if we do not cast our lot with adulterers; if we do not unbridle our tongue in speaking deceit; if we do not lie in secret against the innocents; if we do not slander other people; if we do not maliciously attempt to take the speck from our brother/sister's eye before removing the log that is in our own; if we do not withhold our food to the poor; if we do not harbor a grudge against someone; if we are not greedy for gain, but lay up treasures in heaven; if we bear one another's burden so as to fulfill the law of Christ; if we pray for those who persecute us; if we let the light of holiness shine in us so that people will be able to recognize the good works we do, by God's grace, and will give glory to God; if we devotedly cultivate our prayer life, so as the be able to resist temptations; if we willingly and patiently carry our cross in imitation of Christ; if we love one another for by doing so people will know that we are Christ's disciples; if we keep Christ's commandments as a genuine sign of our love for Him; then, our uprightness and integrity will truly know no decay, and our troubles will no longer trouble us.

This is the blessing of all who put their trust in God and lifts up their souls to the Lord who is infinitely kind to all who are not skeptical of His goodness and love.

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Icon # 252 = Vindication: Poor Widow

Psalm 26 (25)

“Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering.”

At one point in His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus told a parable to the effect that we ought always to pray and not lose heart. It is a story about a judge in a certain city who neither feared God nor regarded any of his fellow human being. In that city there was also a widow who kept coming to him and saying: “Vindicate me against my adversary.”

For a while the judge refused; but afterward he said to himself, “Though I neither fear God nor regarded man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming.”

To hammer down His point the Lord wanted us to hear carefully what the unrighteous judge says. Then He goes on to say: “And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

In this parable there are two obvious characters: the judge and the widow. The judge was clearly not a Jewish judge, because all ordinary Jewish disputes were taken before the elders and not into the public courts at all. Under Jewish law, if a matter was taken to arbitration, one man could not constitute a court.

There were always three judges, one chosen by the plaintiff, one by the defendant, and one independently. This judge was one of the paid magistrates appointed either by King Herod or by the Romans. Such judges were reputed to be notorious. Unless a plaintiff is influential and had money to bribe his way to a verdict he had no hope of ever getting his case settled. These judges were said to pervert justice for a dish of meat.

On the other hand, the widow was the symbol of all who were poor and defenseless. It was obvious that she, without resource of any kind, had no hope of ever extracting justice from such a judge. But she had one weapon which she undauntingly used: persistence.

What the Lord Jesus, therefore, was saying is that: if, in the end, an unjust and rapacious judge can be wearied into giving a widow woman justice, how much more will God, who is a loving Father, give His children what they need, and vindicate us against our adversary – the devil? If this widow prevails by being importunate, much more shall we prevail! She came to an unjust judge; we

came to a righteous Father. She had no friend to speak for her, but we have an Advocate with the Father, His own Son – Our Lord Jesus – who ever live to make intercession for us. She had no encouragement to ask, but we are told to ask and it shall be given. She could have access to the judge only at some certain times, but we may cry to God at all times.

That is why the Lord said we must never be discouraged in prayer. We will never grow weary in prayer and our faith will not stagger if, after we have offer to God our prayers and requests, of course with the Blessed Virgin Mary who also experienced being a widow, we add the perfect prayers: “Behold, I’m the handmaid of the Lord be it done to me according to thy word;” and “Thy will be done.”

This is an integral part of our walking in integrity, a trusting in the Lord without wavering amidst the vicissitudes of human life. In the end, when the Lord comes, even though He shall not find faith on earth, He shall find faith in us because we trusted Him.

We have to trust God wholeheartedly because He will not forsake us no matter what. He is so good that He could not find it in His generous heart to careen us to ourselves if we surrender ourselves completely to Him. Wherefore, He vindicates us. →

Icon # 253 = Growing in Self-Knowledge

“Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and my mind. For thy steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to thee.”

The psalmist here sounds like a heavy weight boxer ready to spar with the Lord. The only reasonable grounds for his daring boldness to spar with the Lord, or rather to ask the Lord to prove, try, and test him, are that he puts before his eyes the steadfast love of the Lord, and he walks in fidelity of heart to the Lord. The steadfast love of the Lord is like a mirror in which we can rightly see ourselves, and by seeing ourselves rightly we will grow in self-knowledge.

Knowledge of the Lord comes as we walked honestly with Him and put before our eyes what He did for us: His Incarnation, His hidden life, His passion and death and resurrection and ascension to heaven; and knowledge of self reveals our own nothingness to us in such an absolutely way that we can never forget it, and the same light makes us see God in the depths of our soul.

There is an abyss of misery; but there is also in us something divine. Disappointed in our own human strength, we lean on that infinite strength that offers itself to

us. True knowledge requires good psychological health and the ability to recognize and to counter neurotic tendencies as they appear.

As gold is tested by fire, so we will be tested by the burning steadfast love of the Lord whether we will be able to walk in this fire without being burned like the three young men in the burning-furnace who walked in faithfulness to the Lord – thus made it as the foundation of their lives. The steadfast love of the Lord, veritably, has double effects: as affliction in the reprobate, and as happiness in the Blessed.

It would be an “intolerable torment for those who have not acquired it within themselves” – whose works did not survive when tested with fire; but an unimaginable glory and bliss for those who walked in fidelity to the Lord in spite of the tribulations they experienced while still on earth. The deed that they did in the body survive when tested with fire. “They have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Though it is true that they were greatly tried, it is also true that they were not tested beyond their strength because the Lord knows of what we are made. Accordingly, since they watch and pray the muscles of their heart and the sinews of their mind are greatly strengthened so as to endure their trials. Trials which come from the Lord have an aim to heal the diseases of our soul. They are for our good that we may learn humility – thus by being humble we become friends of God.

As friends of God, we are placed in trials, not in punishment as some people think, but with a view of our spiritual progress. Yet divine providence proportions these trials according to our strength and needs. In these trials are mingled both consolation and grief, light and darkness, wars and aid. This is a sign of the increase of God’s help.

St. Isaac of Syria says, “As long as you are journeying in the way to the city of the kingdom and are drawing near the city of God, let this be for you a signpost: the strength of the trials you encounter. The nearer you draw and progress, the more trials multiply against you. Whenever you perceive in your soul diverse and intensified trials in your path, therefore, know that at that time your soul has in fact secretly entered a new higher level, and that grace has been added to her in the state where she was found; for God leads the soul into the afflictions of trials in exact proportion to the magnificence of the grace bestows.”

So, if we walk in faithfulness before the Lord and rivet our eyes to His steadfast love, then, the testing of our faith produces a patient endurance; and our perseverance in patient endurance will have its full effect in such a way that it

will sustain us in our walking in the way of perfection, because God's grace is sufficient for us. →

Icon # 254 = Bad Company ruins good morals

“I do not sit with false men, nor do I consort with dissemblers; I hate the company of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked.”

It is as bright as a noon day sun that when we walk in faithfulness to the Lord and that His grace is actively working in us that we do not keep company with liars and do not make friends with hypocrites and, above all, will not sit with the wicked.

It is not puritanism on our part to do so nor pronouncing unfair judgment, but simply because light has nothing to do with darkness nor Christ has to do with Belial. Besides, bad company will certainly ruin good morals and who we keep in company indicates who we are, as the famous axiom says: “Tell me who are your friends and I will tell you who you are.”

Certainly, we do not want to be identified with the liars, because Our Lord said that the Devil is a liar and the Father of lies. For this reason, we do not want to sit with the Devil and his friends because friendship with them is enmity with God.

We do not want to sit also with the wicked, because we are told by the Lord not to throw our pearl before the swine nor give dogs what is holy lest they trample it down and turn to attack us. Notice that it is only with the liars and the wicked that we should not sit, but it is left to one's prudence to sit with sinners as the Lord Jesus did. Of course, those who were self-righteous were scandalized by it.

It is true to say that all wicked are sinners, but not all sinners are wicked. It is also evident that the Lord came for sinners to repentance, but not for the wicked. The Devil and the fallen angels are wicked, thus the Lord did not come for them. In other words, the wicked are those who are impervious to repentance, whereas the sinners who has not turned wicked has still a vestige of susceptibility to repentance as in the case of Peter, Paul, Zacchaeus, and of us too. If you want Mary Magdalene also.

The people before the flood were so wicked, but Noah and his family did not sit with them. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah, too, were so wicked, but Lot and his family did not sit with them. It certainly vexed them to see the wickedness of those people, but they took it patiently; and it was by their patience that they share in the coming passion of the Christ. What good did they gain from it? Of course, they were save from the flood and from the fire.

These things happened for our instruction to give us a lesson that we should not make friendship with the liars and the wicked and should not eat the leaven bread of hypocrisy. In other words, although we are in the world we should not behave like worldly people while pretending that we are in the service of the Lord for it will make our whole life a lie and would amount to sitting with liars and the father of lies. Therefore, →

Icon # 255 = Water of Innocence

"I wash my hands in innocence, and go about thy altar, O Lord, singing aloud a song of thanksgiving, and tell all thy wondrous deeds."

It is a kind of revelation to realize that innocence can be likened to a water in which we can wash our hands. We can even go further to say that not only our hands, but also our heart as well as our mind can be washed by the water of innocence.

Innocence is like the pool in Siloam where we have to go and wash and receive our sight. It is a place of renewal and transformation wherein we put off our old nature which belongs to our former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts; a place where we acquire a new way of seeing and thinking wherein we put on the new nature created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Only few people were privileged to preserve the purity of the water of innocence of their lives, such as Gabriel Possenti, Gemma Galgani, Dominic Savio, Therese of the Child Jesus, Aloysius Gonzaga, etc. For most of us, this water of innocence had been contaminated, and even heavily polluted: waste of all kinds of impurities had been thrown there, dead animals of skepticism and incredulities are found there.

It is far beyond our natural resources to restore it to its pristine purity. Nonetheless, a company from heaven, owned by the Lord Jesus, came and negotiated with us – offering us His willing service, free of charge, to cleanse this water of innocence.

He did it Himself by shedding His blood on the cross and immersing Himself into the depths of this contaminated water of innocence, as the Scripture says that He became like us in all things except sin. We were cleansed not by an ordinary "chlorox"*² or any powerful cleansing chemicals, but by the "precious blood" of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

² Bleach

His zeal in cleansing this water of innocence is tantamount to His zeal in cleansing the Temple – the house of His Father, for we too are the temple of the Holy Spirit who is pure innocence itself.

Now that this water of innocence has been reconditioned to its untarnished lucidity, the virtues within us formed a committee to set up rules and regulations to guide us of its use. They are very sensitive in monitoring that no vices or any other impurities would contaminate this water of innocence again.

We have to do penance and receive the sacrament of reconciliation if it happens that any impurity or unseemly word, thought, or action falls into this water, or at least make a sincere act of contrition while waiting to receive this sacrament. Doing this is already a foretaste of seeing God in the depths of our heart, as the Scripture says: "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God."

Consequently, with clear conscience we can go about the altar of the Lord and can confidently sing a song of thanksgiving for all the wondrous deeds Our Lord has done for us, who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. For once we were darkness, but now we are children of light, of Him who says: "I am the light of the world. Everyone who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Thus we are now light in the Lord. For this reason, we have to walk as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good, right and true.

We who entered the monastery/religious life are highly privileged to access this water of innocence and go about the altar of the Lord singing spiritual hymns and chanting psalms day and night – like sheep going in and out to find pasture, because we have the Divine Office with us and have the boon to receive daily the Body, Blood, soul, humanity, and divinity of the Lord Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist which is the wellspring of holiness and the source and summit of the Christian life and the spring of living water welling up to eternal life. Besides, we don't have to travel several miles to receive the sacrament of reconciliation because there are priests in the monastery.

Although people in the outside world would find it very difficult to take care of the maintenance of this water of innocence, but it is not impossible so long as they take God seriously and intensify their prayer life and build up the inner cloister in their heart where they can go in and out to nourish themselves with the soothing presence of God amid their daily activities so as to be more prudent in their thoughts, words, and conduct.

The more each one possessed God, the more room each one had in him; and the more space is within him, the more God turned to each one. In the cloister of their heart there is an eternal altar where they can go about and offer a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

From this altar flows the water of innocence; and wherever this water flows it makes fresh and gives life, that is to say, out of their intimate union with God in prayer and contemplation flows their external activities whether it be in terms of singing spiritual songs and doing menial works or by preaching the words of God, for all these come from the Holy Spirit who inspires them in everyone to the greater glory of God. →

Icon # 256 = God's Habitation on Earth

"O Lord, I love the habitation of thy house, and the place where thy glory dwells."

If we follow any of the four senses of the Scripture: the literal sense, the moral sense, the allegorical sense, and the mystical sense, it is not contrary to sound doctrine to say that we are "the habitation of thy house, and the place where thy glory dwells," because we are the temple of the Holy Spirit which is the dwelling place of the Most High God here on earth.

Therefore, in loving the habitation of God's house – the place where His glory dwells, we are just fulfilling the great commandment to love ourselves as we would have love our neighbor; and of course, love God too, above all else, who dwells in us.

We hit also the bull's eye if we say that the Church is "the habitation of thy house, and the place where thy glory dwells," because the Church is the spouse of Christ – a bride adorned for her husband, bedecked with jewels, and having the glory of God with its radiance like a most rare diadem. The Church is bedecked with jewels because its teachings are precious.

The monastery is also the habitation of God on earth, a place where He has a special predilection not only because monks and nuns sang the praises of God day and night and has an incredibly nutritious food and drink, that is, the Body and Blood of the Lord – the food of angels, but also because they consecrated their whole lives, giving their only treasure – their two small coins, that is, their body and soul, for this purpose.

St. Paul tells us that "husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but

nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church, because we are members of his body." Therefore, in loving the Church and our monastery – the dwelling place of God on earth, we love Christ and ourselves, too, because we are His mystical body.

We show love for the Church when we keep her teachings, just as we show our love for Christ when we keep His commandments which are boiled down to the two great commandments of love. By keeping, then, Christ's commandments people will know that we are His disciples, and that God the Father has destined us in love to be His adopted children through Christ and will stay in His house forever to behold His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

He will sustain us with His grace so that we will not be carried away with sinners, because everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin and the slave does not remain in the house forever, but the children stay forever and have the rights and privileges to go in and out gazing upon the glory of the Lord. →

Icon # 257 = Acknowledgment of Sin

"Sweep me not away with sinners, nor my life with bloodthirsty men, men in whose hands are evil devices, and whose right hands are full of bribes."

Surely, Our Lord will not sweep us away with sinners if we recognize the sin within us and admit it, for this facilitates the opening of ourselves to the truth and light of God and not remain darkness; for it is only when sin is unacknowledged that the darkness remain, as it is written:..."men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed." Moreover, if we acknowledge our sins, Our Lord is faithful and just, and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Our sins had to be confessed before salvation could be obtained. Our conscience must be aroused; otherwise, Our Lord will sweep us away with sinners and cast us out of His sight. Hence, the first requirement for enlightenment is to remove the rough garment of sin; so we have to stop sinning now and cry out for mercy for our past sins.

We also pray that our life be not sweep away with bloodthirsty men. If only these men who are bloodthirsty would be thirsty for the blood of the Lord they would be doing well, for instead of using their hands as instrument for evil devices and bribery, they will now use them as instrument of righteousness for justification.

In once they were professional killer who are thirsting for blood and accept bribes to liquidate people, they will now live for the rest of their lives no longer by human passions but by the will of God. Of course, this will bewilder the hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places, for they will no longer do what they instigate in their mind to commit such monstrous act and they abuse them; but they will give an account to Our Lord who is ready to judge all spirits and all the living and the dead.

For once they were darkness and bloodthirsty, but now they are light in the Lord – walking righteously and speak uprightly. They now despise evil devices and shake their hands lest they hold a bribe. They also stop their ears from hearing of bloodshed and shut their eyes from looking upon evil.

In this case, to be swept with converted sinners is a wholesome thing because in sweeping the Lord will not throw us away, but rather gather us into His barn where the other repentant sinners, like sheep in the sheepfold are gathered together.

The most dangerous thing that could ever befall us, which we have to avoid with utmost carefulness, is to be swept away with unrepentant sinners who are not only bloodthirsty but are also ingenuous in inventing all kinds of evil devices, because there is awaiting for them a just and terrible sentence: “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

Then, there will be gnashing of teeth and their worms will never die, that is to say, their evil deeds will always be before them – the memory of them will never depart from them even for a single second. The worst thing of it is they will see the unspeakable splendor of the glory of God which they lost forever. →

Icon # 258 = Foundation in walking in Integrity

“But as for me, I walk in my integrity; redeem, and be gracious to me. My foot stands on level ground; in the great congregation I will bless the Lord.”

We have to assert that we can be steady in walking in our integrity only if we are rooted and grounded in the two great commandments of love: loving God and loving one’s neighbor as ourselves, because not even an angelic and encyclopedic knowledge can assiduously sustain us in integrity if we are devoid of love.

Accordingly, since genuine love has an unlimited capacity to suffer and endure all things, therefore, it is strong enough to uphold us in our integrity. Come and see Our Lord Jesus Himself who walks in integrity all His life – both in His hidden

and active ministry, amidst conflicts and toils and hardships and scourging and crucifixion: pleading for forgiveness and offering a kingdom to anyone who has the courage and humility to repent.

In His suffering He shows us His love, for it is an ancient law that suffering is part of love. We cannot be a lover unless we are willing to endure any suffering that may come our way. Hence it is to be expected that a person encounter occasional hardships if she/he chooses such a lofty object to love, thus, maintain in walking in integrity.

Walking in integrity is a luminous signal that we are open for redemption and are willing to receive the graciousness of the Lord Jesus, because He will not redeem us against our will. Moreover, as we allow Him to remove the debris in our hearts – our inner eyes will be opened and we will know what is the hope to which He has called us.

He will make His face shine upon us and be gracious to us, so as to have the freedom to go in and out to find pasture either in walking in integrity or standing on the serenity of His peace which is as smooth as a leveled ground. For this reason, we will be confident enough to graciously bless the Lord either in the great congregation of His creation or in the great congregation of public worship. →

Icon # 259 = Be not afraid

Psalm 27 (26)

“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”

At one point in His life on earth, Our Lord Jesus said: “I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” And in the prologue of the Gospel of John it says: “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” Moreover, Psalm 22(23) bolster our trust in the Lord when it says: “If I should walk in the valley of darkness no evil would I fear.”

From these passages we can see darkness in various angles: either a darkness of sin, a darkness of ignorance, a darkness of unbelief, a darkness of immorality, of corruption, or a darkness of trials and challenges, etc., yet we fear no evil because the Lord becomes the stronghold of our lives and His providential solicitude upholds us.

So long as we utmostly steer clear of from sin as we avoid being around with snakes, we have nothing to fear what might happen to us. When we are fearful or always feel threatened it suggests some selfishness in ourselves. It has to be affirmed, though, that as Christians we believe that fear is not eliminated but transformed through a profound personal encounter with the Lord Jesus and His cross – the shrine where all human fear was offered by Him to the Father, delivering us all free from fear: “If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

One of our heavenly friends, St. Ambrose, has this to say: “It needs discipline of soul never to be disturbed by fears or broken by any trouble.”

As Our Lord Jesus comes to His disciples walking across the water, He says: “It is I. Do not be afraid.” We hear that message from God many times in the Bible. “Fear not! I am with you; do not be afraid, it is the Lord.” The angel Gabriel said to the Blessed Virgin Mary: “Fear not, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”

The same angel said to St. Joseph: “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife....” An angel, too, said to the shepherds, “Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Christ the Lord.” Moreover, on the day of His resurrection the Lord Jesus tells His apostles and friends as He appears: “Do not be afraid.”

Our Lord spoke this admonition to many people He encountered. He keeps on telling them and us, too, be not afraid. These words are not uttered in vacuum, for its source is from the fountain of Wisdom, the Lord Jesus Himself. It does not come out of His mouth without accomplishing its task, that is, to bolster our trust.

We should not be afraid of the truth about ourselves, of our own weaknesses, for our weakness does not diminish our dignity as sons and daughters of God. Thus we should not be afraid to approach the throne of grace, we should not be afraid of God – to expose our own woundedness to Him for in due time we will receive mercy to help us in times of need.

Therefore, since the Lord condescended to make Himself the stronghold of our lives, of whom and of what, shall we be afraid? No one shall snatch us out of His hand. The Father who has given us to Him is greater than all, and no one shall be able to snatch us out of the Father’s hand. →

Icon # 260 = Stumble and Fall

“When evildoers assail me uttering slanders against me, my adversaries and foes, they shall stumble and fall.”

The night before His passion and death when the Lord Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane praying with His disciples, the band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees whom Judas brought with him apprehended the Lord.

The Lord asked them a personal and poignant question: “Whom do you seek?” Of course they answered, as though they were sincere in their seeking, “Jesus of Nazareth.” But the malice of their intention was revealed when the Lord answered them: “I am he,” because instead of being upheld by the Lord’s revelation of Himself, His identity made them draw back and fell to the ground, that is, they “stumble and fall.”

Therefore, we have to be very careful in our seeking the Lord. It would be very helpful to check our intention from time to time. St. Bernard of Clairvaux is known to have asked himself often the question Our Lord used in addressing Judas: “My friend, why are you here?”

How many people from age to age were seeking the Lord only to find reasons to assail and slander Him? But their malevolence recoil to themselves, for it is they that stumble and fall, and hurting themselves.

Consider also the case of St. Paul before his conversion how he searched the disciples of the Lord to put them in prison, but it was he who stumbled and fell to the ground when the Lord Jesus, who identified Himself with His followers, appeared to him in a dazzling light. Hence, it is not prudent to assail and slander the Lord because His presence alone is hard to bear if we are not in a healthy relationship with Him.

Realizing the malice of his deeds and who it was whom he slandered and assailed, and not wishing that sinners go on stumbling and falling to the ground – trodden underfoot by other sinners, but that they may be converted and live, St. Paul cries out from the depths of his heart: “We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

God in Christ is so patient with us not wishing that any of us should perish, and stumbled with no one to lean on, and fell to eternal disgrace because we deprived ourselves of His grace by our evil deeds, but that we may be

converted so as to live and become confident in His providential solicitude for us so that our hearts will not fear of what will befall us. →

Icon # 261 = Original Goodness

“Though a host encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.”

When the king of Syria was warring against Israel and realized that the prophet Elisha had discovered his plan and relayed this to the king of Israel, thus saving the king of Israel more than once or twice, he commanded to search for Elisha to seize him. When he was told that Elisha was in Dothan, he sent there horses and chariots and a great army; and they came by night, and surrounded the city.

When the servant of Elisha rose early in the morning and went out, he saw a vast army with horses and chariots surrounding the city. He was so alarmed by this and cried out: “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” Elisha assured him, saying: “Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Elisha then prayed, saying: “O Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see.” So the Lord opened the eyes of Elisha’s servant, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire around about Elisha.

We, too, while we are sojourning in this world are surrounded by host of wickedness of every kind: Horses of pride, chariots of inordinate desires, and a great army of vices. These are overwhelmingly dangerous to our souls. The sight of them alone is enough to cow us to fear. Who could ever conquer this host of spiritual wickedness beleaguering us mercilessly?

St. John tells us that “the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” Therefore, to have conquered this host of spiritual wickedness that encamp against us is not our own doing but is the working of Christ within us, because He who is in us, that is, the Lord Jesus, is greater than he who is in the world, that is, the devil.

We are told that the kingdom of God is within us. We are also told that our enemies are within our own household, that is, within our own heart. Hence, our heart is the battlefield in which this war is waged. When we enter into our heart, of course, we will see there the footprints of original sin, but we will also see there the relics of our original goodness.

These relics are so precious that the Son of God came to enshrine them to its proper place, for our hearts would be restless until these relics of our original

goodness are placed to where they belong, that is, in God. The devil and his army come only to steal and destroy this original goodness in us, but Our Lord Jesus came to let it grow and develop until we blossom into a mature manhood, into the fullness of His own stature and likeness.

Deep down in our heart is a secret spot which, if once touched by divine grace, will make us more like Christ. Therefore, as the Christ in us grows into maturity we will also grow in confidence; as we grow in confidence, fear will lose its foothold.

Then, with courage, we can say with the psalmist: "I am not afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me round about," that is, I am no longer afraid of the passions in my flesh that wage war against my spirit because in Christ who strengthens me I can trod them underfoot and dash them against the rock, that is, against Christ Himself. He is so good that He could not find it in His generous heart to forsake us in this warfare if we entrust ourselves completely to Him with confidence.

Just as our body has to be nourished by food, so this confidence in the Lord should be nourished by prayer. It is by prayer that the eyes of our heart be enlightened to be able to see that the saints and angels who are with us are more numerous than the demons and their allies. Did not Our Lord say, "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" Whereas the man with an unclean spirit, who lived among the tombs, when asked by the Lord his name, replied: "My name is Legion; for we are many."

Notice that a legion is composed of 5,000 to 6,000 foot soldiers. Hence the man was possessed by an amazingly numerous numbers of demons which beggars comparison with what possessed Mary Magdalene, and yet it is only a legion. On the other hand, if we are possessed by God we are surrounded by innumerable numbers of angels because where God is the angels are there too, as the Scripture says: "a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him...."

This, then, is our confidence. So long as we are united with the Lord and kept His words our heart should not fear of whatever we see in it or when we are surrounded by a host of overwhelming trials, difficulties, and distress, as the Psalmist says: "With the Lord on my side I do not fear. What can man do to me?" "Even if an army encamped against me, even then would I trust." →

Icon # 262 = House of Prayer

"One thing have I asked of the Lord, that I will seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple."

