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Icon # 543 = Legitimate Prayer of Supplication

Psalm 55 (54)

“Give ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not thyself from my supplication.”

The essence of prayer, of course, is not the effort to make God give us something – as this is not the basis of sound human relationship – but there is a legitimate prayer of supplication.

A most sweet law which places us in a fairly good position to be heard in the very cry of supplication is this: “He shall cry to me,” says the Lord, “and I will hear him.” Hence, we will justly be heard when we do not neglect to cry and when we pray with fervor and devotion.

When we pray, the voice of the heart sounds louder than that proceeding from the mouth. “It is not so much the length of our prayer,” says our heavenly friend, St. Louis De Montfort, “but the fervor with which it is said which pleases Almighty God and touches Him.”

Almost everyone suffers distractions in prayer, which are no sin, according to the great spiritual writers, so long as we do not intend them or encourage them. A good habit for those distracted at prayer, however, is to intend to concentrate and to offer up as a penance the very distractions themselves. Concentration at prayer, of course, is much better than distraction, but God sees our intention and effort, and those are what count most. We can still derive great fruit even though suffering distractions, for it is infinitely better to pray though distracted than because of distractions not to pray at all.

We must also pray with true penitence, that is, sorrow for our sins, because true repentance of soul is absolutely essential to having our prayers for our salvation unfailingly answered by God.

We have the assurance that God will answer every prayer, but He has not told us how or when. God has His own hours; we must wait for them. He wishes to be prayed and begged and pressed so as to make us appreciate His graces.

When prayers are made to God and are not immediately answered, the reason may be one of the following: whether that the petition is premature, or because it has been made unworthily or vaingloriously, or because, if granted, it would lead to conceit, or because negligence and carelessness would result.

If we allow God to come close to us through the practice of regular prayer, personal prayer, the conditions are ripe for God to do something in us. God who is total goodness will eventually give us what is best. We have it in our

perseverance in prayer which the Lord Jesus called persistence because of its unwearied supplication: "Amen, I say to you, that he will get up and give him as much as he needs on account of his persistence, if not on account of friendship."

We see, then, in how many ways the grace of being heard is obtained, so that no one should be discouraged by a sense of his own inadequacy in asking for things that are beneficial to one's soul and eternal salvation.

The Lord who wants to bestow what is eternal and heavenly, encourages us as if were to compel Him by supplication. He not only neither disdains nor refuses our persistent supplication but He even welcome and praises us, and He very graciously promises that He will give us whatever we have perseveringly hope for when He says: "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who ask receive...." And again, "Everything whatever that you ask for in prayer you shall receive if you believe, and nothing shall be impossible for you."

If our supplications are in accordance with God's will, and if we seek His glory in the asking, the answer will come in ways that will astonish us and fill our hearts with songs of praise and thanksgiving. This experience of being answered in our prayer which, of course, lead to singing songs of praise and thanksgiving, is such of great importance in as much as it serves as a chamber where we can always go in and out to find solace when we, again, are overwhelmed by troubles. Thus we beseech God expressing our condition: →

Icon # 544 = Trouble: Noise of the Enemy

"Attend to me, and answer me; I am overcome by my trouble, I am distraught by the noise of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked. For they bring trouble upon me, and in anger they cherish enmity against me."

We have to reiterate every now and then that so long as we are still in this present life we cannot escape the law of alternation. We experienced peace and joy, and even singing songs of praise and thanksgiving when our prayer is answered, but then after a period of time we are overwhelmed again by our troubles; vices that had been cut off sprouted again and caused troubles within us – they are noisy because they are not in harmony with our conscience.

While the blood in our veins is still circulating, we have to expect a struggle against the three enemies of our soul, namely: the flesh, the devil, and the world. Our struggle against the flesh goes on till death, although at times it seems to diminish when the principal vices, such as lust, pride, anger, vainglory, sloth,

gluttony, etc., are tamed and the senses brought to subjection to a mind enriched by practical knowledge and skill in the art of warfare.

If we no longer fulfill the desires of the flesh, in accordance with the Scripture, then, with the Lord's help, what was instilled into us before, that is, passions of the soul and wrong habits, will readily cease to trouble.

We have also to contend against the devil. In truth he is powerless to conquer unless we freely surrender ourselves to him. He cannot do us spiritual harm except by inducing us to harm ourselves. When he enters into a human person, it cannot be by forcing an entry: we have to open the door to make him welcome.

He is an enemy who can make a direct assault only upon those whom he sees giving in to him. He keeps us in terror because we make ourselves liable to be terrorized by using the members of our body as instruments of wickedness. When this happens, the devil and the other demons join forces with us since, by loving and desiring what we ought to avoid, we become our own enemies, and they will bring much trouble upon us.

"We make them fight against us with our own weapon," says our heavenly friend, St. Teresa of Avila, "which we put into their hands when we ought to be using them in our defense. This is the great pity of it." She also said: "I realize so clearly now how little power the devils have, if I am not fighting against God, that I am hardly afraid of them at all: for their strength is nothing unless they find souls surrendering to them and grown cowardly, in which case they do indeed show their power."

We have also to struggle against the world. The first letter of John tells us: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."

The Lord Jesus is light, and the world is darkness; and as light and darkness, Christ and Belial, cannot exist together – one casts out the other, so neither can the Lord and the world be one. When the spirit of the world gets entrance into our heart, the Lord is cast out, rejected; and in proportion as the Spirit of the Lord Jesus gains ground in the soul, the spirit of the world is cast out.

God has situated us in the midst of this enormous torrent of humanity, more than 5 billion people, in the world He made for us, not so that we would become worldly, but so that we might take advantage of the world to sanctify ourselves

and sanctify those we share with it. "These things I have spoken to you," says the Lord, "that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

The monastic concept of the world is that all things created are good provided it enables us to orientate ourselves to God. The truly religious seekers said that we must go apart, break our addiction to the world and live in another way before we return to the world; then we can be fully in the world but no longer trapped by it. In other words, we are "in the world," but we are "not of the world."

We will be overcome by these three enemies only if we yield in the members of our body as instruments of wickedness, only if we praise God with our lips but our heart is far from Him. When this happens, it would not be surprising to hear: →

Icon # 545 = A Tranquil and Sweet Death

"My heart is in anguish within me, the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me."

It is reasonable to say that having a guilty conscience causes a trembling anguish within a person especially when death is approaching. The Lord said that we should not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul, rather we have to fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

"In order not to fear death," says our heavenly friend, St. Peter of Alexandria, "it is needful to begin by dying to self, renouncing our will, and detaching ourselves from all things." To the soul that has long yearned for beatitude, the supreme separation, death, should hold no terrors. A life without great sins often ends with a tranquil death, and a life with a very strong marked vocation almost always so.

For such a life is a life of strong light, of definite consciousness, and its grand result is a great gift of tranquility; and to such persons death almost loses the character of death. It is a great action which comes in their way, and is done greatly and quietly, without drama and without emphasis. Certain forms of the spiritual life are followed by such deaths. It has been curiously remarked by our heavenly friend, St. Andrew of Avellino, that those who have a special devotion to the Passion of Our Lord Jesus generally die quiet and sweet deaths, as the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. John the Evangelist, and St. Mary Magdalene did.

Our Lord Jesus suffered a terrible and horrible death even though He was completely innocent. His death is the ultimate sign of His mercy and of His

humility to suffer with us and for us. His death gives hope that meaning can exist in suffering, when our heart is in anguish within us, and the terrors of death have fallen upon us. His resurrection also teaches us that there is life after tragedy, when fear and trembling come upon us, and horror overwhelms us.

In the shadow of death the Lord Jesus produces life, and although the senses are terrified – the heart is in anguish within, fear and trembling came, and horror overwhelms; yet, faith, taking all for the best, is full of courage and assurance. Our faith is convinced of the Christian good news that death does not have the last word about the human person; that none of us is isolated in his/her own self; and that the human person is promised more than this earthly life here below: “I am the resurrection and the life,” says the Lord, “he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.”

Death is an act of which we have no experience, because it is done only once. No matter how it is done, either well or ill, it is irreparable. Once over, all discussion, deliberation, retrospect, discovery of mistakes, fresh plans, are out of the question. It is one, absolute, final, immutable act; and now that it is done, it must be left as it is, helplessly fertile of eternal consequences: either to eternal glory to those who have done good, who have used the members of their body as instruments of righteousness or to eternal condemnation to those who have done evil, who have used the members of their body as instruments of wickedness.

If a soul, by a deliberate choice, gravitates toward eternal damnation, then, it will unceasingly feel: “My heart is in anguish within me, the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me and horror overwhelms me.”

The greatest reason why we fear death is because we have never prepared for it. Most of us die only once when we should have died a thousand times, when we should have died daily. Death is a terrible and horrible thing for someone who dies only when s/he dies; but it is a beautiful thing for someone who dies before s/he dies. In the words of our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “It is a good death which dies to sin that it may live for righteousness. And this death to sin must come first if that final death is to be safe.”

Our other heavenly friend, no other than St. Teresa of Avila, has this to say: “To those who love God in truth and have put aside the things of this world death must come very gently. I think, too, that this experience has been of great help to me in teaching me where our true home is and in showing me that on earth we are but pilgrims; it is a great things to see what is awaiting us there and to know where we are going to live.”

Thus with the Psalmist, we pleadingly exclaim: →

Icon # 546 = Wings of Prayer: Shelter From the Raging Wind and Tempest

“And I say, ‘O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest; yea, I would wander afar, I would lodge in the wilderness, I would haste to find me a shelter from the raging wind and tempest.’”

Often times when our problems, sufferings, and difficulties overwhelmed us, or instinct is to get away from them; we wish to have wings like a dove and fly away to a solitary place in order to find rest for our wearied soul, and we don't want to be bothered by people.

Of course, this is a very natural tendency. Since God knows perfectly well our human nature and its proclivity and propensity, He offers us means to handle constructively our problems, sufferings, and difficulties by inviting us to come to Him that we may find rest to our wearied soul. “Come to me all who are weary, and I will give you rest,” He says.

In creating us in His own image and likeness, God provided us wings not only so that we can fly into the wilderness to find shelter from the raging wind of our problems and the tempest of our difficulties, but above all that we can fly into the chamber of His Sacred Heart by means of prayers. “Come to me,” He said, “all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

“Have no anxiety about anything,” added our good friend, St. Paul, “but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

There's no person on earth who cannot raise one's heart and fly to God in simple and humble prayer. The wings of prayer which gave us the capacity and ability to be able to fly to God and be at rest is one of the greatest privileges we have as human beings.

In the raging wind of sufferings and the tempest of trials, if we do not have the wings of prayer and fly to God, we will likely be desolate, sorrowful, and dejected. “Do not abandon prayer under the pretext of infirmity even for one day,” says our heavenly friend Theoleptus, Metropolitan of Philadelphia, “so long as you have breath, and listen to the words of the Apostle: ‘when I am weak,

then I am strong" (2Cor.12:10) acting thus you will gain much profit, and prayer will soon restore you by the action of grace."

In the raging wind of sufferings and the tempest of trials, then, the kindly grace of the Lord Jesus in our regard brings us greater peace and rest, for in Him we have found a safe shelter than if He had removed from us all trials and tribulations. Thus with the wings of prayer it is more nobly and eminently virtuous to take shelter in the Lord when buffeted by the raging wind of afflictions and the tempest of difficulties, to cling confidently and courageously in the protection of God, and in some way to acquire strength from weakness, because strength is made perfect in weakness.

Hence, the soul in the midst of trials and aches becomes like a dove flying – it follows the radiant beam of God's will through the fog and raging wind and the mist and tempest of sorrows and pains, ever at rest for it found its shelter in God.

The hunter, that is, the devil and the other wicked spirits, of course, will relentlessly pursue the soul who takes shelter in the mercy of God for they could not bear the thought that we human beings, have been given the wings of prayer to fly into the heart of God and be at rest. Hence, with dreadful apprehension we implore the Lord: →

Icon # 547 = Tongues Confuse: Temptation

"Destroy their plans, O Lord, confuse their tongues; for I see violence and strife in the city."

Although the devil and the other wicked spirits have many plans against us, their main plan is to inhibit us to inherit the kingdom of heaven which they had lost. The envy and deception by which the devil was instigated to deceive our first parents was the cause of his ruin beforehand, for he saw that he who had only recently formed from the dust of earth was destined for that glory from which he remembered that he had fallen when he was one of the angels in heaven.

They are like roaring lions seeking the ruin of human souls, and they are extremely pleased to see human souls afflicted and disquieted, for they know that disturbance hinders the soul from being totally occupied in loving and praising God.

As far as lies in their power they wish to leave nothing in the state in which God has ordained. They are unsatisfied with God and His order, and wherever they infiltrate we will always perceive the work of God being distorted. Wherefore we

entreat the Lord: "Destroy their plans, O Lord, confuse their tongues; for I see violence and strife in the city."

They will tempt us to do something sinful for the very purpose of separating us from God. By itself temptation is not prevarication; so long as it is displeasing to us it is even meritorious of a divine reward.

Our Lord Jesus is more than ready to help us overcome our temptation if we call upon Him, ready to "destroy their plans," and "confuse their tongue," so that being encouraged and aided we may not only withstand them, but gloriously triumph over them.

Numerous texts in the Sacred Scriptures point out the necessity of temptations and the valuable results they produce in souls who never allow themselves to succumb. They have been compared with the furnace in which clay receives its hardness and gold its gleam; or that they are represented as a cause for rejoicing, a sign of God's regard, a lesson indispensable if knowledge of God is to be acquired.

When we think of the story of Our Lord's temptations, we can for practical purpose, when applying it to our own experience, think of Satan and the other spirits simply in terms of those evil suggestions and impulses, rising within us, with which we are so familiar. "The life of man upon earth is a warfare," and temptation is the actual clash of arms which its issues are decided. Thus we keep imploring: "Destroy their plans, O Lord, confuse their tongues; for I see violence and strife in the city."

Resistance to temptation means quelling powerful impulses; and this only the disciplined personality can do. If we are in the habit of giving way to every passing whim and desire, we shall be in no position to exercise self-control in the moment of temptation.

Our great defense is the grace of God and it is freely given, but only if we sincerely desire it and show our desire in the ways appointed by God, namely: prayer and the sacraments, on the one hand, but also a certain degree of austerity and self-denial on the other.

"We must not yield, we must not give way," advises our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux, "even though the violent heat of temptation is furiously burning us in both our spiritual and material parts." Accordingly: →

Icon # 548 = Worthy endurance of Mischief and Trouble

“Day and night they go around it on its walls; and mischief and trouble are within it, ruin in its midst; oppression and fraud do not depart from its market place.”

To avoid self-complacency, it would be very helpful and beneficial to constantly bear in mind that so long as we are still here below, in this valley of tears, we will never be completely free from mischief and trouble, and that when a mischief or trouble happens to leave us, we may always expect another, and that we may only so pray to be delivered from them as never to look for or promise ourselves perfect repose and security while we abide in this valley of tears.

The Lord allows us to undergo certain mischief and trouble in order to protect us from more dangerous ones; and from some He delivers us quickly so that we may be exercised in others which He foresees shall be more profitable to us.

Our troubles, rightly used, become greatly lessened and proportionately profitable. Worthy endurance of them is a great sacrifice comparable to that of those noble Christians who of old confessed their faith at the stake, since life's mischief and the sorrows of circumstance provide the martyrdoms of Providence, even as the tortures of tyrants provide martyrdoms for faith and religion.

With the saints and the chosen ones mischief and troubles make for endurance, endurance gives proof of their faith, and a well tested faith gives ground for hope; with the damn and reprobate, on the other hand, troubles and mischief make for faint-heartedness, faint-heartedness for worry, worry for despair, and that is the finish: “Day and night they go around it on its walls; and mischief and trouble are within it, ruin is in its midst; oppression and fraud do not depart from its market place.”

