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Icon # 477 = Clapping One's hand and Crying Out to God with songs of praise and joy relieve the Anguish of Our Heart

Psalm 47 (46)

“Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy! For the Lord, the Most High, is terrible, a great king over all the earth.”

For some of us who are not used to clapping our hands and shout to God with loud songs of joy, to do so would likely insinuate thoughts and feelings of clumsiness; but if we found ourselves in a group of people doing so, we will be amazed to find ourselves being carried away by the spirit that moved those people, then, in a mysterious way, we too will start clapping our hands though without elegance, and mumbling songs of joy like a child learning to speak.

To be in the midst of that kind of people perhaps indicates that there is already in our heart the achievable openness of experiencing God in gestures that are unfamiliar to us. A dosage of humility is certainly needed to do so, because thoughts might be lurking in our mind saying, for instance, “what if my friends know that I am doing this kind of thing, what will they think and say about me?”

In this case, it indicates that we are still concern of what people think or say about us rather than holding to a conviction that there's nothing wrong in clapping one's hands and crying out to God with loud songs of praise and joy. Actually, by doing so, it has a grateful effect of relieving the anguish of our heart. We will soon realize that it was not really that hard, as we imagine, to clap our hands and shout to God with loud songs of joy! Of course, we probably not have the guts, as king David has, to go naked, and dancing in the presence of the Lord.

It is true to say that we have our preference of worshipping God. Some people might prefer to pray in stillness, and others might find it stimulating to pray with clapping of hands, with dances, and with songs of joy, provided, of course, that this is done in righteousness and sincerity of heart.

Either we pray interiorly or exteriorly, or perhaps combination of both, the most important thing is that it will help in the transformation of our life so that people may see goodness in us and will give glory to God. If we will achieve this we will be more than half way in our spiritual journey.

Desires for pleasures of this present world will certainly diminish if we can taste even a single drop of heavenly joy, for the thought of the things that are above, our heavenly home, will always make us happy. Living with faith in the Lord Jesus is the only way to be truly happy and to enjoy life on earth, for Christ, with Christ, and in Christ, we are given the power to transform the earth into a waiting room of Heaven.

Hence, while waiting in this anteroom we have the freedom of the children of God to clap our hands and to shout to God with loud songs of joy! We offered this to Him because He is a great king over all the earth. His dominion is vast and without end.

The Lord Jesus is king by birth, and He wanted to show us His royalty, establishing His title by right and conquest. He ransomed us from the slavery of sin and vices and gave us His own Spirit, that Spirit of which our good friend, St. Paul, said: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."

No one who is attached to and enslaved by the world and all its harmful desires can understand His dominion, because His sovereignty is not like the supremacy of men. He became like us in all things except sin to bridge the infinite distance between the natural order and the supernatural, to be as it were, a conductor in the difference of potentials established between Heaven and earth, so that the current of divine grace would flow between God and man, between divinity and humanity.

The Lord Jesus turns on the switch to make the current flow between all over the heavens and all over the earth. Thus what God is by nature we will be by grace, that is, God became a human being like us, so that we, human beings, will become like God. Hence, we have a good reason to be very grateful. One way of expressing this gratitude, of course, is to clap our hands and shout to God with loud songs of joy!

How happy the Lord Jesus must have been to have us near Him, to be able to speak to us in human words and open His merciful heart to us, disclosing for us a new path of hope and love! This is what moved Him most, this constant understanding for us sinners and for those wounded and crippled by life, for those who did not yet understand and know Him as the Lord – the Most High, a great king over all the earth.

Why did God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, that same God who made us out of nothing and sustains us in being, choose to be born in a manger, and not in a palace more fitting for royalty? He, who had everything, the Omnipotent, who is infinite wisdom, knowledge, and mercy, stripped Himself of everything to give us all. God, who is the same LOVE who fills all, humbled Himself and made flesh, born poor to teach us what is true, the truth about the kingdom of God on earth.

“As we could not see ourselves reflected in glass of a mirror unless the back were covered with lead or tin, so we could not easily contemplate the Divinity in this world if it were not united to the sacred humanity of Christ,” says our heavenly friend, St. Francis de Sales. On the other hand: →

Icon # 478 = Subduing Temptations

“He subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet. He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves.”

Undoubtedly, if we are united with the Lord Jesus and do His will and keeps His commands, we will have the strength to subdue our vices under us, and our unhealthy desires under our feet, because the Lord who is with us is stronger than the ruler of this present world.

Apart from the Lord Jesus, we can really do nothing. Our will power alone, no matter how strong it is, is not enough to subdue our toxic attachments to the things of the world which has a persuasive mastery to captivate our hearts and weaken our will.

The Lord Jesus took great pains both with created things and with us human beings, so that the spirituality He gave us might grow and might be found alongside the everyday things of life and the world. He taught us that when our passions, feelings, and emotions are getting purer and noble, when they are all of them guided by faith, they ennoble us and help us to attain the ultimate goal which we yearn for, that is, the kingdom of God which He chose for us as our heritage.

We, who have believed in Him, “were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.” It is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heir with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

We suffer with Him when we do not yield in to our passions and desires, hence, resisting temptations, for all who belong to the Lord Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

The temptations that the Lord had subdued in the desert are the fundamental temptations that we have to subdue too, namely: to turn stones into bread, that is, to see the fruits of one's action, to meet people's needs, and the need to be effective and relevant; to stand on the pinnacle of the temple, that is, the need to show off one's intelligence and achievements, the need to be considered indispensable, and the need to be vainglorious; to behold all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor, that is, the need to control, power, and prestige.

These temptations are lurking in our lives. Until they are subdued it is very likely that it is not the Lord that we are serving but ourselves.

Just as the Israelites did not acquire the promised land, the heritage the Lord has chosen for them, until they had subdued their enemies, and nations under their feet, so, too, we will not acquire the kingdom of Heaven, the heritage the Lord Jesus has chosen for us, until we have subdued all our unhealthy passions, destructive vices, and evil desires.

"The demons," says our heavenly friend, St. Maximus the Confessor, "grow feeble when our passions diminish through keeping the commandments; they perish when the soul becomes passionless; for them they vanish from it completely, no longer finding there what supported them and served them as weapons in their fights against us."

We have to assert firmly that this is not our own doing, but owing to God's grace working in us. As an expression of our gratitude for all that God has done in our lives, we have to sing praises to Him, for praise is fitting for loyal heart and it is truly good to sing praises to Our God. We have to hold our breath and listen to God's response: →

Icon # 479 = The Shouts of God: Trumpet Blast

"God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praise to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our king, sing praises! For God is the king of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm!"

It is gratifying to notice that in the beginning of this psalm we, as people of God, clap our hands and shout to God with loud songs of joy! Now, it's God turn. He has gone up with a shout, with the sound of a trumpet. What would it be like to hear the shout of God when we consider the verity that He is a silent type personality, creating the whole universe in profound silence!?

One thing that is pretty obvious here is the atmosphere of gladness. Both God and men are happy. We, as His people, are singing praises to Him with psalms and spiritual hymns in a spirit of joy. He, as Our God, is very well pleased with our songs of praise, and psalms. As a gesture of satisfaction in our singing of praises to Him, He, too, shouts with the sound of trumpet, as the prophet Zechariah says: "the Lord will sound the trumpet, and march forth in the whirlwinds of the south....On that day the Lord their God will save them for they are the flock of his people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land."

Of course, there is a precedence that the Lord had met His people with the sound of a trumpet. This happened at the wilderness of Sinai where the Lord said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments, and be ready by the third day, for on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people."

It did happen, for "on the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled." When the people perceived the thunders and lightnings and the sound of trumpet and the mountain smoking they were exceedingly frightened and trembled; and they stood afar off, and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die."

No matter how dull our intelligence is it would not be difficult to recognize the difference between these two episodes mentioned above. In the latter, the people were very much afraid and trembled, and they stood at a distance; while in the former the people were very happy, clapping their hands and crying out to God with loud songs of joy, and singing praises to Him.

This difference had its parallel between the giving of the ten commandments at Mount Sinai where the people were instructed to stay afar off and the giving of the Sermon on the Mount where people drew near to the Lord to listen to His teaching. The barrier of unhealthy fear was broken. God made Himself accessible to His people at anytime, anywhere, as we sing praises to Him in spirit and in truth for such is the worship that He desires.

The culmination of this gladness, shared by God and His people, of course, as though by a bond of marriage, will be in the bridal chamber of heaven. There we will hear the melodious voice saying, "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great." "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her

to be clothed with linen, bright and pure – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.”

The great and solid foundation of the spiritual life is to give ourselves to God to be the subject of His good pleasure in everything internal and external. This foundation being laid, we have nothing to do save to pass all our lives in singing His praises, in rejoicing that God is God, abandoning ourselves so completely to His good pleasure.

Nothing happens in this world that is not dictated by a Providence that turns all things to the advantage and exceeding profit of resigned and submissive souls. To hope firmly on God, to rely strongly on Him, in and through the Lord Jesus, is the firm and lasting foundation that no illusion, self-love or suffering can threaten. Hence, we can accept our sufferings and disappointments provided we may love Him and sing His praises. It is right and fitting for us, too, to confess that: →

Icon # 480 = Well-Spring of Christian Life

“God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne. The princes of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God; he is highly exalted!”

We have to affirm from time to time that the kingdom of the Lord Jesus is in the heart, mind, and will of every human being who receives Him and believes in His name and endeavor to put into practice His teaching, for the kingdom of God is wherever God reigns, wherever His commandments are obeyed, for instance, in the heart and soul of every believer. We will make this kingdom our own if we are willing to let go everything else for it, fixing our eyes upon it.

If the kingdom of God is within us, and the kingdom of God is itself righteousness and peace and joy, then whoever abides in these things is unequivocally in the kingdom of God. The Lord reigns in their lives. Moreover, just as the kingdom of the devil is gained by conniving with the vices and other evil things, so the reign of the Lord Jesus is realized in purity of heart and spiritual knowledge by the steady practice of virtues. And where the kingdom of God is, there without a doubt eternal life.

If our ultimate end is to have been created and raised to the order of grace in order to give glory to God, and that He may reign in the lives of all people, it is but natural and logical that whatever goal we may seek in this present life, there is nothing that can fully satisfy and give us supreme happiness except God.

When God reigns in our lives and sits on the throne in our hearts, then, we have only to live a simple and ordinary life: fulfilling our duties of religion and our state of life. We will no longer need the ornament of marvels which has nothing to do with it. All our menial works, and the performance of our daily duties and responsibilities draw its efficacy from the cultivation of an intimate personal relationship with Our Lord Jesus, and of course, the Blessed Virgin too.

The more we draw from the well-spring of Christian life and holiness through an ever deeper commitment to personal prayer; and if we are vowed to religion, to liturgical prayer, the more closely we will be conformed to the Lord Jesus whom we serve. If we persevere and endure the challenges that come our way, we shall also reign with Him. He will even let us sit with Him on His throne, as the Lord Himself said: "He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne."

In other words, the Lord Jesus Himself will let us participate in his authority because whatever belongs to Him, He deigns that it belongs also to us, just as what belongs to the Father belongs also to the Lord Jesus.

See what love the Father has given us for allowing us to share in the power and dominion of His Son, bestowing on us the unsurpassing dignity as sons and daughters of God! Since we are considered adopted children of God, hence, we too are princes and princesses, the people of the God of Abraham – our father in faith, for the God of Abraham is not the God of the dead but of the living.

In Scripture God is often called the shield of His people. For instance, in Ch. 15:1 of the book of Genesis, it says: "After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, 'Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be great.'" Faith in Scripture is likewise called shield. For example, in his letter to the Ephesians Ch. 6:16, our good friend, St. Paul says: "above all taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one."

Therefore, all the believers around the world who believe in God and share in the faith of Abraham have shields with us. The Psalmist is very right to say that these shields belong to God, because faith, as one of the theological virtues, is a gift from God. Thus it belongs to God. It is given to us so that we can use it in crushing the assaults of Lucifer and his evil minions who are like roaring lions seeking someone to devour.

Once we overcome their temptations and evil machinations we will give glory to God because we know that it is not our own doing but owing to the grace that He supplies to us. For this reason, God is really highly exalted! Consequently, with profound gratitude in our heart, we could not help but cry out at the top of our lungs, saying: →

Icon # 481 = God is Great

Psalm 48 (47)

“Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God! His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great king. Within her citadels God has shown himself a sure defence.”

In the book of Revelation, John tells us that he saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away....And he saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband...having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal.

The prophet Daniel too had a similar vision. He told us that thrones were placed and one that was ancient of days took His seat; His raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, its wheels were burning fire..., a thousand thousands served Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him....

Even if our mathematics is very poor and our imagination is not that powerful, yet it would not be difficult for us to think that there are lots of beings, either they could be angels or human souls or combination of both, who served and stood before this Person. If we put in numbers a thousand thousands it would be: 1,000,000 which is likely a million; ten thousand times ten thousand would be: 100,000,000 which is likely a hundred million.

Taking these two texts together, we can absolutely say: “Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God!” Solomon was a very great king, so much so, that when the Queen of Sheba who visited him and saw all his wisdom, the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his officials, the attendance of his servants and their clothing, and his cupbearers, she was totally dumbfounded and there was no more spirit in her; yet if we put Solomon side by side with the other king he will be utterly dwarfed, because even in our very conservative, but generous estimate, the total number of those officials and those servants who served and stood before him combined together, very likely, were less than 10,000 people.

But granted that is 10,000; what is 10,000 compared to a hundred million? A hundred million, of course, is a hundred thousand thousand. Just to build a palace that can contain ten thousand people is already mind boggling, how much more of a hundred million!?

Therefore, the Lord is really Great and highly to be praised! Moreover, between God and ourselves there will be not even an intermediary idea, because all created ideas, however elevated, can be only limited participation in the truth, and cannot therefore represent God as He is in Himself: Supreme Being, Infinite Truth, Wisdom without measure, Infinite and luminous source of all knowledge.

No created idea could ever represent God as He is in Himself who is thought itself. Thus the child's cup cannot contain the ocean. Hence, God is really Great and great to be praised in heaven, on earth, and under the earth and all tongues should confess that this Great God humbles Himself infinitely by becoming a human being like us in the Person of the Lord Jesus, the Son of Man, who was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him; His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

The angel Gabriel himself bore witness to this Great God in His Incarnation, saying to His would-be mother: "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end."

It is for this reason that this Incarnate God, the Son of the Most High in His divinity and the Son of Man in His humanity, later says: "I and my Father are one." He knows perfectly His identity! Of His kingdom there will be no end; hence, shall not be destroyed.

Since His kingdom shall never be destroyed, therefore, within the citadels of this kingdom, the Great God Himself is definitely a sure defense! Moreover, this Great God assures us that the powers - gates of hell - death shall not prevail against it.

Because nothing can ever prevail against it, hence, God is really great and highly to be praised. But notice the location where this Great God is greatly to be praised. It is "in the city of our God!" That is to say in the souls of those who live a virtuous life, those who are honest and humble, those who entrust their lives to Him, those who suffer various illnesses, yet are patient enough to keep intact their faith in God, those who wallowed in sins but turned over a new leaf, those who are faithful in their vows, in their ordinary duties and responsibilities, those who endure the little pinpricks in community life, and everyone that does what is just, right, and true. We know that there are still many which are not listed here. You can certainly add more to these. Whoever does these things are citizens of the city of God.

On the other hand, God is not considered Great in the city of the world, thus is not greatly to be praised because all that is in the city of the world, namely: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life are not of God but are of the ruler of the world, that is, the prince of darkness. But the seductive and deceptive glamor of the city of the world is ephemeral like the flower of the field which today blossom, yet tomorrow withers away.

Just as the prince of darkness – the ruler of the world took this Great God to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and said to Him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me,” so also this same ruler of the world – the prince of darkness is taking all humanity, except the one whom he is allergic to, that is, the humble Virgin, to this very high mountain of pride and shows us all the allurements of the world and will give it to anyone who will bow down and worship him.

Therefore, each one's response undoubtedly indicates where his/her allegiance is, whether s/he belongs to the city of God or to the city of the world. If a person lives according to the flesh it shows that s/he is a citizen of the world. “Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like.”

All these are not the values of the citizens of the city of God, but of the citizens of the city of the world. Therefore, the citizens of the city of the world cannot please God. Moreover, the world passes away, and the lust of it; but whoever does the will of God abides forever, that is, everyone who strives for holiness, for this is the will of God: our sanctification.

Our good friend, St. Paul, tells us that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Hence we have to glorify God in our body. Since our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and a temple is a house of prayer, therefore, our body, then, is a house of prayer where we can pray to God wherever we are, in spirit and in truth, either in public with other people or in secret by ourself. God is glorified in our body if we grow in holiness, for it is in the growing of holiness that people will see and appreciate our deeds, no matter how little or insignificant it might be and will give glory to Him.

Our body can be rightly called both a temple and a home. It is the temple of the Holy Spirit and also the Home of the Father and the Son, as this Great Incarnate God 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.” Thus our body is destined for eternity where our soul is completely united with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The great speculative theologian, Origen, had discovered the four senses of Scripture, namely: Historical sense, moral sense, allegorical sense, and mystical sense. One word in the Scripture that embodies these four senses is the word Jerusalem, which is also known as Zion. The historical sense of the word Jerusalem is, of course, the city of Jerusalem in Israel; the moral sense is the soul; the allegorical sense is the Church, and the mystical sense is the kingdom of heaven, as the letter to the Hebrew says: "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven...."

The poverty of our human words cannot fully do justice even to begin to delineate the beauty of the heavenly Jerusalem and all its joy. Our good friend, St. Paul, who had seen a small portion of the beauty of the heavenly Jerusalem can only mumble: "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him." It's far beyond what our mind can imagine.

About sixteen centuries later after St. Paul, this Great God, the king of this heavenly Jerusalem deigned to show a portion of Himself to one of His lovers, no other than St. Teresa of Avila. Here's the testimony of this great lover of the king of this heavenly Jerusalem: "If I were to spend years and years imagining how to invent anything so beautiful, I could not do it, and I do not even know how I should try, for, even in its whiteness and radiance alone, it exceeds all that we can imagine. It is not a radiance which dazzles, but a soft whiteness an infuse radiance which, without wearing the eyes causes them the greatest delight, nor are they wearied by the brightness which they see in seeing the Divine beauty. So different from any earthly light is the brightness and light now revealed to the eyes that, by comparison with it, the brightness of our sun seems quite dim and we should never want to open our eyes again for the purpose of seeing it. It is as if we were to look at a very clear stream, in a bed of crystal, reflecting the sun's rays, and then to see a very muddy stream, in an earthly bed overshadowed by clouds. Not that the sun, or any other such light, enters into the vision: on the contrary, it is like a natural light and all other kinds of light are artificial. It is a light which never gives place to night, and being always light, is disturbed by nothing. It is such a kind, indeed, that no one, however powerful his intellect, could, in the whole course of his life, imagine it as it is...the majesty and beauty of God are so deeply imprinted upon the soul that it is impossible to forget these....The eyes of the soul see the excellence and the beauty and the glory of the most holy Humanity. And in the other way which has been described it is revealed to us how He is God, and that He is powerful, and can do all things, and command all things, and rules all things, and fills all things with His love....There is nothing enough to divert our attention from it....A most special bliss, then, will it be to us when we see the Humanity of Jesus Christ, for if it is so

even on earth, where His Majesty reveals Himself according to what our wretchedness can bear, what will it be where the fruition of that joy is complete?"

No one can fully tell, nor even conceive or understand, while still in our mortal flesh, the joys and the beauty of the heavenly Jerusalem, prepared as a bride for her husband, for it is greater than all report, better than all praise of it, more manifold than all knowledge, more perfect than every conceivable glory. It is full of light, and peace, and charity, and wisdom, and glory, and honesty, and sweetness, and loving kindness, and every unspeakable, and unutterable good, that it can neither be described nor envisioned by the mind.

It is the love of this heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God, which ought to dominate our attitudes. Our thoughts and desires should tend toward it each day, and firmly fix the anchor of our hope there. If we are animated by this panorama then our progress in the practice of virtues will be fostered and more courageous and we will be less dismayed by the hardships we encountered in fighting for the glory and honor of Our Great God, the king of the Heavenly Jerusalem, no other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

All the kings and presidents of our present world who worked against the dominion of this Great God would rather have fled than to face this Great God when he comes in His glory, escorted by all His angels. Thus, →

Icon # 482 = God's judgment on the Mighty

"For lo, the kings assembled, they came on together. As soon as they saw it, they were astounded, they were in panic, they took to flight; trembling took hold of them there, anguish as a woman in travail."

The book of Revelation tells us that when the Lamb opened the sixth seal John looked and saw a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale; the sky vanished like a scroll that is rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the generals and the rich and the strong, and every one, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 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; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand before it?"

It's really hard to imagine nor describe what the wrath of God be like when we consider the fact that he is "meek and humble of heart. There are flashes of this,

of course, when He was cleansing the temple. With the aid of movies we can, at least, visualize a fragment of His wrath when He beat the sheep and the oxen with a braided cord and drove them out of the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers.

Most of us, possibly, have experienced feeling a deep anger whether it had been acted out or not. We can only make a very limited analogy in trying to imagine what the wrath of God, a Supreme Being, be like, then multiply it to infinity. This is, of course, applicable only to wicked people who made a fundamental option to have nothing to do with God and persevered in this choice till the gateway of their death, and for all who presumed God's mercy by adding sin unto sin, and for those who preoccupied themselves in all kinds of works of ungodliness, suppressing the truth about themselves and about God, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. 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. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened."

Therefore, by having a hard and impenitent heart one is storing up wrath for oneself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. For God will render to every person according to one's works. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil. Hence, the kings and the presidents and all the rulers of this world who are signing into law bills that are inimical to the commandments of God will be astounded and in panic, will tremble in anguish as a woman in travail when the Lord comes in all His majesty and glory shedding light in the hearts and minds of every human being because nothing that is covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be made known, unless they repent before they die.

There's always a chance, but it causes us to wonder whether there will still be a remnant of humility left in their hearts to ask for forgiveness from God, especially if they consider an intrinsic evil to be good and what is obviously good as evil. It is not ours to judge, but we can make a comparison. The analogy between divine judgment and that of human justice brings with it resemblances, but also differences. Judgment before a human tribunal involves three steps: examination of the case, pronouncement of the sentence, and the execution of that sentence.

In the divine judgment the examination of the case is instantaneous, because it needs neither the testimony of witness, for or against, nor the least discussion.

God knows by immediate intuition, and at the moment of separation the soul knows itself without medium. It is enlightened, decisively and inevitably. It sees its state without possibility of error, sees all that it has thought, desired, and said, and done, both in good and in evil. It sees all the good it has omitted.

Memory and conscience penetrate its entire moral and spiritual life, even to the minutest details. Secondly, the pronouncement of the sentence is also instantaneous. It does not come by voice to be heard by the ear, but in a manner entirely spiritual. Intellectual illumination awakes all acquired ideas, gives additional infused ideas, whereby the soul sees its entire past in a glance. The soul sees how God judges and conscience makes this judgment definitive. All this takes place at the first instant of separation.

Thirdly, the execution of the sentence is also immediate. There is nothing to retard it. On the part of God, omniscience and omnipotence accomplish at once the order of divine justice and on the part of the soul merits and demerits are like lightness and heaviness in bodies.

For instance, where there are no obstacles, heavy bodies fall, light bodies rise. Thus separated souls go without delay, either to the recompense due to their merits, unless perhaps they have to undergo a temporary punishment in purgatory, or to the eternal punishment due to their demerits, as the Lord said: "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."

Hence, the rulers of this present world, the kings and presidents of nations, and judges who perverted the law, and all who does evil will be astounded and in panic, trembling will take hold of them as of a woman in travail, "because severe judgment falls on those in high places. For the lowliest man may be pardoned in mercy, but mighty men will be mightily tested."

On the other hand, there's also an anguish which is highly beneficial. This brand of anguish is also likened to an anguish of a woman in travail, but ended up in an ineffable joy and eternal happiness, that is, when we bear patiently our sufferings, in whatever form they will take, in this present life, for the sake of the kingdom of heaven in union with the sufferings of Our Lord Jesus, for it is in our patience that we share in the sufferings of Christ and will also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed, 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.”

Therefore, if we are united with God all our anguish and travail in this present life will be for our benefit, for it will turn into eternal joy. But if we are not united with God our sufferings and pains can easily shatter our inner self. Wherefore: →

Icon # 483 = Ships Vices vs. Ships of Virtues

“By the east wind thou didst shatter the ships of Tarshish. As we have heard, so we have seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God, which God establishes for ever.”

In the Scripture the powerful operations of God's Spirit, quickening or reviving the heart toward God, are compared to the blowing of the wind, as the Lord says to Nicodemus, and to all of us: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born anew.’ The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit.”

For as with the wind, we perceive, by the effects of it, that there is such a thing, and that it does blow, yet our power cannot restrain, neither can our reason reach to know whence it rises, or from how far it comes, or how far it reaches; so is the spiritual transformation fashioned in the soul, freely, where, in whom, when, and in what measure the Spirit pleases; and also powerfully, so as to make an evident sensible change, though the manner thereof escaped our comprehension.

Just as when Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided; and the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, so we hope and trust that as we stretched out our hands in prayer to God over the sea of our passions and unhealthy desires, the Lord may drive them back by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and little by little, dried up our passions and unhealthy desires.

Then we can walk on the path of God's commandments with expanded heart; the ships of vices being shattered, that is, they no longer dominate us. Once our vices are shattered, then, we have to build new kinds of ships, that is, the ships of virtues, because the only way for our lives to genuinely improve is by acquiring virtue.

No one is born virtuous, except, of course, Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary. Good habits are not infused. Hence, virtue must be sought and can be acquired only by continual practice just as we learn patient by practicing patience. Thus we become virtuous by practicing virtue. And it is only in our relationship with the Lord Jesus that gives us the strength, the grace, the wisdom to grow in virtue.

It is worth our while to listen to what our other heavenly friend, St. Bonaventure, says: "He who desires to go on advancing from virtue to virtue, from grace to grace, should meditate continually on the Passion of Christ." Without any shadow of a doubt, continual meditation on the Passion of the Lord Jesus has a whopping efficacy to destroy our vices, for it enables us to develop a vivid realization how much He endured and suffered to set us free from the slavery of death – dealing habits, as it is written: "She who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives."

It makes us grateful for what He has done for us. Thus we don't want to frustrate Him by being carriers of death. Therefore, we should not let vices reign in our mortal bodies to make us obey their cravings, nor yield the members of our bodies to sin as instruments of nefarious habits, but we have to yield ourselves to God as men and women who have been brought from death to life, from slavery of sin to freedom of the children of God, and our members to God as tools of righteousness.

Faith and common sense joined venture in conveying that if we yield ourselves as subservient vassals to either or perverse habits, which leads to death, or of virtues, which leads to righteousness, we are bondmen to the one we obey.

Of course, all these are going on in our soul which God endows with an everlasting existence, either to be happy with Him forever in His kingdom, or to be separated from Him forever in utter pitch-black darkness with no hope whatsoever to see even an iota of light.

As we have heard, so have we seen in the lives of those men and women who cooperated with the action of grace in their lives, for once they immersed themselves in the darkness of sin and making their bodies as ships of vices, but now they are light in the Lord and making their bodies as carriers of virtues heading toward their ultimate destination, that is, the city of the Lord of hosts – the kingdom of heaven which God establishes for ever, a kingdom which will never be shaken nor have an end, for it is designed and built by the very WORD of God Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father in His divinity and the only begotten Son of His mother in His humanity, true God and true Man, to whom be glory and honor and power and might and thanksgiving

and wisdom and blessing forever and ever. So be it. Since it is very beneficial for our soul to contemplate on this day and night, hence, we can graciously say: →

Icon # 484 = Steadfast Love of the Lord Jesus

“We have thought on thy steadfast love, O God, in the midst of thy temple. As thy name, O God, so thy praise reaches to the ends of the earth.”

Our heavenly friend, St. Teresa of Avila, says: “Whenever we think of Christ, we should remember with what love He has bestowed all these favors upon us, and how great is the love which God has revealed to us in giving us such a pledge of the love which He bears us; for love begets love. And though we may be only beginners, and very wicked, let us strive ever to bear this in mind and awaken our own love, for, if once the Lord grants us the favor of implanting this love in our hearts, everything will be easy for us, and we shall get things done in a very short time and with very little labor.” “It is evident truth that we love a person most when we have a vivid remembrance of the kind of actions he has done for us,” she also said.

It is true to say that God's steadfast love for us surpasses our understanding and imagination. Neither have we sufficient words to tell of this love, but God has His Word, namely, Christ Jesus the Lord. Christ is the Word telling us how God loves the world. Everything that Christ said and did and experienced on earth is the Word saying, “See how God loves you!” For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Our other heavenly friend, St. Francis de Sales, observes that “every mother shows her love to her baby in three ways: feeding, cleaning, and correcting, and thus did the Lord Jesus impart to Mother Church the mandate to cleanse in baptism, feed in the Eucharist, and correct in penance.”

The supreme happiness we know is love, but love means to love someone else. To love God is the supreme act of altruism which is rewarded by true happiness, because the Divine Other – One is infinitely good, and to possess infinite good is infinite happiness.

The steadfast love of the Lord Jesus for us is willed by Him to transform us into His image and likeness, to grow into a mature manhood in the fullness and stature of His own personality. He gave Himself in complete submission; He gave everything right up to the last drop of blood and water that remained in His battered body. Then he have us His most beloved Mother, the most cherished of creatures in all the earth, to be also our Mother; and no one can rob us of this

love, because the Father who has given us His Son is greater than all, and no one can snatch us from the Father's hands. See how steadfast the love of God is for us! "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."

God loves us so much, and has much care for us, as if He had none others to think of but us. "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..." says the Lord. Thus we see the steadfast love of the Lord. He even goes so far to be crucified for our salvation. Hence, God shows us how He loves.

The Lord Jesus is not only the Creator of the world, but also one who takes responsibility for our salvation. He manifests His love for us in that while we were yet sinners He died for us. Christ Jesus is God became man, placed within our reach in human form, making sanctity accessible and visible, and making Himself tangible, known, and loved. Therefore, able to be emulated.

His whole life and work are revelations of the divine perfections and steadfast love of God. In a sublime priestly prayer for His disciples, He prayed, "Father, sanctify them in truth." His disciples were alarmed by the truth when Christ told them that the Son of Man was to die for the redemption of sinners. He uncovered the most recondite feelings and the most deep-seated instincts in each of us so that all of us might see our own wretchedness and where it would lead; and this He did, not to dishearten us but to infuse in us a holy hope.

All human relationships with all their gladness, grandeur, misery, and grief are put right and made wholesome by the clean and precious blood of a true man who was truly divine. He gave meaning; He gave new form and expression to pain, joy, sorrow, and distress. He was what Love is, Christ is life; He has ennobled the world and offers nobility to all who live in it.

His life on earth was not just some sentimental tale, nor just a shallow tacking together of sane impressions, or sensations, not just a dream. He was real, actual, a life living faith and burning love! Christ Jesus the Lord was and is being totally consistent in His steadfast love for men. He took great pains both with created things and with us human beings, so that the spirituality He gave us might grow and might be found alongside the everyday and ordinary things of life and the world we live.

God, in His unshakable steadfast love for us, came down to earth and was made flesh in the person of Christ to establish the point of union between heaven and earth, to unite human beings with God, uniting through the Lord Jesus Christ who welded divine and human love together. We and all who

believe in the Lord Jesus as true God and true Man, consubstantial with the Father, and who reveals the Father's love for us, are conclusively recipient of this love, as the Lord Himself says: "O righteous Father, the world has not known thee, but I have known thee; and these know that hast sent me. I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them."

It was the divine and steadfast love of God which brought Him down to earth, so that we might learn what eternal felicity is, and through the humanity of the Lord Jesus we might live in freedom as children of God and in confidence that He is with us until the end of time.

The Lord Jesus teaches us to unite our hearts with God Our Father through His heart of love, so that we may all joined together, converted sinners as we are, into one great act of love: "In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he has first loved us and sent his Son as propitiation for our sins."

All of the above re-echo at the sound of the name of the Lord Jesus. In the words of Thomas A. Kempis: "Write Thy blessed name, O Lord, upon my heart, there remain so engraven that no prosperity, no adversity, shall ever move me from Thy love." For this reason, we can joyfully announce: →

Icon # 485 = The Victory of Christ on the Cross

"Thy right hand is filled with victory; let Mount Zion be glad! Let the daughters of Judah rejoice because of thy judgments!"

When Christ was crucified, it looks like He was a total failure. The chief priests and the elders of the people with the Scribe mocked Him to one another, saying: "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those who passed by derided Him, too, wagging their heads, saying: "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" But what looks like a total failure turns out to be an overwhelming victory, because on the third day He rose again, as He explicitly said He would, glorious and immortal.

Since in the Jewish law the testimony of two men is considered to be true, and since the resurrection of the Lord far exceeds the natural scheme of things; hence, two heavenly beings in the form of men bore witness to His resurrection saying to the women who went to the tomb early Sunday morning to anoint His body: "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of

man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise."

Before He ascended to heaven, the Lord Jesus appeared several times to His disciples and ate and conversed with them. Thus angelic beings and human beings bore witness to His great victory on the cross which is, of course, foolishness to unbelievers and stumbling block to skeptics, but to all who believe it is the well-spring of salvation, source of gladness and rejoicing, the fountain of consolation in the time of desolation, the root of immortality, and the buttress of our weaknesses, for when we are weak then we are strong because Christ's power on the cross is made perfect in our weakness.

Let us hearken to these words of our heavenly friend the illustrious St. Cyril of Jerusalem: "All kings, when they die, lose, along with their life, their power. But Christ, though He was crucified is worshiped by the whole world." Isn't this stupendous! Thus it is imperative that Mount Zion, that is, the heavenly Jerusalem, be glad, and the daughters of Judah, that is, all the saints and all people of goodwill, rejoice because of God's impeccable judgments, for He sets Christ as the rise and fall of many people of this world.

The crucifix is an autobiography in which every single person on earth can read the story of his/her life, either to his/her own salvation or his/her own condemnation.

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

We do not love the cross, the wood of the cross in itself, just as we do not love suffering nor rejoice and be glad for its own sake. Its peerless value comes from the beneficial effect it has on our souls, in the good we do and the meritorious acts we perform, in the love of God which we put in the things we do. The value of the cross depends highly on how much we allow ourselves to be nailed to it, a little each day.

Our former abbot General, Dom Gabriel Sortais, has this to say, "The cross Jesus presents to us and places upon each one of us is never too heavy. If it seems to us, it is because there is something in it that isn't right: Either we aggravate this cross by adding something to it; or we are not abandoned enough to God's will."

It is right to say that the cross is less heavy when we carry only what is actually laid on our shoulder. There might be some natural virtues without a cross but there would never a growth in virtues without it, and only those who bore a cross could ever really understand the Lord Jesus. The person who has seen the cross has seen the heart of God in a way that no person who lived before the cross could ever see it; only in the cross of the Lord Jesus do we see the full revelation of the heart of God.

In the words of our heavenly friend, St. Francis de Sales: "The everlasting God has in His wisdom foreseen from eternity the cross that now He presents to you as a gift from His inmost heart. The cross He now sends you He has considered with His all-knowing eyes, understood with His divine mind, tested with His wise justice, warmed with His loving arms, and weighed with His own hands to see that it be not one inch too large and not once ounce too heavy for you. He has blessed it with His Holy Name, anointed it with His grace, perfumed it with His consolation, taken one last glance at you and your courage, and then sent it to you from heaven, a special greeting from God to you, an alms of the all-merciful love of God."

The death of Our Lord Jesus on the cross reveals the infinite humility of God, His kenosis, that is, emptiness. He poured out everything of what He is, that is, His love, without withholding an atom of it in order to show us how much He loves us. This is only what He asks of us as a token of gratitude for all He has done for us: that we act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly in His presence. If these gestures are ours and abound, our hands too will be filled with victory because we will be able to conquer our vices and other issues in our lives that we are afraid or ashamed to face.

Consequently, gladness and rejoicing blossom again in our heart, for by our own experience we have tasted the fruits of victory – they are really good. As children and people of God, we are granted the freedom to: →

Icon # 486 = Surveying the City of God

"Walk about Zion, go round about her, number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels; that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God for ever and ever. He will be our guide for ever."

Since we are granted to "walk about Zion, go round about her, number her towers, consider her ramparts, go through her citadels;" that "we may tell the next generation that this is God, our God for ever and ever. He will be our guide

for ever," thus let us report what we have discovered about Zion, the new Jerusalem – the city of God.

This is from a firsthand account of John, the writer of the Book of Revelation: "And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its breadth; and he measured the city with his rod, twelve thousand stadia^{*1}; its length and breadth and height are equal. He also measured its wall, a hundred and forty-four cubits^{* 2} by a man's measure, that is, an angel's. The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoptase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass. And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun and moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day – and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations. But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the lamb's book of life."

This is recounted that we may have something to long for. Isn't this a very beautiful place to live?! Yes, it is absolutely a very beautiful place to live, indeed. We have to also to report the other stunning wonder that we have discovered about this place, that is, all its citizens live forever and ever. They have eternal life. They do not die anymore. In this place there will be no more anxiety nor disappointment nor frustration nor heartache of any kind, for behold, the dwelling of God is with us. He will dwell with us, and we shall be His people, and God Himself will be with us; He will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and

¹ About fifteen hundred miles

² 1 cubit = 18 inches

death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.

In this place both angels and human beings live together in perfect harmony and love. There we find the glorious splendor of the humanity of the Lord Jesus, adored as true God and true Man by all its citizens, and the breathtaking beauty of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all who live in this place. Seeing one another in God, the citizens of this place love one another. Each rejoices at the degree of happiness which others have received. In this place we find harmonized the greatest variety with intimate unity, the highest intensity with the deepest repose.

Seeing God face to face, all the inhabitants of this place love Him above all things because they see with the most absolute proof that God is infinitely better than all creatures combined together. This love knows nothing of end nor any shadow of alteration, nor anything can diminish its vigor. Faith will give way place to vision, hope will be superseded by possession, but love never falls away.