When Solomon became a king, the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying: "Ask what I shall give you." Solomon could have asked, in a spur of the moment, for the life of his enemies to be sure that no one will dare to lift up his head against him and that his kingdom will be secure, or to ask for riches or honor or power or prestige or longevity; but he asked only for wisdom and understanding to be able to govern God's people – that he may know how to discern between good and evil. Of course, this pleases God more than anything else and it was granted to him.

Wisdom and understanding, then, are the primary entity. The rests are secondary and flow from it, for along with wisdom and understanding Solomon also obtained riches, honor, power, prestige, and long life. However, with all his wisdom and understanding, Solomon was not immuned from what later theologians called the effect of original sin, that is, concupiscence because deep down in his heart the lust for women was cozily lingering which he unbelievably pampered to such an intensity that would boggle the mind of even a polygamous person.

Solomon too, like us, was called to freedom but he used his freedom as an opportunity for the flesh to gratify its desires, and was tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of religion introduced by his many foreign wives. Wherefore, his orthodox faith was blunted and he fell into religious relativism.

This thing happened to him for our instruction to make us realized how dangerous it would be and how slippery it is to gratify our passions, for it will present itself as a good thing at first but after a while it reveals its true face, that is, we begin first in the spirit but ended up in the flesh.

This is what we have to guard and careful of when we asked that we may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our life, that is, when we entered the monastery and joined the religious life we should not be worldly and gratify our passions by seeking the pleasures of the world; but rather to consider it as a noble privilege to be accepted in the school of the Lord's service to cultivate good and upright habits and practice the commandments of loving God and our fellow human beings.

Herein lies the beauty of the Lord which should be reflected in us who dwell in the house of the Lord. By this people shall know that we are Christ's disciples – that we are not ashamed to acknowledge His name.

It is like honey in the mouth and music to the ear to say again that the monastery, as the Church, is the house of the Lord. It is also a song in the heart to affirm that God has condescended to make each one of us His house, to be temple of His Holy Spirit where we can go in and out to pray in Spirit and in truth, to behold in the inner chamber of our heart the beauty of the Lord which is no other than His own image and likeness, and to inquire in the depths of our heart what the will of God is and what are the things that please Him. St. Paul tells us that God wills our sanctification.

Spiritual common sense unequivocally tells us that prayer, spiritual reading, singing religious songs, chanting psalms, doing acts of kindness and love are highly pleasing to God. In carrying out these things the Lord sees His own beauty mirrored in us.

In the inner temple of our heart there is, then, this mutual gazing where the Lord sees His own beauty in us and we see our true beauty in the Lord. This mutual gazing is already a form of prayer which is a serene shelter in the day of trouble because we are in the presence of the beloved. →

Icon # 263 = Shelter

“For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent, he will set me high upon a rock.”

Whether we like it or not, there will be times in our lives that we will experience fears, dangers, trials, and troubles. However, Christ assures us that we will not face our trials and troubles alone but that He will be with us, as He Himself said: “I shall be with you until the end of time.” Although this is primarily promised to the Church – it is also applicable to us individually because He will be with us till we die.

Certainly, His divine mercy is a comfortable shelter when we are caught in the rain of calamities and distress, or the heat of fleshly desires oppresses us. His Sacred Heart, too, is a spacious tent where we can take cover when the wind of temptation is blowing within us. “Call on me in the day of distress, and I shall deliver you,” says the Lord.

Christ's desire to protect us in the shelter of His tent is far greater than our desire to take refuge in Him, because His love for us surpasses all knowledge. It is far

beyond our feeble imagination. However, we can see flashes of it in how bears and lions protect their youngs, and how a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. No wonder, then, that once we are in the shelter of His tent no one can snatch us out of His hands.

This evokes confidence in us. We have only to plunge ourselves without fear into His loving arms like children who naturally gravitate toward their parents. This is the beauty of abiding in God in the recesses of His tent, His Sacred Heart, His divine mercy, for what is more blessed than to cast all our cares on Him who cannot fail? This is what we do when we pray, as St. Paul says: "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

For whatever reason, if it happens, that a flicker of anxiety appears in our heart, then, we have to be mindful of what the prince of the apostles says: "Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you." Prayer is devotion of the heart, the turning to God through pious and humble affection. Humble from the intimate knowledge of our need and weakness; pious from the acknowledgment of God's mercy and concern for us.

Blessed are we if we know these things and act them out, for it is like the mother eagle who build her nest high upon a rock; and in training her eaglets how to fly she will cast them down only to lift them up before it hits the ground. The same is true with prayer, for in praying the wings of our confidence in God are strengthened.

We are trained how to fly in the pressure of daily life by casting all our cares and anxieties to God, for in prayer we give the perfect mind of God the opportunity to feed our hearts and minds, so that we may grow into a mature manhood in the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Consequently, we confidently say: →

Icon # 264 = Ambassadors

"And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies round about me; and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord."

At this point in one's spiritual journey, the soul is now in control over its passions and desires for worldly things. We can go further by saying that even the devil and the other demons are now subject to the soul. However, to prevent us from self-complacency and being too elated, Our Lord cautions us not to make this

as the basis of our rejoicing but rather in the assurance that our names are now listed in the book of life; that we are no longer resident aliens of God's kingdom but are now one of its citizens.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, of course, one of the noble citizens of God's kingdom, gave us two reasons why God permitted the devil and the other demons to wrestle with us – human beings, so that those who conquered them would be crowned, and secondly, after the victory, the devil and the other demons would suffer greater shame for being defeated by inferiors, while we – human beings would gain great glory for having triumphed over the devil and the other demons who were once an archangel and angels respectively.

It would become crystal-clear to us that we are able to conquer the devil and the other demons solely because of Christ who comes to our aid. Thus we ascribe to Him the victory and joyously say: "Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name give the glory."

This is a song of thanksgiving and sacrifice of praise which we offer in His tent, in His loving and merciful heart, so that we, being delivered from the hand of our immortal foes may now serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life on earth and for all eternity in the life to come, making melody to the Lord.

We who entered the monastery and those in the outside world who are frequent Church goers are granted the foretaste of this as we fully and actively participate in the Liturgy, Opus Dei – work of God, and at Mass which is the culmination of all the works of God for in it the sacrifice of the cross is being made alive every day.

In both the Divine Office and Mass we entered into the mind of Christ sharing His feelings and emotions and whatever interests Him, we entered into the Lord's service. We are, then, His emissaries as our other heavenly friend – Blessed Dom Columba Marmion says: "In choir we are the ambassadors of the Church. Now, what is most fundamental quality for an ambassador? To be skillful? Powerful? To have at his disposal a big fortune? To command belief? To shine by his personal talents? To be persona grata with the sovereign to whom he is sent?"

"All that is useful, necessary; all these qualities will contribute without any doubt to the success of what he does, but they will be insufficient and sterile, will even deviate from the end result, if the ambassador does not in the first place identify himself in the most perfect possible way with the intentions and feelings of the sovereign who sends him, with the interests of the country he represents.

“Now, the Church deposes us monks [*we will say nuns, too*³] to the kings of kings, to the throne of God. We ought, then, to identify ourselves with His views and His wishes; the Church entrusts to us her interests, which are those of souls, those of eternity. This is not a trivial matter!

“Let us then take into our hearts all the needs, all the necessities of the Church so dear to Our Lord since it is bought at the price of His Blood, the anguish of souls who are in pain, the perils of those who at this moment are grappling with the devil, the solicitude of those who have to direct us; in order that each of these may receive the help of God.

“It is true that worldly people shrug their shoulders when they learn that we stay long hours in choir to praise God. For them, nothing has worth except what is exterior, what one can touch or finger the results of; what one talks about, what has been successful, what dazzles one....But it is during these hours that we carry out our apostolic work par excellence, even in regard to our neighbor: for him we obtain help from on high, the grace of God, we give him God: this is the soul’s greatest good.”

To be a monk and nun, then, is a great privilege God gives us that we may participate in His works of saving our fellow human beings who are in danger of losing their souls for all eternity. We do this not in gloom but in joy as we sing and make melody to the Lord. →

Icon # 265 = God Uncovers His Face

“Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer! Thou hast said, ‘Seek ye my face.’ My heart says to thee, ‘Thy face, Lord, do I seek.’ Hide not thy face from me.”

One of the most comforting blessings that God bestows on us is when He uncovers His face to us and makes His face shine upon us. This is tantamount to having constant awareness of His presence which is gracious and not oppressive. It brings peace to the heart, pleasantness to the mind, and stability to the will.

The face of the Lord is the kingdom of God in all its fullness and splendor which nothing greater and lovelier we can ever think of, because the Lord Jesus is the image of the invisible God. In Him the fullness of the deity was pleased to dwell. Therefore, whoever sees the Lord Jesus sees the Father and whoever believes in Him believes in God.

³ Mine Italic

His desire to reveal His face to us is infinitely greater than our eagerness to seek His face. "What do you seek?" He asks. "Come and see...." He wanted us to seek Him and His righteousness, so that we may highly value His presence once He shows Himself to us and that we may realize how insipid are all other things apart from Him.

We will certainly find Him if we will seek Him with all our heart, mind, will, and soul. Christ Himself gives this assurance when He says: "Seek and you shall find, for He seeks find." In finding Him we will also find our-self, our highest potential as a human being destined to be a partaker of His Divine nature.

In gazing His face we will be transformed into Him whom we behold, as it is written: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

As we go deeper and deeper into the interior of our heart we don't even have to cry aloud in order for the Lord to hear us. A sigh is enough, because it is the Holy Spirit Himself who has been poured into our heart that intercedes for us with sighs too profound for words.

And the Lord Jesus who searches our heart and discerns our thoughts and intentions, knows what is the mind of the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit intercedes for us according to the will of God, for the Holy Spirit will not speak on His own authority but only what He hears. And what He hears is always in accord with the will of the Lord Jesus, because He and the Lord Jesus are One.

We may ask those who have seen the Lord – what does He look like? Of course, we can only describe facets of it because of the limitation of our human words. The color of **His eyes** is compassion. He has penetrating look that pierces our whole being to the division of our soul and spirit, of joints and marrow.

He looks at us as though He knows us even before we were born. It evokes trust in us. The shape of **His nose** is solicitude. It is extremely sensitive to all our needs. It perceives that the jars are empty – thus to be filled with water which will be transformed into wine to gladden the hearts of both angels and human beings.

It makes sure that the travelers have something to eat lest they will collapse on the way. **Its mouth** is wisdom. None of the words that flow from it returned to Him empty handed but accomplished everything He wishes. It speaks parables and mysteries hidden before the foundation of the world bringing to light things concealed in darkness.

By it He created all things both in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible guiding and governing them all in finest perfection. **Its eyebrow** is forgiveness: "My son, your sins are forgiven." "Woman, has anyone condemned you?"...Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again." **Its ear** is obedience: "I came not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me." "He who listens to you, listens to me."

It knows that the labor of obedience will bring us back to Him from whom we had drifted through the sloth of disobedience. "Listen carefully, my son, to the master's instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart." **Its forehead** is discernment: it shifts through, sorts out, distinguishes, and judges what attracts us towards Him or draws us away from Him and His preferences for us.

The **skin** of His face is light: "I am the light of the world," He says. "Everyone who sees me sees the Father also." It is a light so brilliant that nothing in the created universe can be adequately compared with it not even the V838 Mon star that emitted light 600,000 times brighter than our sun, for compared with it the V838 Mon star is just like a faint shadow on a gray, dull day, because it is an uncreated light without beginning or end with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change; yet the little ones and those whose hearts has been purified by the crucible of pains and sorrows who never dared to blaspheme God even when they were tempted to, those whose love for God has never been blotted out of their hearts, can freely gaze at this light without hurting their eyes, because love is the eye that permits them to see His face and the sharpness of its vision is in proportion to its purity.

Every human being, all the angels and saints, and all the demons and evil-doers shall one day look at His face. Those who can steadily stare at it even for a brief moment shall pass from death to life and shall never see death anymore, but it will be a cause of unspeakable humiliation and shame for all evil-doers both humans and demons alike, for in the light of His face they will see their own selves, their being, their nothingness, their unrepented evil deeds, their own face.

It is like looking at the most refined, clear, and brilliant mirror which no one could really deny what she or he looks like. Because of the utter deformity and irreparable distortion of their faces, all the demons and all evil-doers would rather hide their faces from His face, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the Face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb...."

His face, then, which could no longer be hidden, is like a two-edged sword that reveals those who belong to Him and those who are not, causing an infinite happiness to the former and an inconceivable chagrin to the latter.

Thus the soul seeing the immense kindness and severity of the face of God humbly cries out in the depths of its heart: →

Icon # 266 = Silent type: Got angry

“Turn not thy servant away in anger, thou hast been my help. Cast me not off, forsake me not, O God of my salvation!”

No matter how powerful one's imagination is, it still boggles our mind to think what it would be like if God would be angry. Even though irritable people can get to our nerves the magnitude of its impact is less intense compared to a silent type of person, gentle and who would hardly even kill a fly, who got angry because it comes as piercing shock to us; whereas in the case of irritable people we become so used to it that it creates a certain degree of immunity in our psyche. But it is so different with a silent type of people who got angry or even just raised their voice. It really gets into our skin and confounds us. The sound and tone of their voice set a seal in our memory. Its echo rings for a while.

God is as silent and gentle as the universe at night who would not even break a bruised reed nor quench a smoldering wick, nor even say a word when His only beloved Son was hanging on the cross and cries out: “My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?”

Yet we are granted a glimpse to peep into the potency of God's voice when He spoke to the people of Israel so much so that the mountains was shaken and there was thunder and fire. Notice that it was a friendly visitation, and yet the magnitude of His voice was so strong that Moses confesses that he trembled with fear and that the people begged him that he should be the one that will speak to them and not God. If that was the case, how much more if God would raise His voice or become angry.

Again, we are granted a glimpse of this in the case of Moses and the Lord Jesus. The former was when he came down from the mountain and saw the people worshipping the golden calf; and in the latter when He cleansed the temple. Another scenario is the last judgment described by the Lord Jesus when God will say to those goats: “Depart from me, you curse, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” This voice will penetrate into their whole being and its echo will reverberate through all eternity.

No wonder, then, why the psalmist cries out in the depths of his heart: "Turn not thy servant away in anger...." If it is painful to be rejected by our fellow human being, how much painful it would be to be rejected by God for all eternity, to lost forever the sovereign Good.

On the other hand, the psalmist was very much aware that the only reason why he was not turned away nor forsaken was that he allows himself to be helped by God, that he could not save himself by his mere human effort – thus he acknowledges God as his savior. →

Icon # 267 = Forsaken

"For my father and mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me up."

Christian history tells us that there were many men and women who were converted into Christianity – Catholic religion and were disowned and forsaken by their parents, and some of them were even killed by member of their own family.

Tale for example Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha. After she was baptized at the age of 20 she suffered great hostility and was forsaken by her tribe, but the Lord took her up into His bosom as her beloved daughter. God became her Father and the Blessed Virgin Mary her Mother.

We would be lucky if our parents will not forsake us if we choose the religion which we heartily believed is the true one. But sad to say this is not always the case. Tremendous fear is always behind it. An example of this is a story told to me by a friend. One of her sisters got married to a protestant just in their neighborhood in Ireland. Though it was painful for her family they were able to accept it. They were married in the Catholic Church. But the problem was the parents of the man. They became so hostile to their son and forsaken him to the point that when their son died, and the procession passes by their house, they closed their windows and did not attend the funeral.

Although this is very painful, but it is far better to be forsaken by our earthly father and mother than to be forsaken by our heavenly Father, for the Lord said: "He who loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me...."

We should love and honor our biological father and mother not only because we are commanded to do so and it brings blessings in our lives, but above all because they are the reflection of the fatherhood of God and the motherhood

of the Blessed Virgin Mary who love us far beyond the love of all fathers and mothers on earth put together and even multiplied by seven.

So long as our parents does not command us things which are explicitly contrary to God's commandments and does not demand that we should love them more than God, then, we have to follow their wishes and negotiate, as we could, with those we might find difficult to accept.

But if there is a conflict between what our parents desire us to do and with that of our intrinsic God given right, namely, to choose our religious belief and to heed to our vocation in life either it be to married life, single blessedness, or to religious life, then, we have to follow God even if our parents will cry in our presence and will threaten us that they will die if we will do so.

This is a moment where we can legitimately say, at least in our heart if we are not bold enough to say it audibly in the presence of our parents, "we must obey God rather than men." →

Icon # 268 = Teacher

"Teach me thy way, O Lord; and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence."

At one point in His public ministry Our Lord Jesus told the crowds that they are not to be called teacher, for they have one teacher, and they are all brethren. Of course, the "one teacher" here refers to Christ Himself. This injunction, "not to be called teacher," is for us too. It serves as a buffer against the encroachment of our inflated ego to make us realize that unless the True Teacher – the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, teaches inwardly, those who teach outwardly labor in vain.

In one occasion, too, in His last discourse at the Last Supper, He told His disciples that when He goes and prepares a place for them He will come again and will take them to Himself, so that where He is they may be also. He, then, goes on to say that they know the "way" where He was going.

This evokes, for St. Thomas, an urgent need for clarification, he said: "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" The Lord emphatically told him that He is the way. So, when we ask the Lord to teach us His way, what we are really asking is that the Lord will teach is about Himself. No wonder that the early Christians were called "the follower of the way," that is, the follower of the Lord Jesus.

Just as it needs a certain degree of intimacy to really know the interior life of a person, so it is through our frequent contact with Our Lord Jesus in prayer; in spiritual readings, especially the Scriptures; and in keeping His commandments that our knowledge of Him widens.

Thus from walking on the rough way of our former manner of life – a life of deceitful desires for personal gratification and selfishness, the Lord will, then, lead us on a level path of holiness, righteousness, and selflessness. Notice the reason why we need to be taught the way of the Lord and be led on a level path: “because of my enemies,” that is to say, the devil and his demons could no longer find any ground to rejoice over us when we walk on the way of the Lord.

Of course, we have to be willing to face the music because the devil and his demons are terribly angry with us – breathing out violence. St. Paul was like them before he was knocked off his horse on the road to Damascus. He was really breathing out fury against the “follower of the way.” And just as the Lord Jesus did not give up the early followers of His way to the will of Saul, so Our Lord would not give us up to the capricious will of our adversaries, namely, the hosts of spiritual wickedness in the heavenly places and the world’s rulers of this present darkness who are actively at work in rebellious people and in those who are ingenuous in fabricating all kinds of evil if He teaches us His way.

However, it is likely that we will stumble even though the path is level that we may learn humility, but we will never be cast down because the goodness of the Lord will uphold us through to the end till we reach the land of the living. →

Icon # 269 = Land of the Living

“I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living! Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yea, wait for the Lord!”

We are told by Scripture that “faith is the assurance of things hope for, the conviction of things not seen.” Hence, it is our faith which tells us that we shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, that is, in those who live a virtuous life, beginning in this present life and be carried over to the other side of life where Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the redeemed of the Lord are now living, for our God is not the God of the dead but of the living.

While still on earth both the living and the dead are living together. Of course, the dead are those who are over self-indulgent, as the Scripture points out that the person who is self-indulgent is dead even while that person lives. It is also clear that the living are those whose faith is alive, whose love is active, and

whose hope is shining. Their culture is life and their ethos is goodness. They live in a city within a city, that is, in the land of the living within the land of the dead, for they are in the world but they are not of the world.

This city is called the land of the living because its builder and maker is God, and is built on the foundation of righteousness which is unshakable. The citizens of the land of the dead have tried and will still try to destroy it but in vain, because its builder has promised that not even the gate of hell could prevail against it.

Blessed indeed are they who live in the land of the living, for their righteous deeds shall never be forgotten and their memory shall never perish. They are all clothed in light far brighter than the noon-day sun. To tell the truth, they are the light of the world; and they graciously let their light shine, so that some of those who dwell in the land of the dead might immigrate to the land of the living, thus they, too, will see the goodness of the Lord; and not only see, but also taste it, as one of the inhabitants of the land of the living says: "Taste and see that the Lord is good."

This experience of seeing and tasting the goodness of the Lord is highly nutritious, and made them strong and courageous of heart to serve one another as they wait for the Lord. Before they had tasted and seen the goodness of the Lord, when they were still in the land of the dead, they were self-centered; they have no oil in their lamps, that is, no charity in their lives; they looked only to their own interests.

But now that they have tasted and seen the goodness of the Lord they no longer looked only to their own interests but also of their fellow brothers and sisters. They learned generosity to give and receive forgiveness from one another, for there were times, though, that they got angry but they did not let the sun goes down on their anger. They tried their best not to let a brother or sister go to sleep with hatred in their hearts, for they knew that they could not worship the God of peace while harboring evil in their hearts.

They have a zealous hatred for sin, but an ardent love for the sinner because they still consider themselves as a recovering sinner and can relapse at any time unless sustain by the grace of God. This is their strength as they wait for the Lord, and will not be afraid even if the Lord will be delayed in coming because they have now oil in their lamps.

Truly, the Lord will not be deaf to this kind of attitude. →

Icon # 270 = Deaf

Psalm 28 (27)

"To thee, O Lord, I call; my rock, be not deaf to me, lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the Pit."

One of the worst things that could befall us is when the Lord make Himself deaf to us – just remain silent no matter how we pry Him with many questions. We have an example of this when Our Lord was in the presence of Herod. No matter how Herod questioned the Lord at some length, but He remained silent.

Notice that "when Herod saw the Lord he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sing done by him." In contrast, the Lord was very indifferent toward Herod and would never speak to him.

Does this mean that Herod was more righteous than the Lord because of his seemingly glad feeling to see the Lord, and that the Lord was a hypocrite because He preaches the gospel of Love but would not speak to Herod even just out of courtesy? God forbid – by no means! If we are kind enough to let Christ have a chance to give a reason for His silence, He will prudently say: "I will put a curb on my lips when the wicked man stands before me. I was dumb, silent and still."

Notice also Herod's attitude toward John the Baptist. He heard him gladly, but he was much perplexed. And what did he do with John? He put him in prison, and eventually have his head cut off.

Herod, then, is an image of both men and women living in sin who could be filled in hearing righteous things but would never budge and inch to give up their sinful lives. These kinds of people would indeed look and look but could never see, they would indeed hear and hear but could never understand because their hearts are hardened; lest they would see with their eyes and understand with their hearts and turn to the Lord and be converted. In this case, words are no longer an effective medicine.

If the Lord will no longer speak in the depths of our heart we will be left to our own caprices, we will be doing things that should not be done. Thus following those who were going down to the Pit of eternal destruction, fragmentation of one's life.

If the Lord makes Himself deaf to us the implication is that the devil makes himself attentive to us; if the Lord be silent to us the devil increases his volume in cunningly speaking to us, instilling thoughts and desires that are detrimental to

our well-being which seem good at first but its end is toward the Pit of misery, as it is written: "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."

In the spiritual life, therefore, there is no neutrality. Either the devil speak to us and the Lord is silent hence we go down to the Pit of eternal destruction, or the Lord inclines His ear to us and speaks word of wisdom and the voice of the devil is muffled wherefore we go up to heaven where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father and be with our beloved Mother – the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the angels and saints forever. →

Icon # 271 = Supplication

"Hear the voice of my supplication, as I cry to thee for help, as I lift up my hands toward thy most holy sanctuary."

The Gospel of John tells us a story of a man born blind whom Christ cured. Of course, there was an ingrained prejudiced on the part of the Pharisees because no matter how the blind man related the story of his healing they would not believe, but even go so far by reviling him, saying: "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." To this the formerly blind man retorted: "why, this is a marvel! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him."

In other words, if we are a worshiper of God, and worship Him in spirit and in truth, and be imitators of Our Lord Jesus in doing the Father's will, then without any shadow of a doubt God hears the voice of our supplication as we cry to Him for help, as it is written: "In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears."

Prayer is devotion of the heart, the turning to God through pious and humble supplication. Humble from the intimate knowledge of our own weakness, our pains, sorrows, and distress; pious from the acknowledgment of God's mercy, kindness, and compassion.

When we cry to God for help, He listens more to the voice of our heart more than that what proceed from the mouth. He hears the voice of our supplication, especially when its tone is humble and contrite. For this reason, we need to pray with humility because the Lord resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. The prayer of him that humbles himself shall pierce the clouds...and he will not

depart till the Most High behold. Humility is pleasing to God because the primary aspect of the virtue of humility is acknowledgment of the truth, and truth about ourselves in relation to God is that we are His creatures and He is our Creator, we are virtually nothing and God is virtually everything, we need help and He is our helper. Humility is the virtue which recognizes this basic evidence.

It is true to say that we can worship God anywhere and everywhere so long as we worship in spirit and in truth, that is, we don't have to go to Jerusalem or to high mountains to pray well; However, it is also true to say that God designated sacred places for worship such as chapels and churches where He abides in a very special way.

The temple built by King Solomon is a good example of this, as he humbly confessed: "Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built! 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; that thy eyes may be open day and night toward this house, the place where thou hast promised to set thy name, that thou mayest hearken to the prayer which thy servant offers toward this place. And hearken thou to the supplications of thy servant and of thy people Israel, when they pray toward this place; yea, hear thou from heaven thy dwelling place; and thou hearest, forgive."

It is really a highly salubrious practice to drop by a chapel or a Church, at least once a day – aside from our regular times of communal prayer, to render a friendly visit with Our Lord, especially if this is along our way. Though lifting one's hands is a praiseworthy gesture, but we don't have to do it at this time. What we have to lift, though, is our hearts and minds to Him, perhaps darting out a simple child-like prayer. At other visits we don't even have to say anything, but just be in His presence.