To have accepted the Lord Jesus as our righteousness and to have embraced His holy faith is no guarantee of freedom from mischief and trouble. The Lord never said to His disciples: “Be good and you will not suffer;” but He did say: “In this world you shall have tribulations.”

Our good friend, St. Paul, declares 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.”

Not only mischief and trouble are within us but also our passions. Day and night they go around our soul, oppressing us by their insistent demands, and even ruining us if we fail to handle them constructively. They have the chicanery to present themselves as good, but in the end bring havoc to our interior life. The passions and bad habits we refuse to tame today will be harder to conquer tomorrow should we leave the hours of today unimproved.

Numerous passions are hidden in our soul, "Day and night they go around its walls," but they escape notice. They are revealed when a temptation comes upon us. However, when the soul does not make friends with passions by thinking about them and entertaining them, then since the soul is constantly occupied with another concern, especially the things of God, the power of the passions is unable to hold spiritual dominion in its grip.

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

Icon # 549 = Meadow of Perfidy

"It is not an enemy who taunts me – then I could bear it; It is not an adversary who deals insolently with me – then I could hide from him. But it is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. We used to hold sweet converse together; within God's house we walked in fellowship."

It is credible to affirm that our body can be rightly considered as our equal, our companion, and our familiar friend. Our body and soul hold sweet converse together; we go Church together and to other gatherings either for cluster prayer meeting or just ordinary convocation for human companionship. Wherever our body is there our soul also, and wherever our soul is there our body also. In other words, we walked together in fellowship.

The union of husband and wife in the bond of marriage in which the two became one reflects the intimacy of body and soul intrinsic to our human nature as composite beings. Thus a betrayal of either husband or wife is acutely painful than that of other person.

Very likely, it is relatively easy to bear a mockery of our enemy than that of our familiar friend and can readily hide from our adversary who deals disdainfully with us than that of our intimate compeer.

The passage above is an apt description of how the Lord Jesus perceived the betrayal of Judas. He considered him as His equal in the sense that Judas too is an apostle sent by Him as He was sent by the Father, and also as His companion and familiar friend by the very fact that Judas was among the twelve apostles whom He held sweet converse together – explaining to them His teaching; they walked together in fellowship within the synagogues and the Temple where He openly taught.

Hence the betrayal of Judas was far more painful than the taunts of the chief priests, the Scribes, and elders who mocked Him, saying: "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the king of Israel, let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" And those who passed by, too, derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the son of God, come down from the cross."

Of course, all these mockeries and taunts are painful, as painful as the nails pierced in the hands and feet of the Lord, for they pierced His soul, but not as painful as the betrayal of Judas.

Betrayal is one of the most painful events that any person could experience: betrayal in spousal relationship, in friendship, in business, and in all kinds of relationships. If we are religious we can also betray our vows. Thus all of us are capable of betrayal. The Lord Jesus showed us the way of faith in our lives so that we might live a life of faith.

However, many people especially in our modern age want to separate faith from life. This is observable: infidelity increases, treachery multiplies, deceitfulness proliferates, and betrayal amplifies. We migrate to a pagan environment – land of unfaithfulness and a meadow of perfidy in which spiritual ideals and all true sense of the meaning of life, of loyalty, are endangered.

Nevertheless, we should not confine our attention to Judas because our sins and the sins of all people, especially of Christians are the agony of Christ. The perfidy of Judas is also applicable to all who partake of the Lord's mercies but meet them with ingratitude and indifference.

For instance, the freethinker who only browses the Scriptures with a desire to do away their authority and destroy their influence; the hypocrite who professes to believe the Scriptures but will not allow him/herself to be governed by them; and the apostate who turns aside from the Lord for the things of the world.

On the other hand, we begin to live in faithfulness when we become aware of the potentiality of our capability for betrayal and are mindful of the limitation of our human heart. Acknowledging our natural limitations, our weaknesses and miseries, and our capability for betrayal, we turn to the Lord Jesus and let Him take over our life completely. Hence, we are no longer our own, we were bought with a price.

However, in spite of this, if we despise the kindness of the Lord and does not listen to His voice but go on sinning, using the members of our body as instruments of wickedness, then what await us would be a terrible sentence: →

Icon # 550 = Going Down to Sheol Alive

“Let death come upon them; let them go down to sheol alive; let them go away in terror into their graves.”

Whatever state of life a person is at the moment of death will be his/her due in the next life. The Lord Jesus Himself testified to this when He 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.”

John, too, in the book of Revelation, bore witness to this saying, “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done.”

We have also an example of those who went down to sheol alive. This is the case of Korah, a descendant of Levi, in-charge of the ministry in the tabernacle of the Lord; and Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab. They rose up before Moses, with a number of the people of Israel...; and they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said to them, “You have gone too far! For all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them; why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?”

When Moses heard it, he fell on his face; and said to Korah and all his company: “In the morning the Lord will show who is his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near to him; him whom he will choose he will cause to come near to him. Do this: take censers...put fire in them and put incense upon them before the Lord tomorrow, and the man whom the Lord chooses shall be the holy one. You have gone too far, sons of Levi!”

Notice that both Korah and his group and Moses were denouncing each other as "having gone too far!" Observe too that both of them are in the service of the Lord. So, how do we know who have gone too far?

Moses also sent to call Dathan and Abiram, but they retorted: "We will not come up." They said to Moses, "Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, that you must also make yourself a prince over us? Moreover you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up."

It is quite obvious that in the case of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram they are grappling with the issue of authority. They questioned the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Both Dathan and Abiram challenged Moses for bringing them out of Egypt where they have drinks and food such as: fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, garlicks, etc.; and also for not bringing them into a land which will provide them food and drinks, and for not giving them inheritance of fields and vineyards.

It is likely that they are more concerned of food and drinks and lands than their freedom and deliverance from slavery in Egypt. They failed also to realize that they were given food such as, quails and manna, and water that miraculously came out of a rock. Moreover, they did not take into account that they were still journeying into the promised land, they haven't arrived yet, but once they arrived they will be given a piece of land for each of the tribe of Israel except the tribe of Levi because God Himself is their inheritance. They wanted an inheritance of fields and vineyards without undergoing hardships and sufferings.

The case of Korah and his company was essentially a religious matter. They were Levites in-charge of the Liturgy but not specifically of the priesthood which Aaron and his sons, who were also Levites, were in-charge. From what Moses said to Korah and his company we can perceive that they wanted to take over the priesthood also.

Let us listen to Moses and hear it ourselves: "Hear now, you sons of Levi, 'Is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself, to do service in the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to minister to them; and that he has brought you near him, and all your brethren the sons of Levi with you? And would you seek the priesthood also? Therefore it is against the Lord that you and all your company have gathered together, what is Aaron that you murmur against him?'"

As Moses had told Korah and his company to take censer and put fire and laid incense upon them, so this is what they did; and they stood at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And the glory of the Lord appeared to all the congregation. Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." Both Aaron and Moses fell on their faces, and said: "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be angry with all the congregation?"

And the Lord said to Moses, "Say to the Congregation, Get away from about the dwelling of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram." Then Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram; and the elders of Israel followed him. And he said to the congregation, "Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of their, lest you be swept away with all their sins." So they got away from about the dwelling of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the door of their tents, together with their wives, their sons, and their little ones.

And Moses said: "Hereby you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works, and that it has not been of my own accord. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they are visited by the fate of all men, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth, and swallows them up, with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the Lord."

And as Moses finished speaking all these words, the ground under them split asunder; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men that belonged to Korah and all their goods. So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly.

No doubt this a very frightening experience: going down to Sheol alive, going away in terror into their graves. We can also see how deadly disobedience, grumbling, and discontent are to incur such destiny. Very likely, this event is written for our instruction so that we will not follow in the footsteps of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

It is curious to recognize that the controversy of Korah and his followers have a certain parallel in our own time in the controversy of the ordination of women to the priesthood. It echoes the same argument used by Korah and his followers against Moses and Aaron who were the higher authority: "You have gone too far! For all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them; why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?"

It is not hard to imagine the Vatican Officials say to them: "You, too, have gone too far! Is it too small a thing for you to be a consecrated religious; to do service in the mystical Body of Christ, the Church; to be the bride of Christ; to feed the hungry; to cloth the naked, to welcome the stranger; to comfort the prisoner; to minister the sick; to teach in school; to serve the poor; to have a degree in theology, etc.? And would you seek the priesthood also?" "In the morning the Lord will show who is his, and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to him; him whom he will choose he will cause to come near to him."

Both of them, too, are indicting each other as "having gone too far!" Both of them, too, are in the service of mystical Body of Christ. So, how do we know who have gone too far? In this case, we have to assert strongly that we will only know for certain without the slightest equivocation who have gone too far once the "morning" comes, that is once we arrive at the shore of our eternal destiny where all the fish, that is, all people in the world will be sorted out: "the Lord will show who is his, and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to him; him whom he will choose he cause to come near to him."

The case of Dathan and Abiram, too, has parallel not only in our own time but since time immemorial. This is the case of loving the world more than the Lord; to lose sight of the promised land, that is, the kingdom of heaven which is flowing with milk of eternal life and honey of everlasting happiness; to forget that the Lord has delivered us from the slavery of sin; to be ungrateful for all He has done to save us; adding more insult to injury by living what the Gentiles and worldly people like to do: living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry: worshiping power, wealth, prestige, and honor; joining them in the same wild profligacy; using one's freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, and the members of one's body as instruments of wickedness, such as: immorality, impurity, sorcery, enmity, envy, jealousy, strife, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, and the like – not heeding the warning that those who do such thing shall not inherit the kingdom of God, that is, the promised land.

The glamour of this world dazzled the vision of their souls, thus they failed to consider that God is preparing for them and eternal weight of glory beyond comparison in the promised land, that once they arrived each of them shall be given an inheritance because through the Lord Jesus they are no longer slave but a son, and if a son then an heir. It is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with their spirit that they are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, that is, what belongs to Him belongs also to them. However, they preferred more the fleeting pleasures of this world – the fleshpots of Egypt than the eternal glory of God's kingdom.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge the authority of the New Moses, the Lord Jesus, God gave them up to a base mind and improper conduct. They

were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness. Full of deceit, murder, 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. Hence, if they will not repent when death come upon them but deliberately persevere in it till their last breath, then, it is very likely that they will go away in terror in their graves, because there will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth.

On the other hand, there will be glory and honor and peace for every one who does good, for every one who had withstood the test because they will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love Him. They put their trust in the Lord as they underwent many trials in life. Hence, they utter their confidence: →

Icon # 551 = God's Two Kinds of Gifts

"But I call upon God; and the Lord will save me. Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he will hear my voice."

To call upon God is man's act of faith; and to save us is God's act of redemption through Jesus Christ Our Lord, because if we confess with our lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, we will be saved. For by believing with our heart we are justified, and by confessing with our lips we are saved. As it is written: "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." For, "Every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

Another name of calling upon the Lord is, of course, prayer. The kernel of prayer is not the attempt to twist the hand of God to enable Him to grant what we want, for this is not a good foundation of a healthy relationship, but there is a licit prayer of supplication. God has two kinds of gifts: 1st, there are those which He sends us whether we pray for them or not; and the 2nd are those which are given on condition that we pray.

The 1st gifts resemble those things which a child receives in a family, such as food, clothing, shelter, and watchfulness. These gifts come to every child whether the child ask for them or not. Of course, the quality of these things varies according to the social status of the family: rich or poor, but these things are there.

On the other hand, there are other gifts which are conditioned upon the desire of the child. For instance, a parent may be eager to have a son or daughter go to college, but if the boy or girl, refuses to study or becomes delinquent, the gift which the parent intended for the child can never be bestowed, not because the parent has retracted the gift, but because the child has made the gift impossible.

Of the first kind of gifts the Lord spoke when He said: "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." He spoke of the second kind of gifts when He said: "Ask, and it will be given you...." If God sometimes seems too slow to answer our prayer, there are several possible reasons. One is that the delay is for the purpose of deepening our love and increasing our faith and strengthening our hope. The other is that God is urging us.

God may defer for some time the granting of His gifts that we might the more ardently pursue not the gift, but the Giver. Or we may be asking for something He wants us to learn we do not need. The greatest gift of God is not the things we think we would like to have, but Himself. "If you then, who are evil," He said, "know how to give good gift to your children, how much more the heavenly Father give His Holy Spirit to those who ask Him."

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

With this attitude of mind as the foundation of our prayer we humbly call the Lord to save us from an overwhelming distress, a distress so devastating which makes us lament in the morning, noon, and at evening. He will hear our voice for we are the sheep of His pasture, the people He redeemed. Consequently, it redounds to His glory and increases thanksgiving to God, as it is written: "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me." Whereupon: →

Icon # 552 = The Battle of the Soul

"He will deliver my soul in safety from the battle that I wage, for many are arrayed against me."

Certainly, no one goes to battle without bringing a weapon for that would be tantamount to committing suicide. In the spiritual warfare, we too need to have

a weapon to withstand against the many vices and evil desires that arrayed against us. In the forefront are pride, anger, and avarice; at the rear are resentment, hatred, and envy; at the left are gluttony, listlessness, and infidelity; at the right are lust, licentiousness, and debauchery; above us are airplanes bombing us with vainglory, vanity, pretentiousness, and conceit. These are all spiritual forces more powerful than the U.S. military forces combined together. Who could ever withstand them without equal or more powerful forces than they?

However, we are not without hope because as soldiers of Christ we are equipped with the whole armor of God with our loins girded with truth, and having put on the bullet proof of righteousness, and having shod our feet with the combat boots of the gospel of peace; taking the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the gun of the spirit which is the word of God.

By putting this whole armor of God we are enabled to withstand against the wiles of the devil: conquering pride by humility looking always at the Lord Jesus on the Cross though He is God did not count Himself equality with God but humbled Himself taking our human nature and becoming obedient unto death – death on the cross; conquering vanity by modesty, lust by chastity, anger by kindness, hatred by forgiveness, infidelity by faithfulness, avarice by generosity, gluttony by moderation, envy by appreciation, jealousy by trust, pretentiousness by sincerity.

For if these things are ours and abound they will usher us in safety from the vices and infractions that we are waging, for anyone who lack these things will very likely taken into captivity, to the land of unlikeness, where we will be enslaved to sin. Thus if we are slaves of sin, we are free in regard to righteousness. But then what return shall we get from it? We don't have to be a dogmatic or moral theologian to know that the return of unrepented, deliberate, grievous, sin is death, because everyone who is self-indulgent is dead even while s/he lives.

All vices have one root in common, namely, the disordered love of self, opposed to the love of good, and especially the sovereign good which is God. This evil root tends to sink itself ever more profoundly into the will, and from this root issues an evil tree. The trunk of this tree is egoism, of which the central and principal branch, the continuation of the trunk, is pride, of which the lateral branches are the concupiscence of the flesh, and concupiscence of the eyes.

From concupiscence of the flesh is born gluttony and luxury. From concupiscence of the eyes, that is, immoderate desire of external goods is born avarice, and then perfidy, fraud, cheating, and hardening of heart. From the pride of life are born, vainglory and ambition, disgust for spiritual things, forgetfulness of God, envy, anger, injuries to neighbor.

Some of these vices in the most wicked people have roots that are very deep and intricate, like that of a bamboo, which manifest in their own pathetic manner the immense deformity of the soul. We know those words of our heavenly friend, St. Augustine: "Two loves have built two cities: the love of self extending to the scorn of God has made the city of Babylon, that is, the city of the world, the city of immorality, whereas the love of God even to the scorn of self has made the city of God, the city of righteousness."

Just as a person does not arrive all at once at sanctity, so too a person does not arrive at once at complete perversity. Inordinate love of self, when it becomes dominating, puts forth roots more and more deep to be seen in certain souls which are on the road to perdition. They close their inner eyes to the divine light which alone could illumine and deliver them.