This is a place flowing with milk and honey; milk of everlasting life and honey of never ending joy which will never run dry. It is our inheritance, for God has prepared it for us since the foundation of the world. Of course, Lucifer and his minions who were also reconnoitering this land gave us a very discouraging report saying that the virtues of the inhabitants of this land, that is, all the angels and saints, are too hard for our wounded-fallen nature to imitate; the commandments of the king of this land are intended to curtail human freedom, unjust in many ways for they make the citizens of this land obsequious to the king, hence, easy to be controlled and manipulated.

Thus because of the disheartening and deceitful report many people dashed their hopes and dampened their spirits. They wish to go back to the land of slavery giving unstinting satisfaction to their passions and unhealthy desires: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

On the other hand, Jesus Christ the Savior of the human race, our stalwart leader, and Michael the mighty general of the heavenly armies, the former colleague of Lucifer, counteracted the report of Lucifer telling us that we are able to possess this land because God is pleased to give it to us; and that the virtues of the angels and saints are not really difficult to emulate, for in reality holiness consists in one thing alone, namely, fidelity to God's plan. And this fidelity is equally within everyone's capacity in both its active and passive practice. The active practice of fidelity consists in accomplishing the duties imposed on us by the general laws of God and the Church, and by the

particular state of life which we have embraced. Passive fidelity consists in the loving acceptance of all that God sends us at every moment.

Which of these two requirements of holiness, then, is beyond our strength? Not active fidelity, since the duties imposed by it ceases to be such when they are really beyond our powers. For example, if the state of our health does not allow us to hear Mass, we are not under obligation to do so. The same is equally true with all positive precepts, namely, those which prescribe duties to be done. The only precepts to which no exemptions can be permitted are those which forbid the doing of things that are evil in themselves, because it is never permissible to do evil.

It is true then that God asks from us only what is simple and easy, for it is sufficient to possess this simple fund of goodwill in order to attain to eminent holiness. Therefore, the report of Lucifer and his factotums are false, for it is within our reach to possess the City of God, the New Jerusalem, the land flowing with milk of eternal life and honey of infinite happiness.

We have only to fulfill the simple duties of the Catholic faith and our state of life, to accept with willing submission the pains and crosses that go with these duties, and to submit with faith and love to the designs of Providence in everything that is constantly being presented to us to do and to endure, without dissecting for anything themselves.

What happens to us each moment by God's design is for us the holiest, best, most divine thing. It is this duty which, in whatever guise it may appear, is the most sanctifying for our soul. In performing these duties we are always sure of possessing the "better part," the "promised land," for God's holy will is itself the "better part."

We have to tell the next generation, and the next generation will have to tell their next generation that God is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison, that the Lord Jesus Christ is our guide for ever. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is not trying to convey to us some abstract knowledge that does not concern us profoundly. He has to lead us to the city of Zion – the city of God, the promised land, the heavenly Jerusalem for that is where He came from before embarking in human person to our world.

In order to make this Promised Land accessible to us, He shows us how the divine light shines through in the things of this world and in the realities of everyday life. Through everyday events, He wants us to show us the real ground of all things and thus the true direction we have to take in our day-to-day lives if we want to go the right way to the Promised Land.

He shows us God in person – not abstract God, but the God who acts, leads, and guides; who intervenes in our personal lives, and wants to take us by the hand. He shows us through everyday things who we are and what we must therefore do to possess forever our eternal inheritance.

He conveys knowledge that makes demands upon us; it not only or even essentially adds to what we know, but it transforms our lives, increases and perfects the “new man” in us until we attain the full stature destined for us by divine wisdom. This mysterious growth of maturity in age of the Lord Jesus in our hearts is the end and fulfillment produced by the loving designs of God; it is the fruit of His grace and His divine goodness.

Christ Jesus is our God, hence, someone who can really guide us the way to His kingdom. His Spirit, filled with the highest ideals, because they are divine ones, knows how to handle constructively and be at home with the most ordinary and common-place things of daily life. The Lord Jesus wanted to be for us a real and living exemplar, a true leader and sure guide, to give us a model of struggle and victory.

He wanted to leave us a complete life series of human actions, done by Him, so that we may ponder them in prayer, since Christ is God become man: a complete, perfect man. And through His human nature, He shows us what His divine nature is.

Calling to mind this human refinement of the Lord Jesus, who spent His life on earth in the service of others, guiding men and women on the path of righteousness and holiness, we are doing more than describing a pattern of human behavior; we are discovering God in whom we live and move and have our being.

Everything that Christ did and said has a transcendental value. It shows us the nature of God and beckons us to believe in the love of the God who created us and wants us to share His intimate life beginning in this world and be perfected in the Promised Land, the City of God, and the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Christ Jesus, our leader and guide, experienced all the emotional states of human beings: sorrow and gladness, pain and joy. He brought everything to the light and from every event extracted from it the most it could yield – a hundredfold and life eternal. He was understanding with the weak and with sinners, since “the Son of Man came to seek and save those who were lost.” He consoled those in troubles, He had kindness and pity for those who were insane or were otherwise tormented in their minds, for the sick, the blind, the dumb, for cripples and lepers, because He wants that many will reach the Promised Land,

a land flowing with milk and honey, a land where there will be no more sickness of any kind.

To be two-faced, that is, to say one thing and do another was anathema to Him. Such people were used to be called liars and coward, but in our own day, so much has the sense of truth and nobility been devalued that they are no longer categorized as such. However, we cannot submerge truth by suffocating it with lies and falsehood, nor can we justify error with hypocrisy. In a sublime priestly prayer for His disciples He prayed: "Father, sanctify them in truth." The Church He founded is not solely charity but truth as well. More than that, is Christian charity on account of its being first of all truth.

While on the way to this Promised Land, the City of Zion, the New Jerusalem, He fed His disciples and all of us with His own Body and Blood to sustain us in this journey, but He saw how, when He spoke of giving His flesh to be eaten and His blood to be drunk, a great number of His followers "left Him." Nevertheless He carried on, retracting nothing, qualifying nothing, firm and confident in His task. He explained His mission clearly: some were scandalized, others were repelled, but He made no attempt to stop them from going away; He respected their decision, whether it was to stay with Him and continue the journey to the Promised Land or to leave and go back to their former way of life.

He had already told them and us what the consequences would be if they and us left Him, and of the eternal happiness we all could look for if we remain with Him and be faithful.

How agonizing His moral anguish! Many turn their backs on Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He came to guide us the way and we speedily distance ourselves from Him. He came to reveal the Truth and we deny it, concealing our motives with lies and hypocrisy, holding the form of religion but denying its power. He came to give us life and we put Him to death on the cross.

During His life on earth the Lord Jesus emphasizes faith. He asks for it through material and practical means to show us that faith in God can be acquired without devaluing or rejecting what is good and human in man. It was the divine Love which brought God down to earth so that we human beings might learn what eternal happiness is, and so that through the humanity of Christ we might live in freedom and confidence.

Hence, we need to see Him and get to know Him as a man – a man like us in all things except sin, who had feelings, who was happy and sad, who suffered and love. Therefore, we must seek our own divinity in Christ, thus becoming paradoxically more human, more sincere. We must first of all go through the initial and most important transformation, that is, the conversion of the heart

which increases our faith and our knowledge of the Lord Jesus, not blindly, but in full cooperation with understanding and with grace, as our good friend, St. Paul admits to the Corinthians: “By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain.”

So with apostolic zeal, we have to thunder throughout the whole world the message of Divine Wisdom: →

Icon # 487 = Proclaiming the Wisdom of God

Psalm 49 (48)

“Hear this, all peoples! Give ear, all inhabitants of the world, both low and high, rich and poor together! My mouth shall speak wisdom; the meditation of my heart shall be understanding.”

Our good friend, St. Paul, tells us that “Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.” Since this is very true, it follows that His mouth speaks wisdom and the meditation of His heart is understanding itself, because He Himself is the embodiment of the thought of God.

In other words, He is “Thought” incarnate. He doesn’t need to go to elementary school or high school or college or enroll in the most prestigious university to get a master or doctorate in philosophy or theology or any sciences or branches of learning in order to learn.

Let us taste a sample of this from people who heard Him spoke. This happened during the feast of the tabernacles. At the middle of the feast He went to the temple and taught. The people were spellbound by His teaching and said: “How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?” The Lord Jesus was emphatic in saying to them, “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me...,” that is, from His Father. He also said: “I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak.”

Since the Father is the source of the godhead and the Lord Jesus is the Incarnate Word of the Father, therefore, the Lord Jesus is the mouthpiece of God Himself; and since God is Wisdom in itself and the Lord Jesus is God, no wonder then that His mouth speaks Wisdom and His heart is full of understanding.

Of course, there was much muttering among the people about Him. While some said: “He is a good man,” others said: “No, he is leading the people astray.” Can

you imagine “infinite Wisdom” leading the people astray! Yet for fear of those in authorities no one spoke openly of Him.

Accordingly, those in authorities heard that there was much muttering among the people about Him; so they sent officers to arrest Him, but the officers too were enthralled by the awesome wisdom of His words and the profound understanding of His heart, so much so, that they went back to those who sent them, who said to them in return: “Why did you not bring him?” The officers answered them in staggered amazement: “No man ever spoke like this man!” Does this include Plato and Socrates and Aristotle and Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Gamaliel, too? Of course!

Certainly, the report that we heard about the Wisdom of the Lord Jesus and the understanding of His heart is just a very, very small fraction of what is still remain hidden, it is just a tip of the iceberg, so to say.

If the queen of Sheba was dumbfounded upon hearing the wisdom of Solomon, how much more to hear the wisdom of Christ Jesus the Lord Who is the Incarnate Wisdom of God! He is the Word by whom God made the whole universe and all that is in it. Nothing that exists came to be without Him. He is the source and giver of wisdom and understanding according to the capacity of the one who receives it.

Hence, the wisdom of Solomon and his understanding were from God, as it is written: “God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and largeness of mind like the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon’s wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt.”

But behold, the Lord Jesus is infinitely greater than Solomon! His wisdom can never be measured and the profundity of the understanding of His heart is without limit. However, we have to be aware that His wisdom is not of this world, for if His wisdom is of this world He would be flattering the celebrities and those who live in luxury – giving them exemption to carry the cross; He would not dare to disturb the comfortable lest they would no longer follow Him; He would not dare to challenged the powerful lest they would put Him to death.

But His wisdom is not of this world. It is precisely on the cross which is, of course, folly to those who are perishing, but to those who believe in the God who saves, who gives His life for the ransom of humanity, it is the power of God and the wisdom of God. “For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

Those who are really wise and humble come to understand that it is only through faith in the Lord Jesus, a working and active faith, that one acquires true wisdom, which is in God, a wisdom which "is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity."

The Lord Jesus spoke in parable to give practical illustration of the understanding of His heart and the wisdom of His teaching. He taught the people with authority, and not like their Scribes. He uses examples drawn from nature and everyday life in order to imprint on the hearts of His hearers and all of us the true wisdom of God.

We find in His words a lovely combination of profound meaning with a striking simplicity of expression, in such a way that no one, no matter where or what era s/he lived, could fail to understand. His divine wisdom penetrates things as they are – not as they should be or as He would have like them to be. He accepted all of us just as we are, with all our weaknesses, our faults, our miseries, and with all our defects.

When the Lord Jesus presented Himself in the temple, talking with doctors of the Law, "He spoke like someone of authority," without a slightest trace of inferiority complex. He spoke as one who was aware of His divine mission, as one who brought a message of eternal value, with a wisdom that staggers the imagination of men. He preached and taught with what was recognized as wisdom and power. His words carried profound conviction and deep understanding, for they came from His heart.

With the dreadful treatment He received, with His submission to torture and to death on the cross, He proves Himself to be the power of God and the wisdom of God. Union with Christ is the most logical and easier way for us to understand how a God could allow Himself to be humiliated, lowering Himself as a servant, "an obedient servant, obedient unto death, death on the cross."

On the cross, then, is the way for us to understand why the Lord Jesus underwent such treatment and was so maligned on earth, why He was to suffer all that pain and humiliation at the hands of men. Only in this way can we come to terms the logic of His wisdom and the understanding of His heart.

At the end of His life on earth He urged us to follow Him, assuring us that we can share in the peace of His wisdom, in the courage of His fortitude, and win everlasting happiness in Heaven. "These things I have told you so that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take courage, I have overcome the world."

In a context of Christian contemplation, our heavenly friend, St. Augustine, sees wisdom as understanding, but understanding based in love, because no good can be perfectly known unless it is perfectly love. This insight of St. Augustine seems to prompt the identification of wisdom with holiness. Ultimately, for St. Augustine wisdom embraces all the Christian values, intellectual as well as moral, and implies a state of perfection in which the soul is anchored in love, enjoying interior peace and habitual joy in God.

With the Psalmist, then, we too have to cry out at the top of our voice: "Hear this, all peoples! Give ear, all inhabitants of the world, both low and high, rich and poor together!" But, does all the peoples hear this? Does all the inhabitants of the world, both low and high, rich and poor alike, give ear to the wisdom of the Lord Jesus and the understanding of His heart?

Certainly, not all; for even at His own time many people did not believe in Him in spite of the many signs He did in their presence. The main reason is simply hardness of heart which is compounded by a preferential option to do evil deeds and loving darkness rather than light.

The wisdom of God has come into our world but people chose darkness of all kinds and does not come to the light lest their deeds should be exposed by the incisive light of wisdom.

But to everyone who hears the wisdom of the Lord Jesus, who endeavors to put into practice His teaching though they sometimes stumble and fall, He gives power to rise again and took them by the hand. He imparts in them a share of His wisdom that they may reach His kingdom, for "the beginning of wisdom is the most sincere desire for instruction, and concern for instruction is love of her, and love of her is the keeping of her laws, and giving heed to her laws is assurance of immortality, and immortality brings one near to God; so the desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom." Since the Lord Jesus is the Wisdom of God, therefore, the desire for the Lord Jesus leads to the kingdom of heaven where He lives eternally.

Even while still on earth we too can partake in the wisdom of God so long as we are united with the Lord Jesus, that is, in good standing with God, just as the association with the Lord Jesus made the apostles Peter and John very bold although they were uneducated, common men. The deeper this union with the Lord is the louder the wisdom of God becomes. Hence, we will be in a fairly good disposition to: →

Icon # 488 = Proverb – Parable: Solving one problem to the sound of music

"I will incline my ear to a proverb; I will solve my riddle to the music of the lyre."

Besides its ordinary modern use, a proverb has in the Bible that of a short parable or a saying with a hidden meaning, an illustration of spiritual truths by comparison with happenings in ordinary life. It is considered that a parable should be founded upon some imagery or circumstances well known, so that the application may be the more easily understood, and that it should be in most of its parts applicable to the instruction it is intended to convey.

The method of conveying instruction by parables or proverbs or moral fictions, sometimes in the form of similitudes, allegories, or fables was very common, and in high esteem among all ancient nations. The asiaties used it more frequently, and brought it to perfection.

The parables of the Lord Jesus show their Divine origin, they are free from all absurdities of heathen fables, they are concise, natural, and probable, and peculiarly adopted for the time and country when and where spoken; they are not intended for mere amusement, but to enlighten the understanding, and purify the heart.

He spoke without convoluted sentences, rhetorical devices, or complicate syllogisms. This was not oratory. It was the Truth. With a few bold strokes He would make us see and live His parables, filled as they were with rich and subtly varied nuances, in the most distinct settings and in the widely differing circumstances. He told us of the wedding reception, the pitiful loathsome lepers, blind men groping towards the light, the unemployed.

Through Him we meet the hired hand and the merchant, the landowner and the farmer, a judge, a widow, an army commander and a king; we come across fishermen and vine dressers, the rich and the avaricious who think of nothing beyond their own private affairs.

With many parables the Lord Jesus spoke the word to the people as they were able to hear it; "He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to His own disciples He explained everything." If we anchor ourselves in the Lord Jesus and continue in His word, we will be truly His disciples; if we are truly His disciples He will also help us understand His teaching and give us the grace to solve our problems, that is, to overcome the trials and difficulties we encounter in our day-to-day life.

As we make progress in the spiritual life, spending a quality time in private prayer, attending faithfully communal prayer if we are religious, from time to

time if we are lay people, we will notice that flashes of inspirations appear through the words of the psalms or passages of Scripture we hear and also through the singing of spiritual hymns.

Hence, we are able to solve our problems. It is a well-known fact that music, especially spiritual ones or religious, has a soothing effect upon our soul. We hear about music therapy. Many groups or individual come to Nursing Homes and play music to the residents.

We also heard of David playing the lyre. And whenever king Saul is troubled in spirit, David will take the lyre and played; so king Saul is refreshed and is well; his troubled spirit is pacified.

We certainly will not sink into heavy depression if we spend time in prayer everyday; sing spiritual hymns to God in our heart, and read Scriptures or religious books. If these become habitual and abound in us they will make us predisposed to incline our ear to the teaching of the Lord Jesus; trials and sufferings are faced squarely and constructively as though solving a riddle – rejoicing in so far as we share Christ's suffering that we may also rejoice and be glad, with the sound of celestial music, when His glory is revealed.

Another word for riddle is mystery. Suffering is a mystery – part of the paschal mystery. Mystery does not mean that we don't understand it. We understand a little portion of it, but not all. Hence a mystery is both knowable and unknowable, solvable and insolvable, lovable and unlovable. Suffering, as a mystery, becomes lovable, and hence also less burdensome, that is, partly solvable, according to the degree of our love of Christ and inclining our ear to His word, imitating His commendable life.

By explaining privately to His own disciples the meaning of a parable we have already a foretaste of knowing and solving the riddle of the mystery of the relationship between the Lord Jesus and His Father and of our participation in this mystery, as the Lord said: "I have said this to you in figures; the hour is coming when I shall no longer speak to you in figures but will tell you plainly of the Father." He also said: "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you."

Since the Lord Jesus is in His Father, and we are in Him and He in us, therefore, we too are in both the Father and the Son; and since the Holy Spirit is the Love of the Father and the Son, and wherever the Father and the Son is there also is the Holy Spirit, so we too are in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is a riddle par excellence! Yet we are destined to know it, of course, according to our capacity, to the music of the lyre, that is, with eternal happiness and super abundant joy. Therefore: →

Icon # 489 = Fear not in Times of Trouble

"Why should I fear in times of trouble, when the iniquity of my persecutors surrounds me, men who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches?"

The example of the Lord Jesus and all the saints ought to encourage us to endure with patience, and if possible even with joy, the times of trouble. Eventually, we will recognize that it is not terribly hard to trudge in the steps of the Lord Jesus, a God-man, and shall discover that if we courageously take up our crosses, face our troubles; He will make them light by sharing the burden with us. It would really be difficult to cope with our troubles without the conviction that troubles, in which the Lord Jesus is eagerly prepared to share, may lead to something worth more than bodily comfort.

Our day to day troubles when borne with reasonable patience have the amazing effect of strengthening our will for future difficulties. Contrary to modern mentality, troubles certainly does not mean unhappiness. Yes, it brings with it pain and suffering. Of course, it does. But for the true followers of the Lord Jesus, to undergo troubles and sorrows for love of Him is to win.

It is translated into Christian love and to a peace which surpasses human understanding, into a victory; for whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith; for everyone who believes that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God, that is, God who became man, overcomes the world.

So if God is for us, who would be against us? Is there anybody or anything that can separate us from the love of the Lord Jesus? No one and nothing really can separate us from Him except a deliberate sin, that is, with full knowledge and full consent. Moreover, the Father who has given us to the Lord Jesus is greater than all, and no one and nothing has a capability to snatch us from the Father's hand.

For this reason, we have an absolute assurance that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, or troubles, or tribulations, or distress, or sufferings, or tragedies, nor anything else in the created universe, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus Our Lord.

Therefore, we should not be afraid in times of trouble so long as the Lord Jesus is with us, and also the Blessed Virgin Mary. What we should be afraid of is to commit a deliberate sin, because it has a sting of death. Hence, if we avoid sin whatever may befall us will turn to our advantage. Wherefore, we should not let

sin reign in our mortal bodies to make us obey their passion; and not to yield the parts of our bodies to sin as instruments of wickedness, but we have to yield the parts of our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness.

If we make progress in this area we need not fear in times of trouble, even when we suffer persecution because of our faith in the Lord Jesus. Accordingly, we are blessed when both demons and malicious people revile us and persecute us and utter all kinds of evil against us falsely on account of the Lord Jesus who, too, was surrounded by persecutors. We have to rejoice and be glad, for our reward is great in heaven.

This is where the true riches are, the wealth which lasts forever where no moth devours, no rust consumes, and no thieves to break in and steal. Wealth and riches in this present world are ephemeral. They are like band aid which can alleviate the troubles of a wounded soul, temporarily useful in this present life, but don't have the power to cure the deep longing of our soul for eternal happiness where there are no more troubles, nor pains, nor iniquities, nor persecutors.

It is for this reason that the Lord Jesus tells us to lay for ourselves treasures in heaven. For where our treasures is, there will our heart be also, that is to say, if our treasure is in heaven it follows that our thoughts and desires are geared toward the things of heaven where Christ, in all His majesty and glory, is awaiting for us. It means living a virtuous life, a life of integrity and honesty, for to live a virtuous life is the hallmark of true nobility, that is, truly rich and wealthy in the eyes of God. Ergo: →

Icon # 490 = Ransom: Infinite Value of the Soul

“Truly no man can ransom himself, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of his life is costly, and can never suffice, that he should continue to live on for ever, and never see the pit.”

We have to assert that although we are truly rich and wealthy if we live a virtuous life because true nobility is consist in living a virtuous life, but we cannot save ourselves! Someone has to save us, for the ransom of our soul is beyond us; it is infinitely costly. We cannot purchase life without end that we may continue to live on for ever.

But since God is our Father and He is far beyond infinitely rich and wealthy, and loves us beyond all telling, so He sent His only begotten Son to ransom us from the futile ways of this world, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. “For

there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all."

We were held captive by our sin, but we are ransomed by forgiveness: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," says the Lord Jesus – the beloved Son of God, on the cross. The cross, indeed, is the test of sincerity of our love for Christ. To meet the cross with faith and bear it well with loving submission, we need to recognize it as the cross of Christ.

Life is the road to the Eternal Home, and this road goes by Calvary. It is there that Christ definitively settles the ransom of our soul. The value of our soul is truly beyond all price. Silver or gold or diamond or any precious metal or any amount of money is not worth enough to buy the salvation of our soul, "For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?" Hence, the value of one single soul is exceedingly beyond the value of the whole world. How much more the value of many souls!

There are two big enemies of the soul which we have to guard ourselves assiduously, namely, misguided love for the world and excessive love for oneself. If we are conquered by these two big enemies we will be dead even though we are still alive, as the Scripture says: "She who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives."

We are also told that we should not love the world or the things in the world. The reason for this is that if anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in that person, because all that is in the world: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of God but is of the world. But the world passes away and the lust of it, hence, ephemeral, so why love it?

If only a person knows the value of the soul and how much price Christ paid to ransom it from the dominion of Lucifer and the other wicked angels, s/he would certainly live the rest of his/her life no longer according to the flesh but according to the spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the spirit set their minds on the things of the spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

The flesh here does not mean our physical body, but all our fallen human nature that resists the grace of God. And the spirit means Christ's whole way of life which brings healing to our wounded human nature. Hence, if we live according to the flesh, that is, continually resists the action of grace in our lives, we are announcing the death of our own soul, because the death of the soul is

a life without God. Just as the soul is the life of the body, so God is the life of the soul.

On the other hand, if we live according to the spirit, that is, live a virtuous life, uniting ourselves to the Lord, we will live with God for all eternity, for the soul will be only fully alive if it is united with God. See how much God has loved us that He ransomed us from the second death. Accordingly, it is true to say though: →

Icon # 491 = Death: Wise, Fool, & Stupid

"Yea, he shall see that even the wise die, the fool and the stupid alike must perish and leave their wealth to others. Their graves are their homes for ever, their dwelling places to all generation, though they named lands their own."

There is an old Arabian tale about a chief of chiefs who suddenly found a young lad in his tent one day. "Who are you?" he demanded. "I am Allah's messenger. I am called the angel of death." The chief turned pale and asked, "Well, what do you want from me?" "I have just come to tell you," the angel said, "that your last day has come. Get ready, because tomorrow at sunset, "I'm coming for you."

With that, the angel left. The chief, now all alone, clapped his hands loudly and a slave came running in. "Saddle my strongest camel," he ordered. The chief smiled to himself and thought, "Tomorrow that angel is going to find this tent very empty."

He jumped onto his camel and rode off at top speed. All night he rode...and the whole next day, despite the blistering sun. The farther he got from his tent, the happier his heart beat. And then, just as the sun was getting low, he approached the oasis he had been heading for. He stopped under the first palm tree, dismounted, and patted his sweaty camel's neck and said, "well done, my friend."

Then he led the tired animal to the well for a drink. There he found very calmly waiting for him Allah's messenger, the angel of death. "I have been wondering why my orders were changed, and I had to collect you out here, so far from your tent," the angel said. If it's any consolation to you, you set some kind of record..." (Fiedler).

Most of our contemporaries do not want to think about death. It's too scary. Yet nothing is more certain for each of us than death. Whether we like it or not, whether we are prepared for it or not we will die.

Our Christian belief tells us that death is not the termination of life but the beginning of new life in God, the gateway of our perfect union with God wherein there will be no more danger of separation. While the human mind is at a loss before the mystery of death, the Church, taught by divine Revelation, declares that God has created man in view of a blessed eternity that lies beyond the limits of his or her sad state on earth.

Moreover, the Christian faith teaches that bodily death, from which man would have been immuned had he not sinned, will be overcome when that wholeness which he lost through his own fault will be given once again to him by the almighty and merciful savior. For God has called us, and still call us, to cleave with all our being to Him in sharing forever a life that is divine and free from all decay.

One of the instruments of good works listed by our Father St. Benedict in Ch. 4 of his Rule is that day by day we have to remind ourselves that we are going to die. Assiduous reflection on death, then, is a noble philosophy. It certainly leads to wisdom, as the Psalmist says: "Lord, let me know the shortness of my life that I may gain wisdom of heart."

Thus when we learn how to die to ourselves, to our ego, to our unhealthy desires, we will learn how to live. If we learn how to live a godly life in this present world chances are high that we will be with God for ever in His kingdom which He has prepared, since the foundation of the world, for all who loved Him. Graves will no longer be our homes for ever, for our names had been written in the book of life, hence, had a portion in the land of the living.

Though in this world we are nobody, but in the world to come we will be somebody, because we are fellow heirs with Christ. Heaven is our inheritance. What belongs to God belongs to us, too, because what God is by nature we will be by grace.

Accordingly, "If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God."

No matter how wealthy we are and are very influential, and have thousand and thousand acres of lands, and have cities or town or streets named after us, yet if we are not rich in God, we will be like the beasts that perish; graves will be our homes for ever, that is, we will be deprived of God's presence which is a very painful death to the soul. Death here doesn't mean the termination of one's existence, because God endowed our soul with a never ending existence, but it is the deprivation of God's grace which unites us to God. Wherefore: →

Icon # 492 = Pomposity

"Man cannot abide in his pomp, he is like the beasts that perish. This is the fate of those who have foolish confidence, the end of those who are pleased with their portion."

The Lord Jesus told a parable about a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously everyday. At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, full of sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. Eventually, both of them died. However, in the other side of the grave there was a reversal of condition. The rich man was in terrible anguish, while Lazarus was in the bosom of Abraham, that is, in paradise.

In the case of the rich man, he was even worse than the beast because the beast, when it dies, will just be out of existence, whereas man is granted an existence which knows no end either for good or for ill. We have to assert that it was not because he was rich that he was in terrible anguish, nor because Lazarus was poor and full of sores that he was taken to paradise, but mainly because of their interior dispositions. The blame should not be put on riches it itself, but on corrupted will, nor accolade be heaped on poverty and suffering, but on the patient endurance of them.

Our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux saw nothing wrong in the possession of riches provided they had been acquired honestly and were used for the benefit of others. It is irrelevant whether a man is rich or poor so long as he saved his immortal soul.

On the other hand, we are also aware that bad rich men are highly responsible for making poor people bad as well as for making good people poor. It was at them that the Lord Jesus hurled his severe invective: "But woe to you rich, for you are now having your comfort! Woe to you who are satisfied, for you shall hunger! Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep! Woe to you when all men speak well of you! In the selfsame manner their fathers used to treat the false prophets."

When we abandon the visible riches of this world, we reject not our own but other wealth, even though we boast either of having acquired it by our own labor or having inherited it from others, our ancestors. For nothing is ours except this one thing, which is possessed by the heart, which clings to the soul, and which can never be taken away by anyone. The Lord Jesus accusingly speaks about visible riches to those who hold on to them as if they were their own and who do not want to share them with the needy: "If you have not been faithful in what is another's, who will give you what is yours."

Hence, man cannot abide in his pomp; he is like the beasts that perish. His life is like a passing shadow, or like the flower in the field which today blossom but on the morrow withers away.

It is true to say that it is not only the rich who is susceptible to pomposity but also the poor, especially if the means are available to them. This is apparent in third world countries. For instance, a man works abroad. Whether he has big salary or not, when he goes home for vocation he will throw a banquet for his friends. He is the main celebrity. His friends swallow his words. Anyhow, he provides them food and wine. But we know that this, too, cannot abide long. This is just to show that we human beings, rich and poor alike, have a tendency to show off. Only the people who lived a virtuous life can regulate this tendency, because it needs an inner discipline.

We are in the world, but we are not of the world. Thus it is still possible to attain an intimate union with God in this present world and not be caught in pomposity, not by abandoning this world materially but rather by transcending it, raising ourselves above the materiality of created things, raising our heart and mind to God while firmly treading the earth, for this same God who created the heavens and the earth, of spirit and matter alike, is also the God of simplicity and modesty.

God has situated us in this world not so that we would become pompous, but so that we might take advantage of the world to sanctify ourselves and those whom we share with it. Otherwise: →

Icon # 493 = Death Shall be their Shepherd

“Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd; straight to the grave they descend, and their form shall waste away; Sheol shall be their home.”

There's a story of a businessman whose only interest in life was to play the stock market. He studied the financial pages of the newspaper greedily everyday. He became so obsessed with finances that one day he said to himself, “I would give anything to see the paper one year from now.” No sooner were the words out of his mouth, than there was a puff of smoke in the room and a little genie handed him a newspaper and then disappeared.

As soon as he got over this stock, he realized that his wish had been granted. The paper in his hand was dated for next year. Feverishly he found the financial page and then his eyes bulged when he saw how the stock market had developed. He wrote down the stocks that had jumped highest and won the

most money in that time. He got into his car and went down to his stockbroker with this latest information. He took the newspaper along and was browsing through it before he started off. Then suddenly he noticed his name in the death column. It described the cause of his death and the funeral arrangements (after James A Feehan).

St. Tomas Aquinas had pointed out that all people agree in seeking happiness, but disagree as to where it is to be found. Some look for it in material things such as riches, power, sensual pleasures, honor, and prestige. Some look for it in spiritual things which befit the dignity of their soul.

This helps us understand why some people would pursue a hedonistic or purely materialistic life and some would enter a religious life. In the book of Ecclesiastes, the Preacher who calls himself the son of David, king in Jerusalem, who is probably king Solomon himself, at the close of his life, after he had tested everything and ransacked all earthly goods in pursuit of happiness, made an astounding conclusion that all is vanity, and what is important is to fear God and to keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of the human person.

He recorded here his experience for the instruction and benefit of others. It shows us that no created good can truly satisfy our soul, and that true happiness is to be found in God alone and to live a virtuous life; to stress more heavenly values rather than earthly values.

If we have done these things, then, we are a new creation. Instead of "like sheep they are appointed for sheol; Death shall be their shepherd; straight to the grave they descend, and their form shall wasted away; sheol shall be their home," it would be a new life for us because we will be with God forever, and heaven shall be our home, as our good friend, St. Paul says: "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things that are above," that is to say, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is gracious, whatever is lovely, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, we need to think about these things and the God of peace will be with us; and not to set our mind only on things here on earth as that businessman in the story above had done. Otherwise, we will be told by the Lord: "'Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." On the other hand: →

Icon # 494 = Kidnapped, but ransomed

"But God will ransom my soul from the power of sheol, for he will receive me."

God has ransomed our soul from the power of sheol, not with things that will pass away such as money or silver or gold or diamond, but with the priceless blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. The inestimable value of His blood is such that even a tiny drop of it is more than enough to purchase the whole universe, but He pours our everything by His death on the cross to reveal to us how precious is our soul in His sight.

If only people knew the invaluable worth of the human soul, they will do all they can to keep it from being robbed by Lucifer and the other demons who are bent to kill, to destroy, and to steal it, so that we, human beings, will not inherit the kingdom prepared for us since the foundation of the world. God has created us for immortality, but out of the devil's envy death seeps in into our world.

On the other hand, God has promised resurrection from the dead which He inaugurated in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Himself. In Christ, then, we have new life so as to live it no longer for ourselves but for Him, who for our sake had died and was raised. If Christ had not been raised from the dead, we are all people most to be pitied because our hope will be only in this present life. We will still be under the dominion of sheol, that is, of sin and vices. But Christ rose from the dead to show us that we, too, will rise from the dead and be with Him forever.

He will receive us into His kingdom and will graciously say to us: "Good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master." It is certain that, as creature, our joy consists in the attainment of the end for which we are created, that is, union with God forever.

Accordingly, to save ourselves it will always be necessary for us to throw ourselves into the arms of divine mercy, in order that he may assist us with His grace to obtain salvation, trusting always in His infallible promises to hear and save everyone who prays to Him.

It belongs to divine providence to provide us with what is necessary for salvation if only there be no impediment on our part. The Lord one day said to our heavenly friend, St. Teresa of Avila: "I would willingly speak to many souls, but the world makes such a noise in their heart that my voice cannot make itself heard."

The essential condition to converse with God is the solitude of the heart without which prayer would be futile, and, as our other heavenly friend, St. Gregory the Great says: "It would profit us little or nothing to be with the body in a solitary place, while the heart is full of worldly thoughts and affections."

In this case, we are still held captive by the power of sheol. However, if we pray for deliverance God will ransom our soul from the power of sheol, for He will receive us. Without prayer we cannot hope to obtain the help necessary for the deliverance of our soul.

While the activity of the devil is to kidnap for ransom, Christ's activity is to forgive for salvation. We are kidnapped by committing sin, but ransomed by repentance. Hence, every time that we commit sin we are kidnapped, but every time we repent we are ransomed.

It is astonishing how people take a great deal of care to avoid poison which destroys the body, yet so negligent in avoiding sin which is the poison of the soul and robs us of God!

Everyone who has not a great dread of mortal sin is not far from falling into it. Hence it is necessary to keep away from dangerous occasions of sin as much as possible; otherwise, we are making ourselves so vulnerable to be kidnapped.

Therefore, let us pray earnestly and do the best we can, with the grace of God, not to let sin be the ruler in our mortal bodies to make us obey their passions, and not to yield the members of our bodies to sin as instruments of wickedness and all wrong doing, but to yield them to God as instruments of righteousness, and ourselves to God as men and women who have been brought from death to life, that is, from the power of sheol to the glory of God's kingdom. If these things are ours and abound, then, we have a fairly stable confidence to: →

Icon # 495 = Riches

"Be not afraid when one becomes rich, when the glory of his house increases. For when he dies he will carry nothing away; his glory will go down after him."

Not only that we should not be afraid when one becomes rich, but above all not to envy if one becomes rich because it can cause in us many unhappiness and pains. It is not outlandish to say that many people would like to become rich, because we are rich and have lots of money we can buy and do many things. We can go to exotic places for vacation, buy luxury items, etc., but it is not farfetched to say that this is more indicative of the emptiness and dissatisfaction in our heart.

This is not to say that riches in itself is evil, but riches is highly dangerous if someone is not truly attuned to spiritual values and have good moral lives, because, in this case, riches become an instrument to feed one's ego, vanity, pride, vices, power, and prestige. People who are dominated by these things are probably using sleeping pills to help them go to sleep at night.

In terms of inner peace, it is true to say that those who lived a simple life, the poor who put their trust in God, and those who served God in whatever state of life they are in, is far happier and peaceful than the former.

Besides, when the rich people die and buried in a very expensive coffin, yet nobody would have the instinct of putting even a penny or a dollar bill in his pocket or her purse, unless s/he explicitly stated in her/his last will and testament, if s/he has one, to do so.

This is probably to defy what the psalmist says, "when he dies he will carry nothing away," for, at least, s/he has a penny or a dollar. But, even so, it is only up to the grave. It could never have access to the other world where riches are based on the goodness of one's life, in whatever is done in the body.

Therefore, we should not be afraid nor envy anyone who becomes rich and whose glory increases, because "when he dies he will carry nothing away; his glory will not go down after him."

We have to contend that a person who lives uprightly even though s/he has few possessions, these possessions are far better than the riches of a dishonest, corrupt, and devious person, because these possessions will serve as vehicle to bring him/her to his/her eternal destiny, that is, using them as means for doing good.

Goodness is certainly a form of riches. A good person is undoubtedly rich in virtue. S/he lays up treasures in heaven where no moth devours nor rust consumes nor thieves break in and steal, for where one's riches are the desires and inclinations of the heart be also.

If our riches are in God the desires and inclinations of our heart will be also in God, in the things that are above, in all that is admirable, decent, virtuous, and worthy of praise; in all that is right, true, and just.

Time is also a form of riches. Even though we are not rich in material things, but if we have lots of time for God and the things that pleases Him such as setting aside a time of prayer, helping others, attending Mass as often as we can if it is in our power, and doing spiritual reading, we are truly rich in the sight of God.

We should not be afraid to become rich in this kind of riches, for it is a healthy kind of riches; whereas, the other kind of riches which is purely material is not a good kind of riches, because when we die we will not carry them with us. The people who have this kind of riches cannot please God and does not submit to God's law. Even: →

Icon # 496 = To be truly wise and Happy

"Though, while he lives, he counts himself happy, and though a man gets praise when he does well for himself, he will go to the generation of his fathers, who will never more see the light. Man cannot abide in his pomp, he is like the beasts that perish."