If we do this so much so that it becomes second nature to us, I am deeply convinced that God will never allow us to fall into mortal sin. We will still be tempted, but will not be led into temptation. In a very mysterious way, God, however, will still allow us to fall from time to time in sins that are not deadly to keep us from being proud of our own righteousness, but His grace stabilizes us so that we will not be dragged away with the wicked.

A person who has learned the need of God's help will never neglect his/her prayer life. →

Icon # 272 = True Peace

"Take me not off with the wicked, with those who are workers of evil, who speak peace with their neighbors, while mischief is in their hearts."

We have to be convinced that zeal for prayer is food and strength for the soul, protection against dangers of all kinds, and a bulwark in time of temptation. It is only when we neglect our prayer life that we will ultimately be dragged away with the wicked and those who are workers of evil, because we will be so susceptible to the scheme of the devil, and the other demons who can deceitfully speak peace to us but their intent is only to destroy us.

They cunningly offer an easy peace devoid of any vestige of justice. We can attain true peace only if we pursue an upright way of life, if we are pleaser of God rather than men; when we confess our sins and acknowledge our own guilt; when we refuse to give in to the urgings of our false self we stir up against us the hostility of the instigator of all evil, but by freely surrendering our lives to the Lord we secured a peace with God that nothing can destroy.

The principle of true peace is God who is loved in all things, and above all things. Peace is one of the interior effects of charity. Therefore, the peace that the wicked and evil doers speak is not a true peace because they not only harbor mischief in their heart but, above all, they do not live a charitable life. It is not farfetched to say that they are allergic of God. For a soul to be perfectly ordered to God: that is peace. →

Icon # 273 (a) = Rendering due reward: Body

"Requite them according to their work, and according to the evil of their deeds; requite them according to the work of their hands; render them their due reward."

One of the unfathomable mysteries of God is that He is infinitely merciful and at the same time He is infinitely just. With God infinite mercy and infinite justice are one. His mercy demands that He should pity us in our misery and forgives us when we repent, and His justice demands that we should be judged according to what we are doing in our bodies either good or evil, as it is written: "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."

There will be an unspeakable sorrows and distress for all evil-doers, for all promoters and staunch defenders of the culture of death, those who wantonly perverse justice, those who proudly call evil as good and good as evil, those

who refuse to repent even at the point of death; but there will be an indescribable joy and gladness for those who have done good, those who have washed their wedding garments with the unblemished blood of the lamb, those who learned to bend their knees in humble prayer, those who have kept their hope intact in the midst of sufferings and poverty, those who have mastered the art of using the things of this present life only as a means to attain the ultimate goal, union with God, and not just for self-gratification, those who have maintained their sanity while living in this insane world, those who have considered not just their own interest but also the interest of others.

Thus everyone will be requited according to what have been done in the body, for our body is the only place on earth where our thoughts can be translated into actions, either good or bad. Our body and our soul are the primary capital in which we trade on our eternal destiny.

Hence, no one can waggle their tongue in saying that they don't have the means to attain eternal life, for we are given a body and a soul as a working place to cultivate the soil of our heart. What we sow in it is, unequivocally, what we will harvest. Our body is meant for the Lord and not for immorality. It is a tabernacle of the Most High here on earth.

Therefore, it is a house of prayer. Since it is a house of prayer, so we have to reverence God in our body for that is His due. For this reason, all the oxen of evil desires, the sheep of vices, the pigeons of worldliness, and the money changers of greediness must be absolutely driven away from the body. This is very painful at first for the soul, but later it yields the harvest of righteousness.

On the other hand, if we ignore the Lord and kept on letting evil desires, vices, worldliness, and greediness have their residence in our body, then, we will harvest the fruits of it. That will be our due reward, as it is written: "I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doing."

Considering all that Christ did for our salvation and justification, it's really mind boggling why people still persist in their evil deeds. Worst still, they would not come to the light lest their deeds should be exposed, for everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light. Consequently, →

Icon # 273 (b) = Works of the Lord

"Because they do not regard the works of the Lord, or the work of his hands, he will break them down and build them up no more."

It's really dangerous to be unmindful of what the Lord has done for us – how much He loves us and how much torments He endured to free us from the clutches of this world that we may love Him, in return, without measure and to serve Him in freedom all the days of our lives.

The reason why it is dangerous not to regard the works of the Lord is that unmindfulness of what He has done for us will eventually harden our heart and darken our mind – thus numbing our conscience.

If there is still danger for righteous people who regard the works of the Lord to fall, how much more of those who are heedless of the works of the Lord, for the Lord says: "Without me you can do nothing." He also said, "If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." "My Father is working still, and I am working." God has worked for our redemption, and He still working now for our sanctification. So let us pray for the grace to give Him a chance to work in our hearts, to put into order our affections and desires. What He is asking of us is only that we cooperate with Him, and perhaps be patient with Him too, because we will certainly experience pain as He begins cleansing our hearts.

However, He will not leave us desolate for the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, will be with us, too, to temper the pain by His love. The Blessed Virgin Mary, too, whose love for us is beyond all telling, will not remain aloof to our needs for if we confide to her our problems or desires we will never leave from her presence empty handed. St. Joseph too is eager to supply our resources. He is our paradigm in serving the Lord and the Blessed Virgin Mary in solitude and silence and in the stillness of our heart, doing one's work humbly and quietly.

In order to do our work humbly and quietly our mind has to have something to chew on. This is where meditation on the life and teaching of Our Lord comes in. WE have to enthrone it in our hearts like a bundle of myrrh and impress it in our minds so as to become part of our consciousness. In this way, whether we eat or drink or walk or sleep or woke from sleep or whatever we are doing we are aware of His presence. Consequently, glimpses of the work of His hands spurt out in our memory to build us up so that we will never be unmindful of His deeds.

On the other hand, just by its very essence, disregarding the works of the Lord or the acts He has done on earth will inevitably lead us to our own downfall

because we will eventually lose our moral mooring and will be tossed to and fro by every wind of sinful cravings that bring death to our soul, that is, darkness of the mind and hardness of heart. Moreover, the will become so weak to resist evil and can easily be exploited even by trivial temptation. It's really a pity that a person will reach this stage. It's only a miracle of grace can draw us out of this deadly Pit which the Lord will mercifully grant if He can see even a flickering faith in our hearts. Otherwise, He will break us down and build us no more.

But so long as the ember of love and the light of faith are totally extinguished in our hearts we should not despair of God's mercy, because there is still hope that our cry for help will pierce His ears, and then we will be able to say: →

Icon # 274 = The Lord: Strength and Shield

"Blessed be the Lord! for he has heard the voice of my supplications. The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts; so I am helped, and my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him."

It's so amazing that once the Lord drew us out from the Pit of a sinful life or from the miry clay of self-complacency, we will learn how to give thanks to Him. This gratitude is being expressed in many ways such as singing a simple spiritual lullaby in our hearts; and like the Blessed Virgin Mary, to exult the Lord for all He has done in our lives; to put our trust in Him especially in difficult times; to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might which comes to us by frequent reception of the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist and by exercising the muscles of our prayer life, that is, spend time everyday in private prayer for in doing so our faith in the Lord increases and it will become for us a shield in which we are able to quench the fiery darts of the Evil One and tempers the deep and compelling desires of our passions and put at bay the seductions of the world.

This is an obvious sign that we are helped by the Lord. It is not our own doing but owing to His grace, for He has heard the voice of our supplications when we cried for help. Therefore, we have a wholesome reason to exult in the Lord even in our sickness and suffering which come upon us to prove us, as though something strange were happening to us. But we have to rejoice in so far as we are granted the grace to share in Christ's sufferings that we may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed.

Awareness of God's presence and the determination to do His will is a potent way of making the Lord as our strength and our shield, for He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him and a strength to all who keep Him always at their side. Therefore, it is possible to sing a song to the Lord and give Him thanks even when

we are in the midst of heavy spiritual skirmishes, engaging a meaningful combat against our inveterate foe who is tenaciously determined to destroy us so that we will not inherit what he had lost, that is, eternal happiness beyond comparison. →

Icon # 275 = The Lord: Strength, Refuge, Heritage, Shepherd

“The Lord is the strength of his people, he is the saving refuge of his anointed. O save thy people, and bless, thy heritage; be thou their shepherd, and carry them forever.”

It is striking to hear that Our Lord is the saving refuge of His anointed, that is, of His chosen ones. Nowadays, many people take refuge in money and make it their strength and savior, for they believe that if they have lots of money they can do whatever they want. They can thwart justice by hiring brilliant lawyers or bribe the judge with a hefty amount. They can lobby influential people in Congress to pass bills that would be for their advantage. They can wallow in the pleasures of this world; go to exotic places and enjoy the luxury of life.

“This is heaven on earth,” they deceitfully say in their hearts. But they are building on sand without any foundation at all, for they are not rich in the eyes of God and can bring nothing of their wealth when they die. Instead it will become one of the witnesses that will convict them of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Of sin, because they abandon God in their lives; of righteousness, because they make riches their strength rather than God and take refuge in fragile wealth instead of the Lord; and of judgment, because they had been weighed in the scale of holiness and found wanting.

But for those whose strength is the Lord and take refuge in Him will not weary in the running the path of God’s commandments, for the strength of the inner man will be renewed each day through constant abiding with Him in the intimacy of profound communion to such an extent that no one is strong enough to snatch us from Him. We are the Father’s gift to Him, and no one shall be able to wrest us from the Father’s hands.

We are His people, the sheep of His flock. He is our shepherd who laid down His life for us. Just as keeping Christ’s commandments is the most authentic and surest sign that we have love for Him, so laying down His life for us is the biggest and clearest sign that He loves us. “I am the good shepherd,” He said. “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” As sheep, there has been several moments in our lives that we were lead astray in the mountains of pride and the hills of vanity, but our good shepherd left the angels in heaven to search for us. When, at last, He found us after so much hounding, He put us into

His heart which is big and wide enough to contain the whole universe and carry us home forever.

His love for us becomes our everlasting heritage which is no other than the Holy Spirit Himself, "which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory." →

Icon # 276 = Heavenly Beings

Psalm 29 (28)

"Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name; worship the Lord in holy array."

Whether mighty people on earth will accept it or not, we have to assert that heavenly beings are far stronger and more powerful than we. Truly, it beggars comparison. In dignity, though, it is true to say that we are far superior than they because God destined us to be His children, whereas, the heavenly beings are His servants sent to minister to us. The psalmist rightly says: "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him? Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor."

The devil and the other fallen angels who sided with him were heavenly beings at first, but because of their pride in dissenting against the will of God they became hellish beings appropriating to themselves what does not belong to them. Take for example the devil when he tempted Christ in the desert. He showed the Lord 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."

Can you imagine the arrogance of these words? He is appropriating to himself the authority and the glory that does not belong to him. Listen to what Christ said when He was about to ascend to heaven after fulfilling His mission on earth: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." And St. Paul hit the nail on the head when he says, "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Therefore, the devil should have worshipped Christ but in his arrogance he said to Christ: "If you, then, will worship me, it shall be yours." Can you imagine that!

Whereas, the heavenly beings who has healthy knowledge of themselves ascribe to the Lord glory and strength, and the glory of His name. They worship

Him in holy array. For instance, at the birth of the Lord Jesus an angel appeared to the shepherds and the glory of the Lord shone around them. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased." See, they ascribe to the Lord the glory of His name, that is, He is God in the highest heavens. They also acknowledge that eventhough He is God in the highest heavens He takes delight in the human race and gives peace to those of good will.

Moreover, these heavenly beings are really very humble because, though they are very strong, they are modest in their argument against the other hellish beings. For instance, when the archangel Michael contented with the devil, disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a reviling judgment upon him but said: "The Lord rebuke you." Thus they ascribe to the Lord the power and strength to censure the devil.

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

He goes on to say, "For I did not come as a favor on my part, but by the will of our God." So, it is very clear that these heavenly beings ascribe to the Lord glory and strength, and the glory of His name. We, too, would be like these heavenly beings, even while on earth, when we impute to the Lord the glory of His name, when we attribute to Him whatever we accomplished, saying audibly or silently in our heart: "Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your Name give the glory."

Christ Himself is our model par excellence in ascribing to God the glory of His name when He said: "I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do...." And St. Paul who inherits a good portion of the spirit of Christ trustfully says: "I can do all things in him who strengthens me." For this reason, if we are true followers of Christ we have to ascribe to the Lord the glory of His name and worship Him in the serenity of our heart. →

Icon # 277 = Voice of the Lord 1

"The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord, upon many waters."

Through Christ we have been justified by the grace of God. This simply means that God has shared His divine life with us in order for us to be able to hear His voice and respond to Him. As Christians, this voice was first uttered upon the waters of our baptism. The ears of our heart were given the capacity to hear the voice of the Lord, so that we may be able to say: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

This voice, too, is spoken upon the waters of Scriptures. When we pray we are speaking to God, and God listens; but when we read the Scriptures God is speaking to us, and we listen. We have to be attentive to His voice and understand what the will of the Lord is.

The more tranquil our heart is the more we will hear His voice. Hence there's a need for solitude and silence, for it is in silence of tongue, of thought that we begin to perceive with our heart what is habitually present, that is, the glory of God, for "the glory of God is man fully alive and the glory of man is the vision of God."

The quiet times in which we listen to the voice of the Lord are never wasted times, for it is in the time when we lay aside our works that we are strengthened for the very works we laid aside. In the hustle bustle of daily activities we are unaware of what is deepest within us – the voice of the Lord is muffled, but in the grandeur of solitude and silence the voice of the Lord sounds like thunder: "Be still and know that I am God."

Notice that this voice is so loud that it is heard not only upon the waters but upon many waters, that is to say, that the Lord speaks to us in many and various ways such as through the prophets of old and through the prophets of our own day who utter the word of God.

It is also heard upon the waters of God's creation for they all speak of the mind boggling wisdom and power of God, for "creation is the direct expression of the divine imaginations, it is the most intimate reflection of God's sense of beauty" – from the ants to the Lady bugs to the dandelions to the dahlias to the roses and orchids to the lions to the giraffes, etc., all these speak of the glory of God. It's so loud that only the spiritually dead cannot hear them.

The voice of the Lord is also heard upon the waters of our own experience, in the events of our lives, in the ordinary actions of our daily activities, in our pains

and sorrows, and in our joy and gladness, in the innocence of a little child, in the love of husband and wife, in the obedience of children, in the unity of brothers and sisters living in community, in the simplicity of the poor, in the justice of the judges, in the honesty of those engaged in business, in the humility of the rich, in the discretion of those entrusted with leadership, etc. We can go on and on, but the point is that the voice of the Lord is heard when the ears of our heart are attuned to what is good, right, and true. Thus “the God of glory thunders, the Lord, upon many waters.” →

Icon # 278 = Voice of the Lord 2

“The voice of the Lord is powerful, the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.”

All the evidences are clear how powerful the voice of the Lord is. We will mention some of these to authenticate the veracity of our claim. First, “He spoke and all things came to be, He commanded and they were made.” Hence, by His word alone the heaven and the earth and all that are in them were created.

His voice extends through all the ends of the earth. It would be stupendous for us, human beings, if we can project our voice up to a mile/km. away, whereas the voice of the Lord reaches to the ends of the earth, and not only to the ends of the earth but even to the infinite corners of the universe.

Second, the voice of the Lord penetrates to the innermost depths of our being and calls us both to repentance and to holiness: “If today you hear his voice harden not your heart.” “Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.” It has power to transform us from a sinner to a saint; it has power to blot out our sins: “My son, your sins are forgiven you...Go in peace.”

The voice of the Lord is so powerful that it raises the dead: “Little girl, I say to you, arise.” He cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth.

The Lord tells us that we should not marvel, “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.” See, how powerful the voice of the Lord is! It is also full of majesty, just by the very fact that He is so powerful.

His voice is infinite delight to the just, who in this present life have developed intimate friendship with Him. They are the friends of the Bridegroom; and with St. John the Baptist they joyfully say: “the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and

hears him, rejoice greatly at the bridegroom's voice; therefore this joy of mine is now full."

The voice of the Lord is full of majesty, because even when He was hanging on the cross He bestowed paradise to the repentant thief: "Today, you will be with me in paradise." It's full of majesty that even the wind and sea obey Him. When He and his disciples were caught by a great storm, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. Thus when the Lord speaks to our troubled heart our passions subsided and peace ensues. →

Icon # 279 = Voice of the Lord 3

"The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars, the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox."

Again the voice of the Lord is so powerful that by the mere sound of it cedars are broken. It has enormous power to break the spiral of hatred and revenge and shattering the chains of evil which fasten the hearts of those in variance with one another.

We are told that cedars were very valuable in biblical times and were much used in building the Temple. What are the things that we greatly value in our life, but has to be broken by Our Lord so that we may rightly worship Him in spirit and in truth?

The cedars are the precious things in our life that we so attached to the point of venerating them. This kind of attachment is certainly inordinate because it moves us away from the center of our being, from true adoration, from God, and engrossed us to material things which are perishable. Though they seem precious, but they are ephemeral, and wither as they are used because there is no root or foundation in them.

Are we not told that we are temple of the Holy Spirit, and that God dwells in us? If we are to be God's temple, are we to be constructed with seemingly valuable materials which may look so beautiful from the outside but has no real substance in them? In that case, it would be tantamount to building a house on sand which would be easily broken to pieces when the winds of adversities, trials, and tribulations blew upon it.

Hatred and revenge are precious to some people, but they have to be broken to gain access to forgiveness and peace. They are insurmountable to our natural human power that is why we need prayer, we have to allow the Lord to

work in our heart and influence our mind that we may be able to forgive because what seem impossible with us humans is possible with God. Only then shall we be able to skip like a calf and jump for joy in gladness of heart, for the moment we forgive the door to God's heart is flung wide open, we are allowed to enter into the joy of the Lord and go in and out into His heart to find pasture for our soul. His heart is so spacious that we can freely hop, jump, and skip for joy in the freedom of the children of God. →

Icon # 280 = Voice of the Lord 4

"The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire."

The voice of the Lord is so majestic, transcendent, and powerful that it alone among other voices flashes forth flames of fires, a living flame of love that tenderly wounds the soul in its deepest center.

It is so passionate in its desire for union to those who are willing to reciprocate His ardent love, so that they, too, will be inflamed with love. Just as fire, by its nature, has an ascending motion so love, by its very nature, is diffusive. It spreads like fire, and grows because it has life. The plainest face becomes so beautiful and lovely when it is lit from within by love. Such is the voice of the Lord which flashes forth flames of love; it communicates life and motion to all the faculties of the soul and enkindles virtues.

No one can muffle the voice of the Lord for it is even louder than that of thunder; its flashes are brighter than the noon day sun, and the darkness shies away from it. Nothing can quench the living flame of love for it is stronger than death. It gives its life for the salvation of all. It discharges fires of devotion to everyone who follows its light, to guide them in the way of peace.

Hence, whoever hears this voice will not walk in darkness of self-will, but will be ardent in obedience to the will of God which, oftentimes, manifests itself through the voice of our superior who is invested with legitimate authority to help us live the life worthy of the Lord; and in deference to one another's wishes with all lowliness, meekness, and patience; fiery in its eagerness to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace; fervent in its desire to spread the aroma of Christ by a virtuous way of life.

Such are the flashes of the voice of the Lord which are easily recognizable to anyone who is willing to learn the ways of the Lord in the school of charity. →

Icon # 281 = Voice of the Lord 5

"The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness, the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh."

The voice of the Lord is so magnificent that it not only breaks the cedars of worldly desires but also shakes the wilderness of our lukewarmness, so that springs of living water may gush forth from it in streaming sweetness to quench the thirst of our wearied soul.

This shaking has its effect in transformation for it transmogrifies the barren wilderness of our heart into a fertile soil of solitude where our soul can clearly gaze the beauty of the Lord just as stars are seen brightly at night in the solitude of the desert. Its concomitant is, of course, joy and gladness of heart as it is written: "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing....For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water...."

In the hustle-bustle of daily activities we are unaware of what is deepest. It is only in silence, prayer, and solitude that we begin to perceive what is habitually present. Therefore, no matter how urgent and important our occupations may have been we should set a quality time for prayer in the solitude of our heart in which our soul is united with God, is saturated with God – the source of the living springs of the water of eternal life.

If we are really serious of our spiritual life we should do the best we can – to the utmost, to love prayer, solitude, and silence; to be frugal in talking, because talkativeness undermines the quality of our life "not simply a side effect, it is a problem in its own right." "There is a close connection between tranquility and sanity, silence and sanctity. When and where a sense of the sacred is lost, noise takes over. Vulgarity clashes with serenity; and wonder, the basis of wisdom, languishes."

If we surrender our whole being to the Lord we will be amazed to hear the graciousness of His voice in shaking the wilderness of our emptiness and fill it with His fullness, that is, we will become one spirit with Him because everyone who is united with the Lord, as St. Paul says, "become one spirit with him."

Thus from barren wilderness of sinfulness we are renewed in our spirit in the fruitful land of solitude where virtues freely flourish. In this fertile land of solitude, a transformed wilderness, we are given the gift of true discernment of light and darkness, vice and virtue, which people of undiscerning mind can easily miss, for

instance, as our Father St. Bernard of Clairvaux says: “Nowadays frugality is reputed miserliness, temperance austerity, silence an effect of sadness; while on the other hand they call laxity prudence, prodigal waste liberality, talkativeness affability, love of laughter cheerfulness, luxury in dress and bedding decency; and when monks entertain each other with lavish profusion they give it the name of charity.”

No wonder, then, that the Lord has to shake the wilderness of our heart – the wilderness of Kadesh (Kadesh is a place in the wilderness where the waters of Meribah is – the place where the people whom Moses brought out from Egypt rebelled against him). →

Icon # 282 = Voice of the Lord 6

“The voice of the Lord makes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forests bare; and in his temple all cry, ‘glory!’”

It is so fascinating and noteworthy to observe the crescendo of the voice of the Lord, its majesty and power, and how it works along the way till it reaches its summit, that is, His temple – the place of worship and adoration where everything and everyone cry: “Glory!”

It was first upon the waters both in the beginning of creation and in the beginning of Christ's ministry when He was baptized in the Jordan river in which a voice from heaven was heard affirming His sonship, a glory of an only Son from the Father.

It moves with irresistible force that it breaks cedars of worldly desires, and flashes forth a living flame of love, shakes the barren wilderness of our heart; and now its intensity is such that it makes the oaks to whirl, that is to say, it confounds all worldly wisdom, and laid bare the thoughts and intentions of the human soul until the forests of our unruly passions, unbridled covetousness, unrestrained vanity, and our irresponsible pride are stripped of everything that does not belong to God.

The magnitude of His voice is as intense as His zeal in cleansing the Temple, for as He drove out the oxen, sheep, and those who sold pigeons from the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers, so the Lord whirls the oaks and strips the forests bare.

Oaks, here are not limited only to worldly wisdom but also of all bad habits. Once we allow Our Lord to enter our life we will be injected with wonder how our vices and false wisdom were spinned around as though something new is

happening to us. We acquire a new way of thinking and seeing. We can see farther – the horizon of eternal life for we think not only of this present world but of the world to come – the new Jerusalem coming down from God, because the obstacles that prevent us from seeing it are stripped bare.

We have to strongly assert though that our soul has to shed a good quantity of tears before the Lord could have finished stripping us of everything that does not belong to Him. Without ever having shed tears all the angels in heaven will wonder if the voice of the Lord could gain access to the inner-most recesses of our heart, how much more stripping us bare; but with the abundance of tears the soil of our heart become soft so as to make the wind of the Holy Spirit and the thunder of the voice of the Lord do their work in divesting us of our old nature which belongs to our former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts.

Since our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, so once we are purified our whole being can confidently join with all the angels and saints in crying out the eternal paean of praise and thanksgiving to our immortal King and God the Lord Jesus Christ – the King of the whole universe: "Glory!" →

Icon # 283 = The Lord: enthroned as king Forever

"The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits enthroned as king forever."

It is so interesting to recognize the omnipotence of God. Things which are impossible to us are possible to Him. He has absolute control of events and guides them all by His wisdom, achieving the end He wanted them to be. Being sits enthroned over the flood titillates our memory where Our Lord manifested his perfect dominion over nature when He rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!"

This, of course, filled the disciples with awe, and said to one another: "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?" This incident happened when Our Lord and His disciples were caught in a great storm, so that their boat was already filling; but He was in the stern, asleep on the cushion.

The obvious lesson we can get from this story is to cultivate our trust in the Lord not only in peaceful times but especially when we are flooded by trials and difficulties as we traversed the sea of life wherein the waves of anxiety rose high and the presence of God is not tangible, that is, He is seemingly asleep. With the disciples, it is likely that the cry of one's heart is: "Lord, do you not care if we perish?" It is not hard to perceive that it is a cry of someone who is afraid, of someone who is not yet perfected in love as most of us are, because love itself

has its own knowledge. With St. Paul it can cry out: "We know him whom we believe." Since God is love, so, does He not care? Yes, He cares, for not even a hair of our head perish without His notice. If He cares the lilies of the field which today blossom and on the morrow wither away, will He not care for us?

Once our relationship with the Lord deepens and we become more intimate with Him our trust in Him also develop and we grow in the perfection of love. We will be given the privilege to participate in His power to sit enthroned over the flood, that is to say, to control our passions and emotions, to tame our unruly desires, to manage productively the challenges and hardships that might engulf us like flood. Not only these, but we are also given the dignity to share in His kingship, for "He who conquers," the Lord said, "I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne." →

Icon # 284 = Strength: Peace

"May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace!"