Just as the kingdom of the devil is gained by conniving at the vices, so the kingdom of God is possessed in purity of heart and spiritual knowledge of the things that are above where the Lord Jesus is at the right hand of the Father, by practicing the virtues. And where the kingdom of God is, there without a doubt eternal life – a place of safety from the battle we have waged on earth. It is a place wherever God is king, wherever His law is obeyed, for instance, in the soul of each believer.

Hence, 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 undoubtedly in the kingdom of God – a very safe place where vices who arrayed against us could no longer be found, for "the unclean shall not pass over it, and fools shall not err therein." No lion of anger and hatred shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast of pride or envy or avarice or lust come upon it; "they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there" – those noble men and women whose souls had been delivered in safety from the raging battle that they had waged in this present world, for many arrayed against them: the enemies within – the works of the flesh, that is, anything and everything opposed to God. But: →

Icon # 553 = The Battle of the Soul

"God will give ear, and humble them, he who is enthroned from of old; because they keep no law, and do not fear God."

God will eventually humble our pride if we constantly keep in our mind the humility of God: first and foremost by becoming a human being like us in all things except sin, and by accepting death, death on the cross. Meditating upon

the Paschal Mystery: the Passion, death, and resurrection of Christ is a very fertile soil where self-knowledge grows abundantly. Knowledge of our self as we truly are is an efficacious means in growing in humility, for it sees that we owe our existence from someone else – the source of all existence, no other than God.

If growth in humility is nourished by self-knowledge, then it is apparent that pride is supported by self-deception. It is the battle cry of pride to trumpet the untrumpetable: "I will not serve." "I will set my throne on high...I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High." Pride ascended above the height of the clouds, but he fell like lightning from on high.

Pride cranes its head by too much admiration of oneself. Pride makes himself his own law, his own judge, his own morality, his own god. The king of pride promised Adam and Eve: "You will be as gods." We make ourselves a god by the exaltation of our own will against the will of God; from this rebellion flows contempt of others' rights, excessive love of personal advancement, the desire to be in the spotlight, and intolerance of opinions that differ from our own.

In our modern world, pride disguises itself under the prettier names of success and popularity. We are encouraged by quack psychologists to "trust ourselves" instead of trusting God. False confidence in the self is promoted – although the only formula of one's contentment lies in saying to God: "Thou alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life." You are the Vine and we are the branches; apart from You we cannot bear fruits that befit repentance.

We have to be convinced that where true humility is present God will give a peace that surpasses understanding, a peace that the world cannot truly give, a peace by which we will walk with greater contentment amidst the trials and sufferings of this present world. The living God, who died in the most degrading condition, has taught mankind to despise earthly values and to esteem those virtues of humility and sacrifice which the world disdains.

"If you want the virtue of humility," says our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux, "you must not shun humiliation. If you will not suffer yourself to be humbled, you can never achieve humility." Humiliation leads to humility just as patience leads to peace, and reading to knowledge.

"Before I was afflicted I went astray," says our heavenly friend the Psalmist, "but now I keep thy word. It is good for me that I was afflicted that I may learn thy statutes." The rationale, then, is clear that God will not despise a humbled and contrite heart, but rather considered it as an acceptable sacrifice.

If we keep the eyes of our heart always open we will see many things that will humble us. First and foremost, of course, is the recognition of our creatureliness,

thus the realization that we are dust and to dust we shall return. The other, which is also unequivocal, is our failure to keep God's commandments in many respects, especially the greatest commandment of love either in our thoughts, words, or actions.

It is further objected that self-knowledge brings despair, as it reveals our true defects. There is no doubt that such despair is likely if we view ourselves apart from God revealed in the Lord Jesus. Self-knowledge is never despairing to those who acknowledge the power and mercy of God. Who fears to reveal one's guilt to a loving Savior who redeems? Self-examination to humble Christian is the digging of a foundation. The deeper the foundation, the higher the building will finally soar; the more humble the soul, the greater her/his exaltation when God touches her/him.

In the words of our heavenly friend, St. Teresa of Avila: "If humility is not genuinely present, for your own sake the Lord will not construct a high building lest that building fall to the ground." These words of St. Teresa sonorously re-echo the locution of our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux: "I wish, therefore, before all else, that the soul should know itself...because such knowledge does not puffs up, but humbles us, and is a certain foundation on which to build. For unless it is founded on the firm foundation of humility, the spiritual building cannot stand."

Hence, if we don't have self-knowledge and humility our spiritual life will eventually collapse; there will be anarchy within: no more keeping of God's law and no more healthy fear of Him; there will be chaos everywhere: each one devouring and biting each other. No wonder, then: →

Icon # 554 = Consequences When We no longer keep God's Commandments

"My companion stretched out his hand against his friends, he violated his covenant."

This, of course, is one of the consequences when we no longer keep the commandments of God and don't have a wholesome fear of Him. When we lose respect of God, we will likely lose respect of our fellow human being because a sincere respect for one another has its origin in our respect of God. Hence, the loss of respect for God leads to disrespect for each other. In this case, even friendship will suffer and promises will be broken. Thus it would not be surprising to hear, "My companion stretched out his hand against his friends, he violated his covenant."

It is plausible to say that this does not happen overnight – out of a sudden, but always start from little things: perhaps little breach of courtesy, a little show of

appreciation, a tiny manifestation of consideration, a dinky deference of reverence, a picayune transgression of affability, and a modicum infringement of graciousness.

These are being hatched within the heart, in one's disposition, then give birth to contempt; and when contempt is old enough it will stretch out its hand even against his friends. Undoubtedly, this is reflected in broken marriages.

In its worst it reflected the case of Judas wherein he stretched out his hand against the Lord, and by implication his other friends, that is, the other apostles; he violated his covenant of friendship with them.

It is also mirrored the method used in Chinese prisons during the time of Mao Tse Tung in which each inmate stretched out his hand against his fellow companion, even if he is his close friend, and they against him in order to inculcate in them the doctrine of communism.

It is also manifested in the form of criticism. We criticize others unjustly, with the excuse that they should know the truth about themselves. It seems that the end or intentionality of criticism is to regain or maintain control at the expense of others. It is a contrary dynamic to love, caring, respect, commitment that makes any close relationship work.

Criticism can be verbal or non verbal. Verbal criticism displays itself in complaining, blaming, sarcasm, hyperbole, and attack. Non verbal criticism demonstrates itself in not acting towards the other with love, care, respect, etc. Instead, we look at the other with disgust and disdain; we won't look at, won't talk to, won't listen to the other; we ignore or act as if the other were not there. The stretching out of our hands against our brothers and sisters is often the veil of our own weakness; we cover up our own nakedness with the mantle of criticism; we see the mote in our neighbor's eye, but never the log in our own. We carry all our neighbor's faults on a sack in front of us, and all our own on a sack behind us.

Driven by the threat inside us or our need for power, we choose the common weapon of criticism in an attempt to force the other party to accept our picture. We who see the faults of others are sometimes, not always, unconsciously revealing our own; for how could one of us say of another, "s/he is jealous," or "s/he is catty," unless we already knew in our hearts how it felt to be jealous or catty?

The Lord warned us: "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." Hence, the judgment we pronounce on our brother or sister is a self-revelation, thus a verdict on ourselves.

The very touchiness and sensitiveness of some people about themselves, the violent way they react to criticism, is an indication of how much they protect their own false ego, of how little courage they have in daring to let their real self stand the light of day.

The one who sees the most faults in his/her brothers or sisters, stretching out one's hand against his/her friends, is the one who has never looked inside his/her heart. Unjustified criticism of others is self-flattery, for by finding others worse than ourselves, we become comparatively virtuous; but in prayer and meditation, by finding ourselves worse than others, we discover that most of our neighbors are better than ourselves.

What we need, then, is genuine self-knowledge, for it constitutes the initial stage in the apprenticeship of charity because true self-knowledge gives birth to humility, which in turn engenders charity. Without good self-knowledge we will be highly susceptible to self-contradiction. Thus people will speak of us: →

Icon # 555 = Contradiction Between Words and Actions

"His speech was smoother than butter, yet war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords."

To a great extent words are self-revelation, because by our words others can notice the grace in our inner life or the vice in our morals. Moreover, life and death are in the power of one's words, and those who love words will eat their fruits.

Here's a story which serves as an example how one's speech can be smoother than butter, yet war is in one's heart. A certain Chinese general, in the 40's – 50's, named Liu was gifted with an intense cunning that helped him out of many a critical situation, and he was so brutally vindictive that he found no cruelty too great to attain his purpose.

One day, when a large part of his army was on expedition, General Liu was surrounded by a troop of bandits. He at once sent a message that he would like to make peace with them and asked the leader to come and see him with all his men a few days later. He would offer them a new year's dinner and they would discuss a compromise.

On the appointed day the hundred and forty brigands arrived and while they were awaiting the arrival of General Liu in the great hall, the doors and windows suddenly opened and Liu's soldiers encircled the brigands and disarmed them. On this day, which should have been a festival of peace and pardon, a hundred and forty men were shot at General Liu's order.

It is also true to say that there are people who will praise you and speak well of you in your presence, but will not hesitate to speak against you behind your back. This attitude shows, very likely, the inner contradiction of the person. It can undermine trust and can greatly diminish one's integrity. It is also a form of self-deception. We are not only deceiving others but also deceiving ourselves when our speech is smoother than butter, yet war is in our heart.

If we are to give an account of every idle word that we utter how much more if our speech contradicts of what is in our heart. In this case, the safest alternative is silence. God cannot be perceived in midst of disturbance and so interior chaos needs to be diminished. It is better to keep our mouth shut and let people think we are a fool than to open it and prove they are right.

"We hold our tongue in check," says our heavenly friend St. Peter Damian, "because if they are undisciplined they empty the soul of the strength of heavenly grace, and weakens its healthful vigor."

The antagonism and the continual disagreement between our speech and what is in our heart is a reflection of the inner civil war of which our good friend, St. Paul, speaks when he says: "The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh."

It is true that this interior civil war is more acute in some people than in others, and in some directions more than in others, and even at certain ages, at certain times, and on certain occasions. Whether this inner contradiction be little or great we need to ask the Lord for the grace to grow in self-knowledge, and to minimize the gap between our words and the dispositions of our heart.

Those who wear a constant disguise over the true self by having speech smoother than butter yet war is in one's heart, not only reveal themselves to their neighbors, at moments of stress, as totally different personalities, but they have within themselves a bare minimum of the true self-consciousness which is necessary for inner harmony.

Their sense of selfhood is so completely externalized that they never feel integrated and never able to find peace. Their words and their actions are at war. Their "words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords." A constant conflict seems to rage within their breasts, between what they ought to be and

what they are. However, so long as we still have breath we should never lose hope, but pray to Our Lord, ask the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the angels and saints for the grace of deeper conversion, to know ourselves more deeply.

When we grow in self-knowledge, and knowledge of God too, we will discover in our interior self many things that can make us shake our head, but also give us hope. With our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux we can say: "As long as I look at myself, my eye is consumed with bitterness. Yet when I lift my eye to the aid of divine mercy, this joyous vision of God soon tempers my bitter vision of myself."

Hence, when we considered ourselves we are troubled and saddened because of our inner contradiction: the disharmony between our words and actions, but when we consider God, we are revitalized and consoled with the joy of the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, from the knowledge of ourselves we engender a healthy fear and truthful humility, but from the knowledge of God we generate hope and trust. Therefore, with confidence we entrust ourselves to Him heedful of the salutary counsel: →

Icon # 556 = God will Sustain Us

"Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved."

We can hear a sonorous echo of this advice in the first letter of Peter where it says: "Cast all your anxieties on the Lord, for he cares about you. Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

When we are loaded with problems and troubles and would not entrust these to the Lord we will likely fall into a severe depression. They are just overwhelming, beyond our human capacity to handle. In this case, our inexorable adversary the devil can easily devour us with unbearable sadness. We will lack the ability to clearly and objectively appraise our crisis. Our intellect will be clouded, our emotion will be in chaos, and our will be weakened. If we are unlucky, we might commit suicide as the only attractive solution to our sufferings.

On the other hand, if we cast our burdens on the Lord, He will certainly sustain us because He cares about us, even dying on the cross for us. He suffered a sorrowful and painful death even though He was completely innocent. His death is the ultimate sign of His mercy and of His willingness to suffer with us and for us, to sustain us in our sufferings. His death gives hope that meaning can exist in suffering. His resurrection teaches us also that there is life after tragedy.

The Lord Jesus cast His burden on His heavenly Father and He was sustained to the end; His heavenly Father never permitted Him to be moved from His goal to suffer and die for us in order to instill in us a trust and reassurance that if we cast all our burdens on Him, He will sustain us till the end of our journey in this present life; He will never permit us to be moved from our goal to enter the kingdom of Heaven where we will be with Him and with all the angels and saints for all eternity, for no one can snatch us out from His hands, and besides, the Father who has given us to the Lord Jesus is greater than all and no one can snatch us from the Father's hands.

Moreover, the Lord Jesus stipulated that He will be with us till the end of time just as His Father was with Him till He finished His mission on earth. And as He was sustained by Simon of Cyrene to carry His cross, so He will sustain us to bear our burden.

He invited us to cast our burden on Him, so that we will find rest for our wearied soul; we will be yoked together with Him. Thus He bears our burden. For what can be heavy or hard to the person who has taken up Christ's yoke and reflects constantly upon the suffering of the Lord and bears patiently all the hardships that come upon him/her, saying: "For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong!"

The Lord will really sustain us and help us handle constructively our trials and difficulties if we cast all these burdens on Him, for the strength of the human spirit and its successful effort to rise above hardships is an indication of superior divine favor, a sustaining love that will never allow us to collapse on the way.

It is only when we are too proud to pray to God and ask His help and guidance, too obstinate to follow our own will instead of His will that He will permit us to be moved and cast down into the pit of self-destruction. That is why: →

Icon # 557 = The Bottomless Pit

"But thou, O God, will cast them down into the lowest pit; men of blood and treachery shall not live out half their days."

It is right to say that no one will be cast out into the lowest bottomless pit unless one has fully and entirely deserved it. The first ones who had been cast down into this lowest bottomless pit was, of course, Lucifer, who is popularly known as the devil or Satan, and his wicked angels.

Among human beings, everyone who dies in unrepented, deliberate mortal sin will also be cast down. This would be unimaginably painful because human beings and demons are enclosed together in this pit. To be thrown down amidst a 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 light and easy endurances these would be, compared with those who will be soaked with panics and anguish in this bottomless pit, an anguish which can neither escape, nor hide itself, nor die!

In this pit, every moment, even an immortal soul, even a deathless body, will feel as if this nervous and mental agony of anguish and pain could be borne no longer; and yet it must be borne still, and it must be borne forever, and it must be borne without its ever becoming easier to bear. Oh, that scared tumult of eternal sleeplessness in this bottomless pit, who shall endure it?!

Plausibly, this topic about God casting down human beings into the lowest pit is offensive to modern sentimentalists, for how can a God who is love cast down someone into the bottomless pit, not just overnight but for all eternity? There are several reasons why modern men and women would not believe this, among which is a psychological reason.

For instance, if a person has led very wicked, murderous, and treacherous lives, s/he does not simply want to be disturbed in his/her wrongdoings by harsh words about justice and truth. His/her wish that there will be no casting into the lowest pit for his/her crimes thus becomes dominant in his/her thought that there is no such thing as bottomless pit.

Another reason is that they confuse the crude imagery of painters and poets with the reality of the moral order behind the belief that there is such a bottomless pit. It is right to say that eternal realities are not always easy to portray in the symbols of time and space, but there is no good reason why they should be denied by anyone.

A final reason is that belief in the existence of this bottomless pit has been isolated from the organic whole of Christian truths. Once it is separated from the tenets of sin, freedom, virtue, redemption, and justice, it becomes absurd as an eye and nose and ear separated from the body. The justice of this reasoning is generated in the fact that people become scandalized about God casting someone down into the lowest pit when they cease to be scandalized about sin.