A story of the famous Greek law-giver Solon who once went for a vacation to the town of Lydia, in what is now the country of Turkey. It boasted to have the richest king in the world, named Croesus. Solon, the great philosopher, quite detached from all possessions of this world – decided to visit the man who seemed to find all his happiness in wealth.

As soon as he got to the place, Croesus showed him his vaults. "What do you think of that?" he demanded vauntingly. But Solon kept silent and so the king went on, "who do you think is the happiest man in the world?" The philosopher thought for a moment, and then named two obscure Greeks whose names Croesus had never heard before.

The king was angry of being cheated out of a compliment, so he asked sharply for an explanation. Solon answered, "No man, my friend, can be considered really happy whose heart is wedded to material things. They pass and their owner becomes a widow. To widows belong grief. Or the man himself passes away, and can take none of his gold with him. Again, it is only grief" (Catholic Anecdotes).

Solon hit the on the head when he says, "No man can be considered really happy whose hearts is wedded to material things," because our heart is not designed to be wedded to materials things. Wedded suggests union. Union suggests love, that is, we are united to the one we love. Hence we are wedded to what we love either to material things or to God.

However, since God made our heart ultimately for Himself, therefore, to be wedded to material things is an act of adultery against God. It is true adulterous people enjoy pleasure, but they are not truly happy not only because of the anxiety and fear of being discovered but above all they are not true and honest to themselves.

The same is true with people who are wedded to material things. They, too, enjoy pleasure when they have new things, but the more they have the more they became discontented and empty inside because nothing is enough for a person of whom enough is too little. It is true to say that there are men and women who resent God's coming into their lives, who strain every sinew of their nerve in order to acquire money and gets praise, and lives pompously or popularity and a life of ease; they often work obsessively hard to achieve these objectives and rarely speak of the inner motives that inspire them. Oh, if only they could develop the same attitude towards the acquisition of another and more permanent kind of treasure that will last forever they will be truly wise and happy.

They will no longer be like the beasts, or lower than the beasts, that perish but really men and women of eternal nobility because their treasure will never fade and their virtues will never perish, "for in the memory of virtue is immortality because it is known both by God and by men."

If we have to consider these things inwardly and meditate upon them in our mind, that living a life of virtue will lead us to immortality and pure happiness, and in the labors of virtue there is unfailing wealth, and in the experience of pursuing eternal values there is true understanding and healthy popularity, like that of the saints being celebrated in the universal Church, then, we will be inspired to aspire a virtuous life. If we do this, it would not be hard to hear: →

Icon # 497 = The Perfection of Beauty

Psalm 50 (49)

"The Mighty One, God the Lord, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth."

We mentioned that the other word of Zion is Jerusalem. However, "the perfection of beauty" in which "God shines forth" is obviously not in the earthly Jerusalem, but in the heavenly Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, the bride of the Lamb adorned with such a magnificent beauty and splendor.

It is to this Jerusalem that God the Lord summons all the inhabitants of the earth from all races, ethnicity, languages, cultures, and tongues, to behold upon the perfect beauty of the City of God which is lighted itself by the unspeakable resplendent of the glory of God that knows no disturbance by the slightest shadow of darkness.

All the nations of the earth shall walk in the light of His glory. There is no night there. All the citizens of this new Jerusalem never get tired or sleepy, and need no sleep, for they are sustained by the inexhaustible energy from the light of God's glory.

The Lord God is constantly inviting all people of our world to live forever in the New Jerusalem to gaze its perfect beauty. Hence, from the rising of the Sun to its setting He is summoning all of us to go into His vineyard, that is, to be a part of the life of the Church, His mystical Body, that we receive eternal life and participate in the perfect beauty of God, for we shall see Him as He is.

Since God made us in His own image and likeness, it follows that our soul has its own pristine beauty. It is sin that deforms it, but reformed by living a virtuous life: honest and truthful. Therefore, we have to emerge from the love of vices and sensible beauty to the love of virtues and moral beauty, then still go up higher to the love of the Supreme Beauty existing eternally in itself.

It is really mind boggling that God condescended to summon all the people on earth to contemplate His pure beauty, simple, without mixture and other perishable vanities. Do we not think that once we perceived the divine beauty by the faculty of our mind to which beauty is perceptible we could bring forth veritable virtues since we are attached and united to God who is truth Himself? As it is written: "Everyone who is united to God become one spirit with Him." At that moment of union the Lord our God will be our crown of glory and a diadem of beauty to all His people.

Not only the perfection of beauty comes out of Zion, the new Jerusalem, which God shines forth, but also the perfection of eternal happiness which God prepared for us since the foundation of the world. As human beings made in the image and likeness of God, we are by nature entitled to this perfection of never ending happiness provided we do not forfeit it by our own fault.

It is an article of faith that the happiness of the saints in heaven is everlasting. This truth is clearly contained in the Scripture, as the Lord says to everyone who serves Him faithfully: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master;" it is daily professed by the Church in the Apostles' Creed. Even natural reason can demonstrate it, for truly if the citizens of this new Jerusalem knew that their happiness was ever to come to an end, this knowledge alone would prevent their happiness from being perfect.

One of our Cistercian fathers, Gilbert of Hoyland in his sermon 10 on the Song of Songs notes that "the inestimable beauty of the divine majesty, once revealed, commends itself to pure minds, ravishes the affection of the beholder, and in

some way makes the mind like itself, allowing it to think of nothing else." Hence, the soul will be in eternal ecstasy once it enters into the city of Zion, the New Jerusalem, to behold the perfection of God's beauty.

Therefore, our thoughts and attitudes ought to be governed by love for our heavenly home, the New Jerusalem. Our longings should be geared toward it every moment of our life, and firmly rivet the mooring of our hope there, for out of this heavenly Jerusalem the perfection of God's indescribable beauty shines forth. Wherefore, with ardent longing and firm belief, we have the boldness to say: →

Icon # 498 = The Comings of God

"Our God comes, he does not keep silence, before him is a devouring fire, round about him a mighty tempest."

We heard from our fathers of old about the three comings of God into our world in the person of His only begotten Son, Our Lord Jesus. The first was in the Incarnation when He utterly humbles Himself to become a human being like us in all things except sin. He experienced all human feelings: He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit for hiding His message from the worldly wise and the unbelieving learned but revealing it to the little ones, to the humble and simple; He felt thirsty and asked for drink from a Samaritan woman; He was moved with pity for a leper and for those who hanged around Him for three days without food; He wept for His friend Lazarus and for Jerusalem; He was grieved at the hardness of heart of the rulers of His people; He was angry that the house of prayer, that is, the temple was turned into a shopping mall; He felt so tired that He sunk into a deep sleep in the boat; He felt hungry; He felt terrible pain in His passion and crucifixion.

All these are woven together in His first coming. His second coming, of course, will be simultaneous with the end of the present world when He comes no longer in lowliness but in full majesty with all the angels in heaven. He will come as a Judge to recompense both the living and the dead according to what each person has done in the temple of his/her body. The brightness of God's glory will reveal what is going on in this temple, that is, in the body.

He is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. He also said in one of His discourses that "nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known." As the Word of God, he is very living and active. He is sharper than the sharpest two edged sword. He penetrates to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrows, and discerning the thoughts and intention of the heart. Before Him no creatures are hidden either angels or demons or human

beings or all kinds of plants and insects and animals, etc, but all are open and laid bare to His eyes.

In other words, all that people do or say or think, are done or said or thought of in His presence. It is just a matter of turning on the light. All will be seen – clearer than a clear crystal.

His third coming is in between the first and the second coming, that is, He comes in our day to day lives. This third coming is very indicative of how a person will be evaluated at the second coming. People who are truthful, and do what is good and right can certainly experience flashes of light of this coming because whoever does what is good, right, and true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been wrought in God.

On the other hand, people who do evil do not come to the light, lest their deeds should be exposed. Hence, they preferred the darkness of evil deeds. But since in God there is no darkness at all, therefore, their deeds could not be hidden from God, so they are just fooling and deceiving themselves.

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

To listen is the capacity to receive a word – to allow ourselves to be changed by the word we received. Hearing is the same with listening but it does involve the transformation of ourselves. It is very important to hear and to listen. Listening leads to insight. Insight is seeing. Thus when we listen attentively to the Lord Jesus, who is the Word of God, we can see what He means. In other words, we understand. We have an expression, “I see what you mean.” It is just another way of saying, “I understand what you say.”

To strive to put into practice what the Lord says is tantamount to obeying His word. Our father St. Benedict opens his prologue with these words: “Listen carefully, my son, to the master’s instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart. This is advice from a father who loves you; welcome it, and faithfully put it into practice. The labor of obedience will bring you back to him from whom you had drifted through the sloth of disobedience.”

When our holy father St. Benedict tells us to incline the ear of our heart, he is telling us to listen in faith. Faith is the secret of the whole thing, and the only guarantee of love. Faith expresses itself in obedience. Obedience is to faith what humility is to truth and what homage is to beauty. Where faith is strong,

obedience follow. Where faith is weak, obedience will be deficient, inexact, and inconstant.

If liberty is the ability to be true to God's idea, that is, to ourselves and our vocation in life, we must first know what is wanted of us, and then we must be single-minded enough not to waste ourselves on other things. Hence we must listen to what God tells us of His will: "Hearken, O my son," thus we will come to know what our life is expected to produce; consequently, we will learn to deny ourselves of whatever may stand in the way.

When we have learned what is our true vocation, then we are free of the things that stood in the way. We will be in a fairly good position to hear the word of the Lord. To look for a variety of activities outside our soul is to find a weakening of activity within us. But when our soul has found itself in Christ the Lord, the outward activities become inward activities. Our things become God's things.

Our God comes to really transfigure our way of thinking. He comes to us by means of signs, such as: our fellow human beings, especially those whom we lived with; the Incarnation; and the sacraments, because we are creature and we could not directly gaze at Him. We desire for God because He has already come into our hearts. This desire is ultimately from Him.

We can come nearer to the mystery of God's coming to our lives if we think of Him saying: "I know you will want to come to Me if I inspire this desire in you. You will not draw near to Me unless I do the drawing for you. I will therefore come to you and be the attraction." In other words, we come to God because He first comes to us. We search for Him because we have been found by Him. God is therefore the mover and the moved, the caller and the called. "My beloved to me, and I to him."

The continuity and harmony in God are reflected in the correspondence and progressive sanctification of our soul. "Draw me," the bride begs of the Beloved, "and we will run after you to the odor of your ointments." We cannot run of ourselves: we need to be drawn, and at every step we need new strength.

"Let us then arise, since the Scripture stirs us up saying: 'It is the time now for us to rise from sleep.' Behold, "our God comes." Let us come out to meet Him; let us come out from our pride and meet Him in humility; let us come out from our vanity and meet Him in simplicity. Since God keeps silence no longer, what does He say?

Let us listen carefully to what He says: "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laded, 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."

If God had not come to us in the person of the Lord Jesus, do you think we can have the stamina, the courage, the desire, and the boldness to come to Him? Probably not! We might possibly be doing something else, or go somewhere else – to a very far country away from Him where we can have an unbridle liberty to squander the graces of our baptismal inheritance.

To prevent the hardening of our heart, therefore, which sometimes comes instinctively to our soul even though we hear God's word, there must be a readiness in us to silence the voices of unhealthy desires which counsel every sort of alternative, such as the desire to turn stone into bread, the desire to be at the top of the ladder of success, and the desire to be admired by everyone.

Our God comes, hence we have to prepare the way of our heart for Him; we have to make the winding roads of our life straight, and the rough ways of our attitude smooth; we have to level the hills of our pride and fill up the valleys of our anxiety with trust in God.

How do we level these mountains and hills of our pride and cockiness, fill up these valleys of fear and anxiety, straighten these crooked roads of deceitfulness and dishonesty, and smoothing the rough ways of our demeanor? Our good friend, St. Paul, gave us a most potent prescription: "My prayer is that your love for each other may increase more and more and never stop improving your knowledge and deepening your perception so that you can always recognize what is best. This will help you to become pure and blameless, and prepare you for the Day of Christ, when you will reach the perfect goodness which Jesus Christ produces in us for the glory and praise of God."

What he say is to increase our love more and more, to improve our knowledge and deepen our perception; in other words, to grow in love for God and our fellow human being and improve our knowledge of our faith and our knowledge of the Lord Jesus. If these things are in us and abound, as our God comes, we will be less fearful and more trustful to hear: →

Icon # 499 = Judge, Sacrifice, Righteousness

"He calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge his people: 'Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!' The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge!"

During His public ministry on earth, the Lord Jesus often speaks of Himself as "the Son of man." As the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son, that is, Our Lord Jesus, to have also life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment because He is the Son of man. Before He became a human being He too was the One who pronounced the verdict on the spirits, that is, the good and the wicked angels. He judged them according to their level, to what they have done, said, and thought of in their spirit.

It is necessary, therefore, that He would become a human being, having a body, if He would render a fair verdict on every human being according to what each one has done, said, or thought of in the body. As the Word of God who became a human being and who Himself is God, He is the only Person who is co-conscious with every human person and with every spirit both angels and demons.

Hence, no one can ever evade and deny His judgment. Even Satan the so called Lucifer, the Great Liar, and the father of lies, was powerless to deny the judgment of God, as the Lord Jesus said: "the ruler of this world is judged," and "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."

Since Christ Jesus is God and is co-conscious with every human person, so He has all the evidence of what a person say or do or think. It is for this reason that we are strictly forbidden to pronounce a moral judgment on another person because we don't have all the evidence. We do not know what a person is thinking, at least, during his/her waking hours, say 16 hours; we do not know what is going on inside him/her. Even if s/he expresses it to us it is still a very tiny portion of that person. We also don't hear all what a person say, at least, during his/her waking hours: what kind of words s/he uses and how s/he uses them. We also don't see everything what a person do during his/her waking hours.

Therefore, whatever judgment we made concerning a person it is not a perfect judgment. Besides, our judgment can be colored too by subjectivity and by pre-conception. But it is quite absolutely different from God, because He knows by immediate intuition. Intellectual illumination awakes all acquired ideas whereby the soul sees its entire past in a glance what it has said, done, and thought of. It sees how God judges and conscience makes this judgment definitive.

When the Lord comes to judge the living and the dead we shall be placed before the awful brilliant throne. Everything on which we formerly leaned, behind which we formerly hid will disappear. All rights, honors, works, success, and anything else that has helped us to avoid the truth. All these will fall away and vanish under the penetrating ray of the Judge. Only our naked conscience will stand before God's gaze. On that day every sentiment, every thought, and every action will be drenched in light. Above all, our most secret intentions will be disclosed: our fundamental attitude toward God.

Let us not, therefore, pass condemnatory judgment in matters whose motivation we do not know, nor let us decry the obvious as if despairing of a remedy; and thus we shall avoid the judgment of which the Lord said: "Judge not, that you may not be judged."

Our heavenly friend, St. Augustine, pointed out two situations in which we must guard against rash judgment. The first is when it is uncertain why and with what disposition a thing is done; the second is when it is uncertain what sort of person s/he will be who now appears to be either good or bad.

Our perception and our fear of the strict truth of God's judgment is a tremendous grace, but we should not spoil it by allowing this fear to become anxiety and perturbation, because the good and true fear of God's judgment is for ever sweet, peaceful and tranquil, and mingled with trust.

Our other heavenly friend, St. Teresa of Avila, likened the Godhead to a very clear diamond, much larger than the whole world. All that we do is seen in this diamond, which is of such a kind that it contains everything within itself, because there is nothing capable of falling outside such greatness.

Hence, we can imagine how terrible it would be for someone to die in unrepented mortal sin when it can be seen in the clear depths of this diamond, how many foul things have been pictured in that clearness and purity. We can also imagine the shame felt by the soul since it has no place to hide. Oh if only those who commit the most foul and dishonorable sins may realize that their sins are not hidden, and that they are committed in the presence of the Judge Himself; that every time we commit sin we are behaving in His presence with the greatest irreverence! Who could ever endure it!?

It is impossible to understand how grave an offense it is to commit such greatest irreverence in the sight of the Judge Himself and how alienated such things are from His nature. However, while we are still in this present life the Mercy of this Judge is unceasingly negotiating with His Justice, and often times is unceasingly negotiating with His Justice, and often times His Mercy becomes ever the more

clearly seen, because, though He knows that we are doing this, He nonetheless bears with us.

His kindness is meant to lead us to repentance, but we should not presume of His mercy by adding sin unto sin; otherwise, we will be dumbfounded when we will hear Him say to us: "These things you have done and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you, and lay the charge before you."

On the other hand, if today we hear His voice and do not harden our heart, and begin to take seriously our faith by cultivating a personal relationship with God, and by curtailing the inordinate desires of the flesh, we will be counted among the faithful ones who made a covenant with Him by sacrifice, because "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passion and desires." Thus the life they now live in the flesh they live by faith in the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, who loves them and gave Himself for them.

The spirit of sacrifice is a servant of charity. It is indispensable for charity in its initial stages, in its progress and even when it is most advanced. In fact, progress in prayer and in virtue is proportionate to the abnegation done to the self, for love is nourished by sacrifice. Without sacrifice love would be impoverished. Sacrifice is necessary in the development of the personality.

A hard life with trials and difficulties to be overcome is needed, it would seem necessary, to bring out our latent resources. It is then that unsuspected strengths lying hidden within us are aroused. Virtues, which by definition make us more a man, are cultivated to the extirpation of contrary vice and brought to bear in our striving towards achieving our true destiny and the ultimate happiness that will otherwise elude us.

The beauty and sublimity of a soul increase its capacity for sacrifice. Only great souls are capable of making great sacrifices, and therefore the greatest of all souls had to take upon itself the greatest of all sacrifice. Sacrifice adorns and beautifies the soul, for it springs from love. It is a veritable proof of love when we give up one thing for the sake of another, and the essence of sacrifice is the renunciation of one goal for the sake of a higher goal.

We renounce our consolation when the honor and glory of God requires it, and with our lives that we may find Christ. Purification and sacrifice go hand in hand in the history of the soul. They are two sides of the medal; two manifestations of the heart's striving towards God.

Love of the more perfect spiritual life will stimulate us to sacrifice, so that we willingly enter the service of virtue, although this cost us blood and sweat and

drudgery. But who would not be willing to pay this slender price, if by so doing we might attain life that is more perfect where we will be with God forever?

Our other heavenly friend, St. Therese of the Child Jesus, has this to say: "the hope of future joy is enough to make present sacrifices acceptable."

It is true to say that any good thing we do in union with God is a sacrifice no matter how little or insignificant it might be. Thanking God is also a sacrifice, as the Scripture says: "I will offer thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord."

Of course, the Eucharist is the par excellent sacrifice and thanksgiving which we offer to God in union with the Lord Jesus who made a covenant with us on the night before He suffered. On His part, He took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, saying: "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

On our part, we have to receive Him into our body by partaking of His body and blood, so that His body will be in our body and His blood will be in our blood; in other words, we have to receive Him into our life, into our whole being, so that we will be transformed into what we received, that is, what God is by nature we will be by grace. God took the initiative to make this covenant with us for our divinization. Our part is to acquiesce, and to be grateful.

When we give our body willingly to another as the means of deliberate self-donation, then our union with the other is complete. We surrender our intimacy, the secret of ourselves, with the giving of our body; and we cannot give it without our will, our thoughts, our minds, and our souls. This is precisely what the Lord Jesus did. He surrendered the secret of Himself to each one of us when He gave us His Body in this everlasting covenant He made with us. In this covenant, the surrender of the secret of Himself goes on. "With desire," He said, "I have desired this hour."

The Holy Eucharist is both a sacramental sacrifice and a sacrificial sacrament. The document *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (On certain Matters to be Observed or to be Avoided Regarding the Most Holy Eucharist, from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacrament) gladly assert that "in the Most Holy Eucharist, Mother Church with steadfast faith acknowledged the sacrament of Redemption, joyfully takes it to herself, celebrates it and reveres it in adoration, proclaiming the death of Christ and confessing His Resurrection until he comes in glory...."

According to the teaching of the Church, the Eucharist is the source and summit of the whole Christian life. The Eucharist contains the whole spiritual wealth of the Church. From the beginning the Church has insisted that the Eucharist was not only a symbol of Christ's presence and sacrifice but His true bodily presence and sacrifice.

Although it is the Lord who took the initiative to make a covenant with us by the Eucharistic sacrifice, yet we are the ones who are really in need of the sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist for our salvation and divinization. We entered into a covenant with Him for our own good.

Let us give ear to these words of our heavenly friend who had made this covenant with the Lord before us, no other than St. Teresa of Avila: "Whenever I approached the altar to communicate, and remembered that it was He who was in the Most Holy Sacrament and that the Lord was often pleased that I should see Him in the Host, my hair would stand on end and I would feel completely annihilated."

"O my Lord!" she continues to say, "didst Thou not cloak Thy greatness, who would dare to come so often to the union of such foulness and wretchedness with such great Majesty? Blessed be Thou, Lord. Let the angels and all creatures praise Thee, who measures things by our weakness, so that, while we are rejoicing in Thy sovereign favors, we may not be so much affrighted by Thy great power as not to dare, because we are weak and miserable creatures to rejoice in those favors."

"The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge!" as it is written: "righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne." Hence, the judgment of the Judge will be based on righteousness and justice. Are we acting rightly and justly?

This is only what He asks of us: to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with Him. Blessed will we be if we do this, for it is a lucid and limpid declaration of His righteousness. In doing so, we participate in the attributes of God; "being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts." On the other hand, if we are only "a hearer of the word and not a doer," then, this is what the Lord will say to us: →

Icon # 500 = Testify

"Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, I will testify against you. I am God, your God."

It is obvious that the reason why the Lord will testify against us is that we are hearer of the word only and not a doer, because if we have been both a hearer and a doer of the word the Lord would not testify against us but would rather commend us saying: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master."

It would really be an unimaginable tragedy if the Lord will testify against us because He has all the evidence. He sees everything we did, hears everything we spoke, and knows everything we thought. So while we are still on the way we have to reconcile our lives to the word of the Lord, try the best we can that the way we live would not be antithetical to His word.

Of course, we stumble and fall along the way, that is, we do not carry out what He says. When this happens we have to avail the sacrament of reconciliation, we have to approach the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find help in moment of need. Doing this is a healthy indication that there is still humility left in our heart which, in turn, makes us recipient of God's favor, His grace.

Our father, St. Bernard of Clairvaux sketched out an extraordinary view of the working of grace that is both solidly founded and very encouraging. He affirms that Our Lord allows us to fall from time to time so that, having experience what life without God's support is like, we might return to our heavenly Father with greater commitment than ever.

When God seems to withdraw from us, it is inevitable that we will fall. This removal of the divine support confronts us with our overwhelming frailty, and this happen repeatedly as we go along on our spiritual journey so that our hearts will not become too proud and it will make us realize that apart from Our Lord we can really do nothing.

And yet, St. Bernard gives us an assurance that this fall is for our profit if it makes us more careful and humble. In his second Sermon of Psalm 90, he says: "It is a necessity for men to fall occasionally so long as they live here below; but while some are bruised by their fall, others are not, for the Lord puts His hand under them. Surely our sins 'work together unto good' for us when they render us more circumspect and humble. Is not he who falls upon humility supported in his fall by the hand of the Lord?"

If our sins does not lead us to humility and make us more careful, then we will be in a serious predicament, because it is very likely that the Lord will testify against us, saying: "These things you have done and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you, and lay the charge before you."

On the other hand, if we are humble enough to confess our sins and amend our lives the Lord will be more than eager to testify in our favor saying: "Come now, let us reason together...though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."

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. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Oh that today we would listen to His voice and not harden our heart, then the Lord will not testify against us. This expression "today" has to be uttered all the days of our life, even when we are already old, because repentance is not judged by quantity of time, but by disposition of our soul. Take for example the Ninevites, they did not need many days to blot out all their iniquities. And the repentant thief also did not take a long time to effectuate and bring about his entrance into Paradise, but in such a brief moment as one might occupy in uttering a short sentence, he washed off all the sins he had committed in his whole life; and instead of hearing a testimony against him, he heard from the mouth of God a word that surpasses his understanding: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Even though, in our supreme ignorance, childishness, and tendency toward evil, turn away from true life and place many impediments along our path because we really do not like to repent, nevertheless, God has great mercy on us. He patiently waits for us until we will be converted and return to Him and be enlightened in our inner selves that our faces may not be ashamed in the day of judgment when He Himself will testify against all evil doers, saying: "I tell you, I do not know where you come from; depart from me, all you workers of iniquity!"

Hence, one thing alone can help to bring forgiveness of our sins, that is, to learn the goal of repentance so that sure of the forgiveness of our past sins we may be heartened to mount the heights of sanctity, as the Lord said: "Be holy, as I am holy." For truly: →

Icon # 501 = Different Kinds of Sacrifices

"I do not reprove you for your sacrifices; your burnt offerings are continually before me."

We have said earlier that any good thing we do in union with God, no matter how small and insignificant it might be, is a kind of sacrifice. Giving thanks to God for all that happens to us either positive or negative is also a kind of sacrifice. Of course, abstaining from something or denying ourselves of something is also a form of sacrifice. In other words, anything that we intentionally offer to God is a kind of sacrifice. Our life too is a sacrifice if we offer it to God. Prayer too is a sacrifice.

Just as there are varieties of gifts such as: healing, working miracles, prophesying, discernment of spirits, etc; and there are varieties of service such as different kinds of active apostolate, but the same God who inspires them all in every one for the common good, so also there are different kinds of sacrifices, but the same God to whom they are offered for the common good of the Mystical Body of the Lord Jesus. These are like burnt offerings which are continually before Him. Of course, He will not reprove us for these, for they are wholesome in His sight. They rise up to Him like incense.

Of all the sacrifices which we offer to God, it is right to say that prayer is the most accessible to us because we can easily offer prayer wherever we are. We have only to enter into our heart and pray to God in secret, and God who sees in secret knows what kind of prayer we are offering Him. The best prayer we can offer, sometimes, carries with it a "Thank You Lord," for whatever solution we have managed to come up with when we encounter trials and difficulties in our day to day life.

There is no person on earth who cannot raise his/her heart to God in simple and humble prayer. The capacity and ability to be able to offer a sacrifice of prayer to God is, undoubtedly, one of the greatest privileges we human beings have. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything, as from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God."

In the days of old, monks and those in other religious Orders used to offer a sacrifice to God by means of flagellation or wearing hair shirt in order to discipline themselves. It seems though that this kind of sacrifice is only for the spiritual elite, for those who entered religion and for those who were affiliated to some religious orders. In all probability, it was not accessible to ordinary people; whereas prayer is accessible even to children.

The other form of sacrifice that we can offer to God which is also very accessible to us is the faithful performance of our daily duty. Devotion to duty to the utter disregard of self is the safest, surest, and simplest way to sanctity. The duties of each moment are shadows beneath which the divine action lies concealed.

In the moral and supernatural order the duties of each moment conceal under their outward appearances the true reality of the divine will which alone is worthy of our attention.

Our heavenly friend, St. Francis the Sales, points out that “routine of everyday, common duties is no hindrance to a free intimacy with God. Hence, when our everyday duties do not demand any very great attention we have to look more on God than on our work, but when they are so important that they demand our whole attention we have to turn to Him from time to time like sailors bound for port who keep their eyes on the sky rather than on the ocean.”

How full of goodness and wisdom is the conduct of God! He has in such a way reserved to His grace and action the sublime, elevated, and admirable part of perfection and holiness, and He has graciously deigned to our souls to perform with the help of His grace what is simple, plain, and easy, that there is no one in the world who cannot offer a sacrifice to Him and arrive at the most eminent perfection by fulfilling with love lowly and common duties. It is not surprising to hear: →

Icon # 502 = Icon of a Right and Restored Relationship

“I will accept no bull from your house, nor he-goat from your folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine.”

The letter to the Hebrews tells us that when Christ came into the world, He said: “Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God,’ as it is written in the roll of the book.”

The author of this letter to the Hebrews points out that when the Lord Jesus said: “Thou has neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offering and burnt offerings and sin offerings,” these are offered according to the law, then He added: “Lo, I have come to do thy will.” He takes away the first in order to establish the second.

And by that “will” we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of the Lord Jesus once and for all. Hence, it is only the sacrifices of bulls or he-goats or cattles or birds that the Lord has neither desired nor taken pleasure because “it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins;” whereas, the precious blood of the Lord Jesus, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot, has infinite value and power in ransoming us from the futile ways of this present world.

When the Lord Jesus was crucified on the cross, He offered up His own body as a supreme sacrifice like a burnt offering wholly pleasing and acceptable to the heavenly Father. In the body of Our Lord on the cross we see the full revelation of the heart of God, the self-emptying and self-abasement of the Second person of the Blessed Trinity and the expression of the Father's profound love for the human race. It proclaims the sovereignty and majesty of Christ. It is an icon of a right and restored relationship, for it opens up the mystery of God to us.

The offering of the body and blood of Our Lord Jesus through being lifted up on the cross makes “eternal life” possible for those who believe, for those who no longer live for themselves but for Him who died and was raised for our justification.

When the Lord Jesus had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. Therefore, let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

Since the Lord Jesus is the Word of God made flesh and by whom and for whom and through whom the whole universe and all that is in it is created, therefore, it is right and fitting that He knows all the birds of the air and all that moves in the field belongs to Him. For this reason: →

Icon # 503 = We Become what we Received

“If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world and all that is in it is mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High; and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

It is true that if the Lord were hungry He would not tell His disciples and us, for the world and all that is in it is His. For instance, when He entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when He had looked around at everything, as it was already late, He went to Bethany with the twelve disciples. On the following day, when they came from Bethany, He was hungry. Of course, He did not tell His disciples that He was hungry. And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, He

went to see if He could find anything on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves....And He said to it: "May no one ever eat fruit you again."

It is very likely that at the back of His mind the Lord was referring this to the temple. Like the fig tree which has many leaves but no fruit, so the temple was so crowded with people and business that it became a house of trade rather than a house of prayer, with no fruit of justice and mercy, as the Lord says: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings."

Although it is true that the Lord would not tell us if He is hungry, but it is also true that whatever we do to the least of our fellow human being we do it to Him. This is a good test of charity whether we really give food to the Lord if He tells us that He is hungry in the person of a really needy person. If we could not give food to a needy person whom we can see, how can we give food to the Lord whom we do not see?

Then He asked us, "Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" since God is a spirit, it follows that He doesn't eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats. Besides, the flesh of bull or the blood of goats can never take away sins.

On the other hand, since God became a human being like us in all things except sin, He offers to us His own flesh and blood, and emphatically tells us that His flesh is food indeed and His blood is drink indeed; and that whoever eats His flesh and drink His blood abides in Him and He in that person; and with divine authority which staggers all human imagination, scandal to some and a mystery to many, He boldly says: "he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him at the last day."

Hence, by eating His body and drinking His blood we enter into everlasting life. By the holy blood of the Lord Jesus, Faith is bestowed to the desperate, Hope to the depressed, and Love to the indifferent.

The eating of the flesh and the drinking of the blood of Our Lord is a tremendous privilege given to us. We can do nothing more pleasing to God than to partake of His body and blood in a state of grace. The reason of this is that love tends to perfect and intimate union with the beloved; as then the Lord Jesus loves a soul that is in grace with an immense love; He ardently desires to unite Himself to it. This is what the partaking of His body and blood does. By it He is wholly united to our soul: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."

Thus in eating the body and drinking the blood of the Lord we are offering to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, because this action of eating and drinking of the body and blood of the Lord is what we called "Eucharist," which means

“Thanksgiving.” Accordingly, when we eat His flesh and drink His blood we join with Him in offering to the heavenly Father a sacrifice of thanksgiving for the sanctification and salvation of our souls.

The importance of blood has already been stressed even in the Old Testament. The book of Exodus, Chapter 24: 3-8, tells us that Moses directed young Israelites to offer holocausts and to immolate bullocks to the Lord as communion sacrifices.

Half of the blood Moses took up and put into basins, the other half he casts on the altar. And taking the book of the covenant he read it to the listening people. Then he took the blood and casts it towards the people saying: “This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you.”

On the other hand, in the New Testament, the letter to the Hebrews 9:11-15 tells us that Our Lord Jesus has entered the sanctuary, of course, of heaven once and for all, taking with Him not the blood of goats and calves, but His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption for us. Moreover, if the blood of goats and calves in the Old Testament can restore holiness on those who have incurred defilement how much more effectively the blood of the Lord Jesus, who offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice to God through the eternal spirit, can purify our inner self from dead actions so that we do our service to the living God!

Indeed under the law of the Old Testament almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. Hence even the first covenant was not ratified without blood. Therefore, in the shedding of the blood of Our Lord, He became the mediator of a new covenant so that all the people who were called to an eternal inheritance may actually received what was promised: His death on the cross took place to cancel the sins that infringed the earlier covenant, for by a single sacrifice He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us, for after saying: “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: ‘I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds.’” This covenant is fulfilled when, at the Last Supper, the Lord took the cup and when He had given thanks He gave it to the disciples and said: “This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

He puts His laws in our hearts when He gave us the commandment to love one another so that all people may know that we are His disciples, and He writes them in our minds when He sends us the Holy Spirit saying, “These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But when the Counselor, the Holy Spirit,

comes whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

Therefore, this covenant which Our Lord Jesus made with us, the eating of His flesh and the drinking of His blood in the form of consecrated bread and wine, is a covenant of love and friendship where we become one with Him as it is written: “He who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.” Thus we become what we received. For this reason we are supplied the grace to pay our vows – promises to the Most High God, and have the humility to call upon Him in the day of trouble, for we gained confidence that He will deliver us, and we in turn will glorify Him.

In paying our vows to the Most High God, we are taking the most radical means of focusing our will in what is good. The aim of our vow is to establish our will in the good. Consequently, the deeds which proceed from a will that is fix in the good become a virtue.

The responsibility that we impose on ourselves by the vows we made to the Most High, truly, does not contradict our liberty; it is rather its wholesome expression. Hence we are free to call upon the Lord when we are in trouble.

In His last discourse at the last supper the Lord told us all that in this world we will have tribulation, but He also encouraged us to be of good cheer because He has overcome the world. The reason why He told us in advance that we have experience tribulation while still in this world is that in our union with Him we will have peace in spite of all our troubles.

Our trouble invites us to have recourse to Him who alone can restore peace in our soul and give Himself to us. Trouble has the ability to discern false goods which are ephemeral from the true goods which endures eternally. In the end, it’s the crosses and struggles and troubles that are most effective in shaping us into the kind of human being we are meant to be. Crosses and troubles transform us by ripping away all the nonsense and triviality and vanity and shallowness that surround us, and showing us the things that are truly important – the things that concern God. On the other hand: →

Icon # 504 = The Importance of Discipline

“But to the wicked God says: ‘What right have you to recite my statutes, or take my covenant on your lips? For you hate discipline.’”

We are told by Scripture that “for the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who

have been trained by it." People who disciplined themselves, certainly, has a goal in view. For instance, athletes do different kinds of exercises everyday, refrain from certain kinds of foods and drinks.

They disciplined themselves to make their bodies healthy; thus ready for the game. It is conceivable to apprehend the muscles aches they have to endure when they first began their regimen. However, after many months and years of doing an exercise, it becomes part of them, their bodies got used to it, and they experienced a sense of "well being."

The same is true in the spiritual life also. All serious seekers of God disciplined themselves in some ways by doing "spirit friendly" spiritual exercises such as prayer and reading. They also refrain from vices and abstain from every form of evil. They do this not only for the good of their bodies but above all for the good of their minds and souls; thus ready for spiritual combat and to win the crown of eternal life which God has prepared for all the victors since the foundation of the world.

In the spiritual life, people who disciplined their bodies and souls by regular spiritual exercises are simply called ascetics. In the mind of many people the word "ascetic" frightfully conjures someone who is so austere and very gaunt and with sunken eyes. Hence, they don't want to be an ascetic.

On the other hand, if they only know how important asceticism is in the renewal of our wounded human nature, there is a high likelihood that they will engage in certain ascetical exercises, that is, spiritual exercises, because without asceticism it is vain to hope for the restoration of our fallen nature. In the words of one of our Cistercian fathers, no other than the amiable St. Aelred of Rievaulx: "Without asceticism there can be no mysticism."

We have to assert though that asceticism has little to do with gauntness and sunken eyes. It is true to say that austerity is necessary but certainly not extremity. We don't have to be scrawny and with sunken eyes to be an ascetic. If we can discipline our mind and our will we are really more than half way to be considered as a genuine ascetic, at least, in the eyes of God who knows and sees everything in secret.

For example, if we go to a store and in the counter there are indecent pictures. If we can discipline our mind not to look at them deliberately, then, truly we are practicing asceticism. From this example, we can see that asceticism has very little to do with gauntness and sunken eyes, but a disciplined mind and a virtuous will. Thus we should not be afraid of asceticism. We can always train ourselves little by little, of course, with the help of God's grace.

Asceticism is simply a discipline. It is not an end in itself but simply a means to attain mysticism, a loving union with God. Asceticism as a form of discipline is really very important because if we do not discipline our mind and our will, it follows that our soul will be so weak to the extent that we could hardly resist the enticement of lascivious life. Just one jab by the "Deceiver" of the world, the father of lies, we will be knocked down right away, that is, we easily succumbed to his allurements. It is even worse when we surrender ourselves to him by loving the things that God hates and hating the things that God loves.

We may not be wicked as Lucifer – the former bright angel but turned into a murderer, yet the words that God says to the wicked will still be applicable to us if we do not repent: "What right have you to recite my statutes, or take my covenant on your lips? For you hate discipline, and you cast my words behind you."

Of course, in our perversity we have the shameless audacity to retort: "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" "We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets." But what is the Lord's answer to all this seemingly persuasive rejoinder? If only we know the intensity of the impact of this answer, I truly believe with all my heart that one would rather wish not to be born than to hear the unbearable verdict: "I tell you, I do not know where you come from; depart from me, all you workers of iniquity! There you will weep and gnash your teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves thrust out."