Without any shadow of a doubt, the Lord will certainly give strength to His people, those who are willing to serve Him in this present life in whatever vocation they have been called either it be to the contemplative life or to the active life or to married life or to single blessedness. To be able to live faithfully and generously the kind of life to which we have been called is already a clear indication that the Lord has given us strength to do it, because as we serve the Lord we come to a realization, as lucid as the midday sun, that left to ourselves we could not even have the strength to persevere in practicing one single virtue. Our wounded human nature has been so weakened by the effect of original sin that we could not think of any good, much more of doing good, without the grace of God which gives us strength to do good, to pursue righteousness, and to act justly.

To have the strength to do all these is already an enormous blessing with peace as its accompanying result, for peace is wanting what God wants for us, and not craving for what He forbids. Of course, God wants us to act justly, to do good, and to pursue righteousness. Since He knows that by mere human effort we could not hope to persevere in doing good, pursuing righteousness, and acting justly, thus God gives us His strength to do all these, for true strength does not necessarily come from physical capacity, it comes from indomitable will to do what God wants us to do.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." The Lord Jesus not only left us with peace, that is, entrusted peace to us,

but gave His own peace to us. Hence, it is not just an ordinary peace. Notice the seduction of the world: it also gives us peace. But those who truly lived the Christian life know the colossal difference between the peace of the world and the peace of the Lord, because the peace which the Lord Jesus gives is not a thing, or a practice, or a technique. It is God Himself, in us. It is the Holy Spirit.

Let us listen to what the Lord Jesus said: "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" whereas the peace that the world gives is self-deceptive.

Robbers and thieves can have peace in their spoils; drug addicts can have peace in taking heroine; adulterers and prostitutes can have peace at the moment of their sexual ecstasy – orgasm; serial killers can have peace in murdering their victim; swindlers can have peace in deceiving other people. But, how long will this kind of peace last? It is so ephemeral. It is a bait which human souls living in sin have swallowed, but "then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape."

Whereas, the blessing of peace which the Lord gives is perennial, it comes from our union with Christ the prince of peace, it is in our soul though our body may feel pain, it is a liberation from our passions, it is given only to people of good will, to those who are willing to pay the prize of the self-sacrifice which peace demands. →

Icon # 285 = Not letting the Foes rejoice

Psalm 30 (29)

"I will extol thee, O Lord, for thou hast drawn me up, and has not let my foes rejoice over me."

If we put prayer on the top priorities of our life, and are serious about it, the Lord will not let the demons rejoice over us. They can chuckle whenever we stumble and fall but could not even prolong it, because the Lord will not let us be tempted beyond our strength but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape that we may be able to endure it.

It is only when we allow ourselves to do evil deeds deliberately, even in small matters, that the demons can really prolong their rejoicing over us. They rejoice over us so long as we are held captive by them. The more vices we have the more their clutches gripped on us and the more we contribute to their feasting

over our misery, and the more miserable we are the more they rejoice over us. In other words, it's really terrible!

How did a person reach such a disastrous stage? Unequivocally, it started with little things, little tasting of forbidden pleasures, little delight in hearing gossips or green stories, little seeing in immodest pictures, little hankering after in smelling other people's lives, and a little longing in touching any part of the body of another person or one's own body unlawfully.

It has to be clarified that this refers only to the seemingly innocent but subtle advances of the "would be" sexual predators or to oneself if touching any part of the body is for sexual stimulation. This is not applied to fathers and mothers who lovingly caressed their children, or to children who has to take care of their younger brothers and sisters, or to ourselves who are in contact with our bodies more than a hundred times a daily; otherwise, we have to depart from this world and no longer desire for the future resurrection of our bodies. Far be it.

Certainly, Our Lord will not let the wicked spirits rejoice over us if we ourselves will not let them to rejoice over us, because we have free will. We are endowed with a capacity to choose right and wrong, good and evil. Even if we are held captive by our foes so long as there is still a desire in our heart to repent, even just a little spark, Our Lord is more than willing to draw us up from the pit of this misery. In this way, it's no longer the demons who rejoice over us but it's all the angels who rejoice over us, as the Scripture says: "All the angels in heaven are happy if one sinner will repent." →

Icon # 286 = Crying for help: Inner Healing

"O Lord my God, I cried to thee for help, and thou has healed me."

The fact that we could still cry to God for help in our problems and troubles is a healthy sign that there is still a godly humility in our heart although this humility varies in degrees from person to person. Of course, Christ Jesus is the humblest of all people, because even though He was by nature God He did not count equality with God – a thing to be clung to, but He emptied Himself by becoming a human being. He became like us in all things except sin. In the days of His flesh, He offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to God the Father, and He was heard for His godly fear. Although He was the only Begotten Son of God the Father, He learned obedience through what He suffered; and since He Himself suffered and been tempted, He is able to help us who are also experiencing temptation in this world. He was wounded so that by His wounds we will be healed.

In the days of His flesh, He healed people both physically and spiritually. He forgave sin to heal the soul, for it was believed that sin is the cause of physical illness. Thus by removing the cause the effect of bodily healing was justified.

Part of self-knowledge is to recognize that we are wounded in many ways: emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically. It is also true to say that if there is a desire in us to be healed we will be guided to find the ways of healing. We will not attempt to hide our wounds from the Lord for He is the true physician of our soul.

His willingness to heal us is far greater than our desire to be healed, for He knows that our inner healing will redound to the greater glory of God. It will make us alive once more to acknowledge and praise His name not only with our lips but much more by the way we lived our Christian life. →

Icon # 287 = Bottom Pit

“O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life among those gone down to the Pit.”

We are told that this word ‘Sheol’ simply means the place of the dead, without happiness. It is often translated as ‘hell.’ In the New Testament the word hell is used to translate two words, 1st Hades which means the same as Sheol – the place of the dead, and 2nd Gehenna, the place of retribution for evil deeds.

For instance, in the book of Revelation it says: “And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they have done. And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire....”

Whether people will like it or not, or accept it or not, the doctrine of hell is one of the four last things, namely, Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell. People committing a deliberate mortal sin and die in that state are really in danger to be hurled into this lake of fire as this book of Revelation had indicated that all will be judged by what they had done.

There are several saints who have seen the vision of hell; to name a few: St. Teresa of Avila and the three children of Fatima.

What the book of Revelation is saying about the lake of fire is confirmed when the Blessed Virgin Mary showed the vision of hell to the three children: Jacinta – age 7, Francisco – age 9, and Lucia – age 10. Before she showed them the

vision of hell, She said to them: "Sacrifice yourselves for sinners and say often, especially when you make some sacrifice: "O my Jesus, this is for love of You, for the conversion of sinners, and in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary."

At these words, she opened her hands on the three children once again and the light streaming from them seemed to penetrate the earth and the children beheld a vision of Hell. Lucia cried out in terror, calling upon the Blessed Virgin Mary.

"We could see a vast sea of fire," she revealed many years later. "Plunged in the flames were demons and lost souls, as if they were red-hot coals, transparent and black or bronze-colored, in human form, which floated in the conflagration, borne by the flames which issued from them, with clouds of smoke falling on all sides as sparks fall in a great conflagration without weight or equilibrium, amid shrieks and groan of sorrow and despair that horrified us and caused us to tremble with fear. The devils could be distinguished by horrible and loathsome form of animals, frightful and unknown, but transparent like black coals that have turned red-hot."

Full of fear, the children raised their eyes beseechingly to the Blessed Virgin who said to them with unspeakable sadness and tenderness, "You saw Hell the souls of poor sinners go. In order to save them, God wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart..." "Pray, pray a great deal and make many sacrifices, for many souls go to Hell because they have no one to make sacrifices and pray for them."

In retrospect, it would not be hard to see and realized that our own conversion is ultimately due to the prayers and sacrifices of other people. It is noteworthy to bring to our awareness that 'sacrifice' is comprised of two antithetical elements, namely: negation and affirmation.

Negation takes the forms in accepting the negative things that we encounter from time to time in our life on earth offering them to God, those little pinpricks, discomfort, hurts, and pains, denying ourselves of even legitimate pleasure.

The affirmative side of sacrifice is doing whatever is good, right, and true in union with God and in conformity to His holy will. This takes its forms in one hundred and one ways, such as washing a spoon or fork or a plate left in a sink instead of just leaving it. This is so menial a thing, but its value in the eyes of God is so great if it is done in love of Him, for the conversion of sinners, and in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Of course, we have to be in a state of grace, for this so insignificant act, to be highly valuable. If this is so, how much more if we do an act of charity toward our fellow human being, going an extra mile, going out of our way to help someone in need, honest in our work, faithful in our commitments, and truthful in our speech.

Once the inner eyes of heart are open, and we follow the impulse of the Holy Spirit, we shall find many ways of doing good even in the most unlikely occasions in which God will humbly use it for our own on-going conversion and for the conversion of those who are still living sinful lives in order to forestall their going down to Sheol, to the bottomless Pit of eternal misery and suffering. →

Icon # 288 = Sing Praises to the Lord

“Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”

Conversion is really a restoration to life. We are already spiritually dead when we are living in sin, but brought back to life by conversion. Two effects are apparent if our conversion is sincere: 1st, we will learn how to sing praises to God not only with our lips but also with our heart, for singing praises to God is a fitting expression of loyal hearts even though we might not have a good singing voice.

Anyhow, we are God's children and He is more interested in the state of our heart than in the sound of our voice. Slowly, we will see ourselves actively participating in the singing at Mass, and in the divine office if we are religious; 2nd, we will be even able to give thanks to God in the negative things that we will experience instead of blaming Him or murmuring against Him in our heart for what had happened.

Of course, He pities us when we are in a state of mortal sin because He does not want us to be separated from Him forever, but His justice necessarily demands that He should be angry of our sin. His anger, though, is not a hankering expression of retaliation but a corollary spark of His justice and holiness, which is but for a moment when we will choose to turn away from sin and be converted to Him.

The echo of His anger is eternal if we adamantly despise the graces He constantly offers to us. On the other hand, His favor is for a lifetime when we seriously cooperate with the graces He gives us, for this leads us the way to God's kingdom where life is eternal; though, necessarily, we have to weep for our sins

and the sins of others while we are still in this world, but our weeping will turn into dancing and our sorrows into joy when we see the glory of God.

In God's kingdom there will be no more mourning and weeping but only gladness of heart. There are tears in the night of this world, but happiness comes with the dawn of eternal glory. Thus let us not run away from pain and hardship in this world, so as to enter at last into the joy of God's consolation, and to obtain the soothing repose of immortal life which comes with the morning when we awake to behold God's majesty and glory. →

Icon # 289 = Mountain Top: Vision of the Promised Land becomes clearer and brighter

“As for me, I said in my prosperity, ‘I shall never be moved.’ By thy favor, O Lord, thou hadst established me as a strong mountain; thou didst hide thy face, I was dismayed.”

If God is for us, who is against us? Who can separate us from the love of Christ? When we cultivate our prayer life and enrich ourselves by frequently receiving the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist, and do spiritual reading; when we abide in Christ and He in us, and then we grow in virtues, we will notice that we are strong enough to resist the fascination of this world and are able to withstand the trials and hardships in life. We will not be cast down by adversity nor be elated by prosperity. We will be like a tree that is planted near a running stream that yields its fruit in due season and whose leaves shall never wither even when hot season comes.

All this indicates a progress in our spiritual life, a time of favor and consolation from the Lord. We not only feel like a strong mountain, but also feel like being on a mountain top where our horizon expands and the vision of the Promised Land becomes clearer and brighter. We have to nurture this experience and be grateful to God for allowing us to catch a glimpse, even for a moment, of the world to come where no eye has seen nor ear heard nor it enters into the heart of the human person what God has prepared for those who love Him.

However, we have to realize that so long as we are still in this present life this experience, or this favor, is not a permanent state but is granted to us as an incentive to goad us to move forward in our ascent to the mountain of holiness. We can always go back, from time to time, to this favorable moment when the Lord, in His infinite wisdom, will hide His face from us. Of course, this dismayed us. On the other hand, it heightens our love for Him, for often times we take for granted the value of the presence of someone we love because we are so

used to his/her features, but when that person is taken away from us we keenly feel that the other part of us is missing.

Our joy would be indescribable when that person is restored back to us. We don't want to lose him/her again. We will greatly value even her/his shadow. The Lord will hide His face from us to make us long for His presence and to make us realize that apart from Him we can do nothing, for He is the vine and we are the branches. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit apart from the vine, neither can we apart from the Lord. →

Icon # 290 = Death

"To thee, O Lord, I cried, and to the Lord I made supplication: 'what profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise thee? Will it tell of thy faithfulness?'"

Of course, our death has no profit whatsoever if we die in a state of sin, especially in mortal sin. Death is unthinkably perilous in that case. That is why while there is still breath in us we have to cry to the Lord and make supplication for mercy that He may give us the grace to ask for forgiveness. The Lord is so kind and merciful that He is more than willing to forgive if we acknowledge our sins. Only then would our death be profitable, as it is written: "O precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his faithful."

Since all of us will die one day, let us make a daily supplication that we may die the death of the righteous – a holy death. In this way, we will no longer be fearful to gaze on the face of death. And if we have love for the Lord as intense as that of St. Teresa of Avila and St. Paul we will not be so deaf so as not to hear the gentle murmur of our spirit: "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better."

We are also aware that there are some people who also long to die. Both longing is real, but we can easily distinguish which one is profitable and which one is not. For instance, if a person is weighed down by difficult problem or serious illness and could not cope with it, but instead is pinched by it, then his or her longing for death, even though he/she might consider it as the best course to take, is certainly not profitable because it doesn't redound to the praise and glory of God. Remembrance of his/her death will even bring a tinge of sadness to the members of his/her family. Where will she/he be? Does her/his death tells the faithfulness of God, or does it question God's faithfulness?

There's an epitaph which says: "Stranger, stop as you pass by; As you are now, so once was I. As I am now, you soon will be; And so prepare to follow me."

Someone added these two lines: "To follow you I'm not content, until I know which way you went." If the way she/he went led to the place where the inhabitants sing forever the praises of God and declare His faithfulness, then it is worth preparing our whole life on earth, but if not, well we can only say with the psalmist: "What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise thee? Will it tell of thy faithfulness?" →

Icon # 291 = Helper

"Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me! O Lord, be thou my helper!"

Since God is more desirous of our salvation than the devil is for our perdition, will He not, then, be gracious to us and be our helper if we put our trust in Him and pray to Him? Absolutely, He will, for He will be gracious to whom He will be gracious, and He will show mercy on whom He will show mercy, and He will make all His goodness pass before us, as it is written: "He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when he hears it, he will answer you. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself any more, but your eyes shall see your Teacher."

In His graciousness Our Lord makes Himself both our helper and our teacher. As our helper He will help us keep His words and do His will; as our teacher He will teach us His ways and guide us in the path that we should walk looking always at the Lord Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. Then our light shall break forth like the dawn, and our inner healing shall spring up speedily; our righteousness shall go before us, and the glory of the Lord shall be for us a rear guard. The eyes of the Lord will be upon us and His face will shine on us, and He will be gracious to us; His ears will listen to our prayers, and even before we ask Him, He will say to us: Here I am.

This is how gracious Our Lord is to us. We have only to anchor ourselves to Him, then, we will know by our own experience how true it is that the Lord Jesus is really our helper. He will help us to carry our cross just as He was helped by Simon of Cyrene to carry His cross.

The Blessed Virgin Mary too is our helper. She will see to it that when the wine of our enthusiasm to do our daily works is running out, she will graciously intercede for us to Her Son to supply us with enough strength and energy to carry out our duties and responsibilities.

The Lord is so gracious to those who leave all for His love, for leaving all for God we will find all. How dear to God is a soul that gives itself entirely to Him. →

Icon # 292 = Thanksgiving

"Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing; thou hast loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness that my soul may praise and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to thee forever "

The most congenial homage we can render to God in this present world for all He has done to us is to offer Him a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. It is not far-fetched to assert that it is for this end that He has turned for us our mourning into dancing; He has loosen our sorrows and clothed us with gladness.

This is clear as a noon day sun in the life of Tobit. He, too, experienced pains and sufferings. He had been girded with the sackcloth of sorrows by being deprived of his sight and mourning in the land of his exile. He was so desolate to the point that he wanted to die. He prayed to God, saying: "...command my spirit to be taken up, that I may depart and become silent. For it is better for me to die than to live, because I have heard false reproaches, and great is the sorrow within me. Command that I now be released from my distress to go to the eternal abode; do not turn thy face away from me."

God, on the other hand, who listens to prayer of anyone who is a true worshiper of Him and do His will, in the end, girded Tobit with gladness and turned his mourning into dancing when his sight was restored and saw his son Tobias again with his wife Sarah.

Then the angel Raphael who was sent by God to help them summoned both Tobit and Tobias and said to them: "Praise God and give thanks to him in the presence of all the living for what he has done for you. It is good to praise God and to exalt his name, worthily declaring the works of God. Do not be slow to give thanks to him."

This art of praising God, giving Him thanks, and declaring his works reaches its crescendo in the Magnificat of the Blessed Mary where in the depth of her humility and the height of her dignity she graciously utters her stunning paean of praise which stupefies all the angelic choirs: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name...."

Of course, it culminates in the peerless Eucharist of Our Lord Jesus – the supreme Thanksgiving being rendered to God the Father. For this reason, how lucky we are, then, who entered the religious life in which we have a very wide access to the Eucharist, receiving it every day as our way of giving thanks to God, for all He has done for our salvation and sanctification.

To remember and celebrate with gratitude in our heart what Our Lord has done for our world in general and for each one of us in particular is not so much an emotion as it is a way of looking at life. To give thanks to God and to our fellow human being is a regular part of faith. All the blessings and graces we receive are meant to shape us into thankful people.

Growing into the practice of giving thanks by always drinking at the source of the water of life, the Eucharist, can even lead us to bless God at times when our emotions and feelings are far from thankful. An old Christian prayer of thanksgiving says: "We thank you for the disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone." In one of his letters, St. Paul encourages us to give thanks for everything in the name of Our Lord Jesus to God the Father.

When giving thanks becomes our habit we will be amazed to discover that it is an antidote to sadness and despondency. We will never fall into despair once we cultivate the habit of giving thanks to God in all circumstances both in good and bad times. We will gently chuckle to find out that by doing so God turns our mourning into dancing, a graceful dance with Divine Providence! It surely will last forever! →

Icon # 293 = Rock of Refuge

Psalm 31 (30)

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

Truly, never was it known that anyone who humbly seek refuge in the Lord was ever put to shame.

St. Francis de Sales once said that a bee, when caught in storm, can maintain its stability by clinging a little stone to itself. It is rightly so with us too. We can still maintain the stability of our feelings and emotions, when we are caught in the storm of contradiction or tribulation or suffering, by clinging fast to Christ the rock of our salvation. This doesn't mean though that we will be completely devoid of all feelings and emotions, but we will be able to handle them constructively.

It is for this reason that prayer is really necessary to make us sober, setting our hope fully upon the grace that will be given to us through Our Lord Jesus, for zeal for prayer strengthens our soul, it protects us against dangers of all kinds,

and is a bulwark in time of temptation, as Our Lord says: "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Wherefore, by taking refuge upon the Lord Jesus, who is our strong fortress and the rock of our redemption, in prayer, we will be safe and be strong enough to withstand the flood of evil in our time.

Sr. Lucia stressed the imperative need of prayer to counter this flood of evil today. In a letter to a nephew, who is a Salesian priest, she wrote: "It is sad that many are allowing themselves to be dominated by the diabolical wave that is sweeping the world and they are so blind that they cannot see their error....What I recommend to you above all is that you get close to the tabernacle and pray. In fervent prayer you receive the light, strength and grace that you need to sustain....Never consider the time wasted that you spend in prayer....We all need to intensify our life of intimate union with God and this we can only attain through prayer....The principal cause of evil in the world and the falling away of so many consecrated souls is the lack of union with God in prayer. If we are not careful and attentive in obtaining strength from God, we will fail because our times are very bad and we are weak. Only God's strength can sustain us."

Sr. Lucia hit the nail on the head when she said: "only God's strength can sustain us," because left to ourselves we could not hope to bear perseveringly the pressures in life and we will be too vulnerable against the aggression of our infernal foe who is like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour; but with God's strength to sustain us we will be able to resist and foiled its evil machinations, we will be taken out of the net which is hidden for us, for God's strength is our refuge. →

Icon # 294 = Faithfulness

"Into thy hand I commit my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God."

The first phrase, "Into thy hand I commit my spirit," reminds us of the words of Our Lord Jesus on the cross when He entrusted His Spirit to the Heavenly Father; the second phrase, "thou hast redeemed me," is, of course, our acknowledgment of the work of redemption Our Lord has done for us; and the third phrase, "O Lord, faithful God," is our unequivocal confession of the trustiness and fidelity of God, that is, no matter if all people will be unfaithful God will always be faithful, for it is His nature, as the Scripture says: "If we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself."

God's faithfulness is extended in all aspects of our life even in determining the quantity and quality of our trials and temptations, as it is written: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. 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.”

God's hand is as wide as the infinite universe. His concern for our well-being is such that he carves us in the palm of His hands. So, we are very safe in committing our spirit into His hand. We need only to trust Him at all times either in sickness or in health, in other words, in the positive or negative experiences that we run into from time to time, for He will not forsake us no matter what.

He is so faithful that He could not find it in His loving heart to let us be snatched from Him if we completely surrender ourselves to Him and follow Him, as the Lord said; “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.”

Our Lord redeemed us so that we may no longer live for ourselves but for Him and with Him for all eternity. Our Lord Jesus is so committed for our redemption that he remains faithful to the end, even death on the cross. As He is faithful to us, we are bound to be faithful to Him too.

Nothing perhaps, outside of love, so defines the follower of the Lord Jesus as faithfulness. Nothing probably is so basically heroic than day by day faithfulness to our commitments no matter what our moods are – faithfulness to obligations, to our work and promises, to religious practices and prayer, to daily routine, and to God. →

Icon # 295 = Vain Idols

“Thou hatest those who pay regard to vain idols; but I trust in the Lord.”

St. Paul tells us that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. He was referring to food which the pagans offered to idols, for idols doesn't count anything at all. He goes on to say that he doesn't want us to be partners with demons, for we cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. If we would dare to do so we are implying that we are provoking the Lord to jealousy.

In the letter of James we are also told that “friendship with the world is enmity with God. Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” Then, he goes on to say: “Or do you suppose it is in vain that the Scripture says, ‘He yearns jealously over the spirit which he has made to dwell in us’?”

Since idols does not count anything, and that what pagans sacrifice they offer it to demons and not to God, therefore, it is not surprising why the Lord “hatest those who pay regard to vain idols,” because in doing so they are paying regard to demons and not to God, they are trusting the demons and not God. And since the demons are nothing in comparison to God who is everything, hence, paying regard to vain idols is an insult to God. It calls to mind how the people chose Barabbas who was devoid of moral standing than Christ who was innocent and sinless.

From generation to the next, history is not lacking of people who are paying regard to vain idols, such as the idol of vainglory, the idol of pride, the idol of Avarice, the idol of sinful pleasure, the idol of power, the idol of vanity, etc.

On the other hand, history is not also destitute of people who trust in the Lord, and not in vain idols. These are the people who, in their lifetime, run with unspeakable sweetness in the path of God’s commandments with expanded heart. They are worthy to hear the words of the Lord Jesus: “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world....” These are the people who trust in the Lord – and not in the things of the world which are idolized by those whom the Lord hated.

Did Our Lord transgress His own precept to love our enemies when He Himself hated those who pay regard to vain idols? By no means, because the Lord loves the sinner, but hates the sin. In other words, if those who are paying homage to vain idols would change their loyalty to the Lord and live a virtuous life they, too, shall be counted worthy to be among the true worshippers of God and shall become heirs of God’s kingdom. They may be reviled by their former comrades for not joining them in their wild profligacy, and has to suffer affliction because of it; but they will be forever grateful to God for it. With gratitude and joy in their heart, they will graciously say: →

Icon # 296 = Steadfast Love

“I will rejoice and be glad for thy steadfast love, because thou hast seen my affliction, thou hast taken heed of my adversities, and hast not delivered me into the hand of the enemy; thou hast set my feet in a broad place.”

In proportion to our humility we will be given patience in our affliction; in proportion to our patience the burden of affliction is made lighter and we receive comfort; in proportion to the comfort we receive, the love of God increases in us; and in proportion to this love our joy in the Holy Spirit grows. Having these in us is tantamount to having set our feet in a broad place, that is,

in the Sacred Heart of the Lord Jesus, for His Heart is as broad as the kingdom of God – broader than the infinite universe.

In His steadfast love for us we will rejoice and be glad forever. Of course, this begins in this life as we remember all the things He has done for our salvation and sanctification, and finally our deification. We were like the Israelites who were being slaved in Egypt. Just as God sent Moses to deliver His people from the Egyptians because He has seen their afflictions and mindful of their adversities, then, brought them to the Promised Land; and as Miriam took a timbrel, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and they were rejoicing, singing, and dancing along the way; so, God the Father sent His only begotten Son Jesus – the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit to deliver us from the slavery of our passions and unhealthy desires because He has seen that we are afflicted in so many by them and they brought us many adversities.

They are in us. No wonder, then, that Our Lord Jesus said that our own enemies are within our household, that is, within our heart. However, it is by His grace that we are not delivered into them. We have to admit though that there was a period in our life that we were enslaved by our passions. We were delivered from them only because we kept on crying for help and did not abandon our life of prayer.

To pray is to open the door of our heart unto Our Lord Jesus and admit Him into our adversities. Therefore, we should not abandon prayer under the pretext of infirmity so long as we have breath, for it is in the weakness of our infirmity that we are made strong in God's steadfast love. Acting thus we will gain much profit; our heart will rejoice and be glad. Thus prayer delivers us by the action of grace. →

Icon # 297 = Coordination of Soul and Body

"Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief, my soul and my body also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away."