The Catholic Church has never altered one single iota the belief in the existence of this bottomless pit as taught by her founder, Our Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus.

In adherence to His divine testimony and the testimony of the Scripture, the Catholic Church teaches that this bottomless pit is a demand of justice and love. Once it is recognized that the moral order is grounded on justice and love, then retribution beyond the grave becomes a necessity, for it is morally intolerable that by the mere fact of dying a murderous and treacherous or an impenitent wrongdoer should triumphantly escape justice.

The same fate cannot lie in store for the martyr and the persecutor; the emperor Nero and the apostle Paul, Judas and Christ. If there is a supreme Good to which a person can attain only by courageous effort, it must follow that the person who neglects to make that effort endangers his/her happiness, and would likely be cast down into the lowest pit.

Once it is granted that exultation to eternal life has to be won, then there must be the grim possibility that it may also be lost. Even the order of nature itself suggests retribution for every violation of a law. There is a physical law to the effect that for every action there is an equal opposite reaction. For instance, if we stretch out a rubber band three inches, it will react with a force equal to three inches; if we stretch it twelve inches, it will react with a force equal to twelve inches, and so forth.

This physical law has its counterpart in the moral order, in which every sin necessarily implies punishment, for sin is an action against a certain order. For example, if we sin or act against our conscience, there is an imminent reaction in the form of remorse of conscience which, of course, in each normal people, varies with the gravity of sin committed.

Moreover, if we sin or act against the order established by a State, there is an opposite and equal reaction in the form of a fine, imprisonment, or death sentence meted out by the State. It is noteworthy that the punishment is never determined by the span of time required to commit the crime, but rather by the nature of the crime itself. It takes only a second to commit murder, and yet the State will take away life for such an offense, or life imprisonment without parole.

Finally, whenever we sinned against God, we are acting contrary to One who is infinite; for this reason, there is bound to be a reaction. The reaction from the infinite must, therefore, be infinite; and an infinite reaction from God is an infinite separation from God, and an infinite separation from God is an infinite divorce from life and truth and love. That is what this bottomless pit is.

It is true to say that this bottomless pit is related to a sinful and evil life in the same way that blindness is related to the plucking out of the eyes, for the two are inseparable. One necessarily follows the other. Life is a harvest and we reap what we sow: if we sow in sin we will reap corruption, cast down into the lowest

pit; but if we sow in the spirit we will reap everlasting life and be raised up with the Lord Jesus in the kingdom of heaven. Of course, we know that this is not our own doing but owing to the grace of the Holy Spirit working within us and our cooperation with this grace. For this reason, we have to put our confidence in Him and say: →

Icon # 558 = I will Trust in You

"But I will trust in thee."

We have thousands of solid reasons why we should put our trust in God, not only because He is so good and Omnipotent and Omniscience, but even simply for our own peace and tranquility. Our life will be peaceful and tranquil in proportion as we trust in God completely and abandon ourselves to Him, because He is so kind that He could not trace any motive in His benevolent heart to forsake us if we entrust ourselves completely to Him.

In this case, we will be carved into the palms of His hands. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the child 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.

The knowledge and fear of the perpetual snares that everywhere lie in wait for us, both without and within our soul, are in themselves the grace which enables us to avoid those snares. When we combine this humble fear with great trust in God we will be amazed by our victory, except perhaps on a few unimportant occasions when God permits trivial lapses for the sake of our greater good. These lapses are beneficial to us in the sense that they serve to keep us always insignificant before God, always distrustful of ourselves but trustful of God.

Nothing happens in this world that is not guided by a wise and divine Providence that controls even the slightest happenings in this life and turning them to the advantage of those who entrust themselves in His divine Providence, and who unreservedly abandon themselves to His gracious care. How such trust and such utter self-surrender bring interior peace and bring release from an infinite multiplicity of cares that are so disturbing and vexatious! Such trust forestalls the anxious thoughts of tomorrow's affairs, for it is wise enough to face one day at a time the trouble that comes its way.

It is true to say that we cannot attain this state all at once, overnight as we say, but only by slow degrees and by almost imperceptible advance, hence, we have to yearn for it unceasingly, beseech God for it, and perform spiritual and charitable acts to secure it.

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, the healthy and true fear of God is salubriously sweet, peaceful and tranquil, and mingled with trust.

All contradictions and reverses can be turned to good if we put on our trust in God. Seeing the trial as coming from the Divine Hand, we will not be afraid how to meet it, nor argue why it came, nor seek defense against it. Each trial is an opportunity for strengthening our faith and a chance to grow in virtue, for having entrust ourselves in the deeper dimension of Divine Love, we will realize as a child in a loving family realize that even what is not understood, at the moment, is done kindly and for the best.

Thus, even though we will walk in the dark valley of sorrows and distress we will still be confident that God will be with us. Our only desire is that: →

Icon # 559 = Liberation From the Oppression of the Foes

Psalm 56 (55)

"Be gracious to me, O God, for men trample upon me; all day long foemen oppress me; my enemies trample upon me all day long, for many fight against me proudly."

When the eight capital vices proudly fight against us, trampling us all day long and oppress us, our only hope is that God be gracious to us. Truly, God will be gracious to us so long as we do not abandon prayer, and if there is still, even a flicker, of humility left in our heart, for humility of heart is the most favorite virtue the Lord Jesus wants to see in soul. The more a soul is convinced of its misery and helplessness, the more it is disposed to union with Our Lord.

When we recognize, indeed, that of ourselves we are weak to resist our enemies who trample and oppress, and fight against us proudly, that we are poor, wretched, and infirm, we implicitly proclaim the power, the wisdom, the holiness, and the goodness of the Lord Jesus. "Call on me on the day of trouble, I will deliver you and you shall glorify me," says the Lord.

Humility of heart is a practical and continuous acknowledgment of our helplessness before God, and this acknowledgment captivates the eyes of God. Take for example the very poor who are utterly destitute of any means. Their miserable conditions are their pleadings. They do not try to hide them, but rather display them in order to touch people's hearts. In the same way we try to

captivate God's pity by the affirmation of our weakness, thus it shows that we have a modicum of self-knowledge.

However, we should not use our weaknesses as a pretext for doing evil, that is, allowing our enemies to oppress and trample us, yielding to their dominion, but rather we have to fight back against them under the auspices of the Lord Jesus, as the illustrious apostle James rightly counseled us: "Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you men of double mind."

The Lord Jesus is infinitely more willing to liberate us from the oppression of our vices if we really desire to be liberated from them. Of course, there should be cooperation between human and divine to accomplish this task not because He is impotent to do it Himself, but because He would never liberate us against our will. It will also give us a sense of dignity if we have a part in overcoming our vices, especially those deeply rooted such as addiction.

For this reason, we have to recourse to human means, such as: drug rehabilitation program, alcoholic and sex anonymous, or gambling anonymous, if these are the ones which oppress and trample us all day long. Combined with persevering prayer and trust in God we will be overwhelmed with awe, thanksgiving, and wonder how the Lord is really gracious to us. The same hold true with smoking if this is the one which oppresses and tramples us. We have to be liberated from this, too, because every kind of addiction is a form of slavery, "for whatever overcomes a man to that he is enslaved." All these vices, of course, afflict the body and almost impossible to overcome by our own good will alone without the help of God and other human means.

Spiritual vices such as pride and vainglory are also equally powerful to trample and oppress our soul. Take for example if we are humiliated in front of other people or suffered a terrible setback and debacle, if we are too proud to accept it or handle it constructively, that would be a nagging incentive to take vengeance or commit suicide.

God knows that these kinds of vices are hard to overcome without His help, hence, He Himself offers us a remedy. He who is Omnipotent, Omniscience, and greater than anything we can think of, whom the angels adored and glorified, humbles Himself by taking a human nature like us in all things except sin. He was born poor and live simply to insinuate in us that happiness and contentment does not consist in possessing and consuming much, but in having few needs and satisfying them at modicum expense.

He was humiliated, mocked, and scorned in front of other people, to give us courage to endure our own humiliation and to assuage our pain when mocked

and scorned in public. Thus He offers us His Incarnation and His Cross to conquer these impervious vices of pride and vainglory.

The Incarnation and the Cross are very powerful medicines to cure these vices of pride and vainglory. They should become part of our daily spiritual regimen, that is, component of our thoughts. In the physical realm, they are equivalent to the medicine that we have to take daily all the days of our lives if we are diagnosed with a chronic disease and should never miss a daily dose, nor stop it because of the grave danger that the disease might come back again with a relentless vengeance and could not be treated again.

Pride and vainglory are spiritual diseases which afflict all people, rich and poor alike, in varying degrees. Many died spiritually due to these illnesses.

It is plausible to say that the feeling of anxiety or fear is not a complete stranger when we go to see a doctor for physical examination, being apprehensive that he might discover something not to our liking. However, it is to our own advantage that we did see a doctor, especially when the disease was still in its early stage.

In the spiritual realm, too, many people who are doing evil things are fearful to come to God lest their deeds should be exposed. But it should have been to their advantage if they did, because no matter how malignant their deeds are God is more than happy to forgive them. "Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord, "though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."

In other words, if they turned from their evil deeds and does what is lawful, right, and just, made reparation for their evil deeds, and walk in the statutes of life, committing no iniquity; they shall surely live. None of the evil deeds that they have committed shall be remember against them; they have done what is lawful, right, and just, they shall surely live.

If fear, shame, and anxiety are lurking in our heart if we will return to God because our former companions of doing evil things might mock us, then, we have to entrust ourselves to God, saying: →

Icon # 560 = When I am afraid, I put my Trust in Thee

"When I am afraid, I put my trust in thee."

The wise thief and the foolish thief on the cross had the same crises of fear and suffering, but the foolish one in his asininity did not put his trust in God but bitterly

complained, so he lost his opportunity for a more abundant life that day which God prepared for him; the wise thief proves himself an ingenuous robber by putting his trust in God and sublimate his fear and spiritualized the brief moment of suffering as though he had stolen the code of martyrdom: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather be afraid of him who can destroy both soul and body in Hell."

His trust earned him eternal life that day, for out of the mouth of the Son of God, Christ Jesus the Lord, consubstantial with the Father in His divinity and consubstantial with the human race in His humanity, true God and true man, he heard the never-dreamed-of paradise: "Today you will be with me in paradise."

From fear to trust, the wise thief attained peace and sanctity in a short time which most of us will take our whole life time. A further grace was poured into him for neither fear, nor anxiety about his present state nor about his future, bother him, as though he became immune to the irregularity of this present world, for that is the fruit and the happy effect of one's trust in God.

Unrepented and unforgiven sins are the most common hidden causes of fear and anxiety. Many neurotics, who profess no religion, do not realize that their troubles are due to a hidden guilt. To deny the existence of our past sin is as serious to a soul as the denial of an existing cancer is serious to the body.

"I think it might be useful," says our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux, "to add that we should approach by three steps the acquisition of salvation and grace: humility, faith, and fear. It is to the humble man that grace is given, it is with faith that he receives it, and it is with fear that he guards it."

Religious faith is not stranger to fear, but this is not the servile fear a citizen would have for a dictator in a communist country; it is the filial fear a child feels for its loving parent. The person of faith fears God in the sense that his/her reverence makes him/her shrink from doing anything that might wound his/her parents. This fear in its turn begets purity of the intellect, so that we seek to avoid all errors that might damage the divine relationship of the soul and God.

We have thousands of well founded reasons to trust the Lord at all times: in times of affliction, temptation, and darkness, for all power and strength are in Him to help; His love, grace, and mercy, move Him to it, and are always consistent. The consideration, too, of what He has done for others who have entrusted in Him, and for ourselves in times past, should induce and encourage us to it. Moreover:

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Icon # 561 = Praise God in His Word

"In God whose word I praise, in God I trust without a fear. What can flesh do to me?"

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," begins the prologue of the Gospel according to John. We neither have any word to convey of God's love for us, but God has His Word; Christ Jesus the Lord is the Word telling the world how much God loves us. Everything the Lord Jesus said and did and experienced on earth is the Word saying, "See how God loves you!"

Christ Jesus is the Word of God made flesh, thus we are on good ground to praise Him, for by His humble and compassionate condescension in the mystery of His Incarnation, and in each of the saving mysteries of His earthly life, the Word made-flesh also offers us all, poor vanished children of Eve, the most perfect paradigm of humility and love.

Our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux pointed out that attachment to the humanity of Christ is the pivotal point on which depends the reorientation of love, from carnal it will become spiritual, concupiscence will become charity. "Your affection for you Lord Jesus should be both tender and intimate, to oppose the sweet enticement of sensual life. Sweetness conquers sweetness as one nail drives out another." Here is the advantage of attaching one's sensual love to the humanity of Christ.

As fallen human beings, then, we feel and yearn only what is fleshy, hence, the Word of God has taken flesh, even the delicate and delectable flesh of an infant that He might entice our heart away from the sensible, fleshy goods we crave in this present world to His own delightful and sensible humanity. His ultimate goal, however, in captivating our sensible affection is not that we might rest satisfied in this condition, but that we might be drawn to the still delectable taste of His own divinity by means of spiritual love.

Wherefore, it is right and fitting that we praise God in His Word. In God we trust without a fear of approaching Him in the lowliness of His sacred humanity in equal confidence as we approach the throne of grace that we might receive mercy and find help in times of need.

If our ultimate end, as human beings, is to have been created and raised to the order of grace in order to give glory to God, it is just cogent and instinctive that whatever goal we may seek in this present world, there is nothing that can give us supreme happiness except God and trusting Him at all times.

Indeed, the Lord Jesus who consoles the humble gives the soul in the midst of its greatest desolation an intimate assurance that it has nothing to fear provided it allows Him to act and entrusts itself completely to Him. Our faults, when we atone for them become profitable and beneficial to us. By such wretchedness and faults God constantly makes us small in our own eyes and keeps us in true humility of heart.

Let us listen to our other heavenly friend, St. Narcissus, on how trust in the Lord is beneficial for us as we journey in this present life amidst trials and difficulties: "God never fail those who trust in Him; He guides them through darkness and through trials and securely to their end, and in the evening time there is light."

For this reason, we are in a good position to resist the inveterate enemies of our salvation whose only desire is to harm us all day long, day in and day out: →

Icon # 562 = Temptation

"All day long they seek to injure my cause; all their thoughts are against me for evil. They band themselves together, they lurk, they watch my steps."

The demons are so madly envious and jealous of us, because God has promised us to inherit the kingdom which they had lost. No wonder, then, that all day long they seek to damage our cause; all their thoughts and desires are against us for evil.

They band themselves together, they lurk, they watch our every movement. They are bent to destroy us at all cost. We have to assert though that they cannot injure us except by inducing us to harm ourselves. They cannot force an entry into us, we have to open the door to make their entrance. This is where temptations come in.

It has been said that "the life of man upon earth is a warfare," and temptation is the actual clash of arms in which its issues are decided. It is true that we tend to think of our experience of sin as playing a tremendous portion in our experience of temptation; and indeed the leaning toward evil which is the legacy of past wrongdoing can add greatly to the force of present temptations. Essentially the force of a temptation depends highly on the gravity of our inward sensation.

The experts in spiritual combat point out that when there is no desire, when we do not feel drawn, or attracted, we are not really tempted; when, on the other hand, we do feel an inner attraction, a desire, corresponding to the outward suggestion, it is either because our wills are already disposed, gravitated, to evil

or because the suggestion awakens and stirs the sleeping giant of our concupiscence.

It is worthwhile to mention that the temptations of which we ourselves have experience seldom consist in a bare proposal of something evil; they are more subtle than that; the evil suggestion is amazingly woven into a complex texture of thoughts and desires which are quite lawful. According to Baudouin's Law that "when the imagination and the will are in open conflict, the imagination always wins: If, by attempting a direct repudiation of the temptation, we merely cause it to loom larger and larger in the imagination, we are courting disaster; the only lies in trying to engage the imagination with other things."