This is the most painful of all sufferings because the soul is rejected by God Himself. Even in this present life to be rejected by someone else is already painful though there is a possibility of reconciliation, how much more to be rejected by God Himself and without the slightest hope of reconciliation. The soul loses God forever, the infinite Good. The utter void of the soul made for the enjoyment of infinite truth and interminable goodness causes the rejected soul immeasurable anguish.

Our Lord said to St. Catherine of Siena: "The first suffering which the damned endure is that they are deprived of seeing Me. This suffering is so great that, if it were possible, they would choose to endure fire and torments, if they could in the meantime enjoy My vision, rather than to be delivered from other sufferings without being able to see Me."

Thus it is not safe to recite the statutes and ordinances of God, or take His covenant on our lips if we hate discipline and cast His words behind us. The reason for this is simply: we will be guilty of hypocrisy and mendacity. For example, if someone boldly proclaims: "we profess the principle we know to be

true. We believe that each of us is 'wonderfully made' in the image of God." Of course, he is referring to Psalm 139(138) which alludes to the unborn human beings who are 'wonderfully made' in their mother's womb. Yet, this same person is astoundingly stalwart advocate of abortion, defended it with courage and zeal equal only to the love of a father toward his children.

The very "image of God" which he recited to be true, he unabashedly violates by his actions in defending abortion, wherefore, casting the words of God behind him. Is this not dangerous? Without any shadow of a doubt it is very dangerous, for it would tantamount to: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me...."

In the spiritual life this action is dubbed as adultery, because we are meant to be united with God, to become one spirit with Him which is analogous to marriage. Wherefore, if one's heart is far from God even though one's lips honors Him, one is still guilty of adultery. Just like in marriage. Even though the husband and wife are kissing lips to lips, but if they are having an affair with someone else they will still be guilty of adultery.

This is the consequence of hating discipline and casting the words of God behind us. It even becomes grievous because: →

Icon # 505 = "Tell me who are your Friends and I will tell you who you are"

"If you see a thief, you are a friend of his; and you keep company with adulterers."

The book of Proverbs chapter 29:24 tells us that "The partner of a thief hates his own life." A thief is someone who pilfers sneakily. So, if someone is having an affair with a married person s/he is considered a thief because s/he is stealing the wife/husband of the other person. Notice that God says: "If you see a thief, you are a friend of his; and you keep company with adulterers." We may or may not have yet done these things, but the fact that we are making friendship with a thief and keeping company with adulterers say something about us, as the saying goes: "Tell me who are your friends, and I will tell you who you are."

Since adultery, that is, stealing the wife/husband of another person is a grievous sin, and sin if not repented led to the death of the soul, it follows that to be a partner of someone who steals the wife/husband of another person is tantamount to hating one's own life for the very reason that the soul is being exposed to death. The letter of James 1:15 is very emphatic in this when it says that "desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death."

The flagrantness of adultery is such that in the olden days it was punishable by stoning unto death. Nowadays, even though we haven't heard of someone executed because of adultery, but still it doesn't diminished the gravity of the sin. A person may look alive outwardly but likely dead spiritually. However, so long as we are still in this present world we should not lost hope because there is a possibility of conversion when a person encounter God in one's life. God has unlimited offer, all year round, of repentance because He does not desire the death of a sinner but that the sinner may be converted and live.

When an adulterous person is converted, truly s/he can be rightly considered as a very wise thief because, instead of stealing the wife/husband of another person, s/he was able to steal the pearl of great price, that is, the kingdom of God – the hidden treasure. In this case, s/he too is admitted into the friendship of the father of all repentant thieves – the most ingenuous thief the world has ever known who stole the kingdom of God while hanging on the cross.

Accordingly, s/he is not abandoning the “love of friendship” but just redirecting its allegiance: from being a friend of those who stole the wife/husband of another person to those who stole the kingdom of God by repentance.

It is very likely that among thieves, either those who stole the wife/husband of another person or those common thieves who robbed people, houses, and banks, they will talk among themselves their experience of how they did it. If this is true, it is also true that among the converted thieves, that is, among repentant sinners, they also talk about their conversion experience of how they met God in their lives or how they were touched by the saving grace of Christ, how amazing grace is.

For once they were blind, but now they can see. They know by their own experience how good the Lord is. They have seen and tasted it in their lives. Now they long for more. God too is pleased with them, for they now talk about Him and the mercy and love that He showed on them.

However, they should not be too complacent, because the precious pearl of great price that they have rightly stolen is still subject to be also stolen by the most insidious THIEF of all who comes for the specific reason to destroy, to kill, and to steal. Hence, they should guard their precious pearl by assiduous prayer and by frequenting the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist.

They should watch over themselves against being “idlers, gadding about from house to house, and not only idlers but gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not,” for “if anyone think he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this man's religion is vain.” In other words, they

are “holding the form of religion but denying the power of it.” The consequence of this is that they will be told: →

Icon # 506 = What comes out of the Mouth comes from the Heart

“You give your mouth free rein for evil, and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son.”

Our Catholic Faith teaches that “respect for the reputation of persons forbids every attitude and word likely to cause them unjust injury.” Therefore, we will be culpable of detraction if without objectively valid reason we disclose another's faults and failings to persons who did not know them. We will be held accountable of calumny and slander if by making remarks contrary to the truth we harm the reputation of others and gives occasion for false judgments concerning them.

Our heavenly friend, the eminent founder of the Jesuits, no other than St. Ignatius of Loyola traced for us a way to avoid rash judgment, that is, we should be circumspect in interpreting insofar as possible other peoples' thoughts, words, and deeds in a favorable way. He says: “Every good Christian ought to be more ready to give a favorable interpretation to another's statement than to condemn it. But if he cannot do so, let him ask how the other understands it. And if the latter understand it badly, let the former correct him in love. If that does not suffice, let the Christian try all suitable ways to bring the other to correct interpretation so that he may be saved.”

Since “honor” is the social witness given to human dignity, and everyone enjoys a natural right to the honor of his/her name, reputation, and respect, hence detraction and calumny and slander destroy the reputation and honor of another person; thus offend against the virtues of justice and charity.

Wherefore, giving one's mouth free rein for evil, and one's tongue for framing deceit, sitting and speaking against one's brother and sister, and slandering our own kin and other people is an assault against the incorruptibility of righteousness and love, as the Lord Jesus says: “Love one another as I have loved you.” “Love does no wrong to a neighbor, therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.”

Detraction means making known, without a sufficient serious reason the hidden sins or failings of another. In detraction, what is said is true, but it is also secret or private. We retain our right to our good name until we forfeit it by some publicly known misdeed or crime. Until such time, we have the right to our reputation.

Calumny or slander means the ruining the reputation of another by lies. It goes beyond detraction and is morally more offensive.

It is true that the damage done by detraction and calumny or slander can frequently not be repaired, but a sincere repentance requires an effort to do what one can do to repair the consequences of one's irresponsible behavior. In our more honest moments many of us would probably agree that our tongue is a "restless evil" and that most of our sins are sins of the tongue. Experience teaches us that we will not be able to gain control over our tongue unless we first gain control over our heart, for external actions proceed from deep within us.

It is only by an assiduous watchfulness over our heart that we will ever be able to control our tongue. In a more positive way, we have to strive as best we can to use our gift of speech to build up rather than to tear down, to compliment rather than to criticize, to highlight good qualities rather than focus on bad qualities. We need to appreciate and understand first before we have to criticize.

We are composite beings. In us body and soul are so united in such a manner that our outward behavior, the words we use, appears as the necessary and most effective manifestation of inward attitudes, because what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart.

It is in a spirit of peace that God has called us, and it is not only in God's sight but in the sight of others also that we have to study our behavior so that, if possible, for our part we may be at peace with other people. This would entail that we should not give our mouth unbridled reign for evil nor our tongue should frame deceit.

We should not sit and speak against our brothers and sisters nor slander other people. However, while we are still in this present life and has not yet reach the border of our heavenly home, it would be unrealistic to say that we will never tumble in this area. Whether we like it or not there will be times, at least if we are honest to ourselves, that we will fall in this domain.

It is for this reason that we have to avail the sacrament of reconciliation. The grace that benevolently flows from this sacrament transmits an inward sanctification to our soul. Little by little there will be a progress in inner transformation. We will be less critical. If there's something that bothers our peace of mind and heart, we have to unburden it to someone whom we can trust, not just to anybody. This will inhibit in giving our mouth free rein for evil, and our tongue in framing deceit, and speaking against our brothers and sisters, and slandering other people. Otherwise we will be told: →

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Icon # 507 = God Keep Silent no longer

“These things you have done and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you, and lay the charge before you.”

It is correct to say that there are wily dangers in the spiritual life. One of which is the thought that God is just like ourselves. Hence, He understands us. This is true, of course, because in the Incarnation God became a human being like us. But this truth can be distorted if we use it as a springboard to justify our misuse of the tongue and our secret unhealthy deeds.

We are called to freedom, but we are also told “not to use our freedom as a pretext for doing evil” and of “speaking evil,” as the letter of James says: “Do not speak evil against one another, brethren. He that speaks evil against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you that you judge your neighbor?”

The implication of judging our neighbor is that we are placing ourselves in the level of God who alone has the right to judge because He has all the evidence, thus can pronounce a precise judgment. In our case, we don't have all the evidence and oftentimes we are misinformed.

We are also told by the Lord: “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye?”

Since we are not co-conscious with our neighbor, hence doesn't have all the evidence; therefore, the offenses that we have spoken of against our neighbor would just be like a speck, that is, just a little portion of what the other person is, whereas we who hear the words that we are saying, know the thoughts that we are thinking, and see the deeds we are doing have a bigger portion, like that of a log, of the knowledge of our offenses in thoughts, words, and actions.

Therefore, if we are honest to ourselves and have, at least, a modicum of integrity, we are not in a right position to speak evil against another person or judge another person. Yet many of us failed in this area and the Lord had been silent. But now He keeps silent no longer, thus rebukes us and lays the charge before us, thus arousing our conscience.

We have to assert that it is far better and beneficial for us that the Lord rebukes us and lays the charge before us while we are still in this present world than to be rebuked and sentenced in the next life where there's no more chance of repentance but each person will be judged according to what s/he has done in the body.

Therefore, if today, while it is called today, we hear His rebuke we should accept it in humility and make amend of our lives. God's kindness is meant to lead us to repentance. His mercy is infinite, but His justice is also infinite. To be engrossed in one while neglecting the other certainly will not redound to our favor.

For instance, if we keep on doing a thing we which we know to be sinful, thinking to ourselves that God is merciful and kind, hence He understands us; do you think that when we die without repenting this sin God's justice will just keep silent?

Are you not aware that God's justice seriously admonished us that while we are still on the way, that is, still in this present life we have to make an effort to settle with our accuser, that is, the word of God, lest we be dragged to the judge, and the judge hand us over to the guard, and the guard put us in prison, and we will never get out from there till we have paid the very last penny?

Thus it is very clear that eventually God's justice will keep silent no longer. On the other hand, if we are too preoccupied of God's justice while neglecting His mercy, we will end up being paranoid. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to have a healthy knowledge of God. We can attain this, little by little, by humbly reading scripture, saying a prayer before reading it for enlightenment; by reading the lives of the saints or their writings, for they are the ones who follow Christ more closely, or the lives of modern godly men and women; and by following the teaching of the Church, for it is the pillar and bulwark of the truth.

If these things are ours and abound they help us develop a balance and more mature image of God. They keep us from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of Our Lord Jesus. For whoever lacks these things is shortsighted and has forgotten that God is not only God of mercy but also God of justice. Wherefore, we are counseled: →

Icon # 508 = Consequences of Forgetting God vs. Practice of God's Presence

"Mark this, then, you who forget God, lest I rend, and there be none to deliver!"

As monks and nuns, our monastic regimen is seen primarily as a structure of mindfulness through which we grow in our ability to perceive truth about

ourselves, about God, and about the world and surrounding in which we live. The greatest obstacle to this work is “*oblivio*,” that is, heedlessness, a consciousness so saturated with tangible occupation that its capacity to absorb things that are above, the things of our heavenly home, is greatly inhibited.

The person who forgets God forgets himself. He ceases to be concerned about things which serve his ultimate welfare and habitually fails to take those steps which required by the reality of his own situation. S/he falls not through malice or overt weakness, but through thoughtlessness and unconcern. Unless s/he is roused by the sharp sting of compunction his/her spiritual senses atrophy, wasting away, and salvation is place in jeopardy.

Heedlessness inevitably issues in death. Forgetfulness of God eventually brings death to the soul. Though a life characterized by forgetfulness of God is often not overtly sinful, its danger lies in its capacity to engender sins of omission coupled with an unseeing sense of complacency.

It is our mindfulness of God and of the ultimate values in our lives and of our personal precariousness which make us tireless in doing good and avoiding evil. Otherwise, we will be rend, and there be none to deliver!

One of the desert fathers, Evagrius, notes that it is often from the undisciplined memory that sin begins, making a person restless and dissatisfied and inclining him/her to instinctual behavior. Thus the effective negation of sin must begin with the countering of instinctual thoughts and memories.

The best means of doing this is to fill our mind with loftier contents, as our good friend St. Paul advice us to look at the things that are above where the Lord Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father. Psalms and hymns and spiritual canticles and spiritual readings invite our spirit to the constant memory of God by cooling our boiling anger and extinguishing our lusts.

On the other hand, forgetfulness of God causes us to degenerate and opens the door to all sorts of aberrations. What is even more dangerous is that it cuts off from the sources of spiritual nourishment, so that even if we continue to follow religious observances, we cease to gain much profit from them.

Our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux describes the condition produced by such forgetfulness. He says: “Brothers, you will find very many, even among those who wear religious habit and are professedly seeking perfection, in whom the fearful sentence of the prophets seems to be realize: ‘If I forget you Jerusalem, let my right hand be given to oblivion.’ They become experienced, somewhat, but it is in the wisdom of this age which they ought to have given up, in those things which flesh and blood reveal and which, according to the Apostle, they should

be unwilling to accept. See how eagerly they grasp at any present gain, how, like seculars, they enjoy fleeting conveniences, how their souls are so easily upset by earthly loss or deprivation of goods. See how carnally they dispute over such things, how shamelessly they pursue them, how they deny their religion to become involved in worldly business as if this was all they had, their entire substance."

As we cultivated the practice of the presence of God in our day to day life, more and more we find ourselves going through the stresses and tensions of daily activity with an ease and serenity that amaze even us. So let us pray for the grace to be always mindful of God wherever we are, with whomsoever we are, and whatever we are doing, for it is only by positively placing before our eyes the memory of God and the ultimate truths of human existence that we are able to avoid succumbing to the dispiritedness and inertia which are engendered by concentration on solely temporal affairs.

Religious life in general, and monastic life in particular, from its beginning, has been geared to promoting mindfulness of God. The years graciously invested in the struggle to turn the mind around so that it regularly includes God within its natural horizons effect a change within the personality itself so that, in time, it is possible to accomplish naturally and easily what would have been very difficult at the beginning.

What characterizes this stage of mindfulness is a fair degree of discipline, though we live from inner values rather than merely because of external constraints. Our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux said that we have to consider as a loss all the time in which we have no thought of God. Mindfulness of God, writes our father St. Aelred of Rievaulx, is like the soul's embrace by which it clings to God without any trace of forgetfulness.

Memory can be cured by a constant remembrance of God, consolidated by the action of prayer, for it is thus imbued with the spirit and is carried from the natural to a supernatural state. It is by our remembrance of God that our soul embraces Him without any sense of weariness. When the memory is occupied with God, then joy, grace, and love pervade the soul, understanding and love are activated, and temptation and infidelity are kept at bay.

The very act of remembering God is already an act of love, the desire to make present the absent Object of one's affection. Love is kindled again when it remembers God, and the great desire of the one who so remembers is itself a loving prayer.

Hence, through mindfulness of God, we become in fact what we are already in nature. Our labor to reform our lives by cooperating with grace and by raising

our mind to God gradually effects a transformation in what we are. We still retain, though, our capacity for sin, but even our failing seems to serve our growth through the depth of our repentance and the humbled sense of our own unworthiness. We are not quite the "New Man," but we are moving in that direction.

At such a stage of growth, remembrance of God is almost a habitual thing. It is like the sap that keeps a tree supple. Actions performed in mindfulness of God somehow have the power to produce an enormous effect on the recipient. For example, a cup of cold water given in mindfulness of God becomes a torrent of salvation which cleanses and carries with it both the giver and the receiver.

We shall scarcely find any one practice of piety which contains such a number, such a variety, such a blessing, and such a frequency of acts of virtue as this Holy practice of the presence of God. If we are interior disciples of the Lord Jesus, all things that present themselves before us will help us to be mindful of Him, and to love Him as present everywhere.

Our father St. Benedict is very much aware that the remembrance of God will be eroded during the day unless it is especially cultivated on a fairly basis. Thus we have to exert ourselves that we may ever enjoy the divine presence, that we may everywhere live before Him. If we love Him, we will find our delight in walking before Him, in enjoying His presence.

Without the practice of the divine presence, solitude is bound to be dangerous, the interactions with other people hurtful but, by the use of it, both are helpful and be sanctified. With discipline and through the grace of God, this practice of the presence of God becomes easier with the years, and even sporadic period of backsliding seem to add something to the quality of the final blend.

At this stage, prayer becomes habitual: the remembrance of God lives in our hearts and the name of Our Lord Jesus becomes as the air that is breath. If we let the memory of Our Lord Jesus combine with our breathing then we know the profit of silence.

This, of course, is not our own doing but is owing to the grace of God working in us. For this reason we have to be thankful to God. Thankfulness is a genial gesture of honoring God which, in turn, incites more graces from Him that leads to salvation. It is not surprising, then, to hear: →

Icon # 509 = Honoring God: Thanksgiving

"He who brings thanksgiving as his sacrifice honours' me; to him who orders his way aright I will show the salvation of God!"

Since everything belongs to God and that nothing exist without Him, and that nothing in us which we have not received, therefore, to offer thanksgiving to God as an oblation is a splendid way of honoring Him. We, who came from nothing, if we still have a vestige of humility, will certainly regard "thanksgiving sacrifice" as a way of honoring God. Both faith and common sense bears witness to this truth.

Thanksgiving is imbedded in our human nature, that it just needed to be dug out. It is a treasure buried in the ground of our heart. Little children can find this treasure by the help, especially of their parents and teachers.

As a treasure, thanksgiving can be invested by simply giving thanks to God before we go to bed at night for all that had happened during the day both the pleasant and unpleasant things. During the day, though it would be intermittent, we can also, interiorly, say: "Thank you Lord for everything."

The virtue of giving thanks to God has double benefits. It is both a vitamin and a medicine. Health practitioners tell us that vitamins are organic substances existing in most food in minute amounts in their natural state, needed in the diet for metabolism, the absence of which results in malnutrition and specific deficiency diseases. Vitamins are indispensable for normal functions and the maintenance of health.

Hence, as a vitamin, giving thanks to God is very necessary in the maintenance of the health of our soul. It helps to prevent depression and despair. It is also accessible to us. We don't have to travel several miles to go to a pharmacy and get supply of this vitamin because it is within us.

If a daily giving thanks to God is part of our prayer life, it is very likely, we would confidently say, that 99.9% we will not sink into depression. Of course we will not be completely devoid of feeling anxious or disturb if some unpleasant things happened, but we can gracefully recover from it because "giving thanks to God" has a very potent substance called "trust in Divine Providence." This substance inhibits the formation of depression and despair.

"Giving thanks to God" serves as a medicine in time of a very tragic and dreadful event. Even a simple "Thank you, Lord," without any rationalization or complain is strong enough to forestall despondency. We are very much aware that to say "Thank you, Lord" for everything that happened is not easy to utter if

we are not used to saying it daily, but if we say it daily we will be awed that we are able to say it. Our human tendency is more to complain or question God why this things happened or why He allows it to happen. Of course, this is very natural because of our limited knowledge. God's ways are far beyond our ways. He operates with infinite wisdom, power, and knowledge. He knows everything in advance and its ramifications.

Our good friend St. Paul tells us that "in everything God works for good with those who love him." Thus if we have love for God everything that happens to us will be for our advantage: both to facilitate the process of purification of our soul and to increase our love for God. Again, both faith and common sense bear witness to this.

If we have had an experience of feeling in love, we will certainly notice the desire to do everything we can for that person. Since this is true, how much more of God Himself who is LOVE and loves us beyond telling: "I have loved you with an everlasting love;" He says, "therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you." He proves His love for us in that while we were still sinners He died for us. Hence, it is right and fitting to express our gratitude to Him by offering a thanksgiving sacrifice. Doing so is one of the many ways of honoring God. We can honor Him by saying a prayer at meals, at gatherings, or at any simple celebrations. We can also honor Him by simply remembering Him – being aware of His presence.

Awareness of God's presence is not only a gesture of honoring but it is also a prodigious help in keeping our moral and spiritual life in proper order, that is, it sustains us in living a virtuous life. Can you imagine doing evil things if you are aware that you are doing these sinful things in front of God?; in front of angels and saints in broad delight?

Living a virtuous life, therefore, is walking on the way of righteousness which opens to us the salvation of God. We have only to persevere in humble prayer that He enables us to know His ways and teach us His paths, to lead us in His truth and instruct us, for He is the God of our salvation. In Him we wait all the daylong to show us His salvation, for left to ourselves we cannot hope to be saved. We stumble and fall along the way and transgress the law of love. We sin either by omission or by commission. As often as this happen we have to cry out in the depths of our heart, humbly imploring God to: →

Icon # 510 = God's Pardon Makes us New

Psalm 51 (50)

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love; according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgression. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!"

It is our Christian belief that even if our sins are like scarlet, they shall become white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool if we truly repent; none of the transgressions which we have committed shall be remembered against us. 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. If we say we have no sin, we lie and deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. However, if we truly repent, Our Lord is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Repentance and intimacy goes together.

God uses great and ineffable goodness and long-suffering toward us, if only we would be willing to be vigilant toward ourselves and strive to be totally converted to Him so that we may receive the forgiveness of our transgression. He sees how much each of us offends Him and yet He tranquilly waits until we are converted from sin.

We have to be reduced to the state in which we can present to God only our wretchedness and His great mercy and steadfast love as our one claim through the merits of Our Lord Jesus. A soul to which God has revealed its shortcoming is far more of a burden to itself than its neighbor can be. For, however near s/he be, that neighbor is not always by our side, and in no case is s/he within us.

On the other hand, we are our own burden; we cannot escape ourselves for a single moment, nor lose ourselves from sight and feeling, nor cease from trailing everywhere we go our imperfections and our failings. The supreme manifestation of God's infinite mercy and steadfast love lie in the fact that the sorrow and the shame of these transgressions cause us, cure us of them, wash and cleanse us of them, always, provided that the shame does not become vexation and that the sorrow is inspired by love of God and not by self-love.

Sorrow born of self-love is full of perturbation and bitterness: far from washing and cleansing our soul from our iniquity and healing our soul's wound it serves only to pour poison into them. On the contrary, sorrow for sin which springs from love of God is serene and full of abandonment. "For godly grief produces a

repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.”

The Lord is kind and merciful. His kindness is meant to lead us to repentance but not to complacency whereby we add sin unto sin. It is very true that He is slow to anger, because He is meek and humble of heart and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but He will by no means clear the guilty. Therefore, we have to be careful not to fall into the pitfall of complacency and despondency, but rather walk in the middle where virtue stands.

It is honorable to say that to be able to pray to God to have mercy on us, to blot out our transgressions, to wash us thoroughly from all iniquity, and to cleanse us from sin, is already a tremendous grace, because to be able to acknowledge our sins is already a commencement of our righteousness.

The blotting out of our transgressions, the washing of our iniquities and the cleansing of our sins that are so embedded in our sinning can be done only by divine power, because it is impossible and outside our competence to uproot sin. Yes, it is true that to struggle against sin and to continue to fight is in our power, but to blot, to wash, to cleanse, and to uproot, belongs only to God.

Once we recognize the sin within us and confess it, then we open ourselves to the truth and light of God. It is only when transgression is unacknowledged that sin is not cleansed. But if we acknowledge our transgression God's judgment will certainly tilt in our favor. Thus in humility we admit: →

Icon # 511 = Knowledge of One's Transgressions

“For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight, so that thou art justified in thy sentence and blameless in thy judgment.”

Knowledge of our transgressions is a very positive sign that we have not yet lost the “sense of sin.” If we have not yet lost the “sense of sin” it would mean that we can still hear the voice of conscience speaking to us, telling us what is good and evil, right and wrong.

However, conscience can be enervated by frequently overriding what it tells us. If our conscience tells us not to do a certain thing because it is evil but we still do it, and if it happens regularly, then, our understanding of the truth will be blunted, presenting us a moral view of our deeds which does not rightly manifest the corruption of our actions, because our conscience is being covered with the “balm of sin.”

Hence, the “prick” of conscience is tranquilized. “We are truly penitent when we deplore those sins we have committed,” says our heavenly friend, St. Gregory the Great. In other words, the clearest indication of true contrition is to refrain in future from falling into grave sins, and actively to seek at all times to correct and decrease our lightest faults.

It is very likely that while we are still in this present world we will not be completely devoid of faults, but by the grace of God which normally comes from prayer and the sacraments, especially the sacrament of reconciliation, its numbers can be diminished. What is still left is probably for our good to stabilize our humility.

So long as we will never give up prayer the door of repentance remains open. What sin is to death, repentance is to resurrection. “Mourning is a sorrowful thing,” says our other heavenly friend, St. Augustine, “for it is the sob of one who is sorry. Does anyone mourn, except for one who is dead?”, he asks. “But, every sinner,” this includes ourselves, of course, “ought to mourn for himself, since there is nothing else so dead as a man in sin. Yet, how marvelous! If he mourns for himself, he comes to life again. Let him mourn through repentance, and he shall be comforted through forgiveness.”

Compunction is a gift of divine love which is aimed at bringing us to salvation. It causes in us salutary pain and fear which keeps us from forgetting the possibility of eternal damnation, thus serves as a restraint on carnal desire, a remedy for depravity, and destroys any lack of seriousness or concern with trivialities.

A soldier asked Abba Mios, a desert father, if God accept repentance. After the old man had taught him many things he said, “Tell me, my dear, if your cloak is torn, do you throw it away?” He replied, “No, I mend it and use it again.” The old man said to him, “If you are so careful about your cloak, will not God be equally careful about his creatures?”

Therefore, no matter how tattered our lives are God will not throw us away if there is still a twinkle of repentance gleaming in our hearts. God is glorified when we repent; the angels are happy, and we will be at peace.

Sin is primarily an offense against God. If we take into account the infinite majesty of God who is offended, and our own finite meanness who is offending Him, in the sense that He is our Creator and we are His creatures, then we will come to understand that sin is in some sort an infinite evil.

For this reason, we can say with the Psalmist: “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight, so that thou art justified in thy

sentence and blameless in thy judgment.” Every sin offends God, but not every sin offends all people, thus the Psalmist is right by saying: “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned.”

We cannot live a completely immaculate existence while still in this present world, sins and transgressions will be likely committed, but the consequence of these transgressions can be alleviated by sincere reception of the sacrament of reconciliation, by penance, and by acts of charity and forgiveness towards others. If we do not love penance for its own sake, let us love it on account of our sins, for we should work out our salvation with holy fear and reverence trembling.

Confession of our sins leads to forgiveness, and forgiveness gives birth to joy and peace, because the most profound form of human liberation – liberation from the grip of sin and its consequences, requires the acknowledgment and confession of sins. We have to attest that it is very unlikely for us and even those who have attained a higher degree of holiness, while still on earth, not to fall into those small sins that are committed by word, thought, by ignorance, by forgetfulness, by will, and by surprise.

Even though these may be different from the transgressions which are said to be unto death, nonetheless they cannot be without guilt and blame. Thus we have to cry out: “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight, so that thou art justified in thy sentence and blameless in thy judgment.”

Whether we like it or not, or accept it or not, we are all implicated in the sin of our first parents. They committed a personal sin by yielding to the temptation of the devil, but this sin affected “the human nature” that they would then transmit in “a fallen state.” It is a sin transmitted by propagation to all humankind, that is, by the “transmission of a human nature” deprived of original holiness and justice. It is a sin “contracted” and not “committed” – a “state” and not an “act.” Consequently, we can rightly say: →

Icon # 512 = Conceived in Sin

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive.”

When I was at New Clairvaux Abbey in Vina, California, studying for priesthood, one of the monks said to me that he preferred to celebrate his baptismal day than his birthday because, he said, when we are born we already incurred “original sin” but when we are baptized we are cleansed from this sin. In other

words, we are born in sin, but cleansed by baptism. We are brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did our mother conceive.

Although original sin is proper to each of the descendants of our first parents, it does not have the character of a personal fault. It is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it; subject to ignorance; and inclined to sin – an inclination to evil that is called “concupiscence.” This concupiscence still remains in us even though in our baptism “original sin” was blotted out and the “life of Christ's grace” was imparted to us.

We have to assert that “concupiscence” in itself is not a sin, but inclined us to sin. It is the consequence of our wounded-fallen human nature. For this reason, so long as we are still in our mortal flesh we have to expect a “spiritual combat”: The flesh against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. The winner, of course, is the one which we yielded either the spirit or the flesh.

The description of a native American in the story below about this “struggle” of the flesh against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, might make clearer what we are trying to convey.

An American Indian was giving testimony about temptations. He said, “My brothers, I seem to have two dogs fighting in my heart. One is a very good dog, a beautiful white dog. He is always watching out for my best interests. The other is a very bad dog, a black dog, who is always trying to destroy a lot of things that I want to see built up. These dogs give me a lot of trouble because they are always quarreling and fighting with each other.” One of his hearers asked him, “Which one wins?” And the young man said immediately, “The one to which I say: ‘go, get it.’”

Our good friend, St. Paul, admonished us not to yield the members of our body to sin as instruments of wickedness, but to yield them to God as men and women who have been brought from death to life, and the members of our body as instruments of righteousness. “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”

Closely connected with that of redemption by Christ, the doctrine of original sin provides lucid discernment of our situations in this present world. By the sin of our first parents, Lucifer has acquired a certain domination over us, even though we remain free. Moreover, Original sin entails captivity under the dominion of the devil who had the power of death. Who can deliver us from this captivity? “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ Our Lord!” The victory that Our Lord

Jesus won over sin has given us greater and more abundant blessings than those Lucifer's envy had taken away from us, because "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."

Another image we can think of "concupiscence" is that of a dog being tied. It barks, but so long as we don't go nearer it cannot bite. The barking is the inclination. Whether we go nearer or not is left to us to decide. It's really very mysterious, that is, hard to understand why many people still opted to go nearer and be bitten. The rabies of this dog is what we can call sin which, of course, lead to death of the soul if not treated right away by the medicine of repentance.

Sin, in many respects, is tantamount to foolishness, because sin, whether big or small, is an offense against God. Since God is so powerful and so majestic, therefore, to offend Him is utter foolishness. In other words, it is not wise to offend God who has power to cast the unrepentant soul to Gehenna.

Besides, if we are living in sin we are no longer true to ourselves, for we succumbed to the devil the father of lies, in whom there is no truth. Only by radical repentance can we be released from the dominion of the devil over us. The glimmer of light begins to shine in our heart – then we long for wisdom and to live in sincerity and truth in our interior life. Therefore, longing for truth and wisdom, we beseech the Lord, saying: →

Icon # 513 = Truth and Wisdom

"Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart."

One of the identifications which Our Lord Jesus spoke of Himself is "Truth." For instance, He says: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Since He is Truth, hence it would be natural that He desires truth in our inward being, that is, in our heart, mind, soul, and spirit. Truth is also one of the four transcendental, namely: Being, Beauty, Goodness, and Truth. We are always attracted to people who are truthful, because they are also honest. If they are honest, then, they are reliable and trustworthy.

A person who is truthful is a beautiful soul. Even while still on earth s/he is already a citizen of heaven whose inhabitants are all truthful. For those men and women who long for truth, for all who love it, what a liberation! It will be an experience similar to that of a person being suffocated and suddenly lifted into pure, pristine air. One's life will blossom into freedom and beauty, for as our heavenly friend, St. Thomas Aquinas, says: "beauty is the splendor of truth become reality."

Such realization is the victory for which Our Lord Jesus contends with the “two-edged sword” of His mouth. “If you continue in my word,” He says, “you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.” It is precisely because the “Truth” is “Himself a person,” not just proposition, that faith is a personal commitment, a discipleship, and not just an intellectual assent to propositions, and that the life which is eternal is the loving knowledge of the Heavenly Father the only true God and of Our Lord Jesus whom He has sent. But to arrive to the knowledge of the truth means to discover the truth: to know the Lord Jesus.

We will know the Lord Jesus by deepening our relationship with Him. This relationship deepens and develops by doing things together, be always together wherever we are and with whomsoever we are; pray interiorly either by ejaculatory prayer or even the simple awareness of His presence; spending time in reading the Scripture – committing to memory some verses so that we can draw it from time to time when we need to, or reading other books that would nourish our spiritual life.

We have also to frequent the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and the sacrament of reconciliation. Above all, to strive to put into practice His teaching even if we fail from time to time. If these things are ours and abound the “splendor of truth” – the beauty of the Lord Jesus, and our knowledge of Him, based on experience, will grow and deepen. Consequently, it leads to wisdom of heart – a heart touched by God, because Christ Jesus is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

In reference to the spiritual life, wisdom is loving knowledge. It is the kind of knowledge which flows from interpersonal communion with God and is directed towards transforming union with Him in love. “He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

Our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux has this to say: “If anyone defines wisdom as the love of virtue, I think you are not far from the truth.” It is right to say that those who abide in the Lord Jesus, and He in them, are the one that bear fruits of virtues, just as children are the fruits of the union between husbands and wives.

Those who are really intelligent and humble come to understand that it is only through faith in Christ Jesus the Lord, a working faith that one acquires wisdom, which is in God, a “wisdom from above which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity.”

Of course, this kind of wisdom is not of this world or of the rulers of this world. Only few rulers of this world knew this kind of wisdom such as king St. Louis of France,

St. Wenceslaus of Bohemia, St. Casimir of Poland. These are kings who are truly wise because their wisdom is from God. They have a genuine concern for the welfare of their people.

Prayer and silence are the natural habitat for wisdom. It is there that wisdom grows. If we listen to the Lord and be silent He will teach us wisdom, He will pour His thoughts to us and make His words known to us, for the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding, He stores up sound wisdom to the upright – to those who walk in integrity. Wisdom will come into our heart and knowledge will be pleasing to our soul; discretion will watch over us, delivering us from the way of evil, guiding our path to holiness and justice.

One of God's pedagogies in teaching us wisdom is to make us feel and realize how brief our life in this present world is, as the Psalmist says: "Make us know the shortness of our life that we may gain wisdom of heart." We heard stories of people who were really very worldly, but when they were diagnosed with terminal illness, especially cancer, and were told that they have only few months to live, they suddenly changed. They started going to Mass, which before they seldom or never did for a long time. They stopped gambling or drinking or womanizing.

This is a rough course in wisdom. Their vices hardened their hearts and made their minds imperceptive. They became foolish in the eyes of the Lord, but the knowledge of the shortness of their lives makes them wise in the Lord. They called upon the Lord, and the spirit of wisdom came to them, making them friends of God; for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives in wisdom.

They no longer conformed to the passions of their former ignorance. Now, they became foolish in the eyes of the world but wise in the eyes of the Lord. They endeavor to keep God's commandments and decrees. By doing so, these became for them their wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the people.

We, too, will be truly wise as well as modest if we do not allow ourselves to be slaves to the passions of self-esteem, always seeking what is hidden from our reason. Then, finding how much and how varied is what is unknown to us, we will marvel at our ignorance and will humble our pretensions. And, having realized our nothingness, we will learn many great and marvelous things.

Not many of God's people in this present age are wise according to worldly standards, not many are powerful, not many are of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the eyes of the world to shame the worldly wise, God chose what is weak in the eyes of the world to shame the worldly strong, God chose what is low and despised in the sight of the world, even things that are not, to

bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Yet among the spiritually, psychologically, emotionally, and mentally mature true wisdom is being imparted, that is, the wisdom of the cross, a secret and hidden wisdom of God, for Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. By the blood of His cross which has infinite power to cleanse us of our sins, we can trustfully beseech Him, saying: →

Icon # 514 = Inward Cleansing

“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

The book of Leviticus tells us that if a house is affected by leprosy, the priest has to examine the disease lest all that is in the house be declared “unclean”; and afterward the priest shall go in to see the house. He shall examine the disease. If the disease spread in the walls of the house, then the priest shall command that they take out the stones in which is the disease and throw them into an unclean place outside the city; and he shall cause the inside of the house to be scraped round about. He shall take other plaster and plaster the house.

If the disease breaks out again in the house, after he has taken out the stones and scraped the house and plastered it, then the priest shall go and look; and if the disease has spread in the house, it is a malignant leprosy in the house; it is unclean. And he shall break down the house, its stones and timber and all the plaster of the house; and he shall carry them forth out of the city to an unclean place.

But if the priest comes and makes an examination, and the disease has not spread in the house after the house was plastered, then the priest shall pronounce the house clean, for the disease is healed. And for the cleansing of the house he shall take two small birds, with cedarwood and scarlet stuff and hyssop, and shall kill one of the birds in an earthen vessel over running water, and shall take the cedarwood and the hyssop and the scarlet stuff, along with the living bird, and dip them in the blood of the bird that was killed and in the running water, and sprinkle the house seven times. Thus the house is cleansed.

It is very apparent that the priest plays a very important role in the process of cleansing a house affected by leprosy. It is he who examined, commanded what to do, and made pronouncement. It is he who performed the ritual for cleansing. The dwellers of the house, too, have their part of the cleansing process. They have to remove the stones in which is the disease, they have to

scrape the house, and have to plaster it. In other words, both the priest and the dwellers of the house cooperate in the process of cleansing, not just the priest nor the dweller but both of them. One without the other would not accomplish the cleansing.

Our good friend, St. Paul, tells us that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Since the Holy Spirit is God, and the temple is the house of God, therefore, our body is the house of God. Moral theology tells us, too, that sin is an image of leprosy. Hence, when we commit sin we develop leprosy and it affects our body which is the house of God.