Whether we like it or not we are lead to avow that there is no permanent state of our life in this present world; we are bound to admit the undisputable law of alternation in life. Notice that we were experiencing rejoicing and gladness for the steadfast love of the Lord, because He has taken heed of our afflictions and adversities in such a potent way that they lost their grip upon us, and then He has set our feet in a broad place.

But now, we found ourselves again in distress. Not only is our eye wasted from grief but our soul and body also. This is because we are composite being. What

happen to our soul will affect the body. A simple example is this: if one's soul is so depressed he/she might not want to eat, so he/she become so thin, then his/her immune system loses its potency thus even a slight punch of a mild fever can knock him/her down; on the other hand, he/she might be over eating, and so become abnormally obese. His/her bad cholesterol level will certainly go high and she might become diabetic too.

And what happen to our body will affect also the soul. For instance, if a person heard the news that she/ he had been diagnosed with a malignant cancer that certainly will make her/him depress. Some people will even commit suicide just to think of the misery they have to wallow. There are others though that in spite of the initial feeling of depression are able to engage in that hard but meaningful combat with the sickness and its concomitant sorrow and sighing.

At this point in one's life, to be able to pray to God, saying: "Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress...", is already a marvelous blessing. It is a form of self-surrender, a sigh to be remembered by God, a plea for the forgiveness of one's sins. God, on His side, who carved us in the palms of His hands, who wept over the death of His friend Lazarus, will gently reply: "Call on me on the day of distress and I will answer you...can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you," because if ever I forget you, you will cease to exist, but I will your existence that you may share in my infinite glory which my Father has given Me before the foundation of the world...I am with you in your distress for you are part of my mystical body just as my Father was in my distress when I suffered on the cross. You and I are one just as I and my Father are one...Because I live, you will live also...You will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you...In my suffering on the cross many sins were forgiven. In the suffering of your body too you put a halt in your sins...My faithful servant rightly says: "Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer by human passions but by the will of God."

To a truly wise person sorrow, sighing, and distress bring remembrance of God, but if a person forgets God, that person is correspondingly saddened by them. Therefore, if we are truly wise these afflictions, which can block all the acts of piety and which make us disintegrate, become now the means that unite us to God. It is no longer a question of adamantly resisting the negative things that we encounter in life. It is a question of fully accepting the means Our Lord condescendingly given us to facilitate speedily our union with Him. Thus even if our strength fails and our bones are wasting away, our soul is being renewed every day. →

Icon # 298 = Object of Dread

"I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbors, an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me."

Once our soul is being renewed every day, even though our physical body is wasting away, we will grow in caring less that we become an object of dread to those who only look at external appearances. It is even a source of a healthy self-esteem and an honor that we are the scorn of all our adversaries, that is, the demons and evil spirits, for it means that the spirit of the Lord Jesus is in us.

Blessed are we, then, when we are held in contempt by the demons and his minions, and all the haters and indifferent of God, as the Scriptures says: "Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you."

We will be the scorn of all our adversaries if we strive to do what is good, right, and true, and abstain from every form of evil – a horror to the hedonists, and objects of dread to our worldly acquaintances.

I remember when I was the guest master, from 1994-1996, I slept at night in the guest master's office which is at the entrance to the parlor. One night, between 9:30-11:00, a group of a not too young boys and girls rang the door bell. I opened the door and they got in. We sat in the parlor with only the light of the lampshade on. There were questions and answers. When I told them that we lived a celibate life, that is, we don't get married, one of the boys snapped right away, saying: "You mean you have no sex?" Sh....!" It was obviously dreadful to him, and even horrible that we abstain from sex.

But, as St. Paul says that if only in this life we have hope in Christ we are of all people most to be pitied. But our inner eyes have beheld, even though it's still a glimmer, of the beauty and glory of the world to come. Thus the same apostle boldly say: "...having the eyes of our hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints...."

For this reason, we are more than willing to be the scorn, a horror, and an object of dread to the people of this world even to such a gravity that they will flee from us whenever they will see us. This is really an immense blessing to us, for it offers us an untrammled opportunity to continue serving the Lord all the days of our life without fear, for He who is with us is greater than he and those who are in the world. →

Icon # 299 = Vessel

"I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel."

Many people in this world who are not of the Lord think of us who entered the monastery as like forgotten dead men, like a broken vessel – a thing thrown away. They consider us as useless to society because we buried ourselves alive in seclusion; and like a broken vessel we are useless to society because for them we don't have any positive contribution to the welfare of this world. But, in thinking this of us, their thoughts boomerang to them for they ignore or ignorant of the fact that it was the monks who save civilization and preserved Christian culture.

Of course, now the preservation of the world is no longer solely consigned to the monks and nuns but to everyone who is a true worshiper of God, who worship Him in spirit and in truth. They are from the ranks of lay people and from those who entered religion. In a certain sense, they are the modern day martyrs for they bear witness to their faith in God's love, mercy, holiness, and existence in a hedonistic and Godless society.

They are men and women who are dead to the world but alive in the Lord, who are in the world but are not of the world. They are forgotten by the world but remembered by the Lord. They have become like a broken vessel for they could no longer contain the seduction of vices. They have crucified the flesh with its unhealthy passions and harmful desires.

What recompense can they have? They too will arise again, that is, the inner person is being renewed every day so as to live the rest of their lives no longer for themselves but for the Lord. And since they have purified themselves from what is ignoble, they are now a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the Lord, ready for any good work. →

Icon # 300 = Whisper

"Yea, I hear the whispering of many – terror on every side! – as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life."

At the stage when we become a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the Lord, ready for any good work, we will not be totally cast down and cringed in fear when terrors are on every side, when we hear the whispering of the enemies of our salvation – scheming together against us and plotting to put us to death, because the Lord Himself will be our stronghold, a bulwark in times of trouble. We too will hear His whisper to us: "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.”

The only terror that we have to really fear is to be ultimately separated from the Lord – to sin deliberately for it is a death to one’s soul. We dread, therefore, the loss of God and the pains of hell, but most of all because we don’t want to offend God who are all good and deserving of all our love.

The enemies of our salvation knew the value of the human soul – how it is destined to inherit the glory that they lost, so, in their jealousy and envy they plot to take it away from us. They have done and will continue to do, until the day of final judgment, to rob us of our unspeakable and glorious inheritance. It has to be clearly said, however, that they can only do so if we allow them to do it – that is, when we fully give our unreserved consent.

They are so horrible that they can really terrify people, but they are also coward and really powerless if we offer resistance against them, as the Scripture says: “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” On the other hand, we can resist the devil only when we are sustained by the grace of God; and we can have the grace of God only when we are not totally devoid of humility to approach Him, as the Scripture again says: “Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.” “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

Therefore, so long as there is still a flicker of humility in us the enemies of our salvation could not take away the eternal life which God bestows on those who put their trust in Him. Thus we can humbly and confidently say: →

Icon # 301 = Trusting God

“But I trust in thee, O Lord, I say, ‘Thou art my God.’ My times are in thy hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.”

Trust in God is a luminous gesture of humility, for it is a truthful knowledge of ourselves and of God: of ourselves because we are very limited and doesn’t have an absolute control of anything and everything, whereas of God there is nothing impossible to Him. Trusting God puts us in a right relationship with Him not only as our Creator and as the Supreme Being, but also as our friend and Savior.

If we trust a stranger who gives us direction even though we do not know for certain whether he is good or bad, how much more we have to trust in God who is all Good and who is Love and who is only after for our well-being!

Trust in God is like a seed planted in our soul that grows and develops when it is faithfully watered by assiduous prayers and fertilized by the practice of virtues

and cultivated by the reception of the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist. Once it grows and develops, it has to be maintained and nurtured by earnestly allocating time in reading the Sacred Scriptures.

If these things are ours and abound they will make us slippery to the hands of vices that are really like vipers that will grip us if in our mishap we are delivered into them. They serve as the enemies of our salvation, persecuting every soul who is under their dominion. They are ingenuous in making life miserable of those who got entangled with them. They appear first to be harmless and pleasant, arousing in us an all-consuming desire for them; but as soon as we swallowed the bait, then, the litany of systematic persecution of one's soul followed. We will be their slaves, oppressing our souls.

At this state only the mighty hand of God can deliver us. Although will power is needed but it is not enough. The grace of the Lord has to come to our aid, for alone and unaided we will even find it difficult to breathe a resistance against them. If the flicker of humility is not totally extinguished in us we will have a fairly good chance to be delivered from these enemies and persecutors, for it will make us to repent in the end.

Then the remaining times that are left in our life are now for the Lord and not for ourselves. We freely entrust our times in the hand of the Lord and we let Him do to us what pleases Him and no longer what pleases the world as it is written: "Let the time that is past suffice for doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry. They are surprised that you do not now join them in the same wild profligacy, and they abuse you; but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead."

Realizing these things in our life, we feel like the prodigal son who considered himself not worthy to be called son but a servant because we had wasted the graces of God. On the other hand, we trust in the loving kindness of the heart of God that in our service, as His servant, He kindly let His countenance sparkle upon us. Wherefore we pray: →

Icon # 302 = Shining Face

"Let thy face shine on thy servant; save me in thy steadfast love!"

To make God's face shine upon us, of course, signifies divine favor. Therefore, when the Lord want to bless His people He said to Moses, "Say to Aaron and his sons, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, The Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace."

Once we found favor with God, then, like the Blessed Virgin Mary we too are blessed although, of course, the magnitude of the blessedness varies. All shall see the face of the Lord shining in full splendor and shall drink His steadfast love according to one's own capacity up to the brim. We shall see Him face to face and no longer as in a dim mirror. For the time being, though, it does not appear what we shall be, but the spirit of love which He has put into our heart convinced us that we shall see Him as He is.

For this reason, while we are still in this present world we allow ourselves to undergo the process of purification so that we will be conformed to the purity of the Lord, as it is written: "And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."

Again, as to the degree of one's purity will be the clearness and brightness of one's vision. Wherefore, "Blessed are the pure of heart," says the Lord, "for they shall see God." Once our heart is getting purer we will be amazingly awed that our thoughts are elevated, our affections are becoming healthy, our words are getting chaste, and our gestures and manners are growing modest.

St. Philotheus of Sinai said that "the only reason why we were given the law of purifying the heart is to have the clouds of evil thoughts driven away from the atmosphere of the heart, and dispersed by constant attention, so that we can see clearly, as on bright fine day, the sun of truth – Jesus Christ."

So, when the face of Our Lord Jesus shines upon us, that is, we found favor in His sight, then, we have nothing to fear because we will grow in confidence that the words of the angels Gabriel to the Blessed Virgin Mary will be addressed to us, too: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor God." However, we have to be clear that having the face of the Lord shine upon us will not, in any way, spare us from trials and sufferings. The Blessed Virgin Mary herself was not exempted from sufferings though she found favor with God.

Our imagination could not do justice of the sorrows and anguish she felt looking at her “innocent” son hanging on the cross. Even mothers whose sons are really guilty of felony would still feel the pain of their sons’ conviction, how much more of the Blessed Virgin Mary whose son is sinless: “Which of you convicts me of sin,?” Her son said.

Above all, the Father did not spare His own son but gave Him up for us all – to be delivered up to humiliation and death, yet the face of the Father continues to shine and its brilliance penetrates the thick darkness of the tomb, for in His steadfast love the Son rose again from the dead shining with unspeakable splendor. →

Icon # 303 = Shame vs. Glory

“Let me not be put to shame, O Lord, for I call on thee; let the wicked be put to shame, let them go dumbfounded to Sheol.”

We, too, will not be put to everlasting shame when we do not cease to call upon the Lord for mercy and forgiveness, for if we will not deceive ourselves we will certainly find in us something that will not make us presume that we are completely free of any guilt, for the Lord Himself said that not everyone who says to Him: Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of His Father in heaven.

We will have a fairly good chance of entering heaven if, like the repentant thief on the cross who acknowledges that he deserved to be put there because of his crimes, we, too, asked humbly to be remembered by the Lord; for it would be an unspeakable shame to all who will not repent and to all who presume in calling upon the name of the Lord while moonlighting in doing evil deeds to hear the terrible verdict: “I do not know you, depart from me....”

It is a dreadful thing, therefore, to be forgotten by the Lord, when He no longer know our name. Herein lies the mystery of God’s love, how inscrutable His judgment, how unsearchable His ways. He who said: “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have graven you on the palms of my hands;” yet, now He no longer know us. What happen in between, then?

Of course, it’s a very long story. It’s a sad story to those who used the members of their bodies as instruments of wickedness, for the Lord will render to every human person according to one’s works: “to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for

those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil...but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good....”

“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” Hence, shame and glory are laid down before us. May we have the grace to tilt unceasingly toward glory by constantly calling humbly on the Lord. If we do this it is very likely that we will not be put to shame and go dumbfounded to Sheol. →

Icon # 304 = Lying Lips

“Let the lying lips be dumb, which speak insolently against the righteous in pride and contempt.”

We are told that “there are six things which the Lord hates, seven which are abomination to him: ...” Two of these have to do with lying/lies. We will mention all of them in the hope that by being aware of them we will not fall into them: 1) haughty eyes 2) A lying tongue 3) Hands that shed innocent blood 4) A heart that devises wicked plans 5) Feet that make haste to run to evil 6) a false witness who breathes out lies, and 7) a man who sows discord among brothers.

It is very likely that the Psalmist is referring to “pernicious lie” – the most malicious kind of lie which is directly and explicitly intended to do harm to another for he was alluding to the lying lips “which speak insolently against the righteous....” And to make it even worse, it was done “in pride and contempt.” Notice also that it was directed against the righteous. How painful it is when righteous people would become the object of lying lips and have been spoken insolently in pride and contempt.

We have a potent example of this in the passion of Our Lord Jesus: “For many bore false witness against him, and their witness did not agree. And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, ‘We hear him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hand.’ Yet not even so did their testimony agree.” This is so malicious and pernicious because it was intended to put Our Lord to death.

Are we justified, then, to wish that this kind of lips be dumb? First and foremost, we have to assert strongly that lying is wrong; however, just as there are sins that are not mortal – thus does not lead to eternal death, though we have to avoid

these as much as possible, so there are lying that are not fatal but still we don't want to engage in it as much as possible except in extreme cases to save life or to avoid harm done to another.

The reason why we have to avoid lying in any form is that the Lord Jesus had identified the devil as the father of lies, therefore common sense does not want us to be identified as son or daughter of the devil, or grandson or granddaughter, or even great, great, great grandchildren of the "father of lies." Moreover, it is also very risky because it is tantamount to a seed falling into our heart which might conceive and then gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death.

Considering all these arguments, how lethal then is pernicious lie! Therefore, it is legitimate to desire that lying lips which speak insolently against the righteous in pride and contempt be dumb not because we want them to be consigned to eternal death in Sheol where their worms will never die and they will gnash their teeth, far be it, we will leave it to the judgment of the eternal Judge who knows everything that is in the human heart, it is not ours to decide; but because we are motivated by the hope that if their lips be dumb their hearts be converted, and if their hearts are converted they will learn the fear of the Lord, and even though there is no more external words in their lips but their inner voice will rise in thanksgiving to God.

Herein the saying holds true: "...where sin increased, grace abounded all the more..." It will increase too in thanksgiving to God. Then together with all the angels and saints in heaven and with our fellow converted sinners on earth we will cry out in one accord to Our Lord: →

Icon # 305 = God's Goodness

"O how abundant is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for those who fear thee, and wrought for those who take refuge in thee, in the sight of the sons of men!"

Truly, God's goodness is abundant because it is infinite. It is far beyond we could ever think or imagine. We might die of sweetness if it will be shown to us all at once. Hence, we receive it according to our capacity. Its sweetness is as honey from the rock, its potency is such that it enable the inner eyes to see the infinite value of the human soul that not even the whole world can be compared to it. It sees too the vanities of this world, and all that are in it are ephemeral.

It is tasted by those who fear the Lord in a filial way for they have began to learn wisdom that comes from above which is peaceable and gentle, open to

reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity. This is an obvious sign that the Lord goes with us in our spiritual journey and that we have found favor in His sight, as Moses said to the Lord: "For how shall it be known that I have found favor in thy sight, I and thy people? Is it not in thy going with us....?" And the Lord said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name....I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord'; and I will be gracious to whom, I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy."

The fact that the Lord let His sun shine on the good and the wicked, and sends His rain on the just and the unjust is a clear evidence of His goodness; added too is the life we received. We say, "received" because we know that there was a time when we were not, that is, a time when we did not exist. These are the basic expressions of His goodness. But only to those who fear Him, that is, in awe of His majesty and benevolence, and to those who take refuge in Him shall this goodness be abundant, because these are the people who opened their hearts to the action of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

They allowed themselves to be steadily transformed in the renewal of their minds and strengthened their wills in the practice of virtues in the midst of their brothers and sisters. In other words, these are people who openly take refuge in God in the sight of all. →

Icon # 306 = In God's Presence

"In the covert of thy presence thou hidest them from the plots of men; thou holdest them safe under thy shelter from the strife of tongue."

It is not implausible to say that to be in God's presence is already a form of taking refuge in Him, and vice versa, nor far-fetched to assert that it is in solitude and silence, in which we are hidden from the schemes of people, that we are safe from the strife of tongues.

The only challenge left is the onslaught of thoughts. What are we thinking when we are in silence or doing when we are in solitude? If in our silence our thoughts are on God and the things of God – what He has done for us, for instance, when He humbles Himself by becoming like one of us in all things except sin, or thinking about His thirty years of hidden life, or His apostolic activities, His ministry of healing various kinds of illnesses, feeding the hungry, preaching the Good News of salvation, or thinking about His passion, death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven where He is now seated at the right hand of the Father; or even when

there are no more thoughts of these kinds, but just the awareness of God's presence, then, our silence is really very healthy and fruitful.

These kinds of thoughts and/or awareness of God's presence will lead to the restoration of our former purity and bring us to an intimate relationship with God. This intimacy with God in the solitude and silence of our heart is also a form of hiding us from the plots of men; and holding us safe under His protection from disputing tongues, because it is just natural for the lover to feel safe in the presence of the beloved and even reach to such an intensity that it is no longer aware of the conversation of people around them.

This intimacy with God becomes even more delicious when it is pickled with the presence of the Blessed Virgin Mary too. She is so good and very contemplative that it is unthinkable that she will be caught, even unaware, in the strife of tongues. She loves silence, for it is there that wisdom is born. Therefore, the steady awareness that we are in God's presence and of the Blessed Virgin is a very safe shelter from the strife of tongues. →

Icon # 307 = Steadfast Love of God

"Blessed be the Lord, for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was beset as in a besieged city."

It is instinctive to our human nature to feel a certain respect for someone who shows a steady kindness to us and will even get out of their way to reach out their helping hands to us especially in our moments of need. Since this is true in our relationship with our fellow human beings it is far infinitely true in our relationship with God.

However, it has to be strongly accented that this relationship does not entail an impunity from trials or pains or unhealthy thoughts or temptations; it is very likely that we will be subjected to them and will even have a bigger share of them, but it is also very likely that we will not be overcome by them because we are being supported by the grace of God working in our heart.

His steadfast love sees to it that we will not be tried beyond our strength, but in proportion to our trials He will also supply us with His divine goodness. His steadfast love, then, is meant to lead us to gratitude and praise, blessing the Lord for that is really His due.

So long as we are still in this present world, the manifestation of the steadfast love of God to us will be mingled with suffering, in any form, so that the former will preserve us from despondency while the latter will keep at bay self-

complacency. How wondrous is God's steadfast love for us! It seems to be surrounded with thorns, but to anyone who overcomes the first stings all is changed into sweetness. "Taste and see how good the Lord is," as the Psalmist invites us.

This goodness is palpable not only in peaceful times but also in times when we are beset with trials, for we realize more of God's steadfast love when we are assailed on all sides for it makes us more dependent on God. From that point it is only a step to loving Him more with a purer love. Hence it is to be expected that we encounter occasional hardships even though God has wondrously shown His steadfast love to us. →

Icon # 308 = Supplications

"I had said in my alarm, 'I am driven far from thy sight. But thou didst hear my supplications, when I cried to thee for help.'"

It's so amazing to realize how our experiences in life bob up and down. Imagine, how we experienced the abundance of God's goodness, how He hides us in the shelter of His presence, how He wondrously shown His steadfast love to us, but now we are far removed from His sight. What causes it? Did we, like the prodigal son, ask for our inheritance and take off to a very far country? It is possible but very unlikely, because in the case of the prodigal son it was he who took the initiative to ask his inheritance and took off to a far country. He was the one who drove himself far from the sight of his father and family.

In the case above the initiative did not come from us. Something, or whatever, has driven us far from the Lord's sight. When things does not turn out as we want them to be, and when our passions and emotions are troubled and being carried away by them, we will notice that we will lose sight of the one thing necessary. At that moment we are driven far from the Lord's sight. But once we realized that our passions and emotions are greatly troubled, then, we sighed for help, we noticed that our passions and emotions subsided. Thus the Lord is ready at hand to hear our supplications, for He says: "Call on me on the day of distress and I will answer you."

No matter how far then we are driven from His sight so long as we will not give up our prayer of supplications in the depths of our hearts, God is close at hand ready to help us because He listens to the intentions of the heart. →

Icon # 309 = Transformation

"Love the Lord, all you his saints! The Lord preserves the faithful, but abundantly requites him who acts haughtily."

It has been said that there is only one mistake in life, that is: not to become a saint. Of course, all the saints love the Lord. It is unthinkable for a saint not to love the Lord. He or she will not even become a saint if she or he does not love the Lord, in the first place.

Hence, love for the Lord is the basic and foremost requirement to become a saint. The saints referred here does not mean only those who are officially canonized by the Church, but all, even while still on earth, love God and do His will which is our sanctification. These are they who are nourished by the same food which the Lord Jesus had been nourished, namely, doing the will of the heavenly Father, as the Lord Jesus Himself says: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work."

Of course, His work is both for our redemption and for our sanctification. For this reason, His work continues till the end of time when all the redeemed will be sanctified. No wonder, then, that Christ says: "My Father is working still, and I am working."

Even though we can truthfully say with St. Paul that we are the foremost of sinners, yet there's a high possibility that we will become a saint if only we give Christ a chance to work within us. We are deformed by our sins, but Christ has enormous power to restore us to our original image which is being patterned to His own likeness, that we may grow into a mature humanhood in the fullness of the stature of Christ.

Although we have to do our part in this work of transformation, yet ultimately it is God's doing. What we have to do, which is really very decisive, is to open ourselves to Him so that His light can enter and enlighten the dark recesses of our hearts. There we can see things that make us shake our heads, but this light is so gentle that it does not induce despair. On the contrary, it makes us grateful and teaches unfeigned humility, that is, without any trace of self-pity.

If we keep open our hearts to this light we will grow both in the knowledge of God and in the knowledge of ourselves. Our experiential knowledge of God will preserve us from desperation because we have tasted His goodness, kindness, and mercy which are really delicious, salubrious, and gracious; and having a good knowledge of ourselves preserves us from pride, for nothing is more efficacious in acquiring humility than knowledge of ourselves as we really are. This two-fold knowledge is what really preserves all the faithful, because seen in

this light there's a need for an encounter between God's mercy and human misery.

Only to those who act haughtily will God's mercy becomes justice, that is, giving them their due, those who flatter themselves in their minds so much so that they no longer see their guilt, those who praise the Lord with their lips but whose hearts are far from Him, those who casts out demons in His name and do mighty works in His name and prophesy in His name and cry out: Lord, Lord, but are moon lighting in doing evil. These are the ones whom the Lord will requite abundantly unless there will be a change of heart and renewal of mind. →

Icon # 310 = Strength and Courage

"Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord!"

Certainly, it is a good admonition to be strong and courageous while waiting for the Lord, because both strength and courage are of tremendous help to make us persevere in our waiting when the Lord is delayed in coming; strength – to carry one another's burden both mind and body; courage – to bear witness to Christian and Gospel values, for if these things are ours and abound the possibility of maltreating our fellow human beings and indulging in debauchery will be negligible. We need strength, too, to watch and pray so that when we are tempted we will not succumb to it; we need courage, too, to resist our mortal enemy – the devil and to renounce all his seductions and all his works.

Above all, we need both strength and courage to do God's will in whatever form it will appear. If it takes shape in a form of suffering: that we may have the strength to say: "My God, let this cup pass from me if it is your will;" and the courage to continue saying: "But if this cup will not pass from me unless I drink it, then, not my will but your will be done." Hence, conformity to God's will in all the events of our lives constitute our true peace. It is the greatest proof of our love for Him who came into our world not to do His own will but the will of Him who sent Him, who is so strong and courageous in enduring the cross heedless of its shame. If it takes shape in the form of consolation: that we may have the strength to be grateful and the courage to be humble.

If we cultivate this attitude while waiting for the Lord, chances are high that in times of tribulations we will not sink into depression and in times consolations we will not take wing into illusion. In other words, we will not be cast down by adversity nor elated by prosperity.

If this is the case, blessed will we be whom the Lord finds awake when He comes. →

Icon # 311 = Relationships

Psalm 32 (31)

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.”

So long as we will not wallow again in our former way of life, living according to the sinful desires of the flesh, we are certainly blessed because our transgression which has been forgiven opens the way for us to heaven, for the forgiveness of our transgression heals our broken relationship with Christ who is the “Way” to heaven, as He says: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.”

Once our broken relationship with Christ the Lord is healed by our repentance and His forgiveness, then a new kind of relationship develops between us and Him. We will know by our own experience that this relationship is very healthy because it improves our behavior and makes us relish the things of God such as the cultivation of our prayer life and the practice of virtues. It makes us grow too in discretion: never presuming His mercy by adding sin unto sin nor flattering ourselves in our minds so much so that we will not know our sin, because in both cases we are just deceiving ourselves.