Certain conditions of mind and body do, in fact, make us an easy prey to temptation, and we have to do what we prudently can to avoid them. For instance, in times of extreme bodily fatigue or mental tension or feeling depressed, we are more susceptible to evil thoughts which the demons would suggest than when we are well and strong in body and tranquil in mind and heart.

Resistance to temptation means quelling powerful impulses; and this only the disciplined personality can do. If we are in the habit of giving way to every passing whim and desire, we shall be in no position to exercise self-control in the moment of temptation. Our great defense is the grace of God, and it is freely given but only if we sincerely desire it and show our desire in the ways appointed by God: prayer and the sacraments, on the other hand, but also a certain reasonable degree of austerity and self-denial on the other.

If these things are ours and abound, they forestall the effort of those evil spirits who seek to injure our salvation, whose thoughts and desires are against us for evil. As a consequence: →

Icon # 563 = Demand of Justice and Love

"As they have waited for my life, so recompense them for their crime; in wrath cast down the peoples, O God!"

This sounds very serious matter; it cries out for a relentless justice. We can hear this same sentiment in the prophet Jeremiah when he said: "But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. I did not know it was against me they devised schemes, saying, 'Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more.' But, O Lord of hosts, who judges righteously, who triest the heart and the mind, let me see thy vengeance upon them, for to thee have I committed my cause."

We can only hope that it is not to gehenna that they are cast down, but to purgatory. It is a place where the love of God tempers the justice of God, for there God pardons because He has time to retouch these souls with His Cross, to recut them with the chisel of suffering, that they might fit into the great spiritual edifice of the heavenly Jerusalem, to plunge them into that purifying place where they might wash their stained linen clothes to be fit to enter into the spotless purity of heaven; to raise them up like the phoenix of old from the ashes of their own sufferings and pains so that, like wounded eagles healed by the magic touch of God's cleansing flames, the living flame of love that tenderly woundst their deepest center, they might mount heavenward to the city of the pure where Christ Jesus is king and the Most Immaculate Virgin Mary is Queen, the redeemed are the children of God, for regardless of how trivial the fault it has to be purified for no one can see God unless s/he is pure.

This purifying flame, of course, is a demand of justice and love. It must never be thought that those who transgressed against God and the Moral Law are outside the reach of Divine Justice. A person can negate sin, but s/he never escapes the effects of sin. A person can transgress the law of gravitation, but if s/he throws her/himself off a very high building in defiance of the law, s/he nevertheless will feel the very sad and tragic effects of that violation. So it is with conscience and the Moral Law.

Hence, people who violated the sacredness of human life has to be recompensed for their crime and will be cast down either to gehenna if the person died unrepentant or to purgatory if the person died repentant but whose crime has not yet been expiated. They will remain there until the last penny of their debt which they owe to divine justice has been fully paid. They pay this debt progressively, not by merits and satisfaction, for the time of merit is gone, but by satsipassion, that is, by enduring voluntarily the satisfactory suffering inflicted upon them. Accordingly: →

Icon # 564 = Silver Liquids Trickling Down From Our Eyes

"Thou hast kept count of my tossings; put thou my tears in thy bottle! Are they not in thy book?"

Just as God kept count the number of our hairs, so He kept count of our tossings, that is, our pains and sufferings endured for love of Him. Our sacrifices, no matter how little they are, are known by Him. He will use it for the conversion of sinners. God is Our Father who sent His Son into the world to be Our Brother, and He on the cross asked the Blessed Virgin Mary, His Mother, to be our mother also.

Now if in the human body it is possible to graft skin from one member to another, and if it is possible to transfuse blood, so it is also possible to transfuse sacrifice, and innocent to atone for the sinful.

It is true that it is not easy to say "No" to oneself. That is why so many quack philosophers have erected a philosophy of life based on saying "Yes" to every impulse and desire while dignifying it with the name of "self-expression." But the fact still remains that serious progress in every walk of life demands some form of restraint: for instance, the doctor, the lawyer, the engineer, the athlete, the artist, the boxer, the singer, the businessman, must all learn to "scorn delight and live laborious days" if they are to attain their ideals.

The expert in Oriental languages or quantum physics cannot at the same time be a world boxing champion. In all walks of life, something must be sacrificed if something is to be gained; the mind is developed at the expense of the body and the body at the expense of the mind.

Religion, too, requires sacrifice; it is not a crutch, but a cross. It is not an escape, but a burden; not a flight, but a response. One leans on a crutch, but a cross rests on us. A coward can use a crutch, but it takes a hero to embrace a cross. The cross is laid on the shoulders of our pride and vanity, our envy and jealousy, our lusts and angers, until by its friction it keeps us tossing to and fro and wears them away; and by so doing silver liquids trickle down from our eyes, and thus brings us to the great abiding joys of life, for when we baptize our conscience with tears, we daily wash away our sins and progressively make our way back to paradise and to enter joy where there will be no more weeping nor mourning for all have passed away. But so long as we are still in this present life we have to pass through many tossings and have to shed many tears, not only for our own salvation but for the salvation of others.

"A single tear shed at the remembrance of the Passion of Christ," says our heavenly friend, St. Augustine, "is worth more than a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, or a year of fasting on bread and water. Because it was for this end that Our Lord suffers so much, in order that we should think of His sufferings; for, if we think on them, it is not impossible not to be inflamed with divine love."

In the words of the most illustrious James Benigno Bousset, "sin is the evil that is cured by weeping, the forgiveness of sins is the fruit of these tears." Thus: →

Icon # 565 = By This, We Know That God Is For Us

"Then my enemies will be turned back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me."

It is true to say that our enemies, that is, of course, the devil and the other demons, will be turned back in the day when we ask the Lord for forgiveness, for they could not stand forgiveness. They are so allergic to it that they would rather plunge themselves to the deepest depth of the bottomless pit than to see us pardon by God.

Our repentance is their defeat; thus they turned back in the day when we invoke Divine Mercy.

They will also be turned back when we sincerely ask the Lord to help us at the moment we are captivated to do something contrary to His commandments or to anything that will damage our Christian dignity, as the Scripture says: "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." By this we know that God is for us. Every step we take under His aegis is a victory for us.

Numerous texts in the Sacred Scriptures give us to understand the necessity of temptations or trials and the valuable results they produce in souls who never allow themselves to despond. They have been compared with the furnace in which clay receives its hardness and gold its gleam; or that they are represented as a cause for rejoicing, a sign of God's regard that He is for us, a lesson indispensable if knowledge of God is to be acquired.

Evil suggestions may seem to promise a grand prize, a pinnacle of fame or fortune, but to accept them is to be set on high only to be thrown down lower than we were before. God works with us very differently: if it is His desire to exalt a person, He will first of all humble him/her, for otherwise his/her exaltation will destroy him/her. By this we know that God is for us.

Our good friend, St. Paul, tells us that all endurance by which we are able to put up with the trials or temptations that afflict us comes not from our strength but from the mercy and guidance of God. "No trial has seized you," he says, "except what is common to humanity. But God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

We should believe that good things are accomplished by the will of God and by His help, while unfavorable things are effectuated by His permission, when on account of our hidden vices and hardness of heart the divine protection

withdraws from us and allows the devil and the other demons or the shameful passions of the body to rule over us.

It is quite certain that it is the grace and mercy of God which always work favorable things in us, that when they are absent it is for our enemies' advantage. Hence, we have to consider and reflect in all honesty upon the fact that by our own power alone we would not be able to produce good things, as the Lord says: "Apart from me you can do nothing."

By this we know that God is for us: His assistance wrestles with far superior power on our behalf than the horde of our enemies that scuffles against us, for God is not only the One who inspires good things but also our Benefactor and Champion. Hence, our enemies will be turned back when we call upon Him. Unavoidably: →

Icon # 566 = The Word of God

"In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I praise, in God I trust without fear. What can man do to me?"
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It is far better that our tongue cleaves to our mouth or to be dumb than not to praise the "Word" of God and to give Him thanks for all He has done for us! Though He was God, yet He became a human being so that we human beings might become God. Shall we not, then, praise Him for this wondrous exchange? He humbles Himself to share our humanity that we, in turn, may share in His divinity. Thus common sense necessarily urges us to praise Him.

He came into our world in His Incarnation; blesses its inhabitants with His teaching and miraculous deeds; He was crucified and buried like a seed, but rose again in His resurrection; then, went back to heaven in His ascension to prepare a place for us. For this reason, it is just right and fitting to praise him.

Is this not what the Lord God had in mind from of old? Let us give ear to what He says: "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it." Therefore, we have all the more reason to praise Him.

As human beings made in the image and likeness of God we have an inborn and ineffaceable similarity to and capacity for the eternal and consubstantial image of God, the Word. This similarity to and capacity for the Word is clearly

seen to consist in our special nobility which raises us above beasts and enables us to share in the companionship with the angels, namely their rationality and freedom.

Through this rationality and freedom, we are capable of knowing, loving, and adhering to the Word in whose image and likeness we were made. We will realize this capacity to the extent that we become like the Word through our growing conformity to His humility and charity which He exemplifies in His Incarnate, and glorified life.

To the measure that we emulate and participate in the Word's humility and love, we become like the Word and so initiate to know, love, and adhere to the Word, to see Him as He is, and to share in His own divine life. Wherefore, it is right and fitting to praise Him.

As fallen human beings we "exchange the glory of God for the likeness of an ox that eats grass," that is, we barter the desire for God for the desire of sensible pleasures and material things. But God in His great love for us sent His Word into our world to "become like grass," that is, became flesh, that we might be drawn to and feed on His sacred humanity.

"So the bread of angels," says our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux, "has become like grass laid in a manger, set before us as beasts. Indeed the Word was made flesh; and, according to the Prophet, all flesh is grass. Yet, this grass does not wither, nor does its bloom fade, for the Spirit of the Lord rested upon Him. For as the Prophet also say, grass and its bloom fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. If, therefore, the Word is grass, and the Word remains forever, this grass too remains forever. How else could it bring life, if it did not remain forever?"

Much more, then, we have a wholesome reason to praise with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength, the Word of God, no other than the Lord Jesus Christ the Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity.

In Him we trust without fear, for everyone who comes to Him He shall not cast out. For He has come down from heaven, not to do His own will, but the will of Him who sent Him; and this is the will of Him who sent Him, that He should lose nothing of all that He has given Him, but raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of His Father, who sent Him, that every one who sees the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life and will be raised up at the last day.

For this reason, we have a robust basis to trust Him without fear, for even if all people will be unfaithful He will remain faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. Moreover: →

Icon # 567 = The Vows

“My vows to thee I must perform, O God; I will render thank offerings to thee.”

We, who freely choose religion as our profession willfully, make vows to God which we must perform, of course, with the help of His grace. “In making a vow,” says our heavenly friend, the brilliant St. Thomas Aquinas, “the person takes the most radical means of focusing his will in the good. The purpose of the vow is to establish the will in the good. And the acts which proceed from a will thus fixed in the good become perfect virtue.”

“Don’t regret your vows,” says our other heavenly friend, the other brilliant the Catholic Church has produced, no other than St. Augustine, “on the contrary, rejoice that it no longer permitted you to engage in harmful license.”

The most common vows that Religious men and women take are the well known: Poverty, Obedience, and chastity. They are also called the three evangelical counsels; they are the three lines of strength, but they ought to be understood and lived in the luminescent light of the entire gospel, and in function of the love which is the ultimate goal, as our good friend St. Paul says that even if we give away all we have and deliver our bodies to be burned, but have not love we gain nothing.

These vows are the privileged means that allow for greater responsiveness to the activity of the Holy Spirit, inscribes God’s image on those who generously work on their hearts and put themselves at the disposal of divine grace.

Aside from the three common vows: poverty, chastity, and obedience, we, monks and nuns living the contemplative life, take another vow called: conversion of manners.

Just as a truck driver cannot afford to get drunk or fall asleep while driving in the night or day, since these are intrinsic obligation of his/her state, so the keeping of our vows is an inherent obligation of being a monk or a nun. Obviously it needs a certain self-discipline. Self-discipline means exchanging the things of earth for better things.

Necessarily, all exchange involves a decision as to which things we can get along without and which we cannot get along without. For example, we can get along without a penny, but we cannot get along without food, so we exchange money for food. Some people find that they can get along without possessions, but they cannot get along without the joy of being free from

material cares in order to possess God alone because for them it is sufficient to have God as their ultimate good, so they barter one for the other, and this is done through the vow of poverty.

Others find that they can get along without following their own will, but they cannot get along without union with the will of God in imitation of Christ who came into our world not to do His own will but the will of Him who sent Him, so they swap one for the other, and this is accomplished by the vow of obedience.

Some people find they can get along without the ecstasy of the body, the orgasm of the flesh, but they cannot get along without the joy of the Holy Spirit, so they exchange one for the other, and this passionless passion, this inner tranquility, is brought about by the vow of chastity.

We have to assert that this is not mainly our own doing, but owing to the grace of God, because these vows demand so much of our wounded fallen nature to the extent that by relying on ourselves alone, without the help of God, we cannot hope to effectuate them. For this reason we have to render thanks to God for all the graces He bestowed on us to help us in the performance of our vows.

Lastly, but not the least, we should never neglect our prayer life, and we have also to invoke all the residence of heaven to support us with their aid, for if these things are ours and abound, in spite of our backslidings we can gratefully declare: →

Icon # 568 = Walking before God in the Light of Life

“For thou hast delivered my soul from death, yea, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.”

The Lord Jesus says that we have to strive to enter through the narrow gate and the less travelled road, because the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, that is, death of the soul – the deprivation of the life giving grace of God in us and many enter by it; but the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life eternal, and not many found it.

The Lord who is compassionate and charitable, does not disdain to assist us in entering the narrow gate to deliver our soul from eternal death, for He yearn more our entrance, far more than our desire to enter, that we may walk before Him in the light of life, for He Himself is “the light,” “the way,” and “the life.”

There are, of course, other ways, which rival the true Way, that seem pleasant to many people, but they end up in death. "I cannot understand," utters our heavenly friend, honored as doctor of the Church, no other than St. Teresa of Avila, "why is it that people are afraid to set out upon the ways of perfection. May the Lord, for His name's sake, make us realize how unsafe we are amid such manifest perils as beset us when we follow the crowd, and how our true safety lies in striving to press forward on the ways of God. Our eyes must be fixed upon Him and we must not be afraid that His sun of justice will set, or that He will allow us to travel by night, and so be lost, unless we first forsake Him."

The way of wisdom and the way of malice are two opposed and inverted ways of life. The crucial question concerning these two ways is that of self-knowledge. If we come to know ourselves in truth, we embark on the way of wisdom, the way of progressive likening to the humility and charity of the Lord Jesus that leads to the vision of God in the light of life.

On the other hand, if we neglect to know ourselves, we set out on the way of sin and malice, the way of pride and self-will that leads to unlikeness of God, blindness, misery, and eternal death.

Our faith is prevailed upon of the Christian good news that death does not have the final say about our human person; that none of us is segregated in our own selves; and that we, human beings, are promised more than this earthly life, for the Lord Jesus came into our world to deliver our souls from eternal death that we may ambulate in the presence of God all the days of our life in the light of His divine life.

A valetudinarian love of pleasures is by no means a wholesome atmosphere to die in. Whereas, a life without great sins often ends with a tranquil death, for such a life is a life of strong light, of definite consciousness of God's deliverance, and its grand result is a tremendous gift of tranquility; and to such people death almost loses the character of death.

It is a great action which comes in their way, and is done adeptly and quietly, without extravaganza and without prominence, for the Lord Himself comes to give them new life in the land of the living; there, He kept their feet from stumbling that they may walk in His presence all the days of their lives.

Since they embarked on the way of wisdom, the way of progressive likening to the humility of Christ, and the way of self-knowledge, thus it is not surprising to hear them utter: →

Icon # 569 = God's Mercy is as Wide as His Wings

Psalm 57 (56)

"Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in thee my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of thy wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by."