Of course, if we have a good self-knowledge we know that we are unclean. We could have just clean ourselves without the involvement of another person, anyhow, we are already adult and are responsible for our action; but it looks pretty obvious that we need someone who is ordained or commissioned to do so. Just as we cannot baptize ourselves, even though we are already adult, saying: "I baptize myself in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Doing so, would just be flattering our conscience. We need to hear it from someone who is authorized to do so. The same is true in the forgiveness of our sins. We cannot pronounce absolution on ourselves, saying: "I absolve myself from all my sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." We need to hear it from someone who is commissioned to do so.

Christ has power to forgive sin. He commissioned, too, His apostles to forgive sins, saying: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." The apostles handed down this authority to their successors, and their successors to their successors, down to this day.

Since we are composite beings, that is, composed of soul and body, hence we need to express what is in our soul by means of words and gestures. We do not live in our mind alone. We need someone to help us externalize what is within our heart and mind. It is always liberating to hear the words of absolution from someone who is commissioned to do so: "God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God grant your pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Amen.

Although we have been forgiven, that is, cleansed of our sins, we should not be complacent because the cleansing itself is just the beginning of a life long process of inward purification. We will be deceived, no matter how great

progress we made in the spiritual life, if we think there is no more in us that has to be purged.

After a while, no matter how clean our room is, dust will start to accumulate because the air itself is not immaculately pure. Thus so long as we are still in this present world, no matter how we live a holy life, we will not be devoid of imperfection. We are bound to fail from time to time either in word, thought, and deed. Our part, then, is to do dusting, sweeping, and cleaning from time to time, and be determined to persevere in doing it till our departure from this present life arrives.

This determination of ever dusting, sweeping, and cleaning our inward self, that is, our heart is the first hope of future purity of heart, the first sign of future perfection, the first token whereby we will be counted among the citizens of the heavenly realm, and the first characteristic mark of a true disciple of Our Lord Jesus.

There are different kinds of dust that can accumulate in our soul such as: carnal dust, that is, inordinate love of fleshly pleasures; mammon dust, that is, the lust of earthly possessions; and egocentric dust, that is, selfishness and vanity. Cleaning, sweeping, and dusting our heart even how little it would be brings us much closer to God and God much inward to us, because "Blessed are the pure/clean of heart for they shall see God."

Purity of heart is that practice of holiness; at different times described as love or perfection or contemplation or tranquility without which the "ultimate end," that is, the kingdom of God, will not be able to be seized. The state of purity of heart, in any event, is the last condition to be arrived at in the present time. It is the sole condition necessary for all serious seekers of God's kingdom, and imposes meaning and direction on all our works and duties, which must be considered ancillary in respect to it.

The extent of our soul's purification in its most secret recesses is also the extent of its more or less intimate union with the God of all purity, no other than Our Lord Jesus Christ the only Son of the Immaculate Virgin Mary in His humanity, and the only son of His heavenly Father in His divinity, true God and true man, the fountainhead of all gladness and joy.

In proportion to our humility we are given patience in afflictions; in proportion to our patience the burden of afflictions is made lighter and we receive consolation; in proportion to the consolation we received, the love of God increases in us and in proportion to this love, our joy in the Holy Spirit grows.

With great longing and hunger for Our Lord Jesus we ardently implore Him, saying: →

Icon # 515 = Joy and Gladness of the Broken Bones

“Fill me with joy and gladness; let the bones which thou hast broken rejoice.”

Some of the stories of the martyrdom of the martyrs tell us how the martyrs experienced a profound and intense joy as they bore their sufferings. For instance, St. Charles Lwanga and his companions were so joyful on their way to martyrdom as though they were going to a picnic!

Even in our own days we hear people experiencing joy and gladness when they surrendered their lives to God in the midst of their sufferings and pains. In other words, it is only in God that we can have a true and substantial joy even though our body is suffering. Of course, the biggest factor of this joy is their faith. It is our faith that enables us to see that our sufferings and pains are participations in the sufferings of Our Lord Jesus.

Without faith our sufferings and pains can be an intolerable torment, but with it we will be highly receptive of the encouragement of the Scripture: “But rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.”

Our joy in this present world in sharing Christ’s sufferings is only a very, very little fraction, a foretaste, of the indescribable and infinite joy when His breathtaking glory and majesty is revealed. Our joy and gladness on that day will not only be filled but will be eternally overflowing from one degree of joy and gladness to another. It’s a joy and gladness that knows no limit and knows no end.

The thought of the world to come has an intrinsic power to make our sorrows and pains in this present life bearable and joyful because of our faith and right disposition. Granted, that while still on earth, this joy is still imperfect when put side by side with the perfect and eternal gladness which God has planned for us, but it is a joy that comes from our participation in the sufferings of Christ.

Sufferings keep our soul humble and teach us patience. It is a guardian of purity and brings the crown of everlasting joy. “Count it all joy, my brethren,” the letter of James emboldens us, “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.”

"The slightest pleasure is a surprise," our dear heavenly friend, St. Therese of the Child Jesus, affirms, "when one expects nothing but suffering. And suffering itself becomes the greatest of all joy when one seeks it like a precious treasure." Of course, we have to admit that most of us are still very far from this outlook, but we have also to accept the fact that there are some people, even while still on earth, experienced joy in their sufferings because of their love of God.

Do we need another evidence? Here's one from our other heavenly friend, no other than the seraphic St. Francis of Assisi, when he testifies, saying: "Perfect happiness does not consist in giving good example, in performing miracles, in knowing all sciences and the Scriptures; it does not consist either in converting all the infidels to the faith of Christ, but in suffering all things with patience and with happiness, thinking of the pains of the Blessed Christ which He had to suffer for love of us."

The example of Our Lord Jesus and of all the saints ought to encourage us under all trials to suffer with patience and even with joy and gladness. We shall soon begin to feel that it is delightful to tread in the steps of a God-man, and shall find that if we courageously take up our crosses, He will make them light by sharing the burden with us.

It is right to say that the phrase "let the bones which thou hast broken rejoice" is a metaphor of a soul experiencing heartrending suffering. No doubt that suffering has an ingenuous ability to break, to crush, and to crumble the heart of a person. It is no respecter of a person, for even the son of God was not exempted of its demand.

However, our Christian faith gives us an assurance that "the sufferings of this present times are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us," for we will see the Lord Jesus in all His ineffable glory. Hence, the bones which are broken by sufferings rejoice greatly and are filled with joy and gladness. We will see clearly, as in the brightest of mirror, and intuitively God Himself as He is in Himself, that is, His essence and His attributes.

The joy and gladness of the first instant in seeing the Lord face to face will last forever, like an eternal morning, eternal spring, and eternal youth. Its newness, its freshness, will be eternally present. All the fibers of our being will be filled with unimaginable joy and gladness, for "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."

Thus we do not lose heart in our trials, sufferings, and challenges in this present world, for although "our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being

renewed everyday. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison....”

Who can tell the potent power of joy and gladness which we will have in our glorified body on that day when we will be raised up in the likeness of the Lord Jesus? Think of the delight of the eyes in contemplating the beauty of nature, and expatiating over magnificent scenery, or feeding itself on some fascinating work of art. Or, again, meditate on how the ears revel in sweet sounds and entranced with the spells of music. Hours and hours passed, and the lapse of time is all unheeded. Or again, reflect with what exquisite tranquil encroachment that the fragrance of sweet flowers and aromatic gums steal over us, and dislodge cares, anxieties, and weariness; and revive the drooping soul, and put a new life and spirit into us, and a life of such peculiar spell-bound gentleness and love!

All these things will be in our true homeland – our heavenly home. They will be uninterruptedly. Only they will be in infinitely higher and deeper degrees than are possible on earth. Innumerable kinds of new and unimaginable joy and gladness will be gushing out, in super abundance, to us there, pleasures worthy of the ecstasies and magnificence of God.

Consider also that love is the sweetest of all earthly joy; and the life of our heavenly homeland is a life of love, for it is the life of God who is LOVE. Think too that the love of all passionate lovers upon earth heaped together could not equal the love of the lowest and simplest soul in the city of our God. Eternity will give us new and sublime powers of loving.

Each one of us, children and adult alike, shall love with immense and unconceivable love, of which parental, filial, conjugal, and fraternal loves on earth only represent a very teeny-weeny fraction, because in the city of our God all its citizens are made to drink of the one Spirit of Love, that is, the Holy Spirit.

Each one will drink to the full according to each one’s capacity, and each one pours out this love to one another, fully and completely, without withholding anything whatever. The joy and gladness of this enormous power of loving is truly far beyond comprehension. Each one of the citizens of this heavenly country will love us with a might of love which surpasses all earthly love.

Since this is the case, think too that there are billions upon billions, that is, countless citizens of this heavenly country, for the redeemed human beings and the angels live there together. The boundless, stalwart, fiery and passionate natures of angels will be poured out upon us in love, a love which our feeble mind cannot comprehend now, but it is a love more profound, more beautiful,

and more possessing than human love; and of these angels there are legions upon legions!

Who can comprehend of the joy and gladness of that love with which the sinless and immaculate Mother of God will pour upon us? No fond earthly mother, rapt in the exclusiveness of an excessive love, ever hung over her first-born and her only born with a fondness like to that of which the Mother of God, the Queen of the universe, will testify to each of the citizens of the kingdom of God. That's the love which awaits us!

The joy and gladness of this prodigious capacity of loving is inscrutable. Then consider that immensity of this ocean of affection will always be poured out gloriously in the immortal vehemence of a stainless love, unutterably blissful because unutterably holy. We all crave for love. Our whole nature expands under its influence. It gives new character. It converts the deepest misery into a soul-stirring happiness. What an amount of it we can drink in even here and now, while our souls are undeveloped, and our lives narrow, and our hearts shallow, compared with what will be in the city of our God. Truly, then, in our heavenly homeland we shall be able to absorb oceans of love; and assuredly there will be oceans to absorb!

Out of every perfection of the immense, omnipotent, all-knowing, all-holy, incomprehensible, jubilant God there will flow unto us torrents of bewildering love in perpetual inundations, overpowering us with thrills of a vast new life, taking away our breath, and suspending all the faculties of our souls far up amid unthought-of regions of unapproachable light, in ecstasies of an incomparable beatitude, like the Beatitude of God Himself! We shall be eternally swallowed up in eternal love, filled with inexpressible joy and gladness.

Who are they who have reached that fair haven of joy and gladness? Those, and those alone, whose bones were broken by sorrows, pains, and sufferings, who on earth took up their cross, and took it up daily, and so, and only so, and always so, have followed the Lord Jesus. They had suffered on earth, but now received the crown of life which God promised to those who loved Him.

They were aware of their own sinfulness while still on earth. Their self-knowledge convinced them that no one could ever stand if God should mark one's iniquities, but they were also confident that with God is found forgiveness.

Since we endeavor to follow their footsteps and hope to arrive where they are now, so we have to capture their attitude and beseech the Lord, saying: →

Icon # 516 = God Hides His Face From Our Sins

"Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities."

If we are only animals, made out of billions and billions of cells, we would not be asking the Lord to blot out all our iniquities and to hide His face from our sins, because we will have no conscience to accuse us of our iniquities, thus we will not be troubled by our sins. Therefore, the need to ask for forgiveness is blotted out.

It's very flattering, because we are giving free reign to our vices without any moral responsibility. Hence, there's no qualm of conscience if a person commits fornication or adultery. Lust, avarice, vanity, pride, and the like will be celebrating their victory!

But since we are human beings endowed with intelligence, memory, and will we are bound to be held accountable by what we have done in our body. Conscience is simply a name for "that aspect of our minds which makes moral evaluations." Even if no one could ever discover what we are doing, conscience alone warns and condemns us. It has all the evidence, for it sees all we do, and hears all we say, and discerns all we think.

Perpetual remorse comes from the voice of conscience which repeats what we refused to listen while there was still time. We cannot indeed erase from our mind the first principle of the moral order, a distinction between good and evil. Conscience recalls sin after sin. It would be like a worm that will never die, but the soul is incapable of changing its remorse into penance, its tortures into expiation. Before this will become endless in eternity we have to humbly ask the Lord to blot out all our iniquities while we still have time on earth, and to turn away His face from our sins.

If we truly repent the Lord is more than willing to forgive, for He is Divine Mercy. In the words of our heavenly friend, St. Isaac of Nineveh, "Repentance is the door to mercy, open to those who seek it diligently; by this door we enter into Divine mercy and by no other entrance can we find mercy."

Penance is the best guarantee for the inwardness of our repentance. The deepest of all spiritual things is inward repentance. It is based on a self-knowledge which implies a profound view of the sinfulness of sin. We only have to have a sincere heart and live in vigilance and be converted immediately after seeking God's help and He Himself is most ready to blot out all our iniquities, for He looks for our ardent will, as best we can, to turn toward Him. When we show good faith and promptness glowing from our desire to repent, then He works in us a true repentance.

Sin had to be confessed before salvation could be obtained. Hence, conscience must be aroused. Our other heavenly friend, St. Bede the Venerable, has this to say: "The beginning of our righteousness is the confession of our sins."

When we sin we are hiding our face from God, as Adam and Eve did, but when we confess our sins it is God who will hide His face from our sins, not only that, He will also blot out all our iniquities, as it is written: "But if a wicked man turns away from all 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 transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness which he has done he shall live. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?"

The infinite goodness of God delights in seeing a soul truly penitent. At the very moment when we confessed our sins we add to our own dignity as a person, for no matter how heavily our sins weigh on our conscience, no matter how our sins have diminished our integrity, the very act of turning again to God is a manifestation of our special dignity, our spiritual grandeur – the grandeur of the personal encounter between God (divine) and us (human) in the inner truth of conscience.

Let us give ear to these words of our other heavenly friend, St. Symeon the New Theologian: "It is in proportion to our repentance, confession, and tears that we receive the remission of our former sins, and as a consequence of this, sanctification and grace from on high."

One of the most consoling experiences in our lives is to receive and give forgiveness. When we commit sin and ask for forgiveness, then, we are the receiver of this forgiveness, but if someone offended us and we forgive him, then, we are the giver of this forgiveness. Our spiritual life will be healthy if we are willing to give and take forgiveness. If we have this attitude, then, Our Lord is likely eager to hide His face from our sins, and blot out all our iniquities, as He said: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you...."

The forgiveness of sins and purification of human souls are the ultimate purpose of Christ's divine working of miracle; and one of the greatest miracles is the miracle of grace, that is, the transformation of one's heart and the possession of a new and right spirit. But since this is not our own doing but owing to God's grace, hence, we have to pray in the depths of our heart: →

Icon # 517 = Cleanliness of Heart

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.”

It is true to say that God’s desire to create a clean heart in us, and put a new and right spirit within us, is far greater and intense than ours, as God Himself said: “And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinance and obey them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”

The reason why God is more desirous than us to have a clean heart and a new and upright spirit is simply because we are made in His own image and likeness. Even those earthly fathers who are not so loving and whose wives are not absolutely faithful would feel a certain gratification if their sons look so much like them, because it is an indubitable evidence that they are really their sons, how much more of God!

It is sin that makes us very unlike God. The more a person sin the more the likeness of God is distorted in that person, but repentance restores this likeness. Once a person repents, then, the process of cleansing begins. The dross of sin has to be cleansed by inward purification so that, little by little, we may attain purity of heart. It is like peeling an onion. The first layer is rough, but the next layer is shinier than the first till you reach the core which is white and shiny.

It’s an image of purity of heart. Cleansing one’s heart, of course, is a lifelong process. It needs a new and right spirit to inspire us to undergo this process. And just as in the process of peeling an onion we shed tears, so in the process of cleansing one’s heart we shed tears of repentance. When the eyes of our heart are cleansed, the joy of our heavenly homeland opens to us.

“The only reason why we were given the law of purifying the heart,” says our heavenly friend, St. Philotheus of Sinai, “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.”

The more we control our bad thoughts the more we come nearer to purity of heart. We have to assert that whether we like it or not bad thoughts come to our mind so long as we are still in this present world with our mortal body. We have no power over their entrance, but we do have power to elbow them out by simply thinking on something else, then something else, then something else, for example, having our mind look on the picture of a saint, then another saint, then another saint, or the Blessed Virgin, or Christ. Try to do this and you will be

amazed by your own experience how true it is that we have intrinsic power to push out bad thoughts from our mind, especially lustful thoughts.

Those who have gone to school will tell you that there are certain subjects that you have to take first before you can move on to another one. We call this pre-requisite subject.

God Himself intended that "purity of heart" is a pre-requisite in seeing Him, as the Lord Jesus says: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Hence, when we die and our heart is not yet pure, then, we have to pass through purgatory where we will be cleansed. Purgatory is the state of the soul which cannot as yet possess God, which is deprived for a period short or long of the vision of God, because by its own fault it was not ready for its appointed seeing of God.

There are faults which are not grave enough to close heaven and to open hell, which nevertheless have their own proportionate punishment. Seen in this light, we will appreciate more the doctrine of purgatory because it is one of wisdom and consolation. It emphasizes the infinite sanctity and the glorious majesty of God, since nothing soiled can ever appear before Him. It fortifies our sense of justice. It manifests the disorder, often unperceived, of venial faults.

Considering that the sufferings in this present life, combined together, are far lesser than the sufferings in purgatory, we will be truly wise if we allow ourselves to be purified here than in the other life, "for he who is purged in this world, by his own free will and the grace on him," says our heavenly friend, St. Catherine of Genoa, "pays less than a penny in a thousand pounds."

If we really want to go straight to heaven and not to pass anymore through purgatory, then, we have to allow ourselves to be purified here on earth. This can be done by carrying our cross daily and following Our Lord Jesus more closely, putting into practice His teaching and obeying His commandments; by accepting the trials and sufferings that come our way either in the forms of incurable illness or tragic events; by exercising virtues and avoiding occasion that leads to sin; and if it is in our power to do so, to receive the sacraments frequently, especially the sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and Reconciliation, because, as our other heavenly friend, St. Bede the Venerable says: "Mankind cannot live a completely sinless existence here on earth, sins and faults, even serious ones, will be committed, but the effect of these failures can be mitigated by sincere confession, penance, and acts of charity and forgiveness towards others." And also to practice patience, for it is in our patience that we share in Christ's suffering.

Patience in suffering is a living sacrifice. It is a sweet fragrance of precious balsam in the presence of God. Suffering keeps the soul humble and teaches it patience. It is a guardian of purity and brings the crown of eternal happiness; it causes faults to vanish and renews the spirit. In other words, it is one of the tools in cleansing one's heart.

Of course, this is not our own doing, but owing to God's grace working within us through the Holy Spirit, for apart from Him we could not hope to attain cleanliness of heart. Thus in humility we pray: →

Icon # 518 = Take Not The Holy Spirit From Me

"Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me."

There was once an incident that happened in Jerusalem at a pool, called in Hebrew Bethzatha, wherein the Lord Jesus healed a man who had been ill for thirty eight years. It occurred on a Sabbath. For this reason, those in authority persecuted Him. He said to them: "My Father is working still, and I am working." Of course, this kind of language incited more the animosity of those in authority, because it is tantamount to claiming equality with God.

But the Lord Jesus never budged an inch. He just told them frankly and truthfully that "the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise." In other words, the action of the Son is the action of the Father Himself. The Father works only through the Son.

It is true to say that the Father and the Son are working still even until this present moment, but now it is through the Holy Spirit. However, their work now is for our sanctification. In other words, the action of the Father, the action of the Son, and the action of the Holy Spirit, is the action of the One God, that is to say, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are at work in creating the whole universe; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are at work in redeeming the human race; and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are at work in sanctifying the human soul. However, we appropriate the work of creation to the Father, the work of redemption to the Son, and the work of sanctification to the Holy Spirit.

The Lord Jesus vigorously stresses the necessity of His going back to the Father, because if He will not go the Holy Spirit, that is, the Counselor will not come to the disciples; but if He goes, He will send Him to them, and to us. The Holy Spirit is also the "Truth" just as the Lord Jesus is the "Truth." Hence, He said: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but what whatever he hears he will speak....He will glorify me,

for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

Just as the Lord Jesus does only what He sees the Father doing, so the Holy Spirit speaks only what He hears from the Son. Since the Father and the Son are One, and the Holy Spirit is the spirit of the Father and the Son, therefore, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are One. Their thought, their word, and their action are one. The Father, of course, is the source of the Godhead. The Son and the Holy Spirit serve us His hands and feet, that is to say, the Father works and speaks only through the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Let us try to understand a little how this really is. For instance, let us consider ourselves. Have we ever thought of how magnificently we have been made; that there is in us something which can be seen and touched, namely, our body whose nature is fleshy; but there is also something invisible about us, namely our mind and soul with its thought, its loves, and its desires? Our soul is, in a sense, “incarnate” in the body – in the flesh; that is, our soul animates and unifies our body.

Now consider the person of the Lord Jesus. He is the true incarnation, not of a soul in a body, but of God in the form of man. There is something visible about Him, namely, His perfect human nature, which can walk, touch, eat, drink, think, and desire like any other human being. But there is also something invisible about Him, and that is His divinity. His divinity could no more be seen than our soul, though it could be seen working through His human nature, as our soul works through our body.

Just as our body and our soul combine to make one person, so in an infinitely more perfect way, His human nature and His divine nature make but one person, the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, true God and true man. Thus He can unequivocally say: “He who has seen me has seen the Father.”

And in reference to the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus assuringly guaranteed all His disciples saying, “And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.” Since it is in the Holy Spirit that the Lord Jesus be with us till the end of time, so if we really want to arrive at our final destination, that is, the kingdom of heaven, it is just logical that we don’t want to be cast away from the presence of the Lord and to be deprived of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, that would be our greatest tragedy.

Here are some of the things which the Holy Spirit is doing for us and how important it is that the Lord Jesus does not take away His Holy Spirit from us. For instance, if we are perplexed and hesitant, the Holy Spirit enlightens us; if we are

ignorant, He teaches us; if we are forgetful, He reminds us; and when we are weary and discouraged, He puts new heart in us. Whatever the trials to which He leads us, He is there to strengthen us, and to go with us through the ordeal to the end. Hence, we can imagine where we will be if we are subjected to different kinds of trials without the Holy Spirit to help us. Certainly confusion, anguish of heart, and depression will have its lion's share.

"Even the virtues alone cannot make the heart pure," says our heavenly friend, St. Simeon the New Theologian, "without the action and presence of the Holy Spirit. As a blacksmith can do nothing without the help of fire, however skilled he may be in wielding his tools...."

Generally speaking, when the Scriptures tell us of the activity of the Holy Spirit, He is shown as stirring mind and will to some great heroic action. So it is when the Lord Jesus was led into the desert; so it was on the first Pentecost, when the coming of the Spirit sent the Apostles forth to preach the wonderful works of God. But the Holy Spirit is given, not just to chosen few, but to all who are admitted to God's friendship. We are all given to drink at a single source, that is, the one Holy Spirit. For this reason, we don't want the Holy Spirit be taken away from us, and be cast away from the presence of the Lord.

Is there anything in ourselves to which we can point as proof of the Holy Spirit's presence and activity within us? Can we say that we have risen to heights worthy of His leadership; or are we still groping dully about the plains of unhealthy desires, our energies at best taken up with the struggle against the lure of sinful pleasures and laziness, against difficulties and failures in prayer, against weariness and boredom in our efforts to do good? If we seem to be in this latter case, it may be that we have failed to take the necessary steps to increase and intensify the workings of the Holy Spirit within us.

St. Luke the evangelist tells us that the Lord Jesus went into the desert filled with the Holy Spirit, and we too, from no matter how great distance, have to aspire to be filled and be led by the Holy Spirit into the desert of our day-to-day lives.

To be led by the Holy Spirit, to be docile to His leadership, is to be lead according to the measure of Our God-given strength; it is not to be immune from trial and temptation. If we simply and humbly try to do our best with our individual capacities, and are fully aware of our own limitations, temptations will come as no surprise; it will indeed be for us an honor if we feel that the Holy Spirit is leading us to trial and difficulties, He will not leave us helpless, for He is the Spirit who not only leads but comforts and strengthens as well. Comfort is indeed to strengthen: not a soft, sentimental attempt to persuade us that all is well when all is far from well, but an attempt to pour into us new strength and courage to meet whatever demands are to be made of us.

As a teacher and a reminder the Holy Spirit will teach us all things and bring to our remembrance what the Lord Jesus had said. The Holy Spirit will also help keep us right in matters of conduct. For example, when we are seduced to do something wrong and are on the very brink of doing it, then, suddenly back into our mind comes a saying of the Lord Jesus or the verse of a psalm or a picture of the Lord or of the Blessed Virgin or any saint, or a teaching we received when we were young – that is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, the presence of the Lord Jesus in His Church is so much better than His bodily presence that it was really expedient for us that He should ascend to heaven to send the Holy spirit, for His bodily presence could be only in one place at one time, but His Spirit is everywhere in all places at all times wherever two or three are gathered in His name.

Accordingly, if the Spirit of Him who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead dwells in us, He who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will give life to our mortal bodies also through His Spirit which dwells in us. Therefore, we are debtors not to the flesh to live according to the flesh, for if we live according to the flesh we will die, but if by the Holy Spirit we put to death the desires of the flesh we will live. For all who are led by the Holy Spirit are children of God. God has put His seal upon us and given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire eternal possession of it, to the praise of His glory. For this reason, we sigh: →

Icon # 519 = The Joy of God's Salvation

"Restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit."

One of the many consolations as we trek toward our eternal home is the thought of what the Lord Jesus has done to save us. Truly, if we habitually keep in our mind what the Lord has done for us, we will be strengthened to tackle the trials in life. One small or big trial which is surmounted or endured undoubtedly causes joy in our heart.

If the thought about heaven is part of our daily thinking, that, too, will be a source of joy and consolation. It eliminates from our lives the things that would hinder union with God and enlightens our desire that all the good things we do shall be done for His honor and Glory. It is never true to say that we have no time to think of what the Lord Jesus has done for us; the less one thinks of Him, the less time there will always be for Him. The time one has for anything depends on how much s/he values it. Thinking determines the uses of time; time does not rule over thinking.

If we are in the verge of death and someone come along to save us, it's just very natural that we often think of this person. It is also natural that we would feel a certain joy. This joy will even be compounded when we know who this person is, that is, he is a king – very rich and powerful. If this is true in the natural level, how much more in the supernatural level.

We are fatally wounded when we commit sin. We would even be in the verge of spiritual death if the sin is mortal. Then come along the Lord Jesus who died on the cross and obtained for us the grace of conversion. Little by little, in the process of inward purification, the vision of our soul becomes brighter and enabled us to see, though as in a dim mirror, the kingdom of this Lord, His majesty and splendor, how He is served and adored by all the angels, how in exchange of the little affliction we encounter in this present life He is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison.

We have sorrow in this world, but our sorrow will turn into joy when we see Him face to face and our hearts will rejoice and no one will take our joy from us, for it will be ours for all eternity without the slightest diminishment.

As children of God, the kingdom of heaven is our inheritance but we squandered this inheritance by loose living, using our freedom as a pretext in satisfying the cravings of our vices. At first, we seem to be happy and joyful, but the more we satisfy our craving our satisfaction turns into repugnance because its joy brings with it the bitterness of dissatisfaction. We found out that its joy was not really a real joy; it was merely a physical pleasure which can never fully satisfy the human heart because we are not made for it.

The joy of God's salvation is the real and lasting joy. God restores this joy to us the moment we made the decision to return back to Him. It comes from a good conscience and a spirit that is willing to do God's will. It is God-centered.

A willing spirit is, of course, an obedient spirit, a spirit that is eager to do the will of God and those in lawful authority. This is the kind of spirit that we want to be upheld. We drifted away from God through the sloth of disobedience, but by the spirit of obedience we are brought back to Him.

Indeed, a willing spirit is an unequivocal sign of the action of God in our soul. A willing spirit is also a fervent spirit. It is a spirit which is willing to leave things unfinished when it hears the bell ringing for the Divine Office – the work of God. Under God's unceasing guidance it turned without conscious effort to each new duty as if presented to it by God each hour of the day.

The reasons why God has not desired to leave us any certainty in respect to the question of eternal salvation are: 1st, to make us go forward in

unpretentiousness, and to make our faith more meritorious on account of the obscurity in which it leaves our mind. 2nd, to keep us always thoroughly strong in humility against the natural and violent inclination of pride, and 3rd, to exercise God's sovereign dominion over us, and to keep us in the most perfect self-abandonment towards Himself, not only with respect to our temporal existence, but also in respect to our eternal destiny.

Indeed, our God who is eager to console the humble gives the soul in the midst of its greatest desolation and intimate assurance that it has nothing to fear provided it allows Him to act and abandons itself completely to Him.

The human heart yearns for happiness, and God wants us to be happy, but we only experience this happiness, and the fulfillment that accompanies it, when He restores to us the joy of His salvation and upholding us with a willing spirit to grow unto a mature manhood, in the fullness of the stature of the Lord Jesus; putting off our old nature which belongs to our former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and putting on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

If these things are ours and abound, then, we are in fairly good position to say:
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Icon # 520 = School of Forgiveness

"Then I will teach transgressors thy ways and sinners will return to thee."

Our Lord Jesus came into our world to teach us the ways of God which, of course, are faithfulness and love. Through everyday events, He wants to teach us the real cause of all things and hence the right way we have to take in our day-to-day lives if we want to go the proper course in returning back to God.

Understanding His ways, certainly, require a complete conversion on our part, not only of our will and deed, but also of our heart and mind. He teaches us by means of parables to give practical illustrations of His teaching, using examples drawn from nature and everyday life in order to imprint on us the way we have to follow.

In becoming a human being like us in all things, except sin, the Lord Jesus founded a School of Forgiveness. All of us who transgressed God's ways and violated His commandments but repented are students of this School. Diplomas are given only at the end of our life on earth. Augustine of Hippo, Mary of

Magdala, Peter of Bethsaida, and Paul of Tarsus, to name a few, are the most famous alumni of this School.

Each of them left us a legacy. Of Mary Magdalene, she is well known to have seven demons cast out from her; of Peter Bethsaida, he is well known of denying the Lord, and in one occasion was heard crying out: "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man;" of Augustine of Hippo, he is well known to live a licentious life, and have cried out later: "Late have I loved You, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved You!"; of Paul of Tarsus, he is a well known fierce persecutor of the follower of the "Way," breathing threats and murders against the early Christians, but later cried out: The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the foremost of sinners; but I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience for an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."

Students of this School can boldly affirm that God's pardon makes them a new person, and that it is through the Lord's mercy that they are renewed; their experience affirms their self-knowledge that there was never once in their lives that they were free from sin. Hence, they acknowledged their sinfulness before God. They also avail, from time to time, the Sacrament of Reconciliation. All these contribute to the stabilization of their humility and the sense of freedom.

For the first time in their lives they realized that 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, forgiveness leads to joy, and joy gives birth to freedom of the children of God.

One of the greatest benefits of this School is the steady growth in self-knowledge among the students. This growth in self-knowledge liberated them from the idea that they should at all times be above reproach which makes them a mockery of repentance and forgiveness as well as of love, because it suggests the need always to look good in the sight of their fellow students and to outsiders, and never to be caught in fault.

They know by their own experience, in attending this school, that no one can really escape the truth that sooner or later one will discover one's own shortcomings as far as living with other people is concerned. Yet, this discovery of their shortcomings never discouraged them in their pursuit of inward sanctification but, rather, serves as a grist in the mill to make them cry out for God's mercy and allow the grace of God to work within them.

It molds them to be dependent on God in everything rather than on themselves. They know by experience that His grace is sufficient for them, for His power is

made perfect in weakness. When they are weak, then, they are strong, for they do not rely on themselves.

They also grow in gratitude of heart, for they apprehend that even the tiniest good thought that they think comes from God. They even give thanks to Him when bad things happen to them, for they believe that everything work together for their own benefit so long as they won't withdraw their love from God.

By their constant familiarity with the Lord Jesus, as their divine teacher, and His pedagogy, they learned His ways through desolations and sometimes through consolations. But either way, they believed that these things are guided and directed by His infinite wisdom and love. The Lord adopted Himself to the capacity of His students. Those who have greater capacity to endure sorrows and pains He gives a little bit bigger dosage of suffering because He knows that they won't be crushed by this suffering, but He gives them consolations, too, to balance their affliction.

The Lord Jesus never flank a soul enrolled in this school, even though it is beleaguered by temptations, for He is absolutely aware of the capacity of each student. Take for example, if a man knows the load that can be placed on the back of a mule and heaps only with as much as it can carry so as not to be broken by its weight, how immeasurably greater is the wisdom and love of our divine Teacher in determining the degree of trial which a soul is able to shoulder.

The Lord uses great and inexpressible goodness and patience toward us, if only we would be willing to be watchful within us and strive to be totally converted to Him, that is, returned to Him so that we may receive the gift of salvation and be docile as He teaches us His ways.

By attending this School we are always persons in formation, forming ourselves slowly, but steadily, into the image and likeness of Our Teacher, no other than the Lord Jesus Christ the second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity, true God and true man.

When our divine Teacher sends us heavy cross which He sees us sincerely willing to bear courageously out of love for Him, He never fails to uphold us invisibly, in such a way that the extent of our submission and interior peace is proportionate with the heaviness of our cross, and at times even surpasses it, so great is the goodness and kindness of Our Teacher and the interior grace which He obtains for us.

Thus let us deduce from this that, to assure our spiritual progress, on our side, our good will avails us everything, or almost everything; our divine Teacher, in His

mercy, does the rest. Knowing the full measure of our weakness, our wretchedness, and our powerlessness in every kind of good, He upholds and strengthens us, and, through His Holy Spirit, Himself effects the good in us.

However, since we are still in this present world and the devil is roaming around seeking someone to devour, therefore, we should never be complacent, but beseech the Lord Jesus, saying: →

Icon # 521 = Deliverance From a Wrathful Disposition

“Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of thy deliverance.”

It is a very natural human instinct that we feel a certain joy and relief when we are delivered from a tragedy or any traumatic incident; so also to be delivered from bloodguiltiness, that is, from a murderous or irritable disposition.

In the Sermon on the Mount, after the Lord Jesus pointed out that unless our righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, we will never enter the kingdom of heaven, He goes on to say: “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....”

It was Our Lord’s teaching that it was not enough not to commit murder; the only thing sufficient was never even to wish to commit murder. It may be that we have never struck a person, but who can say that s/he had never wished to strike somebody? In the Old Testament a person has to murder in order for him to be liable to judgment, but in the New Testament Our Lord says that whoever is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; and whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council.

Hence, we have to beseech the Lord not only to be delivered from bloodguiltiness, but also from irritable temperament. It is one thing to feel angry or get angry, but it is another thing to have a wrathful character. Our good friend, St. Paul, says: “Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger....”

The Lord, too, really got angry. An incident occurred when He entered a synagogue. There was a man whose hand was withered. The Pharisees watched Him to see whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. The Lord said to the man who had the withered hand, “Come here.” And He said to them: “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to

do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. And He looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart.

Does Our Lord, then, violated His own teaching since He says: "I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment," but now He got angry with the Pharisees? By no means, of course, because, first of all, irritability is not His character. Did He not say: "Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart?"

Of course, it is wrong to lose one's temper, but it can be wrong also not to be angry. Our heavenly friend, St. Thomas Aquinas, says that "one may sin by not having used a holy anger when it was proper or necessary to do so." The anger, to be just anger, must be all the time under the control of reason.

We take into account here the issue of anger instead of bloodguiltiness, for it is very likely that we won't kill anyone but it is quite possible to feel angry. Anger is a dislike hatched from the memory of offences received, a desire to get even with the person who have offended us.

Now remembrance of the offences that happened to us is one thing, loss of temper or rage another, annoyance another, and disturbance of mind yet another. For example, someone who is lighting a fire sets a spark to the tinder, this is some brother's/sister's provoking remark, this is the point where the fire of anger starts.

Of what consequence is that brother's/sister's remark? If we put up with it, the spark goes out; but if we go on thinking, 'why did s/he say that to me and what do I have to say to him/her? And, 'If s/he did not want to annoy me s/he would not have said that, and s/he must think that I also want to annoy him/her.

So we add a small bit of wood to the flame, or some bit of fuel, and we produce some smoke, that is disturbance of the mind. This disturbance floods the mind with thoughts and emotions which stimulate the heart and embolden it to attack. And this boldness incites us vengeance on the person who annoyed us and this becomes recklessness, that is to say, the heart is stirred up to rashness when the thoughts are set on malice, but malice taken upon itself by prayer and hope leaves the heart at peace.

If, therefore, we put up with a sharp answer from the brother/sister, the little firebrand is extinguished before it causes trouble. Even if we are a little troubled and we desire promptly to get rid of, since it is still small, we can do so by remaining silent with a prayer on our lips and by one good heartfelt act of humility.

But if we dwell on it and inflame our hearts and torment ourselves with thoughts about why s/he said this to us, and what do we have to say to him/her, we are blowing on the embers and adding fuel and causing smoke! From this influx of thoughts and conflicting emotions the heart catches fire and there we are in a passion.

Our heavenly friend, no other than the great St. Basil calls this passion a boiling up of the blood around the heart: this makes us what is called irascible. But even this commotion can, if we wish, be put out before it becomes rage. If we allow ourselves to remain disturbed, however, we will begin to let fly at others – we will be like someone piling logs on a blazing furnace and fanning the fire and so making more firebrands.

This is how we get into a rage. This is exactly what a desert father, Abbot Zosimos, said when he was asked to explain the saying, “Where there is no bad temper fighting dies out.” “If at the beginning of a dissension,” he said, “when there is first smoke and sparks begin to fly, if a man do not prevents it by blaming himself and humbling himself before he gets drawn into the quarrel and gets into a temper, until, not remaining tranquil but wrangling and becoming reckless, he acts like a man who is piling a wood on a fire which gets hotter and hotter until he has made a great blaze. For just as burning logs are reduced to cinders and get covered ash but do not go out for ages, even if water is thrown on them, so also anger that endures for a long time becomes rancor. And for the rest, unless a man sweats blood he will never be free from it.”