One of the most consoling experiences in our lives is to receive and give forgiveness. It makes our heart soft and buoyant. There's a certain feeling of happiness, contentment, and satisfaction. It cures our wounded memories and makes us more receptive to one another and more kind and understanding of one another.

Forgiveness of our transgression is already a foretaste of blessedness here on earth and will be a beatific vision in heaven. If there is in us an attitude of readiness to forgive, we have already forgiven. Thus our sin is covered by God's pardon. It is the teaching of Our Lord Jesus that God's pardon is always linked with our willingness to forgive. We resemble God more when we forgive, because “to err is human, but to forgive is divine.”

Even when we grow in our resemblance to Our Lord Jesus, we will still be aware of our own sinfulness, and yet we are still considered blessed because the Lord does not charge to us our sin since we stumble into it not deliberately nor out of malice or deceit, but mainly because we are still in this world. This, of course, refers only to sin which is not mortal. However, in either case, we need to receive the sacrament of reconciliation frequently to help us stabilize our humility and to grow in honesty. To the degree that we make progress in this the spirit of deceitfulness will be vanished. →

Icon # 312 = Dancing with Death

"When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer."

One of the most terrible things that could happen to us is when we begin to hide our sin from the Lord, because at this instance we are commencing to swindle ourselves. Then when we freely allowed ourselves to be swindled by our own very self to such an extent that we will lose the awareness of our sin and even calling it good because it seems pleasing to us – we are certainly dancing with death. This kind of dance is very tiring, as one continues dancing, because of the intricacy of its steps. People who are engaging in this dance are living a life of falsehood.

We are made in the image and likeness of God. Since God is Truth, thus we are made for the truth. So, when we sin deliberately and will justify it – hence barring the door for acknowledgment of our sin, we are no longer true to ourselves. Consequently, we are heading in the wrong direction which end in eternal death, as the Scripture says: "There is a way which seems right to a man, but it's end is the way to death."

Since we are composite beings, our body too has a lion's share to whatever happen to our soul. Thus when we do what is good, right, and true we feel a certain lightness in our body, but when we do what is evil, wicked, and vile, God forbid, we feel a certain weight in our body.

The saint are now fully happy in heaven and their happiness will still increase when they are united to their bodies on the day of final recompense, and it will still increase unceasingly from glory to glory. The same is true, too, to all the damned in hell – they are now groaning in pain all day long and their groaning will still increase when they are united to their bodies, and it will still increase without ceasing from pain to pain.

Those who allowed themselves, in this present life, to be swindled by taking cocaine or heroin feel also a lightness of their bodies, but obviously their bodies are wasting away; and once the substance in their bodies is running low they will be groaning all day long, for their inner strength is dying up and, unfortunately, sinking into depression as the heat of summer. However, so long as these people have a desire to be healed the hope for healing is readily available. First, of course, they have to acknowledge that they are too weak and powerless to do it themselves. They need the grace of a higher power to help them and humbly admit their condition. Therefore, they are to say: →

Icon # 313 = Acknowledgment of Sin

"I acknowledged my sins to thee, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord;' then thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin."

The Scripture says that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. This is as clear as the noon day sun, for if we acknowledged our sins and we turned away from evil none of the sins that we have had committed shall be remembered against us.

What is even marvelous is that when we are reconciled back to our heavenly Father He kills the fatted calf and there will be a celebration, in thanksgiving, a Eucharist, where we are nourished with the body, blood, soul, humanity, and divinity of the Lamb of God; the best robe of Christian dignity is put on back to us; a ring of union in spirit is put into our hand which will always remind us of our renewed commitment to fidelity to God's unswerving mercy and love; the shoes of the gospel of peace are put on our feet that we may walk in the newness of life – no longer living for ourselves but, foremost, for Him who loves us and dies for us, and for our fellow human beings, especially those whom we live with by looking not only to our own interest but also to their own interest so that we may live in harmony and peace; and then, the people who noticed this will graciously say: "See, how they love one another." By this, all people shall know that we are the disciples of Him who commanded us to do this.

Of course, we were able to do this because we acknowledged our sin to the Lord and did not hide our iniquity. The beginning of our righteousness is the confession of our sin. When we avail the sacrament of reconciliation because we acknowledged our sins, at that very moment we add to our dignity as a human person; for no matter how heavily our sins weigh on our conscience, no matter how seriously they have diminished our dignity, the very act of turning to God is a manifestation of the special dignity of our humanhood, our spiritual grandeur – the grandeur of the personal encounter between God and the human person in the inner truth of conscience.

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. A penitent heart is the one that is ready to receive the generosity and goodness of God to dispel the darkness of our lives.

→

Icon # 314 = Prayer

"Therefore let every one who is godly offer prayer to thee; at a time of distress, in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him."

In the days of His flesh, Our Lord Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him, that is, the heavenly Father who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His godly fear. Our Lord Jesus, then, gave us an example that we may follow in His steps.

As He offered up prayers, we too, need to offer up prayers to God both for ourselves and for others, so that all of us may attain salvation. By the very fact that we are able to offer up prayers even though we are not able to articulate it at times, is already a luminous sign that the vestige of godliness is still in us no matter whether we feel that there are still lots in us that has to be purified.

It is only when we totally cut off prayer that we will lose this vestige of godliness in us. If we are still vulnerable to different kinds of temptations even though we pray, how much more when we no longer pray! Prayer is a strong weapon, a defense, a port, and a treasure. It is a weapon sufficient to overcome every assault of the devil, especially the rosary which the Blessed Virgin Mary recommended at Fatima; it is a defense to preserve us in every tempest; and it is at the same time a treasure which provides us with every spiritual blessing in abundance that we may always have enough of everything.

To totally cut off prayer is tantamount to cutting off life support. It is a spiritual suicide. Not to pray anymore is a self-surrender to the number One enemy of our salvation – the devil who prowls like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. It is like mounting a white cloth on a pole for the devil and his army to see, so we become a spiritual prisoner of war, enslaved by every harmful passions and desires.

Just as it is impossible to cross an ocean without a boat, so it is impossible to get out of this spiritual prison without prayer. Without prayer we are in the clutches of the evil One, but with prayer his grip loosens up; and if we are earnest in our prayer we will be a pain to him and eventually will be released from this dungeon of desolation.

Prayer, then, is necessary as a means of salvation, a road of recovery to freedom as children of God. Prayer comes to our aid to help us fulfill His commandments and keep His sayings. Thus in times of distress when the rush of great waters flooded us we will not be washed out for we will be likened to a house built upon a rock, that is, we anchor our lives in Christ who is the rock of

our salvation – a safety place to hide from the tumult of this world. Therefore, we can trustingly say: →

Icon # 315 = Hiding Place

“Thou art a hiding place for me, thou preservest me from trouble; thou dost encompass me with deliverance.”

The image of a hiding place rightly suggests that we are still in a state of spiritual warfare. We really need a hiding place, so that we can also take a rest for a while; for as the body needs rest after so much labor, so the soul absolutely needs rest to replenish its strength in resisting the seductions of this world and to renew its inner vision so as to make clearer its ultimate goal, that is, the unspeakable glory of the kingdom of heaven and the infinite beauty of God.

Notice the dynamics of this spiritual combat: there is so much labor involved in making a stand against the evil One, but we are also provided a hiding place where we can have repose and be preserved from trouble. Notice also that this hiding place is not just a location, a protected space, but really is a person who has intelligence and will. Different people call Him in various names. Believers, in general, call Him God. Christian believers call Him “The Christ” or “The Lord Jesus.” Those who developed a close relationship with Him considered Him their “Best Friend.” To those who entered the religious life and have grown in the bond of intimate union regarded Him as the “Bridegroom” of their souls. Some of those who love animals christened him as a “Hen” who gathers her chicks under her wings.

All these names certainly signify a hiding place, a place where we can be at peace, and relax for a while, a place where we can be ourselves, be in touched with our true self which is a replica of God's identity in us.

We can also call this place a sanctuary, a house of prayer, a temple of the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says: Do you not know that you are the temple of the Holy Spirit? Christ calls this place the kingdom of God within us. It is a very secure hiding place because it is not made with hands; therefore, cannot be shaken but remain steadfast in times of trouble. It provides ways, too, of deliverance to those who are heavily tested so that they will be able to endure their trials.

Just as the prophet Elijah hide himself by the brook Cherith and the Lord commanded the ravens to feed him there bringing him bread in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook, so everyone who hide in this inner sanctuary – the kingdom of God within us, are being nourished day and night by the bread of sincerity and truth, drinking from the

brook of life the blood of the Lamb of God who gave His life as a ransom for many and the meat of His flesh for the life of the world.

The more they eat Him the more they long for Him, and the more they long for Him the more they grow in wisdom and knowledge, and the more they grow in wisdom and knowledge the more they are strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, because they are now rooted and grounded in the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge and understanding.

This love of Christ within them preserved them from trouble, for as St. Paul says: "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 things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure 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."

Since "Love" is a person itself and it has intelligence and will, therefore, it has power to guide us wisely how to conduct ourselves uprightly in this present life. With both a motherly and fatherly affection Love will say to us: →

Icon # 316 = The Way

"I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you."

One of the major evidences that our relationship with God come to fruition is that we grow in docility of spirit, open to be instructed and be taught in the Way of the Lord Jesus which is a way of truthfulness, and a way that is life-giving. What is so fascinating is that this "way" is not just a custom, a behavior, a manner, a habit, a usage, or a road, a trail, a passage, or a pathway, but it is also a person, for the Lord Jesus says: "I am the Way...."

Therefore, we are being instructed and taught by "Love," who is really the Holy Spirit – the mutual love of the Father and the Son, that it is to the Lord Jesus that we should go that we may be able to conduct ourselves becomingly in our sojourn in this present world.

Just as the people of Egypt were told and instructed to go to Joseph for their ration of food in the time of famine, so now we are instructed to go to the Lord Jesus who is Himself the Bread of Life and the Way to the Father. And since the Lord Jesus and the Father are One, so to be "in" the Lord Jesus is to be "in" the

Father. Consequently, to be walking in the Lord Jesus is one and the same as walking in the Father.

Both common sense and faith joined venture in telling us that the Father is infinite, that is to say, nothing greater that we could ever think of, thus the way of the Lord Jesus is infinitely spacious although it is bound to be narrow at the outset. However, our perseverance in walking on this way enlarges our heart which enable us to run with unspeakable sweetness in the path of God's commandments, with a freedom which comes from the realization that the Father of Our Lord Jesus is also our Father.

And just as the birds encounter the air wherever they go, so those who are united with the Lord Jesus have a certain "sense" of awareness of God's presence wherever they are and wherever they go. It is true to say that this is already a "foretaste" of the life in heaven which the saints and angels are living. Thus even though the angels are sent to minister to us here on earth, yet they never lost sight of the face of God, as Christ said: "See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven."

What the angels and saints now see face to face, without any shadow or alteration due to change, we are beholding too, yet, still as in a dim mirror but one day will be ours in its fullness, as Christ says: "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you."

This union of our soul with Christ, which begins here on earth, really serve both as a Counselor who counsels us in our decisions and in our undertakings and also as the eye that gazes mutually upon one another, because this bond of union between our soul and Christ is no other than the Holy Spirit Himself who is given into our heart as a guarantee of our future inheritance until we acquire full possession of it to the praise of God's glory.

"if people of this world know how to give good gifts to their children," Christ said, "how much more the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Of course, the Holy Spirit can appear in many forms as He wishes. One of these forms is "Dove" which signifies gentleness, meekness, and peace; the other one is "tongue of fire" which signifies fervency, ardent love for the things of God, wisdom, and understanding.

It is not farfetched to say that all who are devoid of the Spirit of God, those who are incredibly selfish and live only for themselves, those who anchored their hearts and minds firmly on the things of this present world and could run swiftly as a cheetah in the pursuit of sinful pleasures or as a horse in their unbridled desires to run after earthly honor and glory, but are so slow and stubborn as a

mule even just to walk on the way of God's commandments, and are so allergic to the things of heaven are really living in a sub-human condition. Therefore, the Holy Spirit counsels us without blinking His eyes: →

Icon # 317 = Intelligence: Horse, Men, and Angels

“Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not keep with you.”

If we only live for this present world as if there's nothing more when we die, then, we are truly without understanding, for faith and reason bear testimony that our soul will continue to live forever. Of course, the horse or the mule will neither accept nor believe this testimony because it is very clear that they are without understanding. If we tell them earthly things and they could not understand, how much more telling them heavenly things!

People who have unlocked the secret of the universe and prided in their “so called knowledge” of the nature of things are really without correct understanding if their “so called knowledge” does not lead them to know the Creator of things through His creatures, seeing Him in them as we see the sun reflected in the waters, “for what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.”

No wonder that the four scientists, namely, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris are called the “Four Horsemen” of the new atheism. Of course, these guys flattered themselves in their minds that they are intelligent men; but it is also clear as a noon-day sun that their intelligence, combined together, compared to the intelligence of the angels are just like the intelligence of the chimpanzee compared to the intelligence of the most brilliant human being.

Since the distance of the intelligence of all the angels, combined together, between the intelligence of God is infinite, where will the intelligence of these Four Horsemen of the new atheism be? What is their intelligence like? We can only hold our breath to the answer of this question until that day when all will be revealed clearly as a crystal and brightly as a diamond, when the day dawns and the unglazable brilliant Sun of “Uncreated Light” will reveal the thoughts and intentions of the human heart, as Christ Himself, who is the power and wisdom of God, says: “nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.”

We can taste a very tiny slice of this power, wisdom, and knowledge of God in the vision of St. Thomas Aquinas had on the feast of St. Nicholas in 1273 which filled him with awe and humbled him to the dust when he said; "What I have written seems to me like so much straw compared to what I have seen and what has been revealed to me." St. Bonaventure, too, spoke in the same vein.

Know that St. Thomas is known as the "angelic doctor" and St. Bonaventure the "seraphic doctor," yet their knowledge and intelligence, which of course, are reflected in their writings, compared to what has been revealed to them by God, are not even considered as a horse or a mule but a straw, a chaff, how much more the intelligence and knowledge of an atheistic human being!

At least a horse and a mule can move and have their own instinct – the former can even run so fast, but a straw is almost nothing at all except, perhaps, if you use it for a straw mattress but nowadays you could hardly find someone using a straw for a mattress.

What I am trying to inculcate here is that all the knowledge and intelligence of all created beings both angels and humans, combined together, putting it side by side with the knowledge and intelligence of God is absolutely nothing.

Without any shadow of a doubt, too, what has been revealed to St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure; and all the brilliant minds, such as St. Augustine, had written is only a very, very small portion of what is still remain hidden. So, what about those that are still to be revealed? If the queen of Sheba can say to king Solomon when she saw his glory and hear his wisdom: "The report was true which I heard in my own land of your affairs and of your wisdom, but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it; and behold, the half was not told me; you wisdom and prosperity surpass the report which I heard," so what about the infinite wisdom and the unspeakable glory of God!

In this case, once we see God face to face in the irreversible beatific vision when we reached our heavenly home after our pilgrimage here on earth, we will be filled with inexhaustible awe and can say to God with interminable humility, "Our Lord – Our Father – Our God, your glory and wisdom and power and knowledge and riches exceed far beyond the account we heard while on earth; only 1/1,000,000*4 of who you are, your majesty, and the splendor of your kingdom has been told to us. Now, at last, we see with our own eyes, understand with our own heart, and perceive with our own mind the truth of what has been said that what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor it enters into

⁴ *St. Paul says that no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor it enters into the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love him. At least, 1/1,000,000 still enters into our imagination, that is, it is .0000001. What about those that could no longer be registered in our mind!

the heart of the human person, what you have prepared for those who love you; for now having the eyes of our hearts wide open we know what is the hope to which you have called us, what are the riches of your glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of your power in us who believe in you which you lovingly accomplished in Christ Jesus, Our Lord, when you raised Him from the dead.

Therefore, since God wanted us to share forever in His happiness, He counsels us to, please, “be not like a horse” that run so fast in pursuing wickedness “or a mule”, that is, slow in serving Him. We have to curb all inordinate desires for worldly honor and glory with a bit of self-control and modesty and a bridle of prudence. Otherwise, our inordinate desires will lead us to more and more unhappiness and even to wickedness which certainly brings anguish of soul. That is why: →

Icon # 318 = Pangs vs. Trust

“Many are the pangs of the wicked; but steadfast love surrounds him who trusts in the Lord.”

Since “there is no peace for the wicked,” says the Lord, no wonder then that “many are the pangs of the wicked.” When there is no peace in one’s heart, what can we expect? Well, we don’t have to get a degree in psychology to know it, for even the illiterate people will appear to be learned in telling us that if there’s no more peace in our heart we will be harboring innumerable inner pains, discomfort, and aches.

If we are lucky enough not to become paranoid, we will be at least suspicious. If we are suspicious, even mildly, we still will never be at peace, so that’s another pang. What about the anguish if we do not get what we want? That again is another pang. What about the sting when someone is praised and honored and we ourselves are not even complemented? That too is a pang. What about the flattery of being elated when someone praise us but could hardly go to sleep even by a moderate criticism? That too is a terrible pang.

Of course, there are still many pangs of the wicked but we will just limit ourselves to mention few, because if all the pangs of the wicked in this present life and in the next will be listed the world might not be big enough to contain it.

On the other hand, those who trust in the Lord are surrounded by His steadfast love, a love that will never waver nor change, a love stronger than death for it lays down its life for His sheep, a love greater than any other love imaginable. Therefore, we will never go wrong when we give all our trust to Him: trust Him

when we feel weak, trust him when doubts assail us, trust Him when things does not turn out what we want them to be, trust Him because His precious will is for our best, trust Him for his steadfast love is our surest place for rest. When we have done this, then, we can understand why we are told: →

Icon # 319 = Gladness

“Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.”

We are explicitly told to whom our gladness should be directed. It should be in the Lord. This is very important because it gives a clear indication where our treasure is and what we love.

Of course, there are people who are seemingly glad but deep down in their hearts they are really sad because their gladness is not in the Lord but in something ephemeral, especially in the world. The world offers various kinds of baits and exotic allurements to draw us away from the source of true and lasting happiness where we can really be glad.

Both the Lord and the world offer us happiness. What people chose indicate what is in their heart. If what is in our heart is love for God we will be attracted to the things of God. If what is in the heart of a person is love for the world it will also gravitate to the things of the world, such as, lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Just as iron is attracted to magnet, so each one of us is attracted to what we love. At the vespers of our life on earth we will be judged by what we love, where our love is, and who we love. In this case, no one can really waggle one's tongue because all the evidences are there.

The dreadful and heartbreaking tragedy if a person willfully chooses to be glad in the world instead of in the Lord is that it will inevitably come to an extremely painful end. They will be bored forever without any hope of recovery, for it is written: “...the sound of harpers and minstrels, of flute players and trumpeters shall be heard in thee no more; and a craftsman of any craft shall be found in thee no more; and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall be heard in thee no more....”

Isn't this a very terrible thing? Who could ever endure it? If we feel so uneasy if there is a power blackout for a day or so, how much more when there's no more light even of a lamp! This is not just for a day or so, but for all eternity! The Egyptians experienced three days of very thick darkness wherein no one can

see one another nor did any one rise from one's place, but at least it was only for three days.

Even if we have poor imagination, but still it is not difficult to imagine how those people feel during those days: their hunger, their thirst, their uneasiness, their fear, their anxiety, etc... On the other hand, there was light for all the people of Israel where they dwelt.

Not only that there will be no more light, even a lamp, for all who had invested their gladness "in the world," instead of "in the Lord," but added to this misery is that there will be no more sound "of harpers and minstrels, of flute players and trumpeters." In other words, there is no more "music" at all! Isn't it that music is the language of the soul? Can you imagine if there will be more music at all, even just a simple lullaby, for all eternity?

Monks are well known as lover of silence, but at least we have several hours night and day to sing the praises of God. Even the Egyptian monks who are reputed to be very austere and lived in the remotest part of the desert can still hear music once they go to Church to attend Mass.

But to end up in no longer hearing a music for all eternity because one had "freely" devoted one's gladness in the world, instead of in the Lord, is certainly a mind boggling choice. And what if instead of music what one hears is groaning and shrieking in pain, more painful than the shriek of a wounded wolf, amidst sorrow and despair – and this too is for all eternity? Truly, this is far beyond our feeble human comprehension.

On the other hand, if we had sowed our gladness in the Lord, instead of in the world, we will harvest rejoicing amidst our earthly trials and distress, for true happiness dwells in the very depth of our soul where the Lord is. Hence, St. Paul encourages us, saying: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance." He also said: "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."

This gladness in the Lord, of course, will reach its full and unutterable intensity when we see the Lord face to face. In contrast with the groaning and shrieking in pain for all who put their delight in the world we will, because of the grace of God, not only sing for joy but shout for joy – and no one will take this joy from us, as the Lord said.

In this present world though we still have to pass many tribulations and sorrows like a woman in travail, as the Lord says: "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world. So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."

Imagine no one will take our joy from us and it will never diminish even by a hair's breath! It will be a "state" and it is for all eternity! Therefore, in spite of our trials and difficulties in this present life, so long as we are righteous in the sight of God and deal righteously toward our fellow human being and practice righteousness in our day to day life; and praise the Lord not only with our lips but also with our heart, then we are in a fairly good position to hear: →

Icon # 320 = Rejoice in the Lord

Psalm 33 (32)

"Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright"

Even though we are not from a noble family, we may not be endowed with a brilliant intelligence, but so long as we are happy in the Lord that would be more than sufficient for us, just as "if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content." In other words, to "rejoice in the Lord," is foundational to all true joys, just as food and clothing are basic necessities of life. All other joys that are not in the Lord are counterfeit joys, which a person can also feel while in this present world but doesn't last forever.

On the other hand, even while still in this present world, "a single drop of heavenly joy gives more happiness than all the pleasures of the world." All the saints are unanimous in saying, yes, it is really true!

The trouble is that most people think that happiness consists in the fulfillment of their wants and desires, or in possessing and consuming much, or at the very least in freedom from pain and suffering, but actually it consists in having few needs and satisfying them at small expense, and above all, it consists in the serenity that comes from conforming our own will to the will of God. Of course, God wills our sanctification.

Therefore, the more we grow in sanctity the more we rejoice in the Lord. This rejoicing in the Lord echoed its zenith in the person of the Blessed Virgin Mary whose Magnificat enraptures all the angels in heaven: "My soul magnifies the

Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my savior....” In the person of the Blessed Virgin Mary we can see it is not necessary to be rich in order to be happy or to have abundance of material possessions in order to rejoice, but it is in keeping alive our “fiat,” our “yes,” to the will of God in every moment of our life.

If these things are ours and abound, God too, rejoices in us, for He sees His beloved Son in us: “Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.” Of course, ours is a participation in this rejoicing according to our capacity. The more we grow into the image and likeness of His Son, Our Lord Jesus, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, the more our rejoicing in God increases; and the more our rejoicing in God increases the more worldly joys become insipid.

For most of us, there certainly was a time in our life that we delight more in the things of the world than in the things of God. The genuineness of our conversion can be easily gauged by our renouncement of the world and worldly behavior and in what we delighted in, for “there is sorrow that has no spiritual humility about, and people who feel this think it washes away their sins. They are, however, foolishly mistaken, for they do not have the sweetness of the spirit which comes mystically in the inner treasury of the soul, and they do not taste the goodness of the Lord. Such people are quickly aroused to anger and cannot renounce the world and worldly things.”

Now that we sided with the Lord, of course by the grace of God, we have to use the member of our body as instruments of righteousness. Our tongue must be use in praising the Lord and saying things that might edify the hearers and no longer to use it in slandering people or gossiping or boasting. There is nothing on earth that is more really a foretaste of dwelling in heaven than when one praises God with spirited joy. There is nothing that exhilarates one’s spirit, ease suffering, drives out evil spirits, or makes sadness disappear as does praising God in all circumstances of our life as earnestly in sorrow as in joy, in all adversity as much as when things are going well for us. Then God really is our goal, and not ourselves. It is really in Him that we rejoice, for Praise is fitting for loyal heart. We too, then, can encourage other people saying: →

Icon # 321 = Ambassadors of the Church

“Praise the Lord with the lyre, make melody to him with the harp of ten strings! Sing to him a new song, play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.”

Even if we don’t know how to play musical instruments such as lyre, harp, or guitar, we can still praise the Lord when we attend liturgical worship. The Second Vatican Council encourages us to participate “fully,” “consciously,” and

“actively” in the Liturgy, especially at Mass, in the divine office, or we may say, in our simple gathering in Christ's name.

Having no good singing voice is not a virtuous excuse at all in not participating in the singing. If we use it as an excuse for not singing at all, it might be a symptom of false humility in us which is even worse than having no good singing voice. We will just moderate our volume just aloud enough for the person beside us to hear.

Although our primary intention is to “Praise the Lord,” but since it is done communally we have the duty and responsibility to sing audibly. I say this because I was told by someone who sat beside me in choir, when I called his attention that I could hardly hear him, that he was addressing it to God.

Following the logic of his reasoning it is not hard to see that since God hears him even if he sings/chants “extremely soft,” that is, if you will gauge it from 0-10 you are not exaggerating if you say it is between 1& 2, he doesn't have to increase his volume anymore even a little bit.

Truly, his principle is correct but his application is wrong, because his principle is applicable only when he will say the divine office privately, for instance when he is on retreat. In that case he can say it in silence within the recesses of his heart, but it is not applicable in choir. Singing in choir is by nature audible. Can you imagine if all the members in choir will just sing within themselves? Have you ever seen or heard or read about a choir whose members prefer to sing or chant almost inaudibly?