Self-knowledge reveals our own nothingness to us in such an absolutely way that it would be impossible to forget it, and the same illumination makes us realize in the depths of our soul the infinite majesty and grandeur of God. We are nothing; God is everything; we are sinful; God is All Pure. There is an abyss of misery, but there is also Divine Mercy. Hence, we cry out: "Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in thee my soul takes refuge...."

"As for me," says our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux, "as long as I look at myself, my eye is filled with bitterness. But if I looked up and fix my eyes on the aid of the divine mercy, this happy vision of God soon tempers the bitter vision of myself...." "knowledge of God preserves us from despair, because God is full mercy, his nature is all good, and his actions pity and pardon. Knowledge of self-preserved us from pride, for nothing is more efficacious in acquiring humility than knowledge of ourselves as we really are. These twofold knowledge assure us salvation, because in its light there appears the need for an encounter between man's misery and God's mercy. Here is the foundation of humble hope." Thus we can humbly cry out: "Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me...."

The more we are conscious of our weakness, the more we become the object of God's mercy. God will never jettison us if we entrust ourselves totally to Him and commend ourselves utterly to His infinite mercy, for His mercy is as wide as His wings.

So long as we are still in this present life we have to expect sporadic storms of destruction, trials, and distress till we reach our true and lasting home, the kingdom of God, where we will be safely nestled in the bosom of God. It is also likely that on the way we will stumble and fall; there would be lapses in the observance of the noble commandments to love God and neighbor, but if the flicker of humility still glimmers in our heart these lapses, providentially, will turn to our own advantage for they will contribute to the growth of true knowledge of ourselves.

Humility will incite us to repent, and in the depth of our heart plead for His mercy, saying: "Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful, for in thee my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of thy wings I will take refuge."

As God is merciful to us, we are also asked to be merciful to one another, as the Lord Jesus said: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful." "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

Works of piety and mercy are necessary in this present world, as long as the storm of iniquity has not pass by. These good deeds are essential in this current age because of its injustice, but once we arrive in the kingdom prepared for us since the foundation of the world there will be no more storm of iniquity, no more injustice and hence no need of acts to redress injustice, as our good friend, St. Paul, says that even the charisms of the Spirit will pass away in our true homeland and only love will remain.

Thus as long as the tempest of iniquity and the rain of injustice are rampant in this present life, then, this behavior will be necessary and beneficial to the one who practices it, crowning a good disposition will with the reward of an eternal legacy; but this will cease in the world to come, where storms of destruction, upheavals of iniquities, and the outburst of injustice has come to pass.

In that homeland perfect equity will rule and when there will no longer exist the iniquity and injustice that made mercy and piety obligatory, only charity stays. Therefore, →

Icon # 570 = To Know, To Love, To Serve God in this Present Life and Be Happy with Him in the Next

"I cry to God Most High, to God who fulfils his purpose for me."

The Baltimore Catechism has laid out a very simple explanation, which even children who reached the age of reason can understand, of God's purpose in creating us, that is: to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this life and be happy with Him in the next.

If we want to know God, beginning in this present life, there is only one effective way to do it, that is, get down to our knees. We can make His acquaintance by investigation of created things or burying our nose on some books of theology, but we can win His love only by loving.

Arguments will tell us that God exists for God's existence can be proved by reason, but only by self-surrender will we come to know Him intimately. A little knowledge or modicum study will tell us that the food we eat contains vitamins, as little study will tell us that God created us.

If, however, we do not take food once we know the necessity of vitamins and minerals it contains, we will certainly lose our health. Likewise, if we do not love God whom our reason proves to us, we may lose even our little knowledge. That is one of the reasons why so many intelligent and brilliant professors in secular institutions have no religion. They know about God, but they do not know God. It is one thing to know that our mother exists; it is another thing to love her.

There is a definite correlation between knowing God and knowing ourselves: God cannot be known unless we know ourselves as we really are. We come to know God by associating, step by step, intimately with the Lord Jesus His Son, and as we grow in friendship and intimacy with the Lord Jesus He can reveal to us His intimate life with His Father.

To know who God the Father is can come only from personal, long-time association and cohabitation with the Lord Jesus. Since He is the only begotten Son of God and by inherent right possesses everything the Father has, as He said, "all mine are thine, and thine are mine," that is, all the treasures of wisdom, knowledge, joy, and power His Father possesses, He apparently desires nothing more than to share all these treasures with us by granting us a share in His very sonship, thus heir with Him of the unimaginable glory, happiness, and riches of the kingdom of heaven.

If the life of our soul, our very "salvation," consists in knowing God closely as the fountainhead of our existence, it is also true that only in the Son will we come to the Father, as the Lord said: "No one comes to the Father, but by me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also." In other words, the Lord Jesus is the active and living exegesis of the Father.

It will do us no good to know theology if all the while pride, sensuality, and selfishness are allowed their license and their anarchy in our lives. In that case, we may possess knowledge of the love of God for us, but very likely we have no love of Him, because Love is meant to be reciprocal.

Where there is love, there is thought about the one we love. "Where your treasure is," says the Lord, "there will your heart be also." Wherefore, the degree of our devotion and love depend upon the value that we put upon a thing. "Love is the law of gravitation," says our heavenly friend, St. Augustine.

All things have their focal point. The schoolboy finds it difficult to study, because he does not love knowledge as much as gambling. The carnal-minded find it hard to love the spirit because their treasure lies in the flesh. Every person becomes like that which s/he loves, that is, if s/he loves the things of the spirit, s/he will likely become spiritual, s/he is transformed into it in his/her outlook, his/her attitude, his/her ideals and his/her aspirations.

The search for pleasure is a glowing sign of inner emptiness which the Divine alone can satisfy. Everyone who is not in love with God is hunting for an artificial paradise on earth. Inside his/her heart, however, is a terrible void. Every single sin s/he commits is a frustrating attempt to fill that void. All lovers without God are dissatisfied lovers.

God's love and power finds itself with its hands and feet tied, so to speak, where it does not find faith, where it does not find a heart that recognizes who the Lord Jesus is and invokes Him with all its strength and affection that He may intervene and change its life. We have to invite the Lord Jesus continually to become Lord of our life. He never imposes Himself by force because, being Love, He wants to be loved in return, and love is born only from freedom and never from coercion or obligation.

If all of us accept as we really are, it is absolutely certain that a day will come when we can see how God's purpose have been accomplished, and precisely through our weakness. Our talents and handicaps may differ greatly but we are all equal in this: each of us is born to manifest God's glory, to know, to love, and to serve Him in this present life and participate in His eternal life, happiness, and beatitude in the life to come.

Though we know that our spiritual journey of conformity to God's divine likeness and happy vision will reach its fulfillment only in the glory of the life to come, we, however, recognize the Spirit's redeeming and sanctifying work in our souls as a reliable token that God the Most High will indeed complete in us the saving work He has already began. In particular, the Holy Spirit's gift of God's own divine charity supplies us with an ever growing trust that God Most High has called us from the foundation of the world to become His adopted sons and daughters, conformed to the humility and love of His only-begotten Son, the Lord Jesus, the Incarnate Word.

This two-fold knowledge of God's loving will to renew us, His fallen human creatures, and of ourselves as being renewed in God's love, is far more precious, the pearl of great price, than any other kind of knowledge for it alone inspires hope, and even confidence, of salvation. If this two-fold knowledge is in us and abound, any further knowledge we may acquire will not puff us up, for any worldly advantage this new knowledge may afford us will fall far short of the hope we will conceive from this two-fold knowledge: of God and of ourselves, the deeply rooted joy in our hearts this hope will engender.

"This hope does not disappoint us," says our good friend, St. Paul, "because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." This hope does not deceive us because this love furnishes us

with confidence, for through this love the Holy Spirit bears witness to our spirits that we are sons and daughters of God.

Therefore, created in God's own image and likeness, we human beings have already some capacity for love. We learn to love God by ordering the ordinary movements of our affection. They should not be suppressed, but rather brought under discipline in order to lead them to their ultimate goal, that is, the fulfillment of God's purpose in us. Thus the whole work of the spiritual life is directed to channeling natural energies rather than eliminating them.

Created in God's own image and likeness, we have the capacity to recognize and reciprocate love; our human affections initiate us into love and encourage us to make it our goal. "Love one another as I have loved you," He says. "By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another." "You, Lord, first loved us that we might love you," proclaims one of our Cistercian fathers, the lustrous William of St. Thierry, "not because you needed our love, but because we could not be what you created us to be except by loving you."

Hence, when we love God the Most High we are changed by that love into a fully alive human being, wholly involved in the act of loving the only One, the Most High, the infinite good, for whom love can be unlimited, as our other Cistercian father, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, candidly declares: "the measure of loving God is to love Him without measure." In this way we attain self-transcendence; we go beyond the limit imposed when the will and desire are directed to inferior objects.

S/he that knows God and loves Him, though s/he be ignorant of what others know, is more learned and intelligent than the learned and intelligent who know not how to love God. To be able to love God is an indication that we, human beings, are truly made in God's image and likeness, because love requires an equality between lovers; and love between the Creator and the creature is possible only on the assumption that the human person has the capacity to be raised by God to a state of equality, for love makes the lover equal to the object of his/her love.

"God so loved the world," the Scripture attests, "that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." So it is true: →

Icon # 571 = The Shame of Those who Trample God's People

"He will send from heaven and save me, he will put to shame those who trample upon me. God will send forth his steadfast love and his faithfulness."

The Holy Scripture tells us that the reason why the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil, that is, to put to infinite and indescribable shame Lucifer and his wicked angels who trample upon our resplendent dignity as sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus the king of the whole universe.

We, too, in spite of our human limitation, far inferior in terms of strength, knowledge, and power than Lucifer and his malevolent followers, can put them to shame if we firmly resist them, not so much by relying on ourselves but in anchoring our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus.

With Him at our side in this stupendous combat against the cruel infernal power of wickedness we will be amazed of the latent toughness of our resistance; and as in every combat the victor will be crowned with happiness and the vanquished will suffer shame, so once we conquered Lucifer and his nefarious angels we will be crowned with glory, honor, and eternal joy while they will suffer an inexpressible humiliation, disgrace, and shame for being defeated by inferiors, they who were once mighty angels.

Their weapon, of course, is temptation. They will entice us to do sinful things which they often coat with apparent good. They will endeavor to extinguish the light of our conscience by blowing into our hearts evil desires and illicit motions, bewildering us with their punches of vanity and pride, seducing us from our allegiance to God with the arrogant assumption that the satisfaction of our desires, whims, and ambitions is more important than doing the will of God.

Therefore, let us beseech the Lord to send forth His steadfast love and His faithfulness, that the filial fear of Him and the love which cannot fail may remain fixed in us, making us wise in all things and keeping us ever unharmed from the destructive blows of Lucifer and his myrmidons. For with these protections we, too, can trample them instead of them trampling us.

God sent forth His steadfast love and His faithfulness to us in the person of the Lord Jesus the Incarnate Word. The Incarnation of the Son of God had shown our world the face of God the Father. At the same time Christ Jesus the Lord, the redeemer of the world, the conqueror of death, shows us the true face of humanity.

In the Incarnation the great human search for God was satisfied - and by God Himself, God in search of humanity: God who comes in Person speak to us of Himself and to show us the path by which He may be reached. The Incarnation tells something about God and something about ourselves.

Satisfying the Fatherhood of God and revealing the depth of God's steadfast love and faithfulness, the birth of the Son of God – the coming of the Lord Jesus from heaven to save us, had also confirmed "the greatness, dignity, and value" of our human race, for our life will be meaningless without love. We will remain incomprehensible to ourself, our life would be nonsensical, if love is not revealed to us, if we do not encounter love, if we do not experience it and make it our own, if we do not participate intimately in it.

God's steadfast love is far greater than our sin, than our human frailty, because "God is Love." That's an amazing good news – the Gospel – that was sent from heaven to save us. On the other hand, this love has an electrifying effect upon those who trample upon it and its followers, for whatever is done to the disciples of Love is done to Love itself.

Love will be a cause of unbearable humiliation, pain, and shame to those who trample upon it just as light bring about agony and distress to a diseased eyes. The Love of God will be unbearable torment, an unimaginable pain, and an inexpressible shame to those who have not acquired it within themselves, first and foremost, for Lucifer and his wicked angels and for human beings who boldly sided with them and unabashedly followed their suggestions, because "the sorrow which takes hold the heart that has sinned against love," testifies our heavenly friend, St. Isaac of Syria, "is more piercing than any other pain. It is not right to say that sinners in hell are deprived of the love of God....But love acts in a double way, as suffering in the reprovved, and as a joy in the Blessed."

So, how could they ever endure their desolation if, in their utter humiliation, they could not escape the penetrating gaze of Love whom they wounded? How could they ever cope with the unendurable shame when they see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and they themselves thrust out into the outer darkness, darker than a pure dark ink, where no dot of light could ever be found?

They were very powerful while still on earth, maliciously persecuting and trampling the honor due to God and those who believe in God. They are like lions ready to claw. Thus the people of God dazzlingly proclaim: →

Icon # 572 = Multifarious Lions

"I lie in the midst of lions that greedily devour the sons of men; their teeth are spears and arrows, their tongues sharp swords."

The Scripture warns us that our adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. It is not farfetched to assert that these "lions" can also be considered as the farragoes of ideologies in our world such as: Marxism, communism, Nazism, fascism, empiricism, materialism, nihilism, etc. that "greedily devour the sons of men; their teeth are spears and arrows, their tongues sharp swords."

Though they vary but they have one common goal: to demolish God's Order in our world, to blot out every facet of things supernatural, to live only for this present life, to dethrone God in the hearts of men and women and have them take the throne of God, to kill and to destroy and to distort and to deny "Absolute Truth."

It would be very easy to imagine the mind boggling corollaries when God will be dethroned in the hearts of men and women. It's very obvious, as a noonday sun, in the history of our world. Take for example the effects of even just communism and Nazism alone not counting the other "isms."

In terms of boasting in the quantity of people liquidated in "praise" of communism and Nazism, truly, truly, it would not be an extravagance to say that Herod, Nero, Vespasian, Domitian, Trajan, Decius, Valerian, and Diocletian, will be put to a gnawing shame if, in the presence of Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mao-Tse Tung, and Pol Pot, not to mention Benito Mussolini and Saddam Hussein, they will brag of the numbers of people they killed.

Again, we will not be guilty of exaggeration when we say that if Herod, Nero and those other emperors are put side by side with Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mao-Tse Tung, and Pol Pot of Cambodia, will be considered as sophomores, of course, not in terms of cruelty but in term of quantities of people killed, because if Herod had his hundreds, and Nero and the other emperors, combined together, had their thousands and thousands, Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mao-Tse Tung of China, and Pol Pot had millions each!

It is not an overestimation to mention that the numbers of people exterminated by Benito Mussolini alone or by Saddam Hussein alone can match the total numbers put to death by Herod, Nero and the other Roman emperors.

How about the countless number of souls caused to be put to spiritual death by the effects of materialism and worldliness?! Of course, these would include

drugs, sex, rock n' roll, prostitution, hedonistic lifestyle, immorality, and dozens of other vices from vanity to dishonesty, etc. Materialism and worldliness are geared to close Heaven from the gaze of wo/men and that wo/men will be resolved never to take their eyes off the earth, but to live henceforth in and for this world alone.

How about the Nihilism of Friedrich Nietzsche? This, too, is one of the "lions that greedily devour the sons of men;" its "teeth are spears and arrows," its tongue "sharp swords." This lion has its aim the declaration of rebellion and war against the true God. This rebellion is an ultimate and irreducible spiritual attitude, having its source and strength in the supreme author of rebellion no other than Lucifer.