If, from the beginning, we take the blame when we are reproached, without trying to justify ourselves or making counter – charges and so repaying evil for evil, we will be delivered from all these maladies. This is why when a passion arise, when it is young and feeble, we have to cut it off and dash it against the rock, that is, call upon the name of Christ in prayer; otherwise it stiffen and cause us a great deal of trouble.

On the other hand, if we humble ourselves and call upon the name of the Lord in prayer, it is very likely that we will be delivered not only from bloodguiltiness, but above all from a wrathful disposition. Calling upon the name of the Lord in prayer involves the uncovering of our own passions, for His name is a powerful light that searches the thoughts and intentions of our heart; it has strong potency to save us from our sins. For this reason, we could not help but sing aloud of His deliverance: →

Icon # 522 = Opening Our Lips to Proclaim the Praise of God

“O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.”

For monks and nuns of contemplative Orders, this verse sound very familiar. It is always the opening verse at Vigils everyday during the entire year. The other opening verse at all the other divine offices during the whole day, from Lauds to Compline, is: “O God, come to my assistance. Lord, make hast to help me.”

The difference between the two verses is quite obvious. At Vigils, which is the beginning of all the divine offices Our Lord is opening our lips to proclaim His praise. It's really a tremendous blessing to begin our day by opening our lips in proclaiming the praise of God. It's an image of resurrection. We just woke up from sleep as though dead, then in gratitude for our mini resurrection we open our lips to declare His praise. Thus our lips are consecrated for God's service.

This is the ideal that we longed for to be perfected in God's kingdom, but since we are still in this present world and the devil is roaming around seeking someone to devour, so we are crying out to God during the whole course of the day: “O God, come to my assistance. Lord, make haste to help me.”

We have to claim that we can always praise God during the course of the day just as it is right to ask for His assistance during the period of Vigils and the early morning, but it is more fitting to begin our day by praising Him on behalf of the sleeping people in the world just as the birds are chanting the melody of the animals and plants kingdom on behalf of the other animals and trees, during the early morning.

The birds that chirp, tweet, and warble at dawn are like monks and nuns, and other religious orders who chant the praises of God in the early morning. Just as not all people proclaim the praises of God but only the monks and nuns, and other religious orders, and some religious people, so also not all the birds chirp and tweet in the early morning.

People who never really praise God can be liken to people who are mute and dumb. Since speaking is very natural to human beings, so to be mute and dumb is an illness. And since we human beings are creatures and God is our Creator and we are made for God, therefore, to praise God should be natural for us. Hence, not to be able to praise God is an illness of the soul.

Of course, this illness varies in seriousness. The more the soul is very ill the more it finds difficult to praise God. On the other hand, the more the soul is healthy the more it delights in praising God. If the soul is lukewarm it will become indifferent to the praises of God.

There is one danger in praising God which the soul has to guard earnestly, that is, praising God only in one's lips, but one's heart is far from Him. Of course, this does not refer to the sporadic wandering of thoughts while the lips are honoring God, that is, the unintentional disharmony of what one says and what one thinks but, rather, the habitual disposition of the soul to gravitate toward the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Rendering praise to God does not mean simply directing piously exaggerated words toward God in heaven. The act of praise involves us in the very life of God-with-us. Words and gestures of praise are 'performative'; their utterance makes actual the glory of God to which they refer and they end.

There cannot be such a thing as true life without praise. Only where God is praised is there life, and we can only truly praise God if we have a humbled spirit and a contrite heart. Whereupon we say: →

Icon # 523 = Humility and Contrition: Offerings Acceptable to God

"For thou hast no delight in sacrifice; were I give a burnt offering, thou wouldst not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

The Lord has no delight in sacrifice and would not be pleased with burnt offering if a person offering them is living in sin and do not want to repent. In this case, sacrifice and burnt offering are likely done merely to appease one's conscience.

Sacrifice and burnt offering in itself are good, for they are expression of one's homage to God. God Himself said: "I do not reprove you for your sacrifices; your burnt offerings are continually before me." Sacrifice is an offering of any sort to God, with the idea of procuring favor or avoiding disaster.

On the other hand, obedience to God's command is far better than sacrifice and to listen to His voice than any burnt offering of animals, as the prophet Samuel said to Saul when Saul disobeyed the command given him: "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

Aside from obedience there are still other important values that God desires more than sacrifice and burnt offerings, such as mercy or steadfast love and knowledge of God, as it is written: "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings."

Although all knowledge is good provided that it does not puff up, yet knowledge of God is the most important because it leads to eternal life. Experiential knowledge of God makes us realize in the depths of our soul that God is everything; we are nothing.

God is sinless, we are sinful. Hence, in need of repentance. If we repent, it shows a contrite heart which God does not despise, for it is already a kind of sacrifice acceptable to Him. The infinite goodness of God delights in seeing a soul truly contrite. Contrition in the heart, confession on the lips, broken in spirit, and complete humility in all one does, this is a sacrifice acceptable to God.

Thus we have to acquire a contrite heart and a humble spirit because if we do not have a humble spirit heart and a contrite heart even if we perform great and humanitarian works they will not be devoid of corruption and perversion.

Both sacrifice and burnt offering are good, but a humble spirit and contrite heart are far better, for the latter are what make the former pleasing to God. Without them any sacrifice and burnt offering are of no value in the sight of God, because God owns everything and has no need of anything, as He said: "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world and all that is in it is mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?"

The infinite goodness of God delights in seeing a soul truly contrite. If we do not love contrition of heart, let us love it on account of our sins, for we should not be complacent by thinking that there is nothing in our heart and soul that has to be pardoned. Hence, we have to work out our salvation in fear and trembling.

Every acknowledgment of our sins brings about humility to our soul, whether it teaches us to recognize that we are justified by God's grace, or impelled us to admit that we are guilty of our transgression through negligence of the things of God.

Humility of spirit and contrite of heart are treasures infinitely to be longed for, as a deer longs for a running stream, and an unspeakable gladness of the heart. It is healing of the soul; a remission of sins; it gives peace to the mind; and brings back again the Holy Spirit into the humble and loving heart.

As soon as we pour the water of humility and the salt of contrition on the sacrifice of our daily actions, a brightness shines upon our souls and makes radiant whatever is dark in them, or lay hidden in shadow. It is precisely the equation between what we are and what we could be which constitutes the genesis of the experience of a humbled and contrite heart.

Humility of spirit and contrite heart are gifts of divine love which are directed at leading us to our eternal home. They cause in us a salutary fear which keeps us from forgetting the possibility of eternal separation from God; hence, serves as a check on our carnal desire, a remedy for degeneracy, and dismantles any lack of gravity or concern with trivialities.

They put before us both the reality of our sinful condition and the urgency of our desire to be totally possessed by God. They enable us to experience a healthy distaste at our low-level lifestyle, knowing that we are made for something infinitely better and that nothing less than God can bring us what our nature truly craves.

God will not despise a humble spirit and a contrite heart because the person who has a humble spirit and a contrite heart is open to receive the goodness and generosity of God to drive away the darkness of depravity of one's life. Therefore, the soul graciously entreats the Lord, saying: →

Icon # 524 = Rebuilding the Walls of the Soul

"Do good to Zion in thy good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, then wilt thou delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on thy altar."

We mentioned somewhere about the four senses of Scripture, namely: Historical sense, Moral sense, Allegorical sense, and Mystical sense. We also pointed out Jerusalem, sometimes referred to as Zion, as an example of a word in Scripture which illustrates these four senses.

For instance, in historical sense Jerusalem is the physical city in Israel; in moral sense Jerusalem is the human soul; in allegorical sense Jerusalem is the Church, and in mystical sense Jerusalem is the kingdom of heaven.

Having this in mind, let us examine "the walls of Jerusalem." The fact that its walls has to be rebuilt suggest the following possibilities: either the walls are completely ruined, or only some parts of it are damaged. So long as the walls are completely ruined, or just partly damaged, the inhabitants inside the city are not entirely safe; hence, are at the mercy of their enemies.

If the walls had been ruined by their enemies, it is very likely that their enemies also ruined the temple; thus no more sacrifices and burnt offerings. In this case, Jerusalem is very pitiable.

Jerusalem is the city of the living God, the place where God's glory abide. Since our soul, in moral sense is considered "Jerusalem," thus our soul is a city of the living God, the place where God's glory abide. This is rightly so as our good friend, St. Paul, says: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?"

As a human person we are composite being, that is, we are composed of body and soul. Our soul is in our body just as the temple is in Jerusalem. Our body is meant for the Lord just as the temple is the place of worship in Jerusalem. Just as the walls protect Jerusalem and the temple, so God's commandments protect our soul and body.

Hence, when we break God's commandments some parts of our walls are broken. These parts of our walls which are broken become a place of entrance for our enemies to ruin our souls, as the illustrious apostle James, says: "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not kill.' If you do not commit adultery but do kill, you have become a transgressor of the law."

Therefore, if we are earnest for the salvation of our soul we have to entreat the Lord to "rebuild" the walls of our soul, that is, we have to pray humbly and sincerely for the grace to keep God's commandments because left to ourselves we might be too weak to do so, but with the help of God we will gain strength to carry out His commands.

His commands are not really burdensome, because God does not command impossible things. If we find some of His commandments to be quite difficult, then, we have to ask for His help. He will certainly help us, so that we will be able to fulfill them. Once we are able to fulfill them, then, we become grateful because we know that by ourselves we are not able to do so. Thus it leads us to humility of heart which is very pleasing to God.

Accordingly, we are in a fairly good position to offer right sacrifices which God delights, such as the sacrifice of praise, the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and above all the sacrifice of our body and soul as a living sacrifice in union with the supreme and ultimate sacrifice of Christ Jesus our Lord on the cross, as a whole burnt offering.

There's another sacrifice which delights God, that is, the sacrifice of our own will in favor of God's will, to be able to say: "Not my will, but your will be done." This is a very good sacrifice, because it enables us to curtail all grumbling and complain, for whatever the situation brings to us bears the imprint of the Divine will.

When we know we are doing God's will, that alone is enough to sustain our happiness and to set aright the sacrifices we offered to God. When we don't have it, all the possessions in the world and all burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings cannot sustain happiness in the depths of our heart. Knowing God outside of God's will avails us nothing either it be knowledge or understanding or piety or inwardness or repose, because the most important thing in life is doing God's will.

In the purview of God's will, all things are, and are of incalculable value, they are pleasing to God for they are "right sacrifices" and are perfect "burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings." Outside the purview of God's will, all things are naught even sacrifices and whole burnt offerings, they are not pleasing to God and are imperfect, as it has been said previously: "For thou hast no delight in sacrifice; were I to give a burnt offering, thou wouldst not be pleased."

God wills our sanctification, as it is written: "Be holy as I am holy." Striving toward holiness makes our soul very sensitive to God's commandments, especially the command to love one another as the Lord Jesus loves us. Hence when we fail to fulfill His command we feel a certain pain at the recollection of it. This is a healthy pain, however, because it is a sign that our soul has not lost the sense of sin. This feeling is what is called compunction of heart, as though our heart is being punctured. It is precisely the comparison between what we are and what we could be which constitute the triggering cause of the experience of compunction.

Our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux pointed out that "at the heart of compunction is a sense of pain, a stinging, a sensation of being pricked. It is a question of being pierced, aroused from our torpor and complacency and stimulated to action. It has nothing to do with an obsessive and depressive sense of guilt, with endless reviewing of past failures."

The supreme manifestation of God's infinite goodness lies in the fact that the sorrow and the pain and the shame of these failings cause us, cure us of them, provided always that the shame does not become vexation and the sorrows is inspired by love and by self-love. Sorrow born of self-love is full of bitterness and inner disturbance, thus instead of healing the wound of our soul it serves only to pour poison into them. On the other hand, sorrow and compunction from love of God is peaceful and calm and full of trust in God.

Consequently, if these things are abounding in us, then, we know that God is doing good to our soul and is pleased to rebuild the walls of virtues that had been broken. All the angels too are happy in the rebuilding of the walls of our soul, because there is rejoicing in heaven even if one sinner repents.

Inward repentance is not a feeling within us, but a change within us; and it is not easy for us to be changed inwardly without manifesting it outwardly. Inward repentance is the deepest of all spiritual things. It is based on a supernaturally-illuminated self-knowledge. It implies a profound view of the sinfulness of sin. It lives in a clear vision of the perfection of God, which almost anticipates the brightness of the glory of God.

For this reason, we can cry with our good friend, St. Paul: "Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ...."

People of this world, especially the mighty ones, the rich, and those in power boast of their riches and even of the mischievous things they have done against religious people. All the evil men from Cain to those who ravaged the world today have the appearance of great and powerful princes who have produced a great effect in the world and whom men have boasted. Therefore, we have to confront them and sternly warn them: →

Icon # 525 = Healthy Boasting: Plotting Destruction

Psalm 52 (51)

"Why do you boast, O mighty man, of mischief done against the godly? All the day you are plotting destruction."

There is only one kind of boasting that is safe, that is, to boast in the Lord, as it is written: "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord. For it is not the man who commends himself that is accepted, but the man whom the Lord commends." All other kinds of boasting are dangerous, because they are likely tainted with pride, as our father St. Benedict pointed out that "every exaltation is a kind of pride."

It is only when we grow in humility that we become prudent in our speech, slow in talking about ourselves and our achievements, unless it is really needed for the edification of others, but if not it is far better and more safer to remain silent.

Since this is the case, how much imprudent then, and how much dangerous for a person to boast of the mischief done against godly people! Pride has always have a lion's share in all boasting unless a person boasts of the Lord or the works of the Lord. For example, our good friend, St. Paul boasted of the Christians of Achaia to the Christians of Macedonia for the generosity of the Christians of Achaia. Thus he says: "Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the offering for the saints, for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to

the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year; and your zeal has stirred up most of them.”

On the other hand, we have also an example of the other kind of boasting which is very dangerous because of too much pride in it. It is the kind of boasting that exalts oneself which darkens the spirit of Lucifer, as he says in his heart: “I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.”

Ultimately, this is the fountainhead of all boasting. All other kinds of boasting flow from it, either it be of “mischief done against the godly,” or “plotting destruction” against the just all the day, as it is written: “The wicked man plots against the just and gnashes his teeth against him....”

Prophets from of old were the easy target of this wicked plot, as, for instance, in the case of the prophet Jeremiah, when they said: “Come, let us make plots against Jeremiah, for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the prophet. Come, let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not heed any of his words.”

Our good friend St. Paul and the Lord Jesus have also their portion of this destructive plots. In the case of the Lord Jesus, it occurred when He healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. For this reason “the Pharisees went out, and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.”

In the case of St. Paul, it happened in Jerusalem when he was brought in the presence of the council and gave an account of the story of his conversion from Judaism to the Christian Faith, and how the economy of salvation is available to both Jews and Gentiles alike.

His account must have been so disgusting to the uncompromising ear of the high priest Ananias who commanded those who stood by St. Paul to strike him on the mouth. Moreover, the following day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed our good friend, St. Paul. There were more than forty who were plotting this destruction. Although their plot was foiled but, it is very likely, that they were not without guilt because in the new dispensation anger is tantamount to killing, hence, subject to judgment, as the Lord said: “You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment....”

Another vice that is also highly responsible for “plotting destruction” against another person, especially the godly, is, without doubt, the vice of envy. Again, Our Lord Jesus was a victim of this pernicious vice which led the chief priests and the elders to plot destruction against Him in order to destroy Him. It reached its climax when they incited the crowd to release Barabbas, a very notorious prisoner, instead of the Lord Jesus. Pilate himself “knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up.”

It is also out of envy that the Devil is “plotting destruction” against us, that is, against the human race, because the second Person of the Blessed Trinity preferred our human nature than the angelic nature, and that we, human beings, will inherit what he had lost, that is, the infinite Good – God Himself and the Beatific Vision. No wonder, then, that the Devil is likened to a roaring lion roaming around all over the world seeking human souls whom he could drag with himself to the bottomless pit.

God created us for Himself and wanted us to be happy and live for all eternity in His kingdom, as it is written: “God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it.” Notice that only those who belong to the devil's party experience eternal death, that is, the second death which is union of spirit with the devil in the lake of fire which is another image of the bottomless pit. In another word, the ultimate destruction of the human soul in hell.

The Devil has power only in those who are in the state of sin. He has absolutely no authority in those who are in the state of Grace, because he is very coward and could not stand those who are in good standing with God, for God's help fights with far greater strength on our behalf than the multitudes of demons who struggle against us. It is clear, then, beyond any doubt, that no one be deceived and overpowered by the devil except the person who has chosen to offer him the assent of his will.

Here's a brilliant testimony of our heavenly friend, St. Teresa of Avila, in her spiritual combat against the devil. She says: “Although I used sometimes to see the devils, I have hardly ever been afraid of them again – indeed, they seem to be afraid of me. I have acquired an authority over them, bestowed upon me by the Lord of all, so that they are no more trouble to me now than flies. They seem to me such cowards – as soon as they see that anyone despise them they have no strength left. They are enemies who can make a direct attack only upon those whom they see giving in to them.”

She also says: “These devils keep us in terror because we make ourselves liable to be terrorized by contracting other attachments – to honors, for example, and

to possessions and pleasures. When this happens, they join forces with us – since, by loving and desiring what we ought to hate, we become our own enemies – and they will do us much harm. We make them fight against us with our own weapons, which we put into their hands when we ought to be using them in our own defense.”

It is unequivocal, then, that the devil has power over us only when we freely offer him the consent of our will, but powerless if we resolutely resist him and yield our will to God, as the Scripture says: “Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.” To resist the devil is simply to resist his suggestion, and to draw near to God is simply to live in the state of grace.

God permits the devil to wrestle with us human beings, so that those who conquer him by not yielding to his suggestion might be crowned, and after the victory the devil would suffer an unimaginable shame for being defeated by us, human beings, who are very inferior in nature than him, while we, humans, will gain an indescribable glory for having victorious over him who was once a “mighty” archangel.

Who and what is Lucifer, this “mighty man” which “boasts of mischief done against the godly?” He is a brilliant intelligence, the most enlightened of all, but an intelligence discontented with God and His order. The mystery of iniquity is nothing but the result of this discontent manifested in as many ways as possible. Lucifer, as far as lies in his power, wishes to leave nothing in the state in which God has ordained and placed it. Wherever he penetrates, you will always find the work of God disfigured. He caused the revolt of the angels in heaven; and his entire occupation since the creation of the world is to keep constantly renewed the supply of evil people who “boast of mischief done against the godly and plotting destruction all the day.”

It is the intention of this warped but still superhuman spirit to plot our destruction all the day to rob us of our humanity so as to make it impossible for us to know divinity. He is an angel like the others, but malignant, and whose mighty nature is wholly given over to the pursuit of evil, all the daylong plotting the destruction of the human race. Of him it can be rightly said: →

Icon # 526 = The Tongue 3

"Your tongue is like a sharp razor, you worker of treachery. You love evil more than good, and lying more than speaking the truth. You love all words that devour, O deceitful tongue."

In Scripture the word tongue can have several meanings. It can mean the material tongue, or organ of speech. For instance, the letter of St. James says: "So the tongue is a little member and boasts of great things." In this context, he likens the function of the tongue to that of the rudder of a ship. A rudder is a very small part of the ship just as a tongue is a very small part of the body, and yet the ship which is so enormous is guided by the rudder wherever the pilot wills.

So also, the tongue even though it is small can utter words which could make our hairs stand or protrude our eyes! He also likens the tongue to a small fire that sets ablaze a huge forest. The tongue is a fire when it is use for gossiping, calumny, detraction, and lying because it ruins the reputation of a person and destroys his/her good name.

Of course, the human person is bigger than a huge forest because it is made in the image and likeness of God, it is designed to have capacity for God. And since God is bigger than the whole universe and the human person has capacity for God, therefore, the human person is far bigger than a huge forest because a forest, no matter how large it is, is still part of the universe.

Hence, the tongue as an organ of speech has to be use properly. The tongue can also mean the language that is spoken in any country. For example, in Deuteronomy 28:49, it says: "The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you do not understand...."

The tongue can also mean for a good and bad discourse. For instance, in Proverbs 12:18, it says: "There is one whose rush words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." Thus the tongue which is like a sharp razor is tantamount to rush words, to hateful words, to abrasive, cutting, hurtful, and caustic words, and the like. These words are like sharp razor because it penetrates the heart.

If an idle word, uttered mindlessly, has to give an account on the Day of Judgment, how much the words mentioned above! But the tongue can also be used to bring consolation to a wearied heart. This is the tongue of the wise, as it is written in the prophet Isaiah: "The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary."

The book of Proverbs tells us too that “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.” Hence, if the tongue is use for lying, backbiting, slander, detraction, calumny, and gossiping, or cutting and hurting people, then, we have to suffer its consequences.

We can only hope and pray, and try our best as we can, that we will not end in that terrible place where we have to cry out: “Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame.”

The book of Revelation tells us, too, that the people who worship the beast, that is, in league with the devil, are said to gnaw their tongues in pain and anguish. To gnaw one’s tongue is a token of fury, despair, and torment. No one in their right mind would want to spend their eternity in the place where one’s tongue is gnawing in pain and anguish, day and night for all eternity! Not just for 100 trillion years!

On the other hand, if the tongue is use in a right way, for example, praising God and thanking Him for whatever happens to us either good or bad; saying thank you, too, to other people, appreciate their goodness; and above all, in using the tongue to speak and defend the truth, then, it is highly possible, of course, with God’s grace, that we will join with those who had conquered the beast and sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, that is, Our Lord Jesus, saying: “Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, O king of the ages! Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord? For thou alone art holy. All nations shall come and worship thee, for thy judgments have been revealed.”

If we are truly wise, then, we would rather prefer that our tongue will sing and praise God for all eternity than to have it in anguish and gnawing in pain forever and ever.

It would really be mind boggling if, knowing all this; people would still deliberately choose to gnaw their tongue without end than to sing the praise of God. This is a mystery which is too hard for our mind to understand until we ourselves experience conversion of heart and renewal of our mind.

It is not far-fetched to say that the mind and the heart are highly responsible for all our words and actions, “for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks,” and by one’s words a person will be justified, and by one’s word a person will be condemned. And also “what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man,” says the Lord.

Our good friend, St. Paul, corroborated what the Lord Jesus says by underscoring the consequences of their passions; therefore, he says, "God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to dishonouring of their bodies among themselves....And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them."

It sounds like a litany of evil, and more than enough to spin our imagination! No wonder that the Psalmist pronounces: →

Icon # 527 = Uprooted From the Land of the Living: The Test of Love

"But God will break you down for ever; he will snatch and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living."

It is right to say, first and foremost, that it can be applied to Lucifer and to his colleagues, that is, the other devils, and to all human beings who sided with them.

Lucifer and the other devils had been in the land of the living, that is, with the other angels. All of them participate in the life of God which we call grace. Grace communicates to us a participation in the intimate life of God, the very vitality of God.

Sanctifying grace is in truth the seed of everlasting life and eternal glory; and when it is widely expanded and developed, it enables us to see immediately God as He sees Himself, and to love Him as He loves himself. Thus it becomes in us a germination of eternal life. If the germination of grain gives thirty or sixty or even a hundred per cent, much the more will be in the supernatural order the germination of eternal life.

However, grace will never and will not violate our free will. As spiritual beings, both we, human beings, and the angels are endowed by God, our Creator, with a freedom either to serve and love Him, or to disobey Him and despise Him.

Like the angels who were under probation before they were sorted out, we, human beings, are also under probation. Our span of life on earth can be rightly considered as our period of probation. The nature of the "test" of both the

angels and us is somewhat similar, because it has to do with “loving” God, with its components of obedience, humility, and service.

In the case of the angels, it did not take them many years to merit their due. Their intelligence is incredibly sharp and their will is indomitably solid. Once they make a decision, it is irreversible.

Our case is a bit different, because we change from time to time. We wobble so much from good to evil, or from evil to good before we receive our eternal due. We are like some politicians who change allegiance to whatever they think might be of their advantage. In either case, it involves “freedom.”

Lucifer, of course, used his freedom in a wrong way. He wanted to be like the Most High God, and doesn't want to serve God. In his incredible pride he insolently avowed that he doesn't want to do anything with God who created him. For this reason, he bears the brunt of the consequences of his decision. He was broken down forever. God snatched and tore him from his tent, that is, from his station with the good angels; and was uprooted from the land of the living, that is, from the kingdom of heaven. There's no more place for him and the other devils in heaven.

Let us look at the case of our first parents, Adam and Eve. They too were in the land of the living, participating in the intimate life of God. They too were endowed with a free will. They have freedom to serve and love God, or to disobey Him. They were told that they must prove their love of God by an act of free choice.

This implied an alternative. The alternative was a choice between a fruit and a garden, the part and the whole. God said that they could eat of all the fruits in the garden of Paradise, except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Was there anything unreasonable about this command? Is not life filled with abundant instances of receiving rewards on the condition of love?

Our first parents were enjoying the happiness of the garden of Eden, but very soon Lucifer, the father of lies, the deceiver of the world, appeared and, pointing to the forbidden fruit, which was delightful to behold, whispered the first doubt. It began with a why? “Why has God commanded you that you should not eat of every tree of paradise?”

The evil behind the question was: God cannot be good if He does not let you do whatever you please. Freedom to Satan is the absence of law and restraint. Satan, the father of lies, was saying: “God is a Fascist,” “a kill joy.”

The second stage is ridicule. When Eve answered that it was God's command that they should not eat the forbidden fruit, because if they did, they would die, Satan ridiculed the idea: "You will not die." God has lied to you! It is stupid to believe such silly superstition! Then, finally, comes the third phase, the false promise.

Eve dwelt jealously on the one thing forbidden, rather than the many things permitted, until quite unconsciously she was ready to be convinced that the devil's promise was true: "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Thus the good she knows begins to become boring, the evil she does not know starts to allure.

More and more she turns away from conscience to the imagined sweetness of the proscribed fruit. There would be a nagging consequence of her decision. Swiftly the crisis is looming upon her, as all crises are. She eats the forbidden fruit, shares it with Adam; and then the floodgates are open: the tiny ripple of an illicit thought, ever deepening, selling, broadening, burst into an irresistible floodwater which engulfed the whole world.

By eating the proscribed fruit, Adam and Eve failed the "test of love." Eating the forbidden fruit was a gesture of contempt, the symbol of rebellion. God was imposing a single limit to the sovereignty of man, reminding him that if he did the one thing forbidden, he would imperil all the other things provided. Like Pandora, he opened the forbidden box and lost his treasures.

Adam and Eve were broken down, but unlike Lucifer and the other fallen angels, we don't have a revelation that in the case of Adam and Eve it will be forever. What we do know is that they were snatched and tore from their tent, that is, from the garden of Eden, and was uprooted from the land of the living, that is, from Paradise. It is our hope though that the merits of their descendants, the new Adam and Eve, no other than the Lord Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary, made up what is wanting in them.

The Fall of our first parents disorganized man's normal human faculties, making man just as he is now, with a propensity toward evil, with a will reluctant to do good, with a leaning to rationalize evil. But man is still a man able to recover part of his former innocence and his former gifts through the merits of the new Adam, "for as by the disobedience of one man, many were made sinners; so also by the obedience of one man, many shall be made righteous."

Notice also the infinite wisdom of God in using three agents in the re-creation of man allowing man to live again in the land of the living: 1st, For the disobedient Adam, there is the new obedient Adam, that is, Christ; 2nd, For the proud Eve,

there is the humble Virgin Mary; and 3rd, For the tree of Eden, there's the new tree of the cross on Calvary.

By coming into a world of sin, Christ the Lord, the sinless One, brought the whole weight of its sin upon His Person. He had achieved our re-creation, our restoration to Paradise, in His own person. He did not need this re-creation for Himself, but in His Divine Love for us He took upon Himself the burden of our human nature, that He might become the life-giving Form of redeemed humanity, or the Pattern of the human race to whom – “as many as are willing to receive Him” – He would give the power to become the children of God; and to eat again not only the fruit of Paradise but also the bread of angels, the Body of the Lord Jesus.

How about our case? We too are called to freedom, freedom of the children of God and fellow heirs with Christ, only not to use our freedom as a pretext for evil but work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. If any of us think that s/he is already secure in his/her tent, that is, in his/her relationship with God and the Church s/he has to take heed lest s/he fall and be snatched and tore from this relationship by secretly moonlighting for evil things because not everyone who says, “Lord, Lord shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On the day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.’”

The reason why we really have to take heed lest we fall is that we don't have absolute certainty whether we will be admitted to the kingdom of heaven and persevere in good works to the end. In this dangerous pilgrimage of life God has ordained that no one shall know for certain whether one is worthy to live in the land of the living forever and ever, because if one uses his/her reason correctly, this uncertainty will incite him/her to seek with all his/her strength, mind, heart, and will the friendship of the king of this land.

The Council of Trent has declared that we cannot have on earth certitude of our predestination without special revelation. Aside from this special revelation no man can know if he will persevere in good works to the end. Nevertheless there are signs of predestination which give a kind of moral certitude that one will persevere.

Following the directions of Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, especially St. Gregory the Great, St. John Chrysostom, St. Anselm, and St. Bernard, and other theologians enumerate eight signs of predestination. 1st, a good life; 2nd, the testimony of good conscience; 3rd, patience in adversities for love of God; 4th,

relish for the light and the word of God; 5th, mercy toward those who suffer; 6th, love of enemies; 7th, humility; and 8th, special devotion to t Blessed Virgin Mary.

Who among us can say with perfect confidence that these eight signs of predestination are in him/her? If one is missing, so there could be a danger that one's salvation is in a precarious situation. Even if all signs are present, still, it can only be in a certain degree and is subject to fluctuation, because so long as we are still in this present life our "state" is not permanent.

Like our first parents, Adam and Eve, who certainly were in good standing with God in the beginning, but was uprooted from this condition because they yielded to the temptation of the devil, we, too, even though we may have all those signs of predestination in a certain degree are still subject to be uprooted from this condition if we will relax our effort in nourishing ourselves with prayer and the sacraments – being aware that the devil is roaming around and is bent to destroy us at all cost.

It is not without good reason, then, that we are advised by our good friend, St. Paul, to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

Like our first parent, Adam and Eve, we too are given commandments, as a sort of a test in our probationary period on earth, which were boiled down by the Lord Jesus into two, namely: to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Love does no wrong to a neighbor, therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.

In giving us commandments, God doesn't mean that He restricts our freedom but to use our freedom in a right way which befits His children. He wanted us to get the maximum happiness out of life on earth and to have a foretaste of the eternal happiness of heaven.

In giving us commandments, God has nothing against us as though He is a tyrant or "kill joy." Take for instance this simple example. When we buy an automobile, the manufacturer gives us a "manual of instructions": the kind of oil we ought to use, the pressure to which we ought to inflate the tires, the proper fuel to put in the gas tank, etc. The manufacturer, certainly, has nothing against us by giving us these instructions, as God has nothing, absolutely nothing, against us in giving us commandments.

Commandments are simply "a guide" to enable us to suck to the ultimate happiness of heaven even while still on earth, a sort of a "foretaste" which will be perfected when we see Him face to face in His infinite glory and majesty.

Of course, we are free. We can do as we please like Adam and Eve, but we have to bear the brunt of the consequences of our actions if we use our freedom in a wrong way. Instead of putting gasoline in the fuel tank we will use our freedom in putting an "ointment" of pure nard. Of course, it will perfume the entire car, but, certainly, it will not run. There's even a grave danger that it will ruin the car.

God's commandments and other Biblical moral mandates are not designed to limit our human freedom, but to help us behave in ways that will lead us to our full freedom and happiness.

"The Lord is concealed in His commandments," says our other heavenly friend, St. Mark the Ascetic, "and those who seek Him find Him in proportion to fulfilling them." In other words, the surest sign that we love God is to keep His commandments as the Lord Jesus Himself said: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." He also says: "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

Of course, the devil, the father of lies, the murderer from the beginning, and the deceiver of the human race, will insinuate in the garden of our heart an opposing view, saying: "Did God really forbid adultery?" "Did he really forbid same sex marriage?" "Did He really forbid euthanasia?" "Did He really forbid the killing of the deformed or unwanted unborn children?" "Did He really forbid lying?" "God knows that if man does these things man will be sovereign over his/her body and over his/her life. Hence, it threatens His authority. God is very insecure, that is why He curtails your freedom to choose what is good for you. He is also merciless by prolonging the life of the elderly and the handicap who are suffering terribly. Besides, He ignores the fact that it is too expensive to maintain the healthcare of these people. God, too, is discriminating those people who have same sex attraction. Therefore, God is an unjust God."

See the logic of the devil's argument! It spins the imagination even of the angels! But man, like our first parents, Adam and Eve, who wanted to be like God and be regnant over all creation and over his/her body and even over life and death, listened to the voice of the Tempter – ate the forbidden fruit. In an incredible choice man cast out God from his heart. The fallen man wanted to have nothing to do with God. He became so allergic of all that pertains to God. But God will always be merciful to man. God's kindness is meant to lead man to repentance, so that man will not be broken down for ever and be snatched and tore and uprooted from the kingdom of God, for that would be the greatest failure of man, that is, to lose the infinite Good to which man is destined to inherit.

Once again, the Lord Jesus who is the Son of God and also the Son of man, the Mediator between God and man, cried out in the depths of His heart: "Father, let the cup of your justice pass away from man, if it is your will, 'forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.' It is for them that I was born and took on human nature that they may participate in My divine nature, and together with them we will give you perfect praise and honor and glory, for this is your due."

The Lord Jesus repeats this prayer not just three times nor seventy times seven times, but all the days of the life of every single man and woman until their last breath. Only then if man and woman still choose freely and deliberately death rather than life, evil rather than good, falsehood rather than truth, Lucifer rather than Christ, that the Lord Jesus will sigh for the last time: "Father, if the cup of your justice will not pass unless men and women has to drink it to the dregs, then not My will but your will be done."

"I have done all I can. I completely emptied Myself. I did not count equality with you although You and I are equal in divinity and glory. I took a form of a slave spending My entire life on earth in the service of men healing all kinds of infirmities, giving sight to the blind, restoring speech to the dumb and hearing to the deaf, feeding the hungry, cleansing lepers, curing paralytics, pardoning sinners, and raising the dead. I gave My life for them in the cross as the ultimate evidence of My love for them. Even if their sins are as red as scarlet, I would be glad to make them white as wool. As far as the East is from the West, so will I remove their sins. Even if they blaspheme Me I will still forgive their sins, if only there is still a flicker of repentance in their heart and will not refuse Me of their love."

To be broken down for ever, to be snatched and tore apart from one's tent, and to be uprooted from the land of the living, demand both justice and love. Failure to see the breaking down, the snatching and tearing, and the uprooting from the land of the living forever and ever as involving love makes us ask the question, "How can a God of love would break down, snatch and tear, and uproot a human soul, whom He loves so much, from the land of the living and to lose the infinite Good not just for 5 trillion years or 20 trillion years but for all eternity?" This is tantamount to asking why a God of love should also be a God of justice. It forgets that the sun which warms so gently may also wither, and the rain which nourishes so tenderly trees, plants, and vegetables may also rot them.

Failure to reconcile the love of God with the breaking down, snatching and tearing, and uprooting from the land of the living forever and ever is to flunk in the meaning of love, for love demands mutuality; love seeks a lover, and when love finds reciprocity there is a union and compenetration and a fusion to

sublime and ecstatic degree. And when it is a question of the love of God and the love of the human soul that is the beatitude and happiness of heaven.

But assuming that love does not find mutuality; or suppose that love does find it only to be betrayed, spurned, and rejected, can love still forgive? Of course, love can forgive injuries and betrayals, and insults, and divine love can forgive not only seven times but seventy times seven times. However, there is only one thing in the world which human love cannot forgive, and there is only one thing in eternity which divine love cannot forgive, and that is the refusal to love.

Therefore, when the human soul by a final and definitive choice freely refuses to return human love for divine love, then divine love, with a sweat of blood, abandons it to its own selfishness, to its own loneliness, and to its own hopelessness. And what punishment in all the world is comparable to being broken down, to be snatched and tore apart, uprooted from the land of the living, to being abandoned forever, not by the lovely but by the love which is God?

The pain and anguish of the soul that has sinned against love is more penetrating and more intense than any other agony and suffering imaginable, for "the love of God will be an intolerable torment for those who have not acquired it within themselves."

Love acts in a double way, like a double-edged sword, as sorrow and misery in those broken down, snatched and tore, and uprooted from the land of the living, and as joy and eternal felicity to those who are allowed again to live in the land of the living.

Love forgives everything, endures everything, bears all things, except one thing, and that is the refusal to love. It is the nature of the human heart to pursue the beloved and pleads for its affection with all the purity and lofty ardor of its being. It showers the beloved with gifts, tokens of sacrifice, and all the while remains most worthy of a reciprocal affection.

But if, after a long and weary pursuit, it has not only been spurned and rejected and betrayed, this human heart turns away and bursting with a pent-up emotion in obedience to the law of love, cries out in a loud voice: "Love has done all that it can. Love can forgive anything, can bear all things, and can endure everything except the refusal to love."

Something of this kind takes place in the spiritual order. God is the great lover in pursuit of His spouse, His lover, which is the human soul. He inundates it with a plethora of gifts, admits it into His royal family in the Sacrament of Baptism, into His royal army in the Sacrament of Confirmation, and invites it to His royal banquet in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist – the Bread of eternal life, and

countless times during human life on earth whispers to it health and sickness, in sorrow and joy, to respond to His plaintive pleadings: abandon a life of sin, and return love for love.

If, however, the human heart, after rejecting this love many times only to be re-loved again, after ignoring the knock of the Bridegroom at the door of his soul only to hear the knock again, finally, at the moment of death completely and deliberately spurns and rejects this divine goodness, then, Christ the Lord, the God of love who lays down his life for the human soul whom He loves so much, in obedience to the law of love, cries out in a loud voice: "Love has done all that it can. Love can forgive everything, love can bear all things, love can endure anything except the refusal to love." And it is the most terrible thing to be through with love, because once divine love departs at death, it never returns again.