It is precisely correct that we should address our singing and chanting to God. This we should do for it is very vital, but without neglecting the other which is also important, that is, to sing audibly. We need to listen, too, to one another so that we can stabilize our harmony.

There is a “dissent” which is righteous when it is done for the common good and if it is not contrary to sound doctrine: of faith and of morals. Since there is no doctrine in terms of faith and morals that we should “play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts,” and even to “sing to him a new song,” so, for the sake of harmony in our singing or chanting in choir we can piously dissent what the psalmist said that we have to “sing to him a new song, play skillfully on the strings,” and especially, “with loud shouts.”

We don't have to shout in singing or chanting. We don't have to sing a new song to the Lord, and it is not absolutely necessary to play skillfully in whatever musical instrument. Of course, if there is someone in the community who can find a new song that is really good and he knows it – the community can

practice it, or even just a small group; then, it can be sung in choir. And if there is also someone in the community who can really play skillfully in whatever musical instrument, then he can accompany the singing and chanting.

But if none of the above is present, then, we will just content ourselves with singing old hymns. Anyhow, there are lots of really good old hymns, for instance, the Ambrosian hymns and Gregorian chants and we will just do it a capella and in a reasonable volume, say, from 6-8 in the scale of 0-10 volume.

I am deeply convinced that God is pleased with us in this kind of provision. What is really important is our attitude and motivation because we are standing before the presence of God – we are doing His work, that is why it is called *Opus Dei* – the work of God. In doing the work of God we are, then, the “ambassadors of the Church.” “Now, what is the most fundamental quality for an ambassador? To be skillful? Powerful? To have at his disposal a big fortune? To command belief? To shine by his personal talents? To be *persona grata* with the sovereign to whom he is sent?

All that is useful, necessary; all these qualities will contribute without any doubt to the success of what he does, but they will be insufficient and sterile, will even deviate from the end result, if the ambassador does not in the first place identify himself in the most perfect possible way, with the intentions and the feelings of the sovereign who sends him, with the interests of the country he represents.

Now, the Church deposes us monks and nuns to the king of kings, to the throne of God. We ought, then, to identify ourselves with His views and His wishes; the Church entrusts to us her interests, which are those of souls, those of eternity. This is not a trivial matter!”

Since the Church deposes us to the the King of Kings and we have to identify ourselves with His views and His wishes, so, there is a need for us to be faithful to our *Lectio Divina* where we encounter the word of God in which His thoughts and wishes for the sanctification and salvation of the world and ourselves are revealed, because if we will be ignorant of the Scripture we will be ignorant of Christ, as St, Jerome rightly pointed out. →

Icon # 322 = The Word of the Lord

“For the word of the Lord is upright; and all his works is done in faithfulness.”

Of course, the word of the Lord is upright because the Lord Himself is upright. His word is His own understanding of Himself, His self-communication of who He is, His thoughts and ideas. Since the Lord is divine, His word is divine too. The Lord

has an infinite desire to communicate His word to us so that we may know Him and in knowing Him we will develop a relationship with Him in love and will participate in His divine life.

In the fullness of time the Lord God deigns that His word become flesh in the womb of a humble virgin and dwell among us full of grace and truth. This is purely His work though it is done in cooperation with a virgin which makes it so marvelous in our eyes. Who could fathom this work? Truly, it is hidden from the wise and learned who are proud, but are revealed to the little ones who are willing to be taught by God and are open to know whether this teaching is really from God or just a wind of doctrine fabricated by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles.

They will know by their own experience how true it is that the word of the Lord is really upright for it will serve as a light in their path and will guide them in what direction in life they should go, what course of action they will take in their decision making, so that they will not walk in the darkness of ignorance and moral deficiency.

This word is so upright that it boldly says: "Which of you convicts me of sin?" To this word too is given the authority to execute judgment because He knows what is in every human person, "piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do." Therefore, He definitively says: "He who rejects me and does not receive my saying has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day."

Even though the word of the Lord will be our judge on the last day, yet He desires ardently, while respecting our free will, that everyone should reach salvation. Thus while we are still on our way to appear before the judgment seat of God, this word humbly beseech us to reconcile ourselves to God, to conform our lives to His teaching for in so doing we will be transformed into His own likeness. So, instead of being our Judge He will be for us and advocate with God, counseling us and giving us hope of redemption.

He is so kind with us for His patience is meant to lead us to repentance. Undoubtedly, many are the works of the Lord, such as all kinds of works of mercy and love: healing, feeding, forgiving, redeeming, purifying, sanctifying, and soliciting faith, as Christ, the Word of God made flesh said: "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." Believing is a potent form of righteousness. We can see this in the life of Abraham, as the Scripture says: "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness; and he was called the friend of God."

Wherefore, believing leads to friendship and rejoicing, as the Word made flesh says to the people: "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad." When the people objected, saying: "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" The Word of God who was made flesh emphatically said to them: "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

Of course, to those who are perishing, those who would not believe even if someone is risen from the dead, those whose hearts are so hardened, these sayings does not make any sense, but to those who have faith, to those who are humble enough and could say: "Be it done to me according to your word," and to those whose ears of their hearts are opened, these sayings are the epitome of righteousness and justice; righteousness because the Word of the Lord is absolutely upright – the Word was in the beginning with God, and the Word was God; justice, because He cannot be otherwise – justice is the foundation of His throne. →

Icon # 323 = In the Order of Grace

"He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast of the Lord."

If the Lord loves the sinner though He hates the sin, how much more does He loves righteousness and justice! "Real righteousness not only means not doing evil, but also not thinking of it. He who thinks of evil has no purity. For how can a heart be pure in a man who is defiled by unclean thought, as a mirror is dimmed by dust?" says one of our heavenly friends, Simeon the New Theologian.

However, this does not mean that there will be no more evil thought that will come to our mind because, whether we like it or not, so long as we are still in this world, our inveterate foe – the roaring lion – the Father of lies and his demons will conduct a sporadic assault upon us, but as soon as our spiritual radar sees them on the screen of our mind we have to shot them down by the missile of prayer.

What we have to do, then, is to be constantly alert, to watch and pray. In our watching and praying we have also to keep the commandments of God, for by doing so it will be for us our righteousness before the Lord; for this is only what the Lord require of us that we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with Him, for by doing so it will be our wisdom and our understanding in the sight of the people we live with and to those we will come into contact with.

When they notice the grace in our words and the modesty in our demeanor, they will surely say: "This is a wise and understanding people. Christ Jesus is very alive in them. Without any shadow of a doubt, in the order of grace, God must

be their Father and the Blessed Virgin Mary must be their Mother. It must be the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Virgin Mary who formed Christ in their hearts. No wonder, then, they behave and speak that way. Inevitably, the light of the holiness of their lives shines forth. Thus God their Father and the Blessed Virgin Mary their Mother are glorified in them. These are the people who are receptive to the anointing of the Holy Spirit who teaches them interiorly.”

Of course, He teaches them righteousness and justice, that is, how to act rightly and how to deal justly – giving people their due: to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, respect to whom respect is due and taxes to whom taxes are due; to God the things that are God’s, that is, our worship and adoration, our prayer.

By giving God what is due to Him, that is, our prayer and adoration, the inner eyes of our hearts will be able to see the truth that “the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.” It is His steadfast love that uphold all things together.

All created things and beings are an overflow of His steadfast love, even the crucifixion itself of the Son of God is an overflow of God’s steadfast love for the human race, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

What we heard in the darkness of mystery should be proclaimed upon the housetop of faith that Christ Jesus “is the Word through whom God made the universe, the Savior He sent to redeem us,” for “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” Thus “the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.”

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Icon # 324 = Re-generation

“By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.”

Unequivocally, both the New and Old Testaments bore witness that it was “by the word of the Lord the heavens were made,” and not only the heavens but also the earth, as the prologue of John’s Gospel in the New Testament says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made,” and the opening verses of the first book of the Old Testament loudly proclaim: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and

darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.”

Their testimony is undoubtedly true no matter what the proud scientists and the conceited atheists will say because the evidences are right before our eyes, for what can be known about God, as far as the limit of human intelligence can go, has been revealed through created things both visible and invisible.

Christ Jesus – the Word of God made flesh, is revealed to us as the icon of the Father; and Mary – the true mother of all the living, in the order of grace, is the icon of the new creation for she is the masterpiece of God’s handiwork. Our renewed hearts and souls, too, are the new heavens and the new earth which the Word refashions to be a worthy dwelling of the Most High God, for “heaven is where God is and since God is in our heart, therefore, our heart and our soul is God’s heaven on earth.”

The Word of God came to our world, knocking at the door of every human heart that we may give Him a job, a chance, to work within us for our sanctification: healing our memories, directing our desires, forgiving our sins, and stabilizing our passions. The Word of God will then say, “My Father is working still, and I am working.” And just as “the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters” at the creation of our world, so, that same Spirit is actively moving over the face of our heart and soul at the beginning of our re-generation and conversion. In Him we live and move and have our being. He is the highest gift of God to us, for in giving the Holy Spirit God gives Himself to us: “He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”

When we were yet dead because of sin we were like dry bones without the life of grace within us, but God in His kindness sent us His beloved Son, His Word, to give us a new life that we may know that He is really the Lord our God. “O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord: ‘Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.’”

Therefore, our own re-generation in the heavenly life is not our own doing but owing to God’s grace. God takes the initiative and we respond. Just as God breathed to us His spirit, we too breathe our heartfelt gratitude to him as our fitting response. By doing so we eventually grow in virtues. →

Icon # 325 = Ocean: Pressure

"He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle; he put the deeps in storehouses."

This work of gathering the waters of the sea as in a bottle stirs up our memory the work of inner transformation, that is, the new wine is being put into a new wineskin. The new wine of the Holy Spirit is put into the new wineskin of the heart – thus both are preserved. "Create a clean heart in me, O God, put a steadfast spirit within me," cries out the psalmist.

Just as the new wineskin has the elasticity to bear the pressure of the wine, so the new heart has the capacity of containing the virtues that it may be able to endure the pressure of the tensions in life much the same as the sea can bear its waters even though it rages and foam as when there is a strong wind blowing. Even though there is an enormous weight of the ocean, yet it is a well known fact that there are life-forms* who live at the bottom of the ocean carrying its almost incredible weight and pressure.

We human beings, especially us who consecrated our lives to God, live an atmosphere of deeper reality than we ever realized. In God we live and move and have our being. We are carrying an infinite weight of God's mystery without being crushed by its inscrutability, just as the life-forms at the deepest ocean are not crushed by its enormous weight and pressure. Who can ever fathom the mysteries of the Blessed Trinity, the Incarnation, the Virgin birth, and the Eucharist? They are too much for our mind to understand, yet we are in them because we belong to the Mystical Body of Christ by virtue of the water of Baptism.

They are called mysteries not because we don't understand them but because we don't fully understand them. They are both knowable and unknowable. Our "faith seeks understanding." It is also a well known fact that there are people who live deeply in these mysteries. They are rare life-forms who live at the bottom of the ocean. They are the "interior" souls who are really contemplative not so much because they belong to an Order wholly oriented to contemplation but because their thoughts and desires are that of God. They are very much at home with God as their natural habitat. They can be found too in religious Orders dedicated to action and also among the baptized faithful, but very rare indeed as it is also rare even among those who joined a contemplative Order.

The Mystical Body of Christ is like a boundless ocean – so deep and so wide. All its members are like fishes or life-forms of the sea. So long as we are in it, both in spirit and in truth, we are nourished by its divine life. Just as there are different

kinds of fishes and life-forms in the sea, so there are also different kinds of spirituality within the Mystical Body of Christ but they are all inspired by the same Holy Spirit who gathers them into one Body united in faith and charity. →

Icon # 326 = Awe of the Lord: War Without Truce

“Let all the earth fear the Lord, let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth.”

All the earth has a reasonable ground to “fear the Lord” because it is His footstool. Hence, all the inhabitants of the world should stand in wonder and reverence of Him, for the Lord is the master of all He created not only the waters of the sea but also all the earth and all the inhabitants of the world.

It sounds too big to us, yet even our natural, acquired, knowledge proclaims that our whole world is just a dot in the topographical chart of the whole universe. So, as people living in this world we have all the more reason to stand in awe of the Lord even if other people will not even bother to think of Him or are disrespectful of His creation.

God spoke only one Word and through this Word He created all things and it came to be. When God created us humans He already put, right in the beginning of our existence, this reverential fear of Him, but the devil the inveterate foe of humankind, through his envy that we will inherit what he had lost, that is, eternal glory, did all he can to remove this reverential fear of the Lord from our heart.

He trampled down the seed of faith that has been sown in the human heart. To those who have faith and have started praying, he will also try to do all he can to destroy their faith by weakening their prayer life. He will even go so far as saying that God is a creation of man’s mind, that is, it is man who created God in his imagination. Human beings that willfully sided with Lucifer believe in this.

Of course, this is very preposterous because “where was man before the world existed?” Scientists, both believers and unbelievers, at least agree that our world is about 5 billion yrs. old and that it was a former star, that is, in a gaseous state which is, of course, incredibly hot. So, following the logic of those who believe that it is man who created God in his imagination, it follows that man, for whatever means, exists amidst this unbelievable hot temperature because if he did not exist how could he ever even imagine the word “God!” But human beings doesn’t even have to go to school to know that it will not take 3 hrs for man to be burned if he will be put in an oven even at 300 degrees Fahrenheit!

They will also say that how we can so be deceived as to believe that there is God! This is really so funny because the devil himself believe that there is God. Notice when the devil tempted Christ in the desert, he said: "If you are the Son of God...." Even though he was not sure whether Christ is the Son of God or not, but he did acknowledge that there is God. In this case their own accusation boomeranged to them because how can they be so deceived as to believe that there is no God when their own master believes that there is God!

Actually, this is not surprising because we are in a state of war, a war without truce. This is a kind of war where there are no civilians – either a human person takes side with the devil and the fallen angels and took up their standard, or a human person takes the side of God and the good angels and live a virtuous life, as Christ says: "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters."

Those who are straddling the fence are also told by the Lord: "I know your works: you are neither cold or hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth."

To supply the energy of those who take side with God in this "spiritual warfare" the Lord reassures them that amidst the hardships and tribulations of this present world they will still experience peace, as the Lord says: "I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Thus by our faith we share in the victory of the Lord "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world," because to all who received the Lord Jesus, "who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

We believe in the written word of God that the reason why the Lord Jesus – the Son of God appears was to destroy the works of the devil – its treacheries and lies – his pride. So, the Lord Jesus reigns in the hearts of all who share His victory, those who believe in His Name not only in their lips but also by the way they live, upholding Christian values till the end of their lives here on earth, learning from Him His two favorite subjects which He loves to teach: humility and meekness.

All of them are the fertile and fecund "humus" – earth, which the Lord did not disdain to take upon Himself by becoming a human being like us. They are those who are saturated with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially the gift of "the fear of the Lord." The Word of God, by whom He created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, is active in them for this Word enables them to keep His command and stand forth in His presence. For these reasons, we can say with the psalmist: "Let all the earth fear the Lord, let all the inhabitants of the world

stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth." →

Icon # 327 = Counsel

"The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to naught; he frustrates the plans of the people. The counsel of the Lord stands for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations."

When the Lord Jesus was presented in the temple it was said of Him by the prophet Simeon that He is destined to be the rise and fall of many nations. No matter how mighty a nation or an empire is here on earth there will come a time that it will collapse and fall, because no nation or empire on earth is designed to last forever, as it is written: "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven," and "from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them." The only kingdom that will last forever is God's kingdom which Christ establishes in the heart of every human person who believes in Him and keeps His commandments.

Counsel is one of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit, of course, are blessings given to our souls, to enhance and refine the natural powers that our souls possess. They are called "Gifts" for two reasons. First, because God infuses them in us without expecting any payment; second, because they give us the privilege of responding to divine inspirations.

The operation of the "Gifts" of the Holy Spirit, of course, depends primarily and essentially upon the grace of God. For our part, we can cultivate them by avoiding sin and by exercising the moral and intellectual virtues. We cannot enjoy the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in a stable or lasting way as long as we remain willing to sin, or unresolved in our determination never to offend God deliberately, as Christ says: "No one can serve two masters."

In His infinite and loving wisdom, God has ordained that it is only through the Gifts of the Holy Spirit that souls should be made fully attentive, alert, and heedful to the Spirit's urgings.

So, in regard to the "Gift of Counsel" typically, our actions follow some degree of forethought and consideration. We ponder and mull, study, muse and ruminate. We seek out expert opinions, take consideration on other's experiences, and compare present options with choices of the past. All of this reasoned inquiry so characteristic of thinking, self-reflective beings can be referred to as "taking counsel."

The Gift of Counsel, then, renders us sensitive to the movement of the Holy Spirit in a manner supremely compatible and congenial to the deliberating way that we become motivated to act. Thus in our searching for truth and freedom, we need the invaluable guidance – the advice or “counsel” of God who knows all things.

Therefore, from the explanation given above, we can see why the Lord brings the counsel of the nations, especially the nations that thrust Him out of their public schools and their public assemblies, to naught, not out of vengeance of being pushed out but mainly because by their very action of shoving Him out of their lives they willfully separated themselves from the source of all that is good, right, and true.

In other words, they lost proper guidance in their lives. They are like ship without a rudder being tossed to and fro by every wind of harmful ideologies and selfish ambitions. No wonder the Lord frustrates their plans. We have example of this in the case of those people who attempted to build a tower which is known to us as Babel – how the Lord brings their plans to naught by confusing them, for they wanted to make a name for themselves. “Come,” they said, “let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves....”

This kind of pride is reminiscent to the pride of Lucifer which is recorded by the prophet Isaiah: “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How are you cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high....’” We know what happened to Lucifer by the words of Christ Himself: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”

The book of Revelation tells us also of the fall of the Devil/Lucifer/Satan when he and his angels were defeated by Michael and his angels: “Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world- he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”

This war, then, has been carried out first in heaven in the realm of the spirit, now it is being carried out in our world in the realm of human beings with both spirits, Satanic and that of the good angels, influencing every nation in general and every human being in particular, so that by our own free will in serving and loving God or serving and loving the Devil in this present world we will share in the victory of Michael and his angels and inherit the kingdom which God has prepared for those who freely serve and love Him with all its unspeakable glory,

beauty, and happiness forever, or share in the defeat of Satan and his angels with unspeakable humiliation, unutterable horror, inexpressible shame, unfathomable disgrace, and indescribable rejection, as the Lord said: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." And He also says: I tell you, many will come from the east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown in the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth."

At the present time, though, it seems that the devil and his angels and who sided with them are gaining the upper hand. They are able to mobilize their resources to pass laws that legitimize the killing of the most vulnerable and innocent members of the human race – the unborn children, deceiving people by couching it in a treacherous "Free Choice," or "Reproductive Health."⁵

But just as the voice of the blood of Abel was crying to God from the ground, so the voices of the blood of these innocent children are crying to God from the womb of their mothers. They cried in unison in the conscience of their mothers: "Mom, is there really such a thing as "Free Choice" in killing the child in your womb?" "Are you so naïve never to know where such an inspiration comes from?"

By nature, to mention few animals, such as dog, cats, and hens, are very protective of their puppies, kittens, and chicks. They will do all they can to preserve their little ones. If these animals, by instinct, take care of their offsprings, how much more of human mothers who are far superior in dignity than the animals!

Thus killing a child in the womb is a degradation of the mother because in making such a decision in the name of free choice the mother lowers herself than the animals. Since Lucifer and the fallen angels are bent to destroy human beings who are made in the image and likeness of God, so it is not hard to see that it is only through their influence and exploitation can a mother choose to murder the child in her womb.

We human beings are so weak and vulnerable that we can easily be both helped and exploited by spiritual beings. Lucifer and his angels are determined to ruin us because of envy and jealousy that our human nature was raised to a higher dignity than the angelic nature in the Incarnation of the Word of God – the Lord Jesus Christ. This was a hard pill to swallow for the proud Lucifer and the fallen angels. On the other hand, Michael and the good angels are also bent to

⁵ Euphemism for abortion.

help us to resist the evil machination of Lucifer and the fallen angels, and that we may be able to obey God's commandments, especially to love God and to respect life.

We can see this going on in governments by those who enact unjust laws and those who fight against them. This is also apparent in the United Nations where C-FAM is consistently opposing those who imposed abortion to the world, especially to third world countries – in this way, thwarting their plans. By the presence, then, of C-FAM in the United Nations “The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to naught; he frustrates the plans of the peoples.”

Much in the same vein we can see this, too, in the Old Testament when King David fled from his son Absalom who conspired against him and usurped his kingdom. He went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, and when he came to the summit behold, “Hushai the Archite came to meet him his coat rent and earth upon his head. David said to him, ‘If you go on with me, you will be a burden to me. But if you return to the city, and say to Absalom, ‘I will be your servant, O king; as I have been your father’s servant in time past, so now I will be your servant,’ then you will defeat for me the counsel of Ahithophel.”

As the story goes Hushai's counsel prevailed over the counsel of Ahithophel – thus bringing to naught the plan of Ahitophel. These are examples of how Divine Providence can easily “brings the counsel of the nations to naught;” and “frustrates the plans of the peoples.”

His counsel alone stands for ever because His wisdom is infinite and His knowledge is absolutely perfect: “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?’”

God reveals Himself to us as Love. And one of the characteristics of Love is thoughtfulness; and since God loves us and desires the salvation of people from every generation till the end of time, so, it is just natural that “the thoughts of his heart” will be to all generations.

If the thoughts of our hearts are also in God, then, there's a mutual gazing and a mutual enjoyment. It's a gesture of lovers. It is an unequivocal sign that we attained a spiritual insight of the things of God and tasted, to a certain degree, the sweetness of our future inheritance, that is, the kingdom of heaven. In us the prayers of St. Paul to the Ephesians are also being carried out: “I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened,

that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints....” Therefore, we can joyfully say: →

Icon # 328 = Great Nation: Inheritance

“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he chosen as his heritage!”

When God condescended to become a human being like us in all things except sin, taking to Himself our human nature, He formed a new nation for Himself who gladly receives Him and humbly acknowledges Him as their God. This is a nation without borders for its citizenship is in heaven.

Although the citizens of this new nation are in every nation in the world, yet they are not of the world for after they received the Lord in their lives their behavior and their values are no longer worldly. They are “a chosen race;” “a royal priesthood,” for in their baptism they share in the priestly function of the Lord; “a holy nation,” for they responded to the universal call to holiness: ‘Be holy, as I the Lord your God is holy;’ “God’s own people,” for they are the sheep of His flock and hear His voice and follow Him wherever He goes.

They are the people who declare the wonderful deeds of God who called them out from the darkness of vices into the marvelous light of a virtuous life, for everyone who does good comes to the light that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God. These are the people peculiarly God’s own whom He has chosen as His heritage.

In reciprocal, they too consider God as their inheritance, as it is written: “What have I in heaven but you? Apart from you I want nothing on earth.” We are also told that the Levites from of old has no inheritance of the land they occupied because God Himself was their inheritance, as the Lord said to Aaron: “You shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall you have any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel.”

If God is our inheritance, what more shall we ask for! We are far richer than a billionaire or a trillionaire or dekanaire. In God we have everything: the kingdom of heaven is ours, the whole universe is ours, and the whole world is ours. However, in order not to give offense to the Federal government and to the IRS people, we have to pay taxes of our property or income in imitation of Our Lord Jesus though He is the Son of God – the king of Heaven and earth and the whole universe, yet paid taxes to whom taxes were due, as He said to Peter: “‘What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tribute? From their sons or from others?’” And when he said, ‘From others,’ Jesus said to him, ‘Then the sons are free. However, not to give offense to them, go to

the sea and cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel; take that and give it to them for me and for yourself.'"

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord because that nation is certainly a godly nation, a pro-life nation, whose laws and policies are oriented for the welfare of its people. This is their wisdom and understanding in the sight of the peoples of this world, for what great nation is there that has laws which protect the life of its people from the moment of their conception? And what great nation is there that has a God so near to it to such an extent that though He is a transcendental God and dwells in an inaccessible light and full of unspeakable majesty and splendor and adored by all the angels yet He infinitely humbles Himself and became a human being like us with all our emotions and feelings: He feels hungry, angry, thirsty, mercy, pity, tired, happy, grieved, sad, etc!

In other words, He became like us in all things except sin. He is so solicitous that He doesn't want to let people go away hungry lest they will collapse in the way. He multiplied bread for them and even gives His own body as food and His blood as drink, for His flesh is food indeed and His blood is drink indeed.

He opens the eyes of the blind, the ears of the deaf, and the mouth of the dumb. He heals all kinds of infirmities – thus alleviates the suffering and pain of the human race. He forgives sin but never encourages sinning: "Has anyone condemned you?," He gently asked the woman who was caught in the act of adultery. No one, Lord," she said. "Neither do I condemn you; go and do not sin again." He also said to the man who was ill for thirty eight years whom He cured: "Behold, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you."

And what great nation is there that has a God so gently and lowly and invites His people to take a rest and come to Him when they are overburdened by their daily works and find life hard to deal with! As He said: "" Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." And what great nation is there that has a god as our God that brought a repentant thief with Him to paradise to broadcast to the whole world that so long as there is still a flicker of repentance in one's heart the pledge of eternal life is infinitely gaping to usher her/him to the bosom of Abraham where the memory of her/his sins is transformed into everlasting gratitude and fruitful fecundity!

"You did not choose me," this God of ours said, "But I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you." And what shall

we ask? This is only what we ask: to be remembered by Him and remember Him too, for He alone suffices; for He too is our heritage! →

Icon # 329 = The only Person who is co-conscious with every single person

“The Lord looks down from heaven, he sees all the sons of men; from where he sits enthroned he looks forth on all the inhabitants of the earth, he who fashions the hearts of them all, and observes all their deeds.”