The literature of 19th – century Humanism, Socialism, Anarchism has its constant theme the "non serviam" of Lucifer: God the Father, together with all His institutions and ministers, is to be overthrown and crushed, and triumphant "Man" is to ascend His throne to rule in His own right.

This lion's rejection of Christian faith and institutions and its ministers is an open rebellion against the authority they represent and the obedience they command. This rebellion which animates the greatest revolutionaries is concern to destroy its greatest rival the "Christian Faith."

For instance, the systematic Bolshevik campaign to uproot the Christian faith, even when it has obviously ceased to be a danger to the stability of the atheist state, has no rational explanation; it is rather part of a ruthless war to death against the only force capable of standing against Bolshevism and of "disproving" it.

The lion of Nihilism failed as long as true Christian faith remains in a single person, because that person will be a living example of Truth that will prove vain all the impressive worldly endeavors of which the lion of Nihilism is capable and will refute in his/her person all the arguments against God and the kingdom of God.

In no one has the lion of Nihilism been clearly expressed than in Nietzsche, in its philosophical form, in the phrase "there is no truth," and in its earliest occurrence in Nietzsche's writings, the "ecstatic" utterance of a madman: "God is dead." These words express a certain truth not, of course, to be sure, a truth of the nature of things, but a truth concerning the state of modern wo/man.

God is dead in the hearts of modern wo/men who were devoured by the lions of materialism, hedonism, Nihilism, and the other "isms," and it is as true of the atheists and Satanists who rejoice in the fact, as it is of the unsophisticated multitudes in whom the sense of the spirituality has simply disappeared.

Wo/Man has lost faith in God and in the Divine Truth that once sustained him/her; the apostasy to worldliness that has characterized the modern age since its conception becomes, in Nietzsche, conscious of itself and finds words to express itself: "God is dead," that is to say, "we have lost our faith in God"; there is no truth," that is to say, "we have become uncertain of everything divine and absolute."

Before the modern age peoples' lives were largely conditioned by the virtues of obedience, submission, and respect: to God, to the Church, to the lawful authorities. To the modern men and women, however, whom the lion of Nihilism has "enlightened," this Old Order is but a horrible memory of some dark past from which humanity has been "liberated."

Modern history has been the chronicle of the fall of authority. A "new order" is in the making; the age of the "lion," the "rebel" is at hand. Of this age the Nihilist regimes have given a foretaste, and the widespread rebelliousness of our present world is a further portent; where there is no truth, the rebellious will reign.

Everyone who has abandoned truth and every authority founded upon that truth has only "blind will" between himself/herself and the Abyss; and this "will," whatever its spectacular achievements in its brief moment of power, as those of Hitler and Bolshevism, is irresistibly drawn to that Abyss as to some immense magnet that has searched out the answering abyss within itself.

God has spoken only obscurely and indirectly to other people; to His chosen people alone has He revealed the fullness of truth concerning the beginning and the end of things. To other peoples, indeed, and to the unaided reason, one of the most difficult Christian doctrines to understand is that of **creatio ex nihilo**: God's creation of the world not out of Himself, not of some pre-existent matter or primal chaos, but of **nothing**; in no other doctrine is the omnipotence of God so plainly stated.

The never-dimmed marvelousness of God's creation has its foundation precisely in this fact, that it was called into existence from absolute non-existence. But what relation, it may be asked, has the lion of Nihilism to such a doctrine? Of course, it has the relation of denial. The lion of Nihilism owes its whole existence to a negation of Christian Truth.

No other religion has affirmed so much so strongly this doctrine as Christianity, because its voice is the voice of God, and its Truth is absolute; and no other religion has had so radical and uncompromising an enemy as the lion of Nihilism whose "teeth are spears and arrows," whose tongue "sharps swords" that "greedily devour the sons of men," for no one can oppose Christianity without doing battle with God Himself.

To fight the very God who has created man and woman out of nothingness requires, of course, a certain blindness as well as the foolish illusion of strength; but no Nihilist is so blind and dull that s/he fails to sense, however dimly and lightly, the ultimate consequence of his/her action.

The nameless “anxiety” and “uneasiness” of so many men and women today testify to their passive and active participation in the program of “antitheism”; the more articulate of them speak of an “abyss” that seems to have opened up within the heart of men and women.

This “anxiety” and this “abyss” are precisely the nothingness out of which the Most High God has called each person into being, and back to which human person seems to fall when s/he denies God, and in corollary, denies his/her own creation and his/her own being.

The person devoured by the lion of Nihilism, the sense of falling into the abyss, far from ending in passive anxiety and despair, is transformed into a frenzy of Satanic – Luciferic energy that impels him/her to strike out at the whole creation and bring it, if s/he can, plummeting into the bottomless pit, the abyss, with him/her.

Yet in the end a Lenin, a Stalin, a Hitler, a Nietzsche, however great their so called “influence” and endeavors, must fail; they must even testify, against their will, to the Truth they would destroy and devour. For their effort to **Nihilize** creation, and so annul God’s act of creation by returning the world to the very nothingness from which it came, is but an inverted parody of God’s creation; and they, like their father the Devil – the roaring giant Lion, are but feeble apes of God who, in their attempt, “prove” the existence of the Most High God they deny, and in their failure to testify to His omnipotence and majesty and glory.

Therefore, with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our strength, and with all our soul, we will loudly and sonorously exclaim, full blast: →

Icon # 573 = Be Exalted O God above the Heavens and the Whole Universe!

“Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let thy glory be over all the earth!”

Of course, without any shadow of a slightest doubt, the atheists, the Satanist, and those who are absolutely allergic of God and the things of God, would rather prefer to be utterly deaf than to hear the praises of God or to be totally pitch-dark blind than to read, even just a very short sentence exalting God.

I would not even be slightly surprised that they will curse me to death if they know that I am one of those who openly and unabashedly exult and glorify God, with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my strength, with all my will, with all my soul, and with all my being.

My hope and desire is to begin it in this present life and to continue it, without an atom of intermission, in the life to come, in the kingdom of heaven. I will also add that not only God will I praise, exult, and glorify, but also the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, the ever glorious Mother of the God-Man no other than the Lord Jesus Christ the king of Heaven and earth – of the whole universe, for how can I live without belonging entirely to Mary! With St. John the Evangelist – the lofty eagle, at the foot of the Cross, I have taken her a thousand times and as many times I have given myself to her.

There are thousands upon thousands, even millions, of reasons why we have to exult, praise, magnify, and glorify God. Foremost and first, of course, is that He gave us our existence, thus it is just right and fitting to exult and glorify Him.

If we say "thank you" to people who gave us even just a cup of cold water, how much more of God who gave us oxygen for free! If we praise and admire someone because of her/his eloquence and encyclopedic knowledge, how much more of God who is Omniscience and All-Knowing! If we applaud someone for designing and making aircrafts, ships, submarines, iPhones, iPads, computers, bridges, and skyscrapers, how much more of God for designing and making all kinds of birds, of flowers, of trees, of fishes, of animals, and endowing them with creative power to engender their own kinds!

None of those who are designing and making aircrafts and ships and computers can engender these things by themselves, and yet we praise them even though the material used in making these things did not originate from them, how much more of God who created something out of nothing! We are not even considering here our galaxy alone with its billions and billions of stars! How much more of the whole universe with its billions and billions of galaxies!

For this reason, it sounds just like common sense, and even just a modicum of humility, to praise, exult, magnify, and glorify God. We are not even mentioning here His attributes: His infinite Omnipotence, unfathomable Wisdom, immeasurable knowledge, endlessly ineffable beauty, unsurpassing riches, interminable goodness, inscrutable humility, and so on...that if all will be written our whole world would be just like a small sheet of note paper – not enough to contain them!

If we extol someone for his/her selflessness in saving/rescuing a drowning child and even publish in newspapers his/her self-sacrificing benevolence for

risking his/her own life in saving the sinking child, how much more of God who humbles Himself by becoming a human being, like us in all things except sin, and gave himself up on the cross to save us from drowning in the pitchy abyss of eternal misery and agony!

Of course, because of our human limitation and the poverty of our words, we will run out of all the adjectives and adverbs to describe the greatness of the Omnipotence and Omniscience of God, as our good friend, St. Paul says when he was caught up to the third heaven that he heard things that cannot be uttered, that is to say, it is immeasurably beyond what mortal being can comprehend, for we would be like a bat being told about light!

God is inexhaustively greater than we can ever think or imagine, for all the concepts and ideas that are put down in words and written in books – even millions and millions of books that will still be written, are just little glimmer of the wisdom and knowledge of God, because all those words and concepts came through the “senses,” that is, through what the person have seen or heard or entered into his/her heart, but what about those s/he have never seen nor heard nor entered into his/her heart?

For this reason, it is just right and fitting to declare with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our whole being: “Be exalted, O God, above the heaven! Let thy glory be over all the earth!”

Of course, Lucifer and his mad angels and other human beings who willfully sided with them will be so angry, with all their heart, with all their mind, with all their soul, and with all their being, to hear God being exalted, glorified, and magnified. Thus they will do all they can to abolish God and everything that has to do with God, and drags us along with them into the bottomless pit. Hence, it is not surprising that: →

Icon # 574 = A Pit: LGBT Movement

“They set a snare for my steps; my soul was bowed down. They dug a pit in my way, but they have fallen into it themselves.”

It's really amazing that they set a net for our steps without realizing that God is also setting a net for their steps, because the kingdom of God is like a net thrown into the sea of life and gathered all kinds of people, then once it arrives at the seashore, the angels of God will sort out who belongs to God and who belongs to the Devil.

Each person will be assessed and evaluated according to what s/he has done in the body. One's conscience is the witness of all the activities done in the body either good or bad, or either making it the temple of the Holy Spirit, a worthy dwelling place of God where we can pray in secret, or make it the hideout of thieves where the seven capital vices are buying and selling their oxens of profligacies and sheeps of debaucheries and doves of promiscuities and the money changers of infidelities and fallacies.

Notice that it is in the plural form: "'They' set a net....'They' dug a pit...'they' have fallen into it...." It is obvious, then, that it is not just one demon who is seeking for our downfall but many of them. This tells us also how precious is our soul, and that the demons had also a hard time in dragging us into the pit unless we ourselves freely jump into it.

God, in His infinite mercy and love, will never allow us to fall into this pit against our will. Signs are being posted, for instance, saying: "It is slippery, be careful!" Or, "Dead End." These signs are written in our conscience.

Even if we grow up in non-religious family, no knowledge of God at all, and no understanding about morality, but still there is this "intrinsic sense," a small gentle voice within, which detects whether the action is right or wrong.

Of course, this "intrinsic sense," this small gentle voice within, can be muffled and distorted but cannot be blotted out because it is the internal witness of all the activities going on in our body. It sees everything that we are doing, hears all the words we uttered, knows all the thoughts we are thinking. It is God's endowment to us which distinguishes us from the animals.

In other words, it serves as God's eyes and ears within us, and also serves as His mouth because it gives us instruction. God loves us so much and at the same time respects our freedom.

Hence, to help us prevent from falling into the pit He gives us a guide within us which we simply called the "natural law." It is called natural law because it is engraved in our human nature, thus present to all human beings irrespective of race, language, nationality, and culture.

It is by this natural law that those who do not belong to a well organized religion such as Judaism, Islam, or Christianity, or even those who have no religion at all, will rise or fall, or condemned or justified; in other words, be judged, as our good friend, St. Paul, says: "All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature

what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.”

Thus, the natural law is very much in accord with the desire of God that all people may be saved; that there will be no excuse at all for not belonging to a specific religion. The natural law, then, is God’s way of giving all people a chance to enter the kingdom of heaven and to help them prevent from falling into the pit.

But what advantage that those who have religion with all precepts and teaching of that religion, than those who solely rely on the natural law? Is there any advantage at all? Much in every way, of course, because they have “clearer” guidance to what will lead to the kingdom of heaven and to what will lead into the pit.

Take for example when people buy an automobile, the manufacturer gives them a manual which, of course, contains: the kind of oil to be use; the pressure to which the tires should be inflated; and the appropriate fuel for the gas tank. It is absolutely certain that the manufacturer has nothing against them by giving these directions. The manufacturer, clearly, wants to be beneficial, interested that they got the ultimate utility of the vehicle.

Hence, the Ten Commandments which are the basics to the teaching of Judaism and Christianity are meant to help us arrive to our ultimate destination, that is, enter the kingdom of heaven. They are sign posts in the road of life, giving us instructions which way to follow and which way to avoid. They help us behave in ways that will enable us to “taste,” even while on earth, the inexpressible happiness of Heaven.

Taste the sample of a husband and wife who loved each other, faithful to one another; of children who honor their parents and of parents who are not overbearing with their children; in short, of families which rendered God His due by allocating part of their time to Him in terms, for instance, attending Mass or other religious services, and by loving and understanding each other. There is so much peace, joy, happiness, and contentment in those families.

The great disadvantage of solely relying on the natural law without recourse to the other commandments is that a person would be likened to someone walking by him/herself in the pathway of life guided by his/her own light alone which can easily to be distorted, that is, the “natural law” becomes “unnatural

law." In other words, one's reason had been "hijacked," or "kidnapped," or "swindled."

Christ boils down the Ten Commandments into two, namely: "To love God and Neighbor." God is love. Therefore, those who abide in love abide in God. Also: love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law. It is clear as a noonday sun that if there is love there is life, liberty, and happiness.

Since we are made in the image and likeness of God, and since God is love, therefore, it follows that love had been engraved in our human nature. We are given the capacity to love. However, in the fall of our first parents Adam and Eve, our human nature was wounded and distorted. The Fall disorganized our normal human faculties, weakened our will and darkened our intellect, with a slant toward immorality, with a reluctance to do good, and with a tendency to rationalize evil. Thus our understanding of love becomes highly susceptible to simulation and distortion.

The Hippies Movement in the 60's bears witness to this distortion of love as indicated in their slogan: "Make Love – Not War!" It sounds very lofty and magnanimous at first hearing, but here love is synonymous with lust which is a distortion of love because it is devoid of moral responsibility. What the slogan really meant is: "Have sex – Not war!" It encourages sexual promiscuity.

The three important components of love, namely: life, liberty, and happiness were utterly deformed. Life suffers so many casualties: utterly innocent children were cause to be murdered in the womb by the instigation of their own mothers which even a savage lion will never dare to do to their own kin. Liberty became license rather than true freedom, because true freedom is not a license to do whatever we want but a strength of character and self-possession to do what is good, right, true, and noble.

Happiness became synonymous with pleasure which in the end brings more monotony and foreboding failure, because when happiness is focused mainly on physical satisfaction and pleasure, the spirit becomes incapable of perceiving spiritual values. Then it is that we cease to be truly human, our life becoming centered on an existence more animal than human, for we do not acknowledge our relationship with our Creator or behave in accordance with our dignity as sons and daughters of God.

Another example of how a "natural law" becomes "unnatural law" is in the case of "Homosexual Marriage." Of course, it is very likely that "love" is involved. Two human beings of the same sex asked to be married because they are in love with each other. There is absolutely nothing wrong if two persons of the same sex love one another as Jonathan loves David as his own self, as St. Basil the Great

and St. Gregory Nazianzen loved each other, and as the Centurion loves his slave.

The Church never condemned homosexual "orientation." What it condemns is homosexual "acts." The Catechism of the Catholic Church plainly states: "Basing itself on Sacred Scripture which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered. They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life....The number of men and women who have deep – seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition. Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection" (#'s 2357-2359).

Love is native to every human nature because it has been engraved in us by God the Creator of nature, but in homosexual "acts" love becomes unnatural, utterly crippled, for the most important component of love, which is life, is missing. "They close the sexual act to the gift of life," as stated plainly by the Catechism of the Church.

Noticed that in the "Hippie Movement," where "love" was vociferously trumpeted, there was abundance of life because the "sexual act" of two opposite sexes produces life but, of course, suffers many casualties. Whereas, in the growing popularity of the "Homosexual Movement" the "sexual act" of two same sexes "never" and could never see the light of day, because it is engraved in our human nature that it is "exclusively" in the sexual act of two opposite sexes that "life" can be engendered.