Therefore, the failure in the "test of love" is the greatest fiasco of all, for the soul will be broken down for ever, be snatched and tore apart, and be uprooted from the land of the living without the slightest hope of reuniting with God again. The separation from the sanctifying power of Divine love is complete and definitive. On earth no fiasco is complete, because it is always retrievable, if not in itself, at least in some other way. But to be uprooted from the land of the living forever is a ruin of the whole of one's being, a botch without any hope of retrieving what is lost.

The impulse to re-start after failure is almost instinctive during life on earth. But there will be no commencing again of life after this final disaster. All is over; the soul is forced to face utter ruin, beyond repair. All that is left is blank despair. Mans has come to his final state in which with all his mental power and the whole energy of his will he either possesses God or, losing Him, is aware of the definitive and everlasting fiasco of his existence.

Every fiber of his being tends toward God by inward necessity; God draws him as a magnet draws iron, and his innermost self thrills with longing for God, who is infinite goodness, beauty, and truth, yet s/he is intimately conscious that his/her nature is so broken, disfigured, warped, and deformed that it can never be united to God. Between him/herself and God there is gulf fixed which no bridge will ever span. Nor God is a distant object, which s/he might manage to forget.

God is infinitely present to him/her, but this presence is a torment, not a joy, for love and holiness is both an object of horror and of desire to those eternally uprooted from the land of living, those who died in a state of mortal sin. Every instant of his/her never ending life s/he wants God and s/he knows that s/he desires Him, yet every instant s/he feels an irresistible recoil, a disgust, a loathing, and a hatred, which turns him/her from that which s/he wants.

To speak in a parable, s/he is like a shipwrecked mariner in a little craft on the open ocean. S/he raves with maddening thirst, though surrounded by water. S/he lifts the sea water to his/her lips and then vomits it out, for it is salt. The salt is sin, the failure in the test of love. His/her sin has turned even the sweet waters of God's goodness and love into brackish; it is a venom which s/he always tastes and makes him/her hate even God as poison, though at the same time s/he is mad with thirst for Him.

If a man or a woman, an adult, who has had the choice between good and evil and with complete deliberation has chosen evil and died persisting in his/her choice, uprooted from the land of the living, there is no substitute for it as the aim of his/her life. She has lost his/her soul in the fullest sense of the word, being snatched and tore apart, broken down, and uprooted from the kingdom of heaven forever.

It is an asking never to receive, a seeking never to find, a knocking at a gate eternally closed, to hear for ever: "Amen, amen, I do not know you." And also to hear: "As for these men who do not want me to rule over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence."

By creating us, God sent us on a journey, a journey towards Himself, a journey which was meant to end in a homecoming in the land of the living. The homeland intended is a nestling in the very bosom of God, the absolute possession, the closest embrace by mind and will of God Himself. But for those uprooted from the land of the living the journey will never end, home and rest will never be; they are broken down forever, snatched and tore; they are lost forever. They are wanderers, idly, foolishly, hopelessly wandering hither and thither in the vast infinity of total darkness, never making headway toward the land of the living, toward God.

While on earth they have lived in luxury and in pleasure, have laid up treasures where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but have nothing to do with God. That is why: →

Icon # 528 = Wealth and Riches in Itself are Neutral

"The righteous shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him, saying: 'See the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and sought refuge in his wealth!'"

What befell to those who were uprooted from the land of the living, who had already received their reward in this present life by living in pleasure and luxury, and trusted in the abundance of their riches rather than in God, and sought

refuge in their wealth rather than in the Lord, is a warning to us who are still in this world, so that we will not fall in the same tragedy.

We are given a wholesome advice not to set our heart on riches even when they increase, because riches are a fertile soil for pride. All kinds of vices can easily grow in the land of riches: from vanity, covetousness, greediness, lust, power, prestige, domination, avarice, etc. Riches are like nutriment which nourish these vices. Riches and wealth can also make a person feel superior and self-sufficient, influential and controlling. It really takes a good dosage of virtues, especially the virtue of humility and detachment not to become a puppet of wealth and riches.

Wealth and riches are really dangerous if a person is not rooted in virtue, because wealth and riches attack even religious people and high ranking prelates, and are merciless to those who have nothing to do with God or the things of God. In this case, wealth and riches become an instrument of wickedness.

Of course,, wealth and riches in itself are neutral, that is, they are neither good nor bad, but can become good or bad, harmful or benign depending on the will of the person who has them. Let us listen to the words of our heavenly friend, St. John Chrysostom, who gives us a good insight of the nature of riches. He says: "It is not the world that is harmful but the cares of this world; it is not riches that is harmful but the love for riches. The blame is not on the created things but on the corrupted will. It is possible to be rich and not be deceived by riches, to be in this world and not to be oppressed by its cares."

Of course, the possibility "to be rich and not be deceived by riches," requires a virtuous life because, if not, riches can certainly deceive a person, for riches encourage a false independence. Take for example; if a person is well-supplied with this world's resources, s/he is very apt to think that s/he can deal well with any circumstance which may arise.

S/he can come to think that s/he can purchase her/his way into happiness and buy her/his way out of sorrow and suffering. Thus s/he comes to cogitate that s/he can do well without God, that s/he is quite competent to handle life by her/himself. However, there comes a time when s/he discovers that it is an illusion, that there are things such as goodness, honesty, integrity, and truth which riches cannot procure, and things which riches cannot save him/her.

Wealth and riches shackle a person to this earth, as the Lord said: "Where your treasure is there will your heart be also." If everything a person desires is embodied within this present life, if all her/his attractions are here, s/he never thinks of the hereafter and the life to come. It is highly possible for a person to be

so engrossed in the things of this world that s/he becomes amnesiac of the things of heaven, to be so attached to the things that are seen that s/he becomes oblivious of the things that are unseen. Herein lies the tragedy, because the things which are seen are transient, but the things which are unseen are eternal.

Wealth and riches, too, tend to make a person selfish, for no matter how much a person has, there is still this compelling tendency to desire more, because nothing is enough for a person of whom enough is too little.

However, Our Lord did not say that it is impossible for a wealthy person to enter the kingdom of heaven, because Zaccheus who was one of the richest men in Jericho, was able to find the way in. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were both affluent, the man who provided the "upper room" for the Last Supper probably was rich too, yet we can affirm with moral certainty that ultimately they make God their refuge and not in their wealth; that they trusted God than in the abundance of their riches.

Our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux saw nothing wrong in the possession of riches provided they had been acquired honestly and were used for the benefit of others. For him it is irrelevant whether a person is rich or poor provided s/he saves her/his soul.

In the Scripture riches are understood in a tripartite way, that is, as bad, good, and indifferent. The bad, for instance, are those of which is said: "The rich have been needy and hungry." And, "Woe to you, rich, for you have received your consolation." In this case, to have cast off these kinds of riches is the highest perfection.

The good are those which is a matter of great virtue and nobility to have acquired and which the righteous person is praised for possessing, as the Scripture says: "The generation of the upright are blessed, riches and wealth are in his house, his righteousness stands firm forever." And again, "the redemption of a person's soul is his riches."

The indifferent are those which can be either good or bad, since they can swing either direction according to the volition and the character of those who use them, as our good friend, St. Paul says with regard to these: "Charge the rich of this world not to be haughty or to hope in uncertain riches but in God, who gives us everything abundantly to enjoy; to do good, to give freely, to share, to store up for themselves a good foundation in the future, so that they may seize the true life."

The consensus of the Fathers of the Church is that wealth of itself is not a bad thing so long as it is properly used, just as poverty, pure and simple, is not virtuous itself. Our heavenly friend, St. Ambrose says: "For not all poverty is holy, nor are all riches criminal." "The crime is not in possessing worldly goods but in not knowing how to use them."

Our other heavenly friend, St. Clement of Alexandria tells the Christians of Alexandria that it would be irresponsible of them to think of throwing away their possessions when so much good can be accomplished with them: "What kind of sharing," he says, "would there be among people if no one had anything? How would one be able to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked and shelter the homeless if one were himself divested of all these things."

St. Clement shows that the narrative of the rich young man in Mk. 10:17-31 is to be understood in a spiritual sense. The Lord Jesus did not intend the young man to abandon his property but rather "to drive from the soul the vain thoughts about wealth, the excitement and distress related to it, the worries that are the thorns of existence and that suffocated the seed of life."

The case of the rich young man, so to speak, is a lesson in self-sacrifice which Our Lord gave in order to atone, repair, and make up for the excess of avarice and selfishness. The Lord had a chance to win the rich young man as a follower; but when He spoke of the cross, He lost him. The rich young man wanted the prize, but the cost was too great. The desire to be associated with the Lord was manifested by the evidence that he came running to Him and fell at His feet. As regards the uprightness of the rich young man there could be no doubt; his question to Our Lord was: "Master, who art good, what good must I do to win eternal life?"

The cross would demand that men and women who are capable of making a decision would give up what they cherished most and be content with the riches in God's hands. One may rightly ask, why did the Lord ask for such a sacrifice? The Lord allowed Zacchaeus the tax collector to retain half of his riches; Joseph of Arimathea, after the crucifixion, was described as wealthy; Our Lord ate in the house of his wealthy friends. But here was a question of a rich young man who asked what was still wanting in the way of perfection. When the Lord proposed to him the ordinary way of salvation, namely, keeping the commandments, he was dissatisfied. He sought for something more perfect; but when the perfect was presented to him, namely renunciation: "The young man went away sad at heart, for he had great possessions."

From this episode, it is right to say that there are degrees in the love of God; one common and the other heroic. The common was the keeping of the commandments; the heroic was the renouncement, the taking – up of the cross

of voluntary poverty. The earnestness of the rich young man had vanished; he kept his possession and he lost the one who would give him the cross.

The laughable thing is that though the rich young man kept his possessions, yet he is described as going away "sorrowful." No wonder, then, that "the righteous shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him, saying, 'see the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and sought refuge in his wealth!'"

On the other hand, every man and woman who make God their refuge rather than riches; and who trusted in the steadfast love of God more than wealth, can humbly say: →

Icon # 529 = The Soul is like a green olive tree

"But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the steadfast love of God for ever and ever."

When our first parents, Adam and Eve, had eaten the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they were uprooted from the garden of Eden, that is, from paradise – the land of the living. But now the redeemed humanity who had the grace of repentance and who were allowed again to live a new life and to eat the fruit of eternal life in the land of the living are like a green olive tree in the house God, that is, morally the soul, allegorically the Church and mystically the kingdom of heaven.

Of old, olive tree was often used as a figure for Israel, but when Christ Our Lord came it can be rightly said that olive tree can be use as a figure of the Church or the human soul. We are a green olive tree in the house of God if we persevere till the end of our life on earth to trust in the steadfast love of God and to do what is right, true, and just.

The steadfast love of God is worthy to be trusted, because it seeks only what is for our good. God sees us as we shall be, but loves us as we are. When we experience love we are encountering the reality of God, since God alone is the source of all love, both human and divine, for love has its own way of knowing and understanding.

God loves us so much, and has much care for us, as if He had none others to think of but we. "To the degree that the saints enter into the things of the spirit," says our heavenly friend St. Dorotheos of Gaza, "they desire to come near to God; and in proportion to their progress in the things of the spirit, they do in fact come close to God and to their neighbor. The closer they are to God, the closer

they become to one another; and the closer they are to one another, the closer they become to God. Now consider in the same context the question of separation; for when they stand away from God and turn to external things, it is clear that the more they recede and become distant from God, the more they become distant from one another. See! This is the very nature of love. The more we are turned away from and do not love God, the greater the distance that separate us from our neighbor. If we were to love God more, we should be closer to God, and through love of him we should be more united in love to our neighbor; and the more we are united to our neighbor, the more we are united to God."

Christ's constant love for us is willed by Him to transform all of us. He gave Himself in complete submission; He gave everything, right up to the last drop of blood and water that remained in His battered body. No one can snatch us of this love once we give our liberty and love to Him. He who loved us to the end cannot be content unless we love Him as much as He loved us.

Love it is that opens up new horizons in our lives, making us see that to be like an olive tree in the house of God consists neither in doing more or doing less, nor in setting progressively harder and more arduous things, but is a matter of trusting in the steadfast love of God for ever and ever; it consists in the loving service of God which we account first of all things in our thoughts, in our words, and in our deeds, in the progressively increasing charity which we put into them.

"We do not love because we believe," says our heavenly friend cardinal John Henry Newman, "for the devil believe yet do not love; nor do we love because we hope, for hypocrites hope, who do not love. But we love for no cause beyond itself: we love because it is our nature to love; and it is our nature because God the Holy Ghost has made it our nature. Love is the material, so to speak out of which all graces are made, the quality of mind which is the fruit of regeneration, and in which the spirit dwells; according to St. John's words, 'Everyone that loves is born of God;... he that dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him.'"

God does not love us for the same reason that we love others. We love others because of need. Our need of love is born of our poverty. We find in someone else the supply of our lack. But God does not love because He needs us. He loves us because He put some of His steadfast love in us. God does not love us because we are valuable; we are valuable because God loves us.

God is love, and everyone who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in that person. Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Everyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen, but if we love one

another God abides in us and His love is perfected in us. Only in God is love at home. Therefore, its pristine place of birth is God. There it is born, there nourished, there brought up ready for marriage and union with God forever.

In the words of our heavenly friend the blessed Bishop Fulton Sheen: "To believe in God is to throw ourselves in God's arms; to hope in God is to rest in His heart in patience amid trials and tribulations; to love God is to be with God through a participation of His divine nature through grace. If love did not have faith and trust, it would die; if love did not have hope, its suffering would be a torture, and love might seem loveless."

As the supreme lover of our soul, God's steadfast love for us does care how we act and think and speak. What father does not want to be proud of his children? If the father speaks with authority now and then to his children, it is not because he is a dictator or a kill joy, but because he wants them to be a worthy children. Not even the radical and progressive parents, who deny discipline and restraint, are indifferent to the progress and welfare of their children. So long as there is love, there is necessarily a desire for the perfecting of the beloved, that the beloved will be "like a green olive tree in the house of God," and "trust in the steadfast love of God for ever and ever."

The graciousness and steadfast love of God, which He always shows to our human race and which is never extinguished by hurt, such that it would lose concern for our salvation and withdraw from His original intention as if overcome by our wickedness, could not be expressed by a better comparison than the example of a man who is passionately in love with a woman and who is all the more vehemently inflamed with desire for her the more he feels that he is neglected and despised by her. It is for this reason that we can absolutely "trust in the steadfast love of God for ever and ever." Accordingly, in gratitude for all that God has done for us, we cannot help but cry out from the depths of our heart: →

Icon # 530 = God has done so Many Things For us

"I will thank thee for ever, because thou hast done it. I will proclaim thy name, for it is good, in the presence of the godly."

God has done so many things for us: first and foremost is His Incarnation in the person of Our Lord Jesus. He humbles Himself so much by taking our human nature. As though this gesture is too little for Him, He still descended to the very depth of humility by freely giving Himself to be crucified on the cross as an unequivocal sign for His love for us. For this reason we can humbly say: "I will thank thee for ever, because thou hast done it."

During His life on earth He lived a hidden life for 30 years to give an imitable example to those who are really serious in their search for God how important solitude and silence are in the pursuit of union with God. For this reason we can gratefully say: "I will thank thee for ever, because thou hast done it."

He also lived an amazingly intense active life for 3 years to such an extent that He could say: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head." By doing so He gave an example to future missionaries and all who worked in active ministry not to seek a cozy comfort in their life-style, but more of modesty and simplicity. For this reason we can shyly say: "I will thank thee for ever, because thou hast done it."

He promised paradise to a dying repentant thief to give hope to those on death rows that they, too, will be admitted to paradise if they truly repent for their crimes. On this basis we can appreciatively say: "I will thank thee for ever, because thou hast done it."

He also raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead, the only son of a widow in the city of Nain, and His good friend Lazarus, to trumpet to the whole world our own future resurrection; that every one who died yet believes in Him shall live, and whoever lives and believes in Him shall never die. With this end in view we have a solid ground to express our heartfelt gratitude: "I will thank thee for ever, because thou hast done it."

Not wishing that those who hanged around with Him for several days, listening to His teaching, will go home hungry lest they will collapse on the way, He performed a stupendous miracle by multiplying the bread and fish in the wilderness. For this reason it is imperative to cry out: "I will thank thee for ever, because thou hast done it."

To give a lesson of obedience to parents, not only to one's father but also to one's mother, He acquiesced to the request of His dearly beloved mother to do something to save from a grueling embarrassment a newly married young couples who run out of wine to serve their guests. For this purpose we cannot help but say: "I will thank thee for ever, because thou hast done it."

In order that every man and woman will know that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, hence, a house of God; and that cleanliness of soul is of paramount importance, He zealously cleansed the Temple that it may truly be called a house of prayer, worthy of God. For this pristine goal we meekly say: "I will thank thee for ever, because thou hast done it."

In order that our soul will be like His soul and our body will be like His body, He gave to us His own Body and Blood and soul, humanity and divinity, in the Most Holy Eucharist as a pledge of our imminent divinization. On this ground it is absolutely decisive to express our profound gratitude: "I will thank thee for ever, because thou hast done it."

What more shall we say? For time would fail us to tell of a woman who had suffered from a hemorrhage for twelve years and had to endure much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was not better but rather grew worse, but had heard about the Lord Jesus and came up behind Him in crowd touched His garment. For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I shall be made well." And immediately the hemorrhage ceased; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

Time would fail us to tell of a leper who came to Him and knelt before Him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." And the Lord stretched out His hand and touched him, saying: "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. Time would fail us to tell of a man possessed by a legion of unclean spirits who lived among the tombs; and no one could bind him any more even with a chain, for he had often been bound with fetters and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the fetters he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out, and bruising himself with stones. And when he saw the Lord Jesus from afar, he ran and worshipped him; and crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For the Lord had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" The legion of unclean spirits did come out of the man. And the people came to the Lord and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind.

Time would fail us to tell of the mother-in-law of Peter lying sick with a fever whom the Lord Jesus cured. What more shall we say of the man who was ill for 38 years; the man with a withered hand, the two blind men; the ten lepers; the daughter of the Syrophenician woman; the man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech; the son of an official in Capernaum who was at the point of death; and the slave of a Centurion who was sick and also at the point of death.

All these were healed by the Lord Jesus, therefore, it is just right and germane to proclaim throughout the whole world our entire gratitude, and say: "I will thank thee for ever, because thou hast done it. I will proclaim thy name, for it is good, in the presence of the godly."

We have a fairly countless wholesome reasons to proclaim the name of the Lord Jesus. First and foremost, because it is good. It is honey in the mouth, music to the ear, and song in the heart. Demons were subject to the disciples by the name of the Lord Jesus. Peter and John healed a man lame from birth by the power of that name. Repentance and forgiveness of sins are preached throughout the whole world in that name.

At that name every knee should bend, 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. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. The power of His name casts a spell upon us, and stirs our most tender feeling, increase our strength and activity.

The name of the Lord Jesus is the symbol of our glory, and all the redeemed bear it written on their foreheads like a crown of victory. In His name we can overcome all obstacles! In the name of the Lord Jesus we will pass through life with a loving heart. The feelings of the saints toward the Holy name of the Lord Jesus charm us like the fragrance and blossom of virgin forest. What prayer and longing, what devoted, glowing zeal, what flaming, passionate love, this name awakens in such souls!

There is no stronger weapon against the demons either in heaven or on earth than the name of the Lord Jesus. In the words of our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux: "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 at the hearing of Jesus' name. Because he is man I strive to imitate him; because of his divine power I lean upon him."

It is interesting to notice that the Psalmist qualifies the ambience of the proclamation of this name; he says: "In the presence of the godly." It is not hard to understand the rationale of this if we realize that the name of the Lord Jesus is repulsive to the ears of unbelievers, offensive to the taste of the agnostics, and aversive to the heart of the skeptics. Therefore, the proclamation of His name is not good in their presence. Take a sample of what the high priest said to the apostles: "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us."

On the other hand, the name of the Lord Jesus is really very pleasant in the presence of the godly. Taste these several samples: "I will cause your name to be celebrated in all generations; therefore the peoples will praise you for ever

and ever.” This is really very true. From the beginning of Christianity we celebrate, that is the Church, various kinds of commemorations in remembrance of the Lord Jesus. First and foremost is the Holy Eucharist, then we have Christmas, Holy Family, Corpus Christi, His passion and death and resurrection and ascension; we have also Christ the king.

These are all celebrated from generation to generation not just in one or two or three countries, but all over the world – even in countries where Christians are in dire minority. To prove that peoples praise the name of the Lord not only in this present world but for ever and ever in heaven, let us listen to the testimony of the illustrious witness of our heavenly friend, John: “And the twenty four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God who is seated on the throne, saying, ‘Amen. Hallelujah!’ And from the throne came a voice crying, ‘Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great.’” Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunder peals, crying, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory....’

Here’s another sample of how good and awesome the name of the Lord Jesus is: “O Lord, our God, how majestic is thy name in all the earth! Thou whose glory above the heaven is chanted by the mouth of babes and infants....” Again, this is really very true. The name of the Lord Jesus is very delightful even to little children, but hateful to those who are very allergic of Him.

Let us give ear to our heavenly friend the evangelist St. Matthew when he said: “But when the chief priests and the Scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ they were indignant; and they said to him, ‘Do you hear what these are saying?! And Jesus said to them, ‘Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of babies and sucklings thou has brought perfect praise’?”

What more can we say!?! Truly, heaven and earth are not big enough to contain the glory of the name of the Lord Jesus, for all authority in heaven and on earth and under the earth has been given to Him by His Father the eternal source of the godhead. Thus we have solid reasons to give Him thanks for ever and ever, and to proclaim His wondrous name.

It is also true to say that the asinine, on the other hand, will not be convinced by any argument in favor of God. The reason is simply this: →

Icon # 531 = Atheism is in the Will

Psalm 53 (52)

“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity; there is none that does good.”

It is not farfetched to assert that for those who believe in the existence of God, even though they could not articulate well their belief, no explanation is necessary; but for those who do not believe that there is God, no explanation is possible. This is part of the mystery of iniquity. Even if someone from the dead will tell these people, but still they will not believe. They would rather put ear plug in their ears than to be persuaded by the enticement of faith.

It is intriguing to observe that “the fool says in his heart, ‘there is no God,’” and not “the fool says in his mind, ‘there is no God.’” Can it be that those who deny the existence of God had primarily thrust Him out of their heart? Majority of the men and women who say, “there is no God,” do not do so because their reason tells them there is no God, for “Reason” itself is on God’s side; hence, how could reason witness against Reason?

The ground of their denial is rather because of “wishful thinking.” They feel they would be happier if there were no God, for then they could do as they pleased: using the members of their body as instruments of “doing abominable iniquity.” Disbelief is born of sin, not of reason.

Nine times out of ten, “atheism,” if we use a more technical word, is conceived from the womb of a bad conscience. As time goes on, the heart of those people becomes callous, and the tender sensitivity of their soul is dulled. Abominable iniquities multiply to such an extent where, having ceased to fight against corruptible deeds, they now commence to scuffle against God. Atheism, then is primarily in the will; it is an act of free and deliberate rejection of morality and its demands. It begins with the affirmation of false self and the denial of the moral law.

The lives of those who say in their heart: “there is no God” are a refusal of God in action. God’s pursuit of a mind is bound to fail unless the mind is also in pursuit of goodness. Take for instance the message of the angels on Christmas night. They told the shepherds and us, as well, that only people of good will would become God’s friends. This “good will” factor helps us see why it is in the heart that the fool says: “there is no God.”

Our heavenly friend, blessed Bishop Fulton Sheen has this to say: “Agnosticism, skepticism, atheism, and cultivated doubt do not represent an intellectual position, for wherever there is a shadow there must be light, and negation would

not exist if there were nothing to deny. These attitudes are rather a moral position, in which a person attempts to make himself invulnerable to divine truth by denying its existence and turning his back on it, as Pilate did."

He also said: "would a duck have the instinct to swim if there were no water? Would a baby cry for nourishment if there were no such thing as food? Would there be an eye unless there were beauties to see? Would there be ears unless there were harmonies to hear? And would there be in you a craving for unending life, perfect truth, and ecstatic love unless perfect Life and Truth and Love existed? In other words, you were made for God. Nothing short of the infinite satisfies you, and to ask you to be satisfied with less would be to destroy your nature."

Oh, if only those who say in their heart, "There is no God," say instead, "There is God," they would no longer be considered as fools, but truly wise, for they will learn wisdom which leads to God's kingdom and be counted as students of the One True Teacher, no other than Christ the Lord – the wisdom of God; for "the beginning of wisdom is the most sincere desire for instruction, and concern for instruction is love of her, and love of her is keeping of her laws, and giving heed to her laws is assurance of immortality, and immortality brings one near to God; so the desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom."

One of the disadvantages of those who say in their hearts, "There is no God" is that having no virtual knowledge of God, no confidence in His Providence, no assurance of His Love, such people lack the shock absorber of Faith and Hope and Love when onerous days assault them. Their minds are caught within the vise of a past they regret or resent and a future they are afraid they cannot restrain. Being thus compressed, their whole being is in agony.

On the other hand, all misfortunes can be transformed into good by those who have faith and put their trust in God. Seeing the trial as coming from Divine Providence, one never has to wonder how to meet it, nor question why it came, nor seek defense against it. Each distress is an occasion for faith, and opportunity for virtue. Having put oneself in the deeper dimension of Divine Love, one knows as a child in a loving family knows that even what is not understood is done kindly and for the best. Therefore: →

Icon # 532 = Those Who seek after God are truly Wise

"God looks down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there are any that are wise, that seek after God."

Really, it is true to say that to "seek after God" is already an indication of wisdom. Since wisdom resides in wise people, hence, people that seek after God are really wise. It is not difficult to see why this is so. First and foremost is that once they found God, God in turn will lead them to His kingdom. Since the kingdom of God is without end and all the inhabitants of His kingdom live forever and ever and are eternally happy without the slightest ebbing, thus it can incontrovertibly be affirmed that those who "seek after God" are truly wise.

For who in their right mind doesn't want to live forever and be happy forever? One without the other is certainly miserable. Can you imagine if you live forever and are not happy, and that too will be forever? Or that you are happy but not forever, so what happen once your happiness ends? That would be an intolerable torment.

God created us for perfect happiness, that is, happiness that will never end nor sag nor diminish, for if it ends or sags or diminish, then, it is no longer perfect happiness. Since perfect happiness is in God alone, so it follows that we are truly wise if we seek after Him and be united with Him forever without an atom of separation, and be happy with Him forever; and not only with Him but with the ever glorious Virgin Mary and with all the angels and saints.

When God created us, human beings, He puts into our hearts the desire for happiness. Since God is Happiness, wherefore, He placed into the heart of each human person the desire to seek after Him. Of course, the number One Enemy of humankind, who disguises himself as angel of light, swindled the human race by presenting an ephemeral happiness, so that human beings will no longer bother to seek the real happiness which will last forever.

The fleshy pleasures which Lucifer and the other wicked and foolish angels offer to the human race is so enticing, so much so, that people are willing to sell their souls to procure this happiness. It is true to say that if sins exclude pleasure, they would debilitate their persuasive attraction to allure anyone. But there is an obvious difference between the wise that seeks after God and the foolish who thrust God out of their hearts.

The foolish always gets the fleeting pleasure first, and the aftermath of pain, emptiness, bitterness, and disgust follows. On the other hand, the wise who seeks after God endures the pain first, which, of course, is of a rather transitory nature, but the aftermath is joy, peace, and true happiness. The foolish who cast God

out of their hearts celebrate the bacchanalia first, followed by the irksome hang-over of distress; the truly wise who seeks after God reverses this pattern by celebrating the mortification first then the festive feast.

Consequently, it is an illusion to imagine that those who say in their hearts: "There is no God," and are doing abominable deeds suffer no malaise worse than a morning after headache, as the well-known atheist, Frederick Nietzsche wrote to his sister, "Remember, my dear sister, that unbelief, too, has its tragedies."

Accordingly, much of the melancholy, frustration, and boredom of the modern world is the psychological consequences of not seeking after God, because if we do not seek after God we will end up in seeking ourselves, that is, self-seeking. We have to affirm that any particular vice indulged on earth is only a manifestation of the preference of self before God.

All sin is self-seeking as opposed to God-seeking. Seeing that God-seeking leads to God's kingdom where life is eternal, wherefore, those who seek after God can be rightly dubbed as wise people. Their life shows nothing on the outside but what is common and very ordinary: they fulfill the duties of religion and of their state in life; others, as far as appearances go, do the same as they. We will not find anything striking or special when we examine the rest of their lives, for they are made up of the ordinary course of events.

It was enough for those who seek after God to see that each moment brought with it a duty to be faithfully fulfilled. On that duty the whole of their attention was fixed at each successive moment, like the hand of a clock which marks each moment of the hour. Under God's unceasing guidance their spirit turned without conscious effort to each new duty as it was presented to them by God each hour of the day.

We have also to insist strongly that when the psalmist says: "God looks down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there are any that are wise, that seek after God," it does not mean as though God is in the sky above looking at His window watching upon the human race to see if there are also people who literally gaze at the sky waiting for Him to appear.

Our heavenly friend, St. Elizabeth of the Blessed Trinity, said that heaven is where God is. Since God is in our heart, therefore, we have already a foretaste of heaven on earth. It is very likely that St. Elizabeth of the Blessed Trinity based this truth from what the Lord Jesus said: "The kingdom of God is within you." We are also told by Scripture that our body is the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in us. For this reason, it is right to declare that God looks at the heart of every human person to see if there are any who are truly wise that seek after Him.

Of course, God is fittingly worth seeking chiefly because He is infinite Good, and to find infinite Good is tantamount to find infinite happiness, that is, to find what we are made for. Our hunger and thirst for the infinite is never quieted until it is satisfied by God. Even those disillusioned by excess of pleasures have always kept in their imagination a hope of somewhere finding an authentic source of satisfaction than any they have tried.

As we get to know the Lord Jesus better, we find that we can get along without innocent pleasure, but we cannot get along without the pleasure of daily communion with Him, and so we exchange the one for the other. We discover that we can move off very well without the pleasures of the flesh, but we cannot go away without the pleasures of the Holy Spirit, and we barter the one for the other, thus we are likely to be truly wise.

Seeing that God is the supreme Good, therefore, love of Him must take precedence of the love we owe ourselves. We can be certain that in exerting all our energy and strength in loving Him for Himself, in that pure love we shall recognize clearly and more copiously all that we seem to have immolated to Him. God will never forsake those who seek after him, those who entrust themselves altogether to Him, for nothing happens in this world that is not authorized by a Providence which turns all things to the advantage and exceeding benefit of those who search for Him.

Theologians may teach us how to seek after God, and angels how to adore Him, but Christ alone – the one True Teacher, teaches us how to find Him. We are groping in darkness in our search for God, but Christ the Lord came into our world to be our Way. “No one can come to the Father, but by me,” He said. He also refers Himself as “The Way.” Hence, it is imperative to cultivate a relationship with Our Lord Jesus in seeking after God, because to find the Lord Jesus is to find God for the very reason that the Lord Jesus is God, that is, He and the Father are one.

Christ shows us God in concrete – not theoretical, but the God who carries out, who intervenes in our lives, and wants to take us by the hand. He shows us through everyday things who we are and what we must therefore do. God came down to earth and was made flesh to establish the point of union between heaven and earth, to unite the human race with God, uniting us all through the Lord Jesus, who welded divine and human nature together.

God left the angels in heaven to seek after the human race, so that human beings may also seek after God. Thus we need to see the Lord Jesus and get to know Him as a man like us in all things except sin, a man who had feelings, who was happy and sad, who suffered and loved. Thus we need to seek our own

divinity in Him who humbles Himself to share our humanity. In so doing we paradoxically become more human, more sincere, and more wise.

On the other hand, those who do not seek after God, those who thrust God out from their heart, those who are corrupt and doing abominable iniquities will be likely: →

Icon # 533 = Sin is a movement away from God

“They have all fallen away; they are all like depraved; there is none that does good, no, not one.”

No doubt that the greatest distress that could ever befall a human person is to be separated from God forever. If we are only animal we don't have to worry about whether there is God or not, or we will be separated from Him for all eternity, or we are depraved and does not do good.

As human beings, we can bring the past to our mind, so that it weighs on the present whatever its memories; and we can also bring the future into the present, so as to imagine its occurrences as happening now. No animal ever known to say: “I have suffered this pain for twelve years now, and it might last until I die.” Animals are free from this anxiety. Animals cannot sin because they cannot rebel against their nature.

On the other hand, we human beings, can be sub-human; we can sink to the level of an animal. Take for example, when we go to zoo and see a monkey acting crazily – throwing banana peels at spectators, we will never say: “Hey monkey, do not be a nut,” but when we see someone behaving foolishly, we might say: “Don't be a monkey.” We said this because it is not natural for a human being to behave like a monkey or any animal; Whereas, it is very natural for a monkey or any animal to behave as an animal.

An unambiguous voice in our moral consciousness tells us that our acts or wrong-doing are abnormal facts in our human nature. They ought not to be. God made us in His own image and likeness – we have certain resemblance to Him. Hence, there is nothing wrong inside us. God made us one way; we made ourselves, in virtue of our freedom, another way.

The remarkable thing about us human beings is that, though we may desist to act like a human person, we never lose the imprint of our human dignity. We are stamped with a Divine image which will never be destroyed, but is merely defaced.

We would be fallen away from the Divine image when we deliberately sin, and be all alike depraved. It is sin which separates us from God, for sin is a movement away from God. It is sin which upsets the intended harmony of human nature. It is extrinsic to our personhood. There are many natural virtues, but no natural vices. When sin is reduced the capacity to seek and find Him is enhanced.

There are ways to reduce sin just as there are medicines to reduce cholesterol, or sugar in the body if one is diabetic, or high blood pressure, etc. Of course, one of the ways to reduce sin is to cultivate one's prayer life. We need a healthy prayer life to resist temptation just as we need medicine to fight a virus in our body. Without prayer we will easily fall away from the right path of life and depraved; in effect we are saying that we can take care of everything by ourselves and do not need guidance or help from God.

In the moment of temptation, in the midst of the struggle, if there is not prayer, if we do not recourse to God at such times of misfortunes or when all seems lost, we will fall away. To resist temptation is certainly a good thing, but if we do not resist, then, we are not doing a good thing.

Meditation improves our behavior. It has been said that it makes no difference what one believes, that all depends on how a person acts; but this is not reasonable, because a person acts upon one's beliefs. For instance, Hitler acted on the theory of Nazism and engendered war; Stalin acted on the ideology of Karl Marx and Lenin and begot slavery. If our thoughts are bad, our actions will also be bad.

The problem of depraved actions is basically the problem of impure thoughts; the way to keep a person from stealing is to distract that person from thinking about stealing. Otherwise, we will be told: "They have fallen away; they are all alike depraved; there is none that does good, no, not one."

However, so long as we are still in this present life and have not yet crossed the border of eternity we should not lost hope for those who have fallen away from the right path of life, because God offers repentance 24 hours a day, all year round.

"For to have fallen," says our heavenly friend St. John Chrysostom, "is not a grievous thing, but to remain prostrate after falling, and not to get up again, and playing the coward and the sluggard, to conceal feebleness or moral purpose under the reasoning of despair. To whom also the prophet spoke in perplexity, saying: 'The Lord says this, 'if someone falls, can he not stand up again? If people stray can they not turn back?'"

Contemplation of ourselves troubles and humbles us, but out of that come repentance which leads to salvation. Contemplation of God restores us and brings us hope and love in the Holy Spirit. Thus without this grace-given knowledge of self we will likely fall away and all alike be depraved and would not be inclined to do what is good, right, and true.

The most profound of all spiritual things is inward repentance. It is grounded on a supernaturally illuminated self-knowledge. It implies a deep view of the sinfulness of sin. It lives in a clear vision of the perfection of God, which almost anticipates the brightness of vision hereafter when we see God in all His majesty and glory.

As we discover our complicity with evil, we progressively discover our need for a greater and higher power than our own if we are to find the courage and strength necessary to face and change our condition. It must never be thought that hardening of the heart is hopeless; as long as any person still breath, there is hope for his/her soul.

A person may have led a deprave and perverse, most profligate life, and yet if, at any moment, that person turns to God and asks for forgiveness, that person will attain salvation, as the prophet Ezekiel says: "Again, though I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' yet if he turns from his sin and does what is lawful and right, if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has taken by robbery, and walks in the statutes of life, committing no iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him; he has done what is lawful and right, he shall surely live."

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

However, if in spite of God's Mercy and kindness shown to us, but we still do evil as though no understanding and devouring one another, and no longer invoke God, then, this is what we will hear: →

Icon # 534 = Working Evil is a Form of Insanity

"Have those who work evil no understanding who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon God?"

It is not outlandish to say that to do evil is a form of insanity; in other words, those who work evil have no understanding at all, because if they have they will not work evil in the sense that the end of that work is eternal death, that is, exclusion from the presence of God forever.

If it is foolish to offend a person who can only kill the body, how much more to offend God who has power not only to kill the body, but to cast the soul into Gehenna!

There are ways which seem good to a person, but its end is death. If to work evil is to end in death, hence those who work evil do not love life at all; one's life would, then, be senseless and meaningless. Once life becomes senseless and meaningless, evil would certainly be lurking around.

God set before us, in our probationary period on earth, life and good, death and evil. If we obey the commandments of the Lord Our God by loving Him, and by keeping His statutes and ordinances, then the Lord will bless our life on earth; we will take possession of our heart and will have peace in spite of the trials and challenges that we encounter. On the other hand, if we work evil and have no understanding at all, turning our heart away from Him, devouring one another by harsh words or cold treatment, honoring God only in our lips, then we shall eventually perish, because we work evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger through our evil deeds.

The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the evil and the good. The way of the evil doers is an abomination to the Lord, but everyone who loves Him pursues righteousness; instead of devouring one another as though they eat bread, they will bless one another for they knew that they were forgiven sinners who have worked evil and have no understanding at all, but by repentance they were reconciled with God.

By their repentance they were healed of their insanity. They tasted God's kindness, and now they long for Him. From not calling upon God they now call upon Him; their repentance opens the floodgate of their understanding. They mourn for their evil works and were comforted by the understanding that God is forgiving.