The tyro in the spiritual life, upon reading this passage, will like imagine that God is somewhere way up in the sky looking upon us on earth like the astronauts looking down on earth from the celestial sphere. However, the veterans such as St. Benedict and St. Teresa of Avila polished the tyro's imagination by sharing with us their experience of what has been revealed to them.

For instance, St. Benedict in his vision saw the whole world in a “single ray of light.” St. Teresa says that no matter how brilliant a person is and how powerful his imagination still could not grasp what she saw. What she has written to describe her vision is just a very, very, very tiny fraction of the actual reality of what she saw. In other words, no human words can fully express it. She can only feebly make an analogy: it is as though all human beings and all created things are in a very huge diamond on a broad daylight – nothing remains hidden from it.

Her description of her vision, of course, stimulates our own imagination too, for it allows us to peep into the brilliant light of the mystery of Christ's words when He says: “Nothing that is hidden that will not be made known, nor covered that will not be revealed.”

Since Christ is the Word of God, God's own understanding of Himself, His own self-divine communication, and in knowing Himself he knows everything perfectly, therefore, He sees everything in the whole universe, especially human beings who are made in the image and likeness of God. Can He who formed the eyes not see? Thus all our deeds are right in His presence.

He is the only person who is co-conscious with every single person. For this reason He has the ultimate right to judge all people according to their deeds – what they have done in the body; and He knows the thoughts and intentions of the heart, as St. Paul says: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before Him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”

God sees all human beings but not all human beings see God, because not all human beings love God. Love, therefore, has its own peculiar way of seeing. Each one will see what he loves. The sharpness of its vision is in proportion to its intensity. The person who loves more sees more. Thus a person who loves God sees God either in the eyes of the heart or both the eyes of the heart and the ocular vision of the palpable eyes as did St. Teresa of Avila, the three children at Fatima, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, St. Faustina, and many other saints. For others it will be only in the eyes of the heart. This happens when our heart gets a little bit purer. →

Icon # 330 = Godly Diplomacy

“A king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a vain hope for victory, and by its great might it cannot save.”

As one who is the power of God and the wisdom of God, Our Lord Jesus tells us a parable of prudence. He says: “...What king, going to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an embassy and asks terms of peace.” Though this parable has to do with discipleship since He concluded it by saying: “So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple,” the fact that it involves war it teaches us a lesson on spiritual combat.

So long as we are still in this present life it is the epitome of prudence to be at peace with God. In this case, it entails godly diplomacy. On our part, we have to renounce our vices and pride. We certainly have them in a more or less degree. On God's part, He has to forgive our sins and failing, which He always does. This, of course, is the initial stage of the peace process.

To improve our mutual relationship, on our part, we have to strive to put into practice His commandments to love one another for this is a landmark for people to know that we are His disciples. To help us do this we have to set aside a time for regular prayer, we have also to read the Scriptures, and at other times read also the writings of the saints or their lives because they are the ones who follow the Lord more closely, or we can read also contemporary authors – those who hold and teach the faith that comes to us through the Apostles.

In this way, our hearts and minds will be solidly founded and it will strengthen the will too. If these things are ours and abound, then, we will be in fairly good

position to engage in a meaningful spiritual combat. Anyone who lacks these things no matter how vast his knowledge is and how powerful his intelligence, is tantamount to “a king is not saved by his great army,” that is to say, his vast knowledge and powerful intellect are futile to help him attain the salvation of his soul.

Since the Lord Jesus is the Word of God made flesh, therefore, it is the embodiment of prudence to conform our lives to His and to His words. It is for this reason that we have to be familiar with Scripture, because “ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.”

Of the paraphernalia which St. Paul mentions in this spiritual combat, the “Word of God” is considered as a sword. Of course, this was in a time when soldiers use sword in battle, but now in our more sophisticated time and in the advancement of a highly developed weaponry, the “Word of God” can be considered as a rocket launcher, a missile, and armalite, a sub-machine gun, and even a pistol – to enable us to resist the temptation of the Devil once we saw it even from afar.

The word of God can be use as our prayer. For instance we will say: “Lord, do not let the enemy rejoice over me lest he tears me to pieces with no one to rescue me....” This, of course, is in the Scripture. Although it is uttered by a human being, we believe that it is the word of God. Thus it becomes our prayer – our weapon. Or we call to mind what Our Lord says to the apostles who were dozing off during His agony in the garden: “Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Although it is in a form of admonition, it is not hard to see that it is an impetus to pray. We can even use the prayer of Our Lord Himself when a certain situation warrants it, that is, when we are faced with difficult circumstances which are painful but at the same time we are convinced that it is God’s will that it be so, we can say, then, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

These are just examples of making the word of God as our prayer. Of course, spontaneous prayer is good too in certain occasion, but under ordinary circumstance, that is, in our day to day life, using scriptural passages as part of our personal prayer is really excellent.

It becomes spontaneous too since it is already a component of our being. In this way, we will always be prepared to make a defense, if a situation calls for it, to any one who calls us to account for the hope that is in us. We have an example of this in the life of Christ Himself. This happened when the Devil tempted Him in

the desert. We have to be aware that the Devil is expert in Scripture too. He can quote from it left and right.

You can imagine if Christ was not the "Word" of God or He was devoid of the words of God when this titan of wickedness tempted Him to change the stone into bread or jump from the pinnacle of the temple to the ground or worship so as to give to Him the kingdoms of this world and all its glories!

It would have been a devastating blow on Christ to be assaulted by those series of dangerous seductive allurements. Christ simply met the Devil on his own ground by quoting Scriptures too. The desert Fathers are well known to use passages from Scriptures when it happens that the Devil appeared to them in some disguises.

Thus it is important to commit to memory some passages from Scriptures. Above all, to strive to put them into practice because by doing so we will be at peace with ourselves and at peace with God, and even at peace with our enemy as it has been said that if one's way pleases the Lord He will make his enemy be at peace with him. Otherwise, we will be like "A king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is vain hope for victory, and by its great might it cannot save," because, ultimately, the battle and the victory is of the Lord. →

Icon # 331 = Mutual Gazing

"Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, that he may deliver their soul from death, and keep them alive in famine."

I have to assert that the Lord sees everything: in heaven, on earth, under the earth, unto the farthest corners of the ever expanding universe, the inmost recesses of the human heart, and the thoughts of the mind both angelic and human. In other words, nothing is hidden from His eyes – all things are laid bare before Him.

So, we can deduce that the lines "Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love," has to do with the Lord's own predilection, that is, His pre-conceived liking on those who has a reverential fear for Him, an awe and reverence of His infinite majesty, grandeur, and glory; to those who do not distrust His unwavering love no matter what – believing that everything, even negative experiences will, in the end, turn out to be for the good of those who love God.

In this case, the eyes of those who fear Him and hope in His steadfast love are also on the Lord. In other words, there is a mutual gazing which is an undeniable evidence that the human soul has a certain degree of love for God because it is a well known fact that lovers spent more time in gazing at each other's eyes when they are together.

God always gaze at us because He is infinite Love. Nothing can distract Him from gazing at us. On our part, however, we have to admit this humbly, our gazing at Him is not stable. It is intermittent. So long as we are still in this present life we are too weak to have the capacity to prolong it uninterruptedly even for an hour.

Of course, there are several factors why it is so. They are interconnected. One of these is our thoughts. Thoughts often rob us of our attention in gazing at the Lord. Another is our passion and emotion which certainly affect our thoughts. This is part of being human still living in this present world who is not yet fully, perfectly, absolutely united with God like an air with the rays of the sun or an iron in the fire in order to make us long for that day when we infinitely rivet our eyes at Him in the irreversible beatific vision where nothing, whatsoever, even a hair's breath, can distract us from looking at Him.

We have an example of this in the lives of the angels themselves. We are told by Scripture that they are "ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation." Yet, their active apostolate, that is, ministering to us, does not deviate their attention from God even a single second. This uninterrupted gazing at God in the midst of one's activity is affirmed by the Lord Jesus Himself when He said: "See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven."

In this present life, all religious life, especially the monastic/contemplative life, is geared toward a greater magnitude and a longer time span of this gazing at God because of the structure of the life itself. In monastic life, the atmosphere of solitude and silence facilitates this gesture, at least on our part, at beholding God. This atmosphere of solitude and silence contributes a lot to this looking at God.

Another word for this beholding God, at least in this present life, is "awareness of His presence." If we are aware of God's presence we are beholding Him. Of course, this is tantamount to looking at a "dim mirror" because we are still in this world but good enough than never. Unceasing prayer is another name for this beholding God. This can be done in so many different ways: one is saying a mantra or ejaculatory prayer continuously, for example, "Jesus living in Mary, come and live in us in Thy Spirit of sanctity," or Jesus meek and humble of heart

make my heart like unto thine," or "Jesus, Son of the living God, have mercy on me a sinner," or any kind of short prayer that we like.

This helps tremendously in stabilizing our thoughts especially when we are working. In other words, it helps us prolong our gazing at God. When we are robbed by another thought, once we are aware of this robbery – in religious parlance it is called distraction, we can always return to this ejaculatory prayer. Or even one word is enough. The point here is that it will help us be aware of God's presence. Or even a sigh or a desire for God is enough too.

If we do this and it becomes part of us, we can honestly and sincerely, but humbly say, that during the day, that is, our waking hours, our awareness of God's presence, which is another way of saying beholding at Him, is far greater than our distractions even when we are doing an active task.

Even people who limit themselves to the minimum interest of "health consciousness" are familiar with the word cholesterol. They know that there is a good cholesterol (HDL) and a bad cholesterol (LDL). They are informed by their health provider that the good cholesterol increases through exercises and the bad cholesterol gets higher through eating food which has lots of saturated fats, that is, oily substance that stays solid at room temperature.

If you are health conscious your minimum interest would be, at least, to lessen the bad cholesterol – to put it below a certain level. You can do this by taking a medicine prescribed by your doctor, that is, if you have the guts to have a regular check up, or/and by being careful not to eat much food that has high saturated fats. This entails a certain discipline. Your main goal why you are willing to undertake all this trouble is that you want to be physically healthy. Otherwise, if you are not careful with what you eat and never have a checkup you will be dubbed as a "walking time bomb," that is, at any moment either awake or sleep you might suffer a heart attack.

The same is true in the realm of prayer. In prayer there's also a "good wandering thought" and a "bad wandering thought." Good wandering thought increases through acts of kindness, honesty, humility, and charity, or anything that is good, right and true because it leads to a peaceful conscience; also through reading healthy books, especially familiarity with Sacred Scripture.

For example, we are saying a rosary and we are meditating on the annunciation of the angel Gabriel to the Blessed Virgin Mary that she would become the mother of God. While meditating on this mystery our mind wander to another scene of Christ's life, for instance, when He was lost for three days and was eventually found in the temple, or suddenly our mind is thinking of His passion and crucifixion, or even His ascension to heaven.

This kind of wandering is what we mean by a “good wandering thought” – a “holy distraction.” It is holy because it is about the Paschal mystery; it is distraction because we could have concentrate on the scene of the annunciation and wait till we reach the sorrowful mystery and the glorious mystery to meditate on the crucifixion and the ascension. By and large, they are very good wandering thoughts because they are all about the mystery of the life of the Lord Jesus.

An example of a “bad wandering thought,” we will still use the scene of the annunciation, is this: while meditating on this mystery suddenly our mind is thinking about a certain Hollywood actress or a party we attended while we were in high school or college, or if we are a cook – about the menu we are going to cook even though a menu for the whole week has already been set up, or we are fantasizing that we are a bishop or cardinal or any ecclesiastical or civil dignitary, or suddenly our mind wander to a thought of getting married to a very beautiful and pious woman and raised our children in the fear of the Lord and we ourselves try the best we can to live a very good Christian life so as to become a role model, at least, in the neighborhood we live.

If this kind of wandering thought is chronic, that is, it happens all the time when we are praying and if the time of the wandering is also very long, say, ninety percent of the allotted time, then, we have to realize that our spirit is giving us a signal that we should have a thorough check-up, that is, seek from someone who could offer some help either from a spiritual director or a confessor, or both.

To talk about this with someone can help in diminishing the frequency, duration, and intensity of these “bad wandering thoughts.” It has to be in a regular basis so that progress can be monitored.

It is not implausible to say that it is highly dangerous if we will just keep these bad wandering thoughts to ourselves, allowing them to soar high, because it will not take that long for them to take their toll. For example, do you think that those priests and nuns or religious brothers who left the priesthood or the religious life and got married have that desire overnight?

It is not far-fetched to affirm that it has been soaring high for a long, long time far beyond the safe limit of one’s passion and desire. We all have passion and desire to a certain degree just as we have cholesterol, but it is more in putting them to a safe-level – increasing the good passion and desire such as passion for the Divine Office, which our Father St. Benedict calls “zeal” for the work of God, and desire for God with all our being and to enter the kingdom of heaven.

We will also notice that even though this good passion and desire increases, yet our attraction to opposite sex is not absolutely eradicated, otherwise, we might be in danger of moving toward the other extreme, that is, of becoming a misogynist – just as people who are extremely afraid of becoming obese might become an anorexic.

Just in case you will become a misogynist, as a result of a misguided zeal to maintain the sterling purity of your chastity, only one thing will I ask of you – for this I long, and I am willing to prostrate before you just to obtain it, that you will not include the Blessed Virgin Mary in your aversion for women. The reason why I am begging this of you is that even though she is a woman and extremely beautiful, yet she never induce lust on you but, on the contrary, she will remove it from you, that is to say, she has all the essential compounds that reduce your “bad passions and desires” and will increase your “good and wholesome passions and desires” so as to insure that your soul is healthy enough to trudge in the way of righteousness and holiness all the days of your life.

These compounds, of course, are her prerogatives such as: the Mother of God; conceived without original sin; the Immaculate Conception; Virgin Most Chaste; Virgin Most Pure; Virgin undefiled; Virgin Most Amiable; Virgin Most Prudent, Seat of Wisdom, etc.

Thus filial devotion to Our Blessed Mother, fidelity to our way of life and to Lectio Divina, and frequent reception of the Sacraments of the holy Eucharist and Reconciliation, and those little acts of kindness, honesty, humility, charity, and the like, are amazingly helpful in increasing the good passions and desires and in decreasing the bad ones.

Accordingly, if these things are ours and abound our souls will be delivered from death and kept us alive in famine, especially the famine of the belief in the existence of God which is getting severe in our world today. Our Lord Jesus has pointed out in advance this kind of famine when he said: “Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

We are not far from reality if we say that the death referred here is the spiritual death of the soul, for whoever is self-indulgent is dead even while he/she lives. On the other hand, those who believe in the Lord Jesus and strive to put His teaching into practice, that is, increasing the “good passions and desires,” though they die the natural death which is the lot of every human being, yet they shall live eternally because the Spirit of Him who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead gives life to their mortal bodies also; and those who are still living in this world – in this present life and believe in the Lord shall never die the spiritual death. These are the people who eagerly await for the Lord. →

Icon # 332 = Wait for the Lord

"Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and shield."

It is safe to say that waiting for the Lord is tantamount to being vigilant, being awake, keeping the lamp of sanctity burning – not only that people may appreciate our good works and will give glory to God who is the author of these works, but also that we may always be prepared when the Lord comes from moment to moment in our day to day life – in persons and events that come our way both pleasant and unpleasant which may arise unexpectedly, or at the hour of our death which still lies hidden.

Our Lord alluded to this when He says: "Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage feast, so that they may open to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes; truly I say to you, he will gird himself and have them sit at table, and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them so, blessed are those servants! But know this, that if the householder had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would have been awake and would not have left his house to be broken into. You also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

His coming to us at our death is uncertain like a thief in the night; and to many it will be a great surprise. What Our Lord expects and requires of us is that we should be ready to open to Him whenever He comes; and that we be found in the posture that befits the servants who eagerly wait for Him, with our loins girded which signifies our readiness to depart from this life and be with Him for all eternity for that is far better.

Of course, we will be absolutely happy once we are found ready when Our Lord comes, for we shall be received into His kingdom which had been prepared for all the redeemed since the foundation of the world.

As an exhortation to readiness the passage "Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage feast..." reminds us of the instruction for the celebration of the first Passover in the book of Exodus: "In this manner you shall eat: Your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand....It is the Passover of the Lord."

And St. Peter has the same exhortation when he said, "Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." The danger, of course, is that we may fall asleep in the sleep of self-complacency and self-indulgent. Watchfulness is marked by prayer, while sleep indicates neglect and unpreparedness.

Therefore we have to pray as we wait for the coming of the Lord, so that when we hear the cry: "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him," we will come out right away without a second thought and will run with unspeakable sweetness to see Him whom our soul ardently waits.

Consequently, what is in the heart of every human person will be revealed at the coming of the Lord: Love? Hatred? Joy? Indifference? Bliss? Ashamed?, and many more. He is the rise and fall not only of Israel but of the whole human race, for "The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father....For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, and has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man."

While we are still in this present world our waiting for the Lord is inextricably entangled with time. However, if we have love for God we will have a foretaste of the nothingness of time even while still in this present life. Time can be too long for those who wait, too short for those who are content, but lovers will tell us that time is nothing for those who love.

In this mode of waiting the Lord will be our help and our shield. He is our help in times of trials, distress, and difficulties. He is our help when we stumble and fall in the practice of charity either in words, in actions, in thoughts, or all of them, that we may be able to begin again and learn a good lesson from them. His desire to help us is infinitely far greater than our need to be helped, but He wanted us to ask for help so that we will know by our experience that apart from Him we can do nothing and also that we may grow in humility and be appreciative for the help received. He is our help in carrying out His commandments, statutes, and decrees. He is our help in carrying our crosses, for He too knows by experience what it is like to be helped by Simon of Cyrene.

He is our shield to protect us from despair when the thought of the immensity of our sins weighs us down and we are bewildered by the loathsomeness of our conscience and when the terrifying reflection of judgment appalls us. He is our shield to guard us from pride so that we will not be elated in times of prosperity, that is, when all things work so well as we want them to be; He is our shield to keep us from losing heart in times of adversity, that is, when things become messy and we are buffeted by the winds of misunderstandings, tribulations, and

tragedies. In other words, He is our shield to stabilize our faith and love for Him neither puffed up by success nor cast down by failures. The implication of this is that we can modestly say: →

Icon # 333 = Trust in the Lord/in His Holy Name

"Yea, our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name."

It is stimulating to notice the object of our heart's gladness and the reason why it is so. Our Lord Himself gives us a hint of this when He says, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Therefore, if we consider Our Lord as our most treasured treasure, then our heart will be naturally be glad in Him. This is brilliantly apparent in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary herself whose only treasure is her Son. No wonder she was full of sorrow, to the brim, when her only treasure was lost and how her heart was glad when she found Him again. Her Magnificat gives us a limpid glimpse of where the gladness of her heart is: "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

Thus it is God who is the object of the gladness of her heart. We too, participate in this gladness when Our Lord becomes the object of our happiness, and to the extent of our capacity of this happiness we can humbly say: "My happiness lies in you alone....What have I in heaven but You, and apart from You I want nothing on earth."

If we have had experienced human love, at least once in our lifetime, then we will comprehend, to the range of our capability, the reason why when we have love for God our heart will be glad in Him, for it is an irrefutable evidence that gladness is the natural habitat of love. Even those young people who experienced puffy love will not blink their eyes to tell us how their heart is glad when they see the person they loved. Not only that, even the adulteress and the robbers are glad once they have the object of their love. The avaricious, too, and all who are engaged with vices are glad in what their heart loves.

No wonder then that at the Vespers of our life, once we reached the border between life and death, the only question that will be asked is: "What do you love?", or "Who do you love?", or where is your treasure?" An answer to any of this question will usher to one's eternal destiny, for each one will be appraised according to what one has done in the body.

From what has been said above, we saw the object of our heart's gladness. Now, we will look at also at the reason why it was so. Even if our mind is not so perspicacious as the most sagacious person on earth, yet we can perceivably take notice that both the object and the reason of our heart's gladness are so

closely related, so intimate, that both came from the same source. The reason itself is given when it says: "because we trust in his holy name."

Trust is the apple of the eyes of love. When we truly love someone we spontaneously trust that person. Trust is so native to love, intrinsic to faith, and inherent to hope. Thus in hope Abraham believed against hope, because he trusts what God has promised that "he should become the father of many nations. He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised."

We are informed by the scholars of the Bible, they are unanimous in this, that in the Scripture "Name" is frequently used to designate the entire person, his individuality and his power. This is usually the case when the reference is to God. So, let us see the rationale why we have to "trust in his holy name."

Let us hear the sweet murmuring sound of our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux as he utters the delectable redolence of this name: "When I name Jesus I set before me a man who is meek and humble of heart, kind, prudent, chaste, merciful, flawlessly upright and holy in the eyes of all; and this same man is the all-powerful God whose way of life heals me, whose support is my strength. All these re-echo for me at the hearing Jesus' name. Because he is man I strive to imitate him; because of his divine power I lean upon him." "Jesus to me is honey in the mouth, music in the ear, a song in the heart." We can absolutely add: Paradise in my life, and all in all to my whole being.

We can never go wrong in trusting His name. He is the "I AM WHO AM" who revealed to Moses. No wonder that He unequivocally said "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me." He is the "I AM" the Good Shepherd; the "I AM" the Light of the world; the "I AM" the Way, the Truth, and the Life"; "I AM" the door; the "I AM" the Bread of Life; the "I AM" the alpha and the Omega. Therefore, He can absolutely and unrestrictedly say "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, 'I AM.'"

Of course, for the unbeliever and all who hate the Lord Jesus – the sound of His name and these "I AM's" is irritating to their ears, disgusting to their taste, blasphemous to their hearts, and abominable to their whole being; but to the saints and angels in heaven and to all who welcomed the Lord Jesus in their lives and believed in His Name, He is melodious to their ears, mellifluous to their taste, auspicious to their sight, sweet aroma to their smell, fortifying to their touch, and infinite ecstasy to their whole being. Hence we have good and solid

grounds to trust in His Holy Name, and also the rationale behind why our heart is glad in Him.

“At Christmas we contemplate God made man, divine glory hidden beneath the poverty of a child wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger: the Creator of the Universe reduces to the helplessness of an infant. Once we accept the paradox, we discover the Truth that sets us free and the Love that transforms our lives. On Bethlehem night, the Redeemer becomes one of us, our companion along the precarious paths of history. Let us take the hand which he stretches out to us: It is the hand which seeks to take nothing from us, but only to give” (Pope Benedict XVI).

There's still another “I Am” that we forgot to mention which is really important because without it we will be of all people most to be pitied, and that is, “I AM” the Resurrection and the Life. Can you imagine if Christ was not raised from the dead? Where will we be now? I will not even become a Christian and much more a Catholic and a priest-monk. You and I may not even exist as we are now, because our parents and great, great grandparents may not even met each other, and since they did, it is also possible that they were pagans, and so in that case it is also possible we were pagans too. Well, if that was the case, we will be like a dead man walking; we are still in darkness and living in sin.

If you can remember other “I Am” sayings of the Lord you can add it here, otherwise, just write it on the tablet of your heart and will be engraved there so that His Name and your name will become one – that will be your new identity. What God is by nature you will be by grace. Thus we can confidently say: →

Icon # 334 = Love

“Let thy steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in thee.”

As St. John the Evangelist grew older and became unable to preach, his sermons were shortened to one line: “My dear children, love one another.” When he was asked why he said the same thing over and over again, he answered: “Because it is the precept of the Lord, and if you comply with it you do enough.”

However, in order to carry out this command we need to have God's own love – steadfast love, because apart from Him we can do nothing. Our own will power is not enough. To practice in this mortal life the lesson which the Lord Jesus had taught and lived, the difficult law of love, is the way by which we can participate in the divine in eternity, as it is written: “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” It also says: “Beloved, let

us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love."

God loved us first that we might love Him in return, not because He needed our love but because we could not be what He created us to be except by loving Him. In other words, to be able to love God is an indication that we human beings are truly made in God's image, because love requires an equality between lovers; and love between the Creator and the creature is possible only on the assumption that we have the capacity to be raised by God to a state of equality, for love makes the lover equal to the object of his/her love.

No wonder, then, that the Lord Jesus says: "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." It is infinitely amazing that this "steadfast love" of the Lord which we are hoping to be upon us is also a Person, that is, someone who has intelligence and will; and this Love is no other than the Holy Spirit who is the love of the Father and the Son – the seal upon our heart as the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire full possession of Him to the praise of God's glory; so much so that if the people of this world know how to give good gifts to their children, "how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

Either to borrow this Love or to ask for this Love is ancillary. What is important is that we have this Love. If we follow St. Therese of the child Jesus, we can say with her: "To love You as You loved me, I must borrow your love – only then can I have peace." Of course, Our Lord will not refuse us if we will borrow His love because He Himself teaches, "Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you." If we will ask for His love instead of borrowing, we will also receive for again He teaches: "Ask, and it will be given you....For every one who asks receives...."

Of course, "we have to ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways, will receive anything from the Lord." The other significant reason why we will not receive His Love even if we ask it with tears is that we ask wrongly, to spend it on our passions. In this case, we will be an unfaithful lovers – deceiving ourselves by loving the Lord, at least that's what we think, and loving the world as well.

We are torn between two loves – serving two masters. Healthy conscience loudly proclaims: "This ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening fresh water and brackish?" "For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial?" Wherefore, it is very vital that the steadfast love of the Lord be upon us as we hope in Him. Consequently, we can take part with all

the angels and saints in heaven and all the people of God on earth in
proclaiming: →