"Mourning is a sorrowful thing," says our heavenly friend St. Augustine, "for it is the sob of one who is sorry. Does anyone mourn, except for one who is dead?"

But, every sinner ought to mourn for himself, since there is nothing else so dead as a man in sin. Yet, how marvelous! If he mourns for himself, he comes to life again. Let him mourn through repentance, and he shall be comforted through forgiveness.”

God's forgiveness gives us a fresh understanding of our need of Him, for we realized that apart from Him we are more susceptible to evil deeds. Repentance engenders renewal of our understanding, a new look of life. Repentance for sin is inseparable from love. Our determination to avoid sin is a measure of the deepness of love.

None of us can claim the value of Divine Love unless we shun all that would wound that love. To shun all that would wound Divine Love, that is, to refrain in future from falling into grave sins, and actively to see at all times to correct and decrease our evil deeds and lightest faults, is truly a clear indication of genuine repentance and conversion of life.

In this case, the reverse will be said of them: instead of having no understanding because they worked evil, it will be said of them: they truly have understanding because they worked good, they come openly to the light that it may clearly seen that their deeds had been wrought in God.

From living a life of vices they now live a life of virtues. Acquiring virtues is the only way for our lives to genuinely improve; and it is in our relationship with Our Lord Jesus that gives us the strength, the grace, and the wisdom to grow in virtue. “Virtue has its sorrows,” says our other heavenly friend, St. John Chrysostom, “but they are not unprofitable as worldly sorrows, but productive of gain and advantage. It is necessary to die well and thus be with the Lord.”

Hence, the end of their ways is no longer death, but life. They have learned what it means to call upon God by their own experience of living a life without calling upon God.

The remaining days of their lives on earth they no longer live by human passions, working evil, and quarreling but by the will of God. The time past was sufficient to them for doing what their former colleagues like to do, living a sinful life-style, doing corruptible deeds, biting one another, and ignoring God. Of course, their former comrades were surprised and displeased that they no longer joined them in the same wild profligacy and they abused them, but they will give account to the Lord who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

With amazing incredulity their former colleagues opted to have nothing to do with God. In their formidable pride they rejected the God of Love. They love

death more than life. The outcome of this decision, of course, is very frightening because: →

Icon # 535 = The Terror of being rejected by God

“There they are, in great terror, in terror such as has not been! For God will scatter the bones of the ungodly; they will be put to shame, for God has rejected them.”

In one of His teachings the Lord Jesus said: “So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”

Truly, it would be an intolerable shame to be denied by God and not be acknowledged by Him. Take for example if you will be in a wedding party or any party at all and the host will say to you in the presence of all the guests, “I do not know you!” Even if the host was just kidding in saying this you will still feel the humiliation. That experience will linger in your memory all the days of your life.

Of course, there would be times that you forget about it, but it will surface from time to time in your consciousness. It would be stored in the hard drive of your life by the very fact that you are not a cat or a monkey. A cat or a monkey will not feel humiliated if we kick them out and deny them in the presence of the other cats and monkeys or in the presence of other human beings.

But it is quite different with human beings because we are endowed with spiritual faculties, such as intelligence and will. There is meaning in all our experiences. We may not be able to understand some of them in this present life, but the moment will come when all will be revealed, for “nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.”

If it is only in this life that we feel the humiliation of being denied and not acknowledged in the presence of other people, and if it is only a mere human being who rejects us, that would still be a tolerable ignominy; but to be rejected by God – the supreme Being, and the concomitant feeling of eternal humiliation is certainly an unendurable chagrin. Our poor mind could hardly even know how to imagine it.

Besides, it is done not in the presence of cats and monkeys, but in the presence of all the angels and saints in heaven. The Lord points this out when He says, “I tell you, I do not know where you come from; depart from me, all you workers of iniquity! There you will weep and gnash your teeth, when you see Abraham and

Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves thrust out.”

If the kingdom of God is just like any other kingdom of this world which will pass away eventually, and whose citizens are a hodge-podge of good and evil people, vicious and virtuous, then, many of us would certainly not bother to live in that kingdom for all eternity; but if we know that no scintilla of evil is found there, as it is written: “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 up on 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,” then, truly, it is worth yearning for with all our heart, strength, mind, and soul.

In that kingdom we will see clearly more than a clear crystal the infinite glory and splendor of the Lord Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the angels, and all the saints. By this vision we will enjoy to the utmost of our capacity the divine essence. We will be truly blessed, for we will have eternal life and perfect repose. We see with unblemished certainty that God is absolutely preferable than created things combined together.

In the kingdom of God there shall be life without death, truth without falsehood, and happiness without shadow of unrest or change. All our senses will experience an unadulterated gladness in the beauties of this kingdom, the chants of adoration and thanksgiving to God for preparing us an ineffable dwelling place since the foundation of the world.

In this kingdom we shall see infinite Goodness as He is Himself. Our eternal act of love will never dwindle the least shadow of weariness. Infinite Goodness, Beauty, Love, and Majesty, seen without the intermediation of any creature, will fill so perfectly our capacity of love that it attracts us irresistibly more than any ecstasy that can be experienced on earth.

Hence, to be rejected by God forever, to be deprived of the infinite Good, Truth, Beauty, and Glory, will be an unbearable pain, shame, and dread, for it will penetrate their whole being – their bones. “There they are in great terror, in terror such as has not been! For God will scatter the bones of the ungodly; they will be put to shame, for God has rejected them.”

It is for this reason that the “pain of loss” is far greater and painful than the “pain of sense,” as Our Lord said to our other heavenly friend, St. Catherine of Siena: “The first suffering which the damned endure is that they are deprived of seeing

Me. This suffering is so great that, if it were possible, they would choose to endure fire and torments, if they could in the meantime enjoy My vision, rather than to be delivered from other suffering without being able to see Me.”

In the life beyond the grave where all illusions about worldly goods have completely banished, where the turmoil of this material world has come to an end, where the soul has outgrown the limitations of this mortal life, and realizes with mental keenness unknown on earth the inner truth of things, to be rejected by God is a disaster exceeding in extent all that we can now conceive.

Beyond doubt the power of the devils to be a source of affliction to those rejected by God is real. This affliction arises from the twofold source of their companionship and their dominion. Demons and damned, that is, those rejected by God are confined in the same realm, and the imagery of Holy Scripture leads us to believe that the perpetual and intolerable nearness of innumerable beings will be an added horror to those jilted by God.

Moreover, the devils, as angels, are mightier than the damned, who ever remain as human beings. These people, however, by deliberate sin have yielded to the allurements of evil spirits, and therefore chosen them as their masters rather than God. They have surrendered to their dominion, and in consequence remain under their tyranny for evermore.

How this tyranny is exercised we have no conception, that is, somehow overwhelmed and mastered by titanic evils, the souls of those rejected by God will be cowed and terrorized into everlasting submission. “There they are in great terror, in terror such as has not been! For God will scatter the bones of the ungodly; they will be put to shame, for God has rejected them.”

In truth, no person ever began with making heaven a consideration of interest, who did not soon come to find it a consideration of love; and the thought of hell, that is, to be rejected by God forever, which commenced with fear for ourselves, ends in devotion to the sanctity of God. If people are rather frightened by the preaching of hell – exclusion from the presence of God, it is certainly an index that the gift of faith is less abundant or less vigorous; but it is no argument against bringing forward a part of divine truth which will find souls to save, even though others may rebel.

The life beyond the grave of those rejected by God forever is also a life of sheer terror. Fear may be reckoned as one of the greatest tortures to which human nature can be submitted. It “betrays to succor of reason” without bringing also the unconsciousness of insanity. It is hard to say whether the visible approach of some great evil, or the agony of an uncertain evil, or the distracted fright of a present evil, may be considered as the worst to bear.

But the whole life in the realm of those cast out from the presence of God is a life of solid fear, and of such of intense and exceeding fear as it is not known on earth. It is a commingling of all unholy fears, and an amalgamation of them in the highest possible degree, and an addition to them of new fears of such terrific aspect and gigantic features as shall be in proportion with the terror of the abode abandoned by God.

One's nature, keen, sensitive, immortal as it has become, will be saturated with terror. Its very pulses will be startling and quaking of horror, horror never removed but ever new, to which one will never grow accustomed, but will strangely magnifying itself to all eternity.

We can only feebly picture one's feelings by comparing to the agony of a suffocated scream when one fear to betray oneself, or to a terrified death-bed without death coming. They shall be in the hands of demons, quailing under the cruel manipulation of those hideous, incorporeal, gigantic spirits. They will do what they will with them, for it is their office to distress, to rack, to torture them, with a vindictive cruelty and a demoniacal skill of which we can form no conception.

To be thrown down amidst of herd of wild horses, to be confined for a night with an unchained frenzied murderer in his condemned cell, to be locked in, bound hand and foot, amidst a crowded ward of howling maniacs, all loose and free, what mild and easy endurances these would be, compared with those who will be soaked with panics of terror in the abode of those rejected by God, a terror which can neither escape, nor hide itself, nor die!

Truly, the realm of those rejected by God is far worse than what is described in the above, because all in the above has still entered our imagination. Just as "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor it enters into the heart of men, what God has prepared for those who love him," so also is the abode of those rejected by God. Wherefore, we have to pray earnestly to God, with profound humility, to be delivered from this dreadful terror, as we supplicate: →

Icon # 536 = Restoration of Our Lost Fortunes

"O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion! When God restores the fortunes of his people, Jacob will rejoice and Israel be glad."

It is right to say that the mystery of evil or sin is far lesser than the mystery of the Incarnation or Calvary, because our mind can easily understand that God should punish sin everlastingly than for God to debase himself by becoming a

human being, and be crucified on the Cross to save us from eternal suffering. It took God this humiliation to deliver us from an unending humiliation.

We are held hostage by sin when we succumbed to the enticement of the devil, but God who is head over heels in love with us died for us on the cross to deliver us from the clutches of the devil and to restore to us the fortunes of our baptismal heritage, "that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage." We are also told by Scripture that "he who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil."

Thus we have a wholesome reason to rejoice and be glad for all the things the Lord Jesus has done for us. By destroying the works of the devil Our Lord has given us power and strength to resist the devil, so that the devil will no longer have dominion over us, as it is written: "Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you."

We resist the Devil by simply not entertaining evil thoughts that he would suggest in our mind. We have to think of something else. We have to occupy ourselves with thoughts about God or the things of God or of our heavenly home. Our Lord is telling us that it is never sufficient to be delivered from the powers of evil; we must also be subservient to the power of good.

If our thoughts are evil, our actions will also be evil; if our thoughts are good, our actions will also be wholesome. The conundrum of evil actions is primarily the enigma of immodest thoughts, because thoughts determine actions. When we command our thoughts down one road, our actions will model after our thoughts. Since thoughts determines action, so it follows that the actions of our life are regulated by our most preponderant thoughts.

It is certain that without some vigorous and constant effort of eliminating useless thoughts, it is impossible to achieve true fervor in loving the Lord Jesus. Just as souls who have deliberately entrusted themselves entirely to God have their thoughts there, their prayers there, their leisure there, walk there, and are bound there by desire of the love of God, so, on the contrary, the souls who have given themselves to the love of the world and wish to live solely on this earth, walk there, have their thoughts and desires there, and it is there where their minds live, "For where our treasure is there will our hearts be also."

In the early days of His ministry the Lord Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth, where He was brought up. And He stood up to read; and there was given to Him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "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." And He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And He said to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

The Lord did all these during His ministry on earth, so much so, that He made use of them as his credential to show to those who did not believe in Him, that His works are also works of His Father. He said to them: "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 in the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father."

He preached good news to the poor, so that the poor will not be disheartened by their poverty and will not be envious of the rich so as to lose the kingdom of heaven, but rather He offered consolation to them by encouraging them to come to him that they may find rest for their tired bodies and wearied souls; and to realize that in spite of their poverty if they live a virtuous life they are blessed for the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

He also proclaimed release to those who were held captives by sin by extending to them His forgiveness: "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven," He said to the paralytic lying on his bed. He also said to the sinful woman weeping, and washing, and kissing His feet: "Your sins are forgiven." This was the woman who was held captive by seven devils, but was released by the Lord.

He also gave recovery of sight to many blind people, opening both their interior and exterior eyes that they may see the wonders of God. Moreover, He set at liberty those who were oppressed by demons in such a manner that bewilders the imagination of the people: "Never was anything like this seen in Israel," says the marveled crowds.

Therefore, in the works of the Lord Jesus "God restores the fortunes of his people." Fortunes are certainly not only monies and properties, but also physical and spiritual health of both mind and body. A person can be materially poor, but spiritually rich in faith. They are heirs of God's kingdom, hence they have lots of fortunes. Thus they have good ground to rejoice and be glad. Blessed are they, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

What they have lost by their loose living, was restored to them by the Lord when they came to their senses and went back to the heavenly Father admitting their sins. They acknowledged that they are no longer worthy to be called His children, but as hired servants. However, the Father who loved them so much

and has engraved them on the palms of His hands restores to them their squandered fortunes, their human dignity.

The best robe of their baptismal patrimony was put on them; the ring of shared authority was put on each of them; shoes of the gospel of peace were put on their feet; and the fatted calf, without blemish, of the humanity of Christ was slaughtered for the eternal banquet so that they may eat and will rejoice and be glad, and make merry for all eternity.

In other words, their priestly, prophetic, and kingly fortunes, which were theirs by participation of the priestly, prophetic, and kingly patrimony of Christ, were restored back to them. Take one example in putting on the ring. In the ancient days were few people know how to read and write, the signet ring of the king contained his seal and would be affixed to a document instead of a signature. To give this ring to another was to give him the right to sign any document in place of the king.

Hence, the king of heaven, in putting on the ring on His repentant children gave them the right to act on His behalf, so that the king can truly say of them: "whoever listen to you, listen to me." And they, in turn, have the authority to say: "So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

If we listen to this appeal and be reconciled to God, we, too, will rejoice and be glad because we will be delivered from the grip of eternal death; and the fortunes of God's kingdom which was ours through the merits of Christ, but have lost by our deliberate sin, will be restored back to us.

Repentance and forgiveness are absolutely necessary for the restoration of our lost fortunes. One without the other would not effectuate this restoration, just as both man and woman are definitely indispensable for the creation of a child; one without the other would not accomplish this creation.

The importance of repentance and forgiveness in the work of restoring our squandered fortunes is such that the Lord Jesus began His ministry on earth by preaching repentance: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;" He says, "repent, and believe in the gospel," and ended it on the cross by offering forgiveness: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." It is our part to repent; and it is God's part to forgive. If we do not repent God would be powerless to forgive. Thus we deprived God of His omnipotence if we do not repent of our sins. In doing so we are making ourselves more powerful than God; we are surpassing the cunning of the devil, because the devil only suggested to Adam and Eve that if they eat the forbidden fruit they will be "like God," not more powerful than God.

In His great love for us, the Lord Jesus shared with us His authority to forgive, so that we, too, will forgive one another as He has forgiven us. In forgiving one another we restore to one another the fortunes of trust, confidence, peace, and joy. Somehow, it makes our lives easier.

Deliverance from the grip of sin and its effects, especially death eternal, demand repentance and acknowledgment of sins. Repentance leads to forgiveness and forgiveness gives birth to happiness. The mystery of perfect happiness is the mystery of the cross. The way of the cross maybe hard, but it remains the only road to happiness, serenity, and gladness in this life on earth. At its end there awaits us joy without measure, gladness without end, and bliss without limit.

Certainly, the words of the Psalmist: "O that deliverance would come from Zion! When God restores the fortunes of his people, Jacob will rejoice and Israel be glad," is truly fulfilled in all the deeds of the Lord Jesus have done for us. He is our new Joshua, our deliverer, our Savior, who vindicates us by His might against the hosts of wickedness that are pursuing us with relentless hostilities. Therefore, we have to fasten ourselves to Him and say to Him in lowliness of heart: →

Icon # 537 = A Christian's Authentic Approach to Life

Psalm 54 (53)

"Save me, O God, by thy name, and vindicate me by thy might. Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth."

As Christians, part of an authentic approach to life will always involve this constant, familiar, and habitual consultation with God about the events, activities, and problems of our daily life. We believe that we are not alone; prayer reveals that we truly comprehend that we are not alone, that God is present and ready to influence our thoughts and actions.

"In prayer," says our heavenly friend, St. Augustine, "it is not words we should use in dealing with God to obtain what we want, but it is the things we carry in our mind and the direction of our thoughts, with pure love and single affection."

Adapting our prayer to our present situation makes it profitable and efficacious. It is very consoling to converse with Our Lord about what we are and what we are undergoing at present. "Prayer will draw into your soul the omnipotence of God," says our Father St. Bernard of Clairvaux, "it is stronger than all the demons." Thus we are confident to invoke His name: "Save me, O God, by thy name, and vindicate me by thy might."

Let us make it a custom to receive everything that God offers us, and to bless Him without fail in all things and for all things. If in this way we welcome His designs, our greatest difficulties will profit us most; at the end we will be vindicated. Our good friend, St. Paul, tells us that all endurance by which we are able to put up with the trials that afflict us comes not from our own strength but from the mercy and guidance of God: "No trial has seized you except what is common to humanity. But God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tried beyond your capacity. But with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to endure."

Constantly harassed by the assault of the nations that surrounded them the people of God would never think and feel that they no longer need the help of God. Thus they would meditate on Him, pray to Him, and cry out to Him to save them by His name; they would neither lapse into sluggish inactivity nor lose their ability to fight and their training in virtue. For frequently security and prosperity have cast down those whom adversities cannot overcome.

Truly, God's help fights on our behalf with far enormous vigor than all the multitudinous hosts of wickedness that wrestles against us. For God is not only the one who suggests good things but also their supporter and advocate. It is clear, then, that God will save us by His name, and will vindicate us by His might, when we pray to Him in humility of heart. Prayer is devotion of the heart, the turning to God through pious and humble affection. Humble from the intimate knowledge of our need of salvation; pious from the acknowledgment of God's vindication.

"Let us rest assured," says our heavenly friend, St. Alphonsus Liguori, "that we can never overcome our carnal appetites, if God does not give us help, and this help we cannot have without prayer; but if we pray, we shall have power to resist the devil in everything, and have the strength of God, who strengthens us; as St. Paul says, 'I can do all things through God who strengthens me.'"

Pope Pius XI of blessed memory, confided to the Trappist monks and nuns the Apostolate of Moses and prayers for the conversion of the pagan nations of the far East: "While zealous missionary is being spent with toil, the prayer of the Trappists strengthens his hands, and often that irresistible force effects more conversion than the burning words of Apostolic men." "Those who pray," says Donosco Cortez, "do more for the world than those who combat, and if the world is growing worse, it is because there is now more fighting done than praying."

Every step we take under the patronage of God ushers our vindication for it will lead us to eternal salvation. God understands our struggles much better than we do, and that His providential guidance of events in regard to us are propitious

even when we do not comprehend them so long as we have love for him, for “we know that in everything God works for good with those who love him.”

There is nothing so small or apparently trifling, even the fall of a leaf or the fall of a hair, that is not ordained or permitted by God, for He is sufficiently wise, good, powerful, and merciful to turn the most seemingly disastrous events to the good and profit of those who are capable of adoring Him, and humbly imploring Him: “Save me, O God, by thy name, and vindicate me by thy might. Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth.” One of the many reasons of this, of course, is: →

Icon # 538 = The Person who Forgets God Forgets Himself

“For insolent men have risen against me, ruthless men seek my life; they do not set God before them.”

The Lord Jesus had told us that whatever we do to the least of His brethren, that is, our fellow human beings whom He identified Himself with, we are also doing it to Him. The Lord gave a clear evidence to this when Paul relentlessly persecuted His followers. The Lord said to him: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” And Paul said, “Who are you, Lord?” And the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting....”

Of course, there are many forms of persecution. They may not be as insolent and ruthless as that of Paul or the modern day persecution of Christians carried out by the ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), but they can be in the form of being indifferent to one another or disrespectful of one another, or being rude to one another or by being discourteous of one another.

They are forms of persecution because of the basic maltreatment involved. We can persecute one another by our attitude. However, the Scripture warns us: “But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another.”

It is in the spirit of peace that the Lord has called us, and it is not only in His sight but in the sight of other people also that we have to be careful of our attitude so that, if possible, for our part we may be at peace with other people, especially with those who live with us.

A person of prayer often keeps step with his/her moral life. The closer our attitude corresponds to the will of God, the easier it is to pray and live in harmony with those around us, ruthlessness and insolence are at bay; but the more our conduct is out of joint with God, the harder it is to pray.

Just as it is not easy to look in the face of someone whom we have grievously wronged, so it is not easy to lift our mind and heart to God if we rise in insolence against Him. This is not because God is unwilling to hear ruthless sinners, for He does hear them and has special predilection for them, as He said: "I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners." And also: "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." But these sinners were the ones who agreed with His will and abandoned their "insolence and ruthlessness."

It is not farfetched to say that our moral life, our attitude, and our character are determinants of our relationships with God. When our conduct is Godless, ruthless, insolent, licentious, then prayer is an extraneous thing – an attempt to make God serve our wishes in contradiction to the moral laws He laid down.

God made a moral universe, a vale of character – making wherein there would be virtue, heroism, saintliness, and faithfulness, none of which is possible without freedom. Either God created us the way we are now, or else we are fallen from the state in which God created us. If we closely follow the evidence, it is crystal clear that the facts support the latter view: the ruthlessness and insolence and inner contradiction within us is due to some fault subsequent to the creation of our human nature.

An unequivocal voice in our moral consciousness tells us that acts of ruthlessness and insolence are abnormal facts in our nature. They ought not to be. There is nothing wrong inside us. God created us one way, but we made ourselves, in virtue of our freedom, another way. We are not animals that failed to evolve into humans; we are humans who rebelled against God, insolent people who have risen against Him, ruthless people who crucified Him on the cross. We do not set God before us. In other words, we forget about Him.

The person who forgets God forgets Himself. He ceases to be concerned about the things which serve his ultimate welfare and habitually fails to take those steps which required by the reality of his own situation. Unless he is roused by the sharp sting of compunction, his spiritual senses atrophy and salvation itself is place in jeopardy. Heedlessness inevitably issues in death.

Forgetfulness of God brings death to the soul. In our monastic tradition the memory of God, that is, setting Him before us, is more than a pious practice; it is the very dynamic of a life which is subordinated to the divine process of transformation.

We were told of the three stages of mindfulness of God. In the first, mindfulness is very close to the notion of fear of the Lord; it connotes a seriousness in the

ordering of life and care to live within the limits fixed by the commandments. In the second stage, mindfulness of God becomes an active effort of mind and heart to retain and enter into the riches of revealed truth through meditation, and finally, mindfulness of God appears less as an action than as a transformed state of consciousness, in which every thought, word, and action take place within the context of the divine.

These stages, of course, are possible only when the insolent and ruthless people discarded their insolence and ruthlessness and no longer rise against the Lord, but consider the Lord as their helper and upholder of their lives. Hence, with great boldness they declare their allegiance: →

Icon # 539 = God is Our Helper and Upholder of Our Lives

“Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life.”

It is right to say that the great and solid foundation of the spiritual life is to give oneself to God and to make Him as our helper and the upholder of our lives. In doing so, we will be the object of His good pleasure in everything internal and external.

Once this foundation being laid, we will know by our own experience that God is really our helper and the upholder of our lives. Then we will rejoice in knowing that God is God, and gained confidence in abandoning ourselves completely to His good pleasure. This kind of disposition is what God asked of us; the rest belongs to Him to choose and determine according to His designs, as an architect selects and marks the stones of the building he proposes to construct.

To hope only in God, to rely solely upon God, in and through the Lord Jesus is the hard rock of salvation, the firm and lasting foundation which no illusion, self-love or temptation can threaten. Thus we have to entrust ourselves to God the helper and upholder of our lives, more self-abandonment to His wise and divine Providence that controls even the slightest happenings in this life! In every case He turns them to the advantage of those who put their full confidence in His Providence, and who unreservedly abandon themselves to His paternal care.

Imagine also a good and loving mother who carries her little child in her bosom for a long while, then holds him uprightly with her hand so that he will be supported at each step, then leaves him for a little while, only to grasp him at once when she sees that he is wavering, steadies him when he is tottering, picks him up when he has fallen down, and either prevents him from falling or lets him fall lightly and lifts him up after a tumble. But when she has brought him to

boyhood or to the strength of adolescence and young manhood, she lays upon him some burdens and hardships by which he will not be oppressed but trained.

How much more does the Lord Jesus know whom to carry in the bosom of His grace and whom to exercise in His sight for virtue's sake by a decision of free will, yet helping him as he struggles, hearing him when he calls, not abandoning him when he looks for Him, and occasionally snatching him from danger even unbeknownst to him!

God provides for the salvation of the human race in numberless different ways and in inscrutable manners. Sometimes He helps to accomplish the things that He sees we desire for our own good, and at other times He inspires the beginnings of that holy desire and bestows both the commencement of a good work and perseverance in it.

Hence it is that when we pray we acknowledge that God is not only our protector and savior but also our helper and upholder of our lives. Inasmuch as He provides us with help in our struggle, and supports and defends us when we seek and refuge, He is called our helper and upholder.

Considering God as our helper and upholder of our lives is a prelude to entering into His own happiness. For instance, before a lump of clay can be formed into a shapely piece of pottery, it must first be abandoned to the potter and must be pliant in his hands. If we are to be made a vessel for God's honor we have to resist those evil tendencies within us which doesn't want to be upheld and helped by God, for it certainly is a manifestation of pride.

It is not slight thing to bar God's help in our lives when He graciously offered Himself as our upholder. The Divine action in our souls does not exclude external help such as we find in a sermon or a book; God may use these as carriers of His Grace.

As our helper, God is also our Paraclete. A Paraclete is a person called in to give witness in a lawsuit in someone's favor. He might be an advocate called to plead someone's cause when someone was under a charge which issue in serious penalty. He might be an expert called in to give advice in difficult situations. Thus in Our Lord Jesus we have an advocate with the Father to intercede on our behalf whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and He knows everything.

Always a Paraclete is someone called in to help when the person who calls him is in trouble or distress or doubts or in bewilderment. On this account God is truly our helper and upholder of our lives. Moreover: →

Icon # 540 = God's Faithfulness puts an end to the Enemy Within us

"He will requite my enemies with evil; in thy faithfulness put an end to them."

It is not implausible to assert that our enemies are within us. They assault us from time to time, harass us every now and then, and often times nag us. They are, of course, the works of the flesh that wage war against the spirit. They contribute a lot to the defilement of our body which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. They are enemies of our soul because they are instruments of sin.

Thus we pray that God's faithfulness put an end to them, so that they will deplete their strength to drag us to eternal ruin. It is by our repentance, of course, that God's faithfulness put an end to them, for unless we repent God is powerless to put an end of our sin. The beauty of repentance is such that it makes us pleasing to God and even make our enemies at peace with us, as it is written: "When a man's way please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."

Therefore, we have to gird up our mind, be sober, setting up our hope fully upon the grace which the Lord Jesus bestows on us. It is by the grace of true repentance that enables us to be no longer conformed to the passions of our former ignorance, but as God who called us is holy, we have to be holy ourselves in all our conduct, since it is written: "You shall be holy, for I am holy.'

A wholehearted response to the universal call to holiness, in imitation of God, is certainly an undoubtable sign that God's faithfulness is putting an end to our sinfulness. There will still be residue of concupiscence and the works of the flesh, while we are still in this present life, lingering in us, for they could not be completely obliterated while there's still blood in our veins, but their presence will serve to our own advantage when they make us more humble and realize our constant need of God's grace.

Accordingly, we are being assured that God's faithfulness will thoroughly put an end to them one we cross the border of life and death, time and eternity, and enter, at last, into our heavenly home where no more enemies could be found: "the unclean shall not pass over it, and fools shall not err therein." All our vices will be put to an end, they shall not be found in our heavenly home; but the redeemed shall freely walk there with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away, death shall be no more – the last enemy that God put to an end. "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through Our Lord Jesus Christ. He puts an end to death, so that we will no longer live for ourselves but for Him," and no longer

abide in the law of the flesh but in the law of the spirit. The life we now live in the flesh we live by faith in the Son of God, Our Lord Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave Himself for us on the Cross.

By His death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus puts an end to death, our dreaded enemy. The other enemy that the Lord puts to an end, of course, is the devil and his works, for "the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." The Lord's assailant is referred to in the Gospels as "the Devil," "the Tempter," and "Satan." The name Satan is derived from the Hebrew verb *Satan*, to oppose, and has therefore the general meaning of adversary, enemy.

Adversary describes the chief of the fallen angels in his relationship to the kingdom of God and to ourselves: he is the leader of the hosts of spirits who work to seduce us from our allegiance to God. The term devil, on the other hand, is derived from the way in which the evil spirit goes about his work: it comes from the Greek noun *diabolos*, which is, in turn, derived from the verb *diaballo*, to twist awry, to accuse, and to calumniate.

It is usually reserved for the prince of calumniators, who speaks evil of men to God and of God to men. The name throws on Satan's methods of procedure. He is the greatest calumniator because his purpose is to defame both God and men: to make God think ill of us and make us think ill of God. He strove to defame men, for instance, when he spoke to God of Job, portraying him as little better than a hypocrite, faithful only because it was in his own interest to be so.

More often, and with better success, it is God he seeks to defame. So he persuaded Eve in the garden that God had forbidden them the fruit of the tree of life out of jealousy, lest they, too, should become as gods, and that God could not or would not punish their disobedience as He had threatened. The method has served him well ever since. And he uses it again and again as he seeks to persuade us that God is unkind and unjust.

It was Christ's mission to dispossess the Devil to establish the kingdom of God in place of the kingdom of darkness and evil. The two are contrasting realities; and unless we really recognize the horror of Satan's yoke, we can never have a proper understanding of the deliverance which came to us through Christ Our Lord.

This would indicate that the resistance of saintly souls to evil is partly due to their consciousness of the Divine Goodness within. It may well be that souls devoid of a sense of Divine Love fall more readily into sin because they have less knowledge what they will lose by that sin.

One of the means to put an end of the enemies within us is to make a sincere confession. Abba Serapion related a story that when he was still a boy and was living with Abba Theonas, he got into the habit due to the attacks of the enemy, of secretly hiding a biscuit in his bosom after they had eaten at the ninth hour, and ate it clandestinely at night without the knowledge of Abba Theonas.

By God's providence, however, it happened that, in order to snatch him from this yoke of willing captivity, some monks went to Abba Theonas' cell for the sake of edification. When the meal was finished the spiritual conference began. Abba Theonas responded to the questions that they had asked about the vice of gluttony and the disposition of hidden thoughts, and discussed their nature and explained the frightful dominion that they exercise as long as they are concealed.

Meanwhile, struck with compunction by the power of the conference and terrified by his guilty conscience, for Abba Serapion believed that these things had been spoken of because the Lord had revealed his inmost thoughts to the old man, he was first shaken by secret sighs.

Then as his heart's compunction grew he broke into open sobbing and tears, and from his bosom, the knowing accomplice of his theft, he produced the biscuit that by wicked habit he used to take out to eat clandestinely, and put it in the center.

He threw himself on the ground with a plea for pardon, confessing how every day he would eat secretly, and with an outpouring of tears he begged them to ask the Lord to free him from his horrible captivity.

Then the old man said: "Take heart, my boy. Your confession freed you from this captivity even before I spoke. Today you have triumphed over your conqueror and adversary, defeating him by your confession more decisively than you yourself had been overthrown by him because of your silence."

The old man had not even finished these words when lo, a burning lamp coming from Abba Serapion's breast so filled the cell with the odor of sulphur that the overwhelming stench nearly made it impossible for them to remain there.

Abba Serapion recounted later that it has been in accordance with the old man's words; to such an extent has the dominion of that diabolical tyranny in him been destroyed by the power of his confession and been rendered forever ineffective that the enemy has never again tried to stir up the thought of this desire in him, nor after this have he ever again felt himself shaken by the temptation to pursue that furtive desire.

From the story above we can see how the Lord put an end to the enemy within. Thus in gratitude to God for all He has done for us, we reciprocate His faithfulness by: →

Icon # 541 = Acknowledging One's Worth

"With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to thee; I will give thanks to thy name, O Lord, for it is good."

As human beings made in the image and likeness of God, bearing "the image of the man of dust" and "also bear the image of the man of heaven," situated between angels and animals, God has endowed us with an irrevocable freewill. We are completely free to offer a sacrifice to Him or not, to give our body and soul to Him or not, to love or hate Him or not, to be familiar or indifferent to Him or not, to give thanks to His name for all He has done for us or not. No one can force this disposition on us without demeaning our transcendent dignity.

In itself, the human will cannot be coerced, precisely because it is free by its very nature; it is a first cause of action within the human soul. And since the will is always free, it is the one supreme sacrifice we can offer to God: "Not my will, but your will be done." "I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord."

Such yielding of the center of our lives to the Lord Jesus is the way to happiness. Our happiness varies according to the center about which our lives revolve. A soul comes under the divine action as soon as goodwill springs up in its heart, and God's action has more or less influence on it according to the degree of its self-abandonment, offering freely as a sacrifice one's will to God.

Freedom of will is at a human being's disposal. In it two angels, that is, a good one and a bad one, are said to be attached to each one of us, but it is up to us to choose which to follow. If we follow the lead of the good angel, he will bring us to the altar of sacrifice where we can freely offer to God all our thoughts, words, and actions.

In other words, we freely offer to God our body and soul as a living sacrifice in thanksgiving to His name, for it is good. In doing so, we are joining with all the angels who stood around the throne of God and round the elder and the four living creatures who fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen."

To freely offer to God our whole being as a sacrifice is certainly a form of worship. The word "worship," says our heavenly friend the Blessed Bishop Fulton Sheen, "is a contraction of 'worth-ship.'" "It is a manifestation of the worth in which we hold another person. Worship is a sign of value, the price we put on a service or a person. When you applaud an actor on the stage, or a returning hero, you are 'worshipping him in the sense of putting value on his worth. Every time a man takes his hat to a lady, he is 'worshipping' her. Now to worship God means to acknowledge in some way His Power, His Goodness and His Truth." Hence, in freely acknowledging God's Power, Goodness and His Truth we offer a sacrifice to Him.

We have a duty to worship God, not because He will pout and be imperfect and unhappy if we do not, but because if we do not worship God and freely offer a sacrifice to Him we will be unhappy and imperfect. Thus it is for our good to acknowledge the worth of God by worshipping Him and freely offer Him a sacrifice.

Take another example, if you are a father, do you not like to receive a tiny little gift, such as a bottle of beer, from your child? Why do you value it more than a case of Trappist Ale from a monastery in Belgium? If you are a mother, does not your heart feel a greater joy in a handful of yellow dandelions from your little daughter, than a bouquet of roses from a dinner guest? Do these trivialities make you richer? Do you need them? Would you be imperfect without them?

They are absolutely of no utility to you! Yet you love them, because your children are 'worshipping' you, offering a sacrifice to you; because they are acknowledging your love, your goodness, and your worth. By doing so they are perfecting themselves, that is, developing along the lines of love rather than hate, thankfulness rather than ingratitude, and service rather than disloyalty. They are more becoming grateful children and more happy children.

As you do not need a bottle of beer, and handful of dandelions, neither does God need your worship and sacrifice. If their giving is a sign of your worth in your children's eyes, then are not prayer, worship, sacrifice, and gratitude a sign of God's worth in our eyes? If you do need your children's worship, why do you think God needs yours? If their worship and sacrifice are for their perfection, not yours, then may not your worship and sacrifice to God be not for His perfection and good, but yours?

Worship and sacrifice are our opportunity to express devotion, dependence, and love; in doing so we make ourselves happy. They contribute for our deliverance from every trouble, and help us to triumph over the enemies within our heart.

In gratitude, we give thanks to the name of Our Lord Jesus for it is good, and humbly acknowledge all the things He has done for us, and say: →

Icon # 542 = Deliverance From Every Trouble

“For thou hast delivered me from every trouble, and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies.”

One of the remedies for the ills that come to us from thinking about time and about what's going on in our world is what we might be called the “sanctification of the present moment” or the “Now moment.” The Lord Jesus laid down the rule for us in these words: “Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day.”

This means that each day has its own trials; we are not to borrow troubles from tomorrow, because that day, too, will have its cross. We are to leave the past to Divine Mercy and to entrust the future, whatever its trials, to His Loving Providence.

When we are in trouble, or in sorrow, humiliation, trial, sickness, desolation, disappointments, repugnance to duties, or struggling under difficulties, Christ Himself draws near and goes with us as He did with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Provided we are not moonlighting sinful comfort, He is sure to comfort us Himself in our troubles.

We do well to reflect that there are many people who have more troubles than ourselves. Remembrance of them is certainly beneficial. If troubles can be swapped, it is very likely that many of these people will not blink their eyes to swap their troubles and sufferings with us. Of course, God is not please to see us in trouble, but He wants to see in what way and how much we love Him in our trouble. He wants to see what love, what virtue, we generate in the face of difficulties, of our miseries and weaknesses.

No one is exempted of troubles in this present life; however our troubles take another meaning when it is seen in the eyes of God. God Himself has suffered in the person of Christ, and we too have our share in human suffering whether we wish it or not. It falls upon everyone in varied degrees and forms whose comparison lies beyond our competence.

There are carrying of daily crosses, even crucifixion, but it is our Christian belief that there is always a happy ending resurrection when God ultimately delivered us from every trouble, no more pain, nor crying, nor suffering; and our eyes will

look in triumph over our vices and sins. At last, we will be delivered from them. Vices and sins are truly enemies of our soul. They are bent to deform us in the conduct of our life, because they taint our will and incline it to an evil end. Thus they are considered as our enemies.

Once the enemies of our soul, namely, vices and sins, have been conquered and our mind has been established in tranquility it will be possible to enjoy the continual awareness of God's presence in whatever we do and in wherever we are, a foretaste, we would say, of the happiness and peace of the world to come, the new heaven and the new earth; an image of serenity and jubilation after the war is ended.

However, in order to stabilize the awareness of God's presence in our day to day life and that we will not fall into self-complacency, we should keep on praying either a prayer of adoration or a prayer of thanksgiving or a prayer of supplication; crying out to Him in humility of heart, saying: →