Even babies in "Vitro Fertilization" where it is absolutely devoid of love, life still need a "male" sperm and a "female" ovum to be able to see the light of day. Even dogs and cats and birds and all kinds of animals need the complementarities of a male and a female to produce their own kind.

It is not cockamamie to assert that if we will let children who reached the age of reason, of course, not being influenced by any one either by heterosexual or homosexual parents, or by teachers, or newscasters, or priests, or religious ministers, to decide whether marriage is really for a man and a woman alone or whether it is for homosexual also, it is predictably imminent that the scale of

judgment will heavily tip over in the side of: "marriage is really for a man and a woman alone."

The rationale behind the children's decision that "marriage is really for a man and a woman alone" is rightly based on natural law encrafted by God in the human nature. There is this "intrinsic sense" in them which detects the difference. The dissimilarity between "homosexual" marriage and "heterosexual" marriage is like the contrast between night and day. Of course, we don't debate the nature of night and day because the distinction is crystal clear, unless one is blind or will start redefining the meaning of night and day.

Never was it heard or known since the foundation of the world and in the history of every race and culture that there was a marriage between homosexual. It is only in our so called "enlightened" age that the "natural" becomes "unnatural." However, this could never happen without redefining the meaning of the true nature of marriage as intended by God.

Once we redefine the meaning of the true nature of marriage we are opening "Pandora's box." We are generating many complicated problems as outcome of the "unwise" interference of nature. We will fall into another pit of "relativism" where all truth is relative. There is no more "Absolute Truth." If there will be no more absolute truths, then there will be moral anarchy – moral relativism.

Relativism is the concept that points of view have no absolute truth or validity, having only relative, subjective value according to differences in perception and consideration. Can you imagine if you hear a man who is profoundly convinced that he is a "woman" trapped in a man's body, or a woman who is thoroughly assured that he is a "man" trapped in a woman's body, or a "black" person who is acutely certain that he is a "white" person trapped in a "black" person's body!? This is more than enough to spin the imagination of Noah, Abraham, and Moses, if they will hear this.

Truly, our age is an age of a well pronounced absurdity, in which the totally irreconcilable exists side by side, even in the same soul; where nothing seems going to any coherent direction; where things fall apart because they have no center to hold them together. It is true, of course, that the business of daily life seems to proceed as usual – though at suspiciously feverish pace – people manage to "get along" to live from day to day.

"Absurdism," which is another pit gaping when the Pandora box of redefining the meaning of the true nature of marriage was opened, indeed, may not be completely understood at all in its own terms, for understanding is coherence, and that is the antithesis of absurdity. If we are to comprehend the absurd at all, it must be from a standpoint outside absurdity, a standpoint from which a word

like “understanding,” “comprehension” has a meaning; only thus may we cut through the foggy reasoning within which the absurdism of “same sex” marriage conceals itself.

The whole food of Christian Truth, however, is accessible only to faith; and the chief obstacle to such faith is not logic, as the facile modern view has it, but another opposed faith. In fact no one lives but by the light of some revelation, be it true or false, whether it serves to enlighten or obscure. Everyone who will not live by the Christian Revelation must live by a false revelation; and all false revelation lead to a pit.

Therefore, we must take a stand within a faith opposed to those who espoused ‘same sex’ marriage and attack it in the name of a truth which it muffles and distorts. In the end we shall find that the absurdity, the unnaturalness of “homosexual” marriage, quite against its will, offers its own testimony to this faith and this truth which are, let us state unequivocally, Christian.

Just as God set in motion natural laws to govern the physical world, so He ordained natural moral laws, imprinted on every human heart and discernible through the gift of reason, to guide human behavior. Hence, there are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar even remotely analogous to God’s plan for marriage and family. Homosexual acts close the sexual act to the gift of life; it goes against the natural moral law, for it does not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity.

The 2003 document from the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith entitled “Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Union between Homosexual Persons,” has this to say: “Those who would move from tolerance to the legitimization of specific rights for cohabiting homosexual persons need to be reminded that the approval or legalization of evil is something far different from the toleration of evil.”

“It might be asked,” pointed that same document, “how a law can be contrary to the common good if it does not impose any particular kind of behavior, but simply gives legal recognition to a de facto reality which does not seem to cause injustice to anyone? In this area, one needs first to reflect on the difference between homosexual behavior as a private phenomenon and the same behavior as a relationship in society, foreseen and approved by law, to the point where it becomes one of the institutions in the legal structure.

“This second phenomenon is not only more serious, but also assumes a more wide-reaching and profound influence, and would result in changes to the entire organization of society, contrary to the common good. Civil laws are

structuring principles of man's life in society, for good or for ill. They play a very important and sometimes decisive role in influencing patterns of thoughts and behavior.

“Lifestyles and the underlying presuppositions these express not only externally shape the life of society, but also tend to modify the younger generation's perception and evaluation of forms of behavior. Legal recognition of homosexual unions would obscure certain basic moral values and cause a devaluation of the institution of marriage.”

It is very clear that society owes its continued survival to the family, founded on marriage. Thus the inevitable consequence of legal recognition of homosexual unions would be the redefinition of marriage, which would become, in its legal status, an institution devoid of essential reference to factors linked to heterosexuality; for example, procreation and raising of children.

If, from the legal standpoint, marriage between a man and a woman were to be considered just one possible form of marriage, the concept of marriage would undergo a radical transformation, with grave detriment to the common good.

Pope Benedict XVI in his 2006 address highlighted the errors ensued in granting legal recognition to same sex marriage. He says, “It is a serious error to obscure the value and roles of the legitimate family founded on marriage by attributing legal recognition to other improper forms of union for which there is really no effective social need.”

Thus from the stance of the social order the principles of respect and non-discrimination cannot be invoked to support legal recognition of homosexual unions. Differentiating between persons or refusing social recognition or benefits is unacceptable only when it is contrary to justice. The denial of the social and legal status of marriage to forms of cohabitation that are not and cannot be marital is not opposed to justice; on the contrary, justice requires it.

Nor can the principle of autonomy of the individual be reasonably invoked. It is one thing to maintain that individual citizens may freely engage in those activities that interest them and that this falls within the common civil right to freedom; it is something quite different to hold that activities which do not represent a significant or positive contribution to the development of the human person in society can receive specific and categorical legal recognition by the state.

Not even in a remote analogous sense do homosexual unions fulfill the purpose for which marriage and family deserve specific and categorical recognition. On the contrary, there are good reasons for holding that such unions are harmful to

the proper development of human society, especially if their impact to society were to increase.

Moreover, since heterosexual married couples ensure the succession of generations and are therefore eminently within the public interest, civil law grants them institutional recognition. On the other hand, Homosexual unions do not need specific attention from the legal standpoint because they do not exercise this function for the common good.

Nor is the argument valid to which legal recognition of homosexual unions is necessary to avoid situations in which cohabiting homosexual persons, simply because they live together, might be deprived of real recognition of their rights as persons and citizens. In reality, they can always make use of the provisions of law like all citizens from the standpoint of their private autonomy to protect their rights in matters of common interest. It would be gravely unjust to sacrifice the common good and just laws on the family in order to protect personal goods that can and must be guaranteed in ways that do not harm to body of society (from the 2003 document: Considerations Regarding Proposals To Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons).

Although it is disappointing to people of Religion and to people who has a "moral sense" that an "unnatural" marriage would become a law of the land, sanctioned by the highest court, it is not really surprising because we are in the age of "absurdity" where sound reason is highly susceptible to being "hijacked," "kidnapped," or "swindled."

If the greatest adroit "Hijacker," the nimblest proficient "kidnapper," and the cleverest dexterous "swindler" no other than Lucifer itself: the father of lies, the murderer from the beginning, and the deceiver of the world, had first hijacked and swindled our first parents who lived in paradise where there was no admixture of good and evil, truth and falsehood, are we then be surprised that he can easily swindle men and women in our time who lived in a world where good and evil, truth and falsehood are so blended that it requires a God fearing and intelligent person to sort them out?

Are we surprise then that even judges who are purported to have a wide range of knowledge and are expert in jurisprudence be swindled by the "father of lies," and the "deceiver of the world?" Not at all. It needs a good dosage of humility and a considerable time of bending one's knees to discern the cunning of Lucifer. He is so brilliant and intelligent that it would not be preposterous to assert that if all the brilliant and intelligent men and women in our world will be put side by side with him they will be just considered as "first grader!"

If his brilliance is such that he was able to persuade the other angels, who were also very brilliant and intelligent, to rebel against God, how much more we human beings who, if we had not gone to elementary, high School, college, or graduate school, would be just like a chimpanzee compared with him! He is a brilliant intelligence, the most enlightened of all, but an intelligence "discontented" with God and His order.

The mystery of absurdity in our world is nothing but the result of this discontent 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.

Since marriage between a man and a woman is ordained by God as it is written: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh," and bolstered at the wedding in Cana to the extent that He performed a miracle to assure married couples that by His help and by allowing Him to be part of their married life they can overcome all the trials and challenges in life, and since Lucifer is discontented with God and His order, therefore, it would not be surprising that Lucifer will do all he can, using all his intelligence and cunning to destroy and distort the true nature of marriage.

The evil of homosexual act is such that Lot preferred that the men of Sodom have sexual intercourse with his two daughters than have sexual intercourse with the men who visited him. Lot said to the men of Sodom: "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Behold, I have two daughters who have not known man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men."

This was Lot's response when the men of Sodom were demanding to have sexual intercourse with the men who stayed at his house. Let us listen for ourselves this demand of the men of Sodom: "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them." For some of us who are not familiar with the Scripture it would be good to understand that the meaning of the word "know" in this passage is "sexual intercourse."

For example, in the book of Genesis it says: "Adam knew Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain..." "Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch..." To "know" here is not just a matter of simple acquaintance.

On this ground, can we imagine if the immorality of the men of Sodom to have sexual intercourse with other men will become the law of the land? Its graveness was such that it compels God to send fire from heaven and destroy Sodom.

Our Lady, in her plural apparitions looks extremely sad to the point of almost shedding tears, like a loving mother, pleading for her wayward children to stop in offending God their father for He is so much offended; the sins of humanity are rising up to heaven at an incredible velocity; and at the same time she is pleading with God to grant “stay” to humanity until we reach repentance – in accord with God’s mercy and kindness, that we will not fall into the “Pit” which Lucifer and his votaries have dug.

Just recently, last week, July 24, 2015, the Satanic Temple in Detroit, Michigan unveiled a \$100,000 plus nine foot bronze statue of Baphomet, a winged, goat headed demon who is half man – half woman while the worshipers were chanting “Hail Satan!” It was considered as the greatest satanic ceremony in history. The spokesman from the Satanic Temple claims that “Baphomet contains binary elements symbolizing a reconciliation of opposite, emblematic of the willingness to embrace, and even celebrate differences.” In other words, they believe that Satan is the proper image for America’s current passion for tolerance and the embrace of every kind of weirdness and perversion in the sun.

It is pitiful to see the figures of two little children, a boy and a girl, standing at Satan’s knee gazing up at him worshipfully. The Devil in this statue is portrayed as transgender or bisexual. Rising from his lap is the pagan Caduceus – the rod with two serpent entwined that the pagan god mercury carries. According to Satanic legend, this is a phallic (relating to or being the stage of psychosexual development in psychoanalytic theory during which a child becomes interested in his own sexual organs –Webster Dictionary) symbol with the earth powers of the serpent intertwined.

Tickets cost \$25.00 or \$75.00 for VIP access. The ticket website states that the Satanic Temple “invites you to join us for a night of chaos, noise, and debauchery at the unveiling, a hedonistic celebration introducing the controversial Baphomet monument accompanied by provocative performances and installations.”

Two bands were invited namely: Detroit Wolf Eyes whose mission is to make heavy, extreme, and weird music; the other one is Boston-based Punk Act Sadist, a highly recommendable band to fans of ATHEISTS, CYNIC, PESTILENCE, ALARUM, CORONER AND DEATH.

The statue not only has male genitalia, but also a woman's breast; one arm is male the other is female. On the arms are the Latin words “Solve” and “Coagula,” meaning “Separate” and “Come Together.” These are occult words for the task of the alchemist who takes what is integrated and natural – breaks it and then puts it back together in a new and perverted way.

This is precisely what Lucifer – Satan is doing in our mind boggling century with human sexuality. The radical transformation story of a man to a woman, of Bruce/"Caitlyn" Jenner the 1976 gold medalist Olympic Decathlon Champion is a graphic illustration of what Lucifer was intending to do with the nature of human sexuality.

He is a Supreme Alchemist who takes the integrated nature of human sexuality – breaks it and then puts it back together again in a new distorted way to such a confounding extent that Bruce Jenner could say: "I am a woman deep down in my soul." Of course, no sensible person would believe this, for the human soul is already given to every human person at the moment of conception, therefore, if he is really a woman deep in his soul, then he would have come out from his mother's womb as a woman with female sex organ because the "nature" of human sexuality is already part of the "structure" of the human person unless God who created "nature" is schizophrenic, God forbids!

There must be something happened in the human person which disrupted the healthy development of one's sexuality. Whatever that disrupted or perverted it will appear as "mysterious," at least, for the time being but it will eventually be known because nothing hidden that will not be known or covered that will not be revealed.

Since the demon Baphomet is portrayed as a "transgender" or "androgynous," then it would be very clear by now, as a noonday sun, who is behind the LGBT movement.

Bruce/Caitlyn Jenner accepted the Arthur Ashe Courage Award at the ESPY Awards at the Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles, California on July 15, 2015. In his/her acceptance speech Bruce/Caitlyn Jenner vowed: "to do whatever I can to reshape the landscape of how transgender are viewed and treated." She/he told the audience about trans teenagers who are bullied, beaten up, murdered or kill themselves. She/he mentioned two people by name whose deaths particularly touched him/her.

It is moving to notice, and this is very common, uniform, and consistent among those who advocated LGBT movement, to cast LGBT as a disadvantaged minority, being bullied and discriminated by parents and church/religious people to the extent that many among these LGBT teenagers committed suicide; and being hunted and executed referring to what Hitler did in Nazi Germany, but never mention that Jews and gypsies and other elderly people were also executed; and that they are hurting and suffering so much by this attitude of society especially people of religion. So, what should be done?

Here are just few of the demands the homosexual lobby put forth during the 1987 Homosexual "March in Washington":

1. "The government should provide protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment, public accommodations and education just as protection is provided on race, creed, color, sex, or national origin." ENDA, of course is the result of this first demand. The corollary is that it would compel all religious business owners, landlord and schools to jettison, under penalty of law, sincerely held and constitutionally protected religious beliefs, to adopt a view of sexual morality which runs entirely counter to central teachings of every major world religion.

2. "Anti-homophobic curriculum in the Schools." This amounted to: pro-homosexual, government – mandated indoctrination. This is already happening in thousands of public school throughout the United States. Children are indoctrinated to accept the doctrine that homosexual intercourse is a perfectly acceptable, "alternative sexual orientation." It's intriguing to notice that the statue of the demon Baphomet, has two little children at his knees gazing up at him worshipfully. Now children in school has to embrace the tenet of Bahomet espoused by the LGBT movement! This well calculated propaganda amazingly continues to grow in popularity despite the fact that Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has unfailingly acknowledged that such activities place homosexual participants at extremely high risk for dangerous and often deadly infectious disease. For instance, the most current data from CDC, as of March 2012, reveals that:
 - a) MSM (meaning Men who have sex with men) accounted 61% of all new HIV infections in the United States in 2009, as well as nearly half (49%) of people living with HIV in 2008.
 - b) CDC estimates that MSM accounts just 2% of the U.S. male population aged 13 and older, but accounted for more than 50% of all new HIV infections annually from 2006 to 2009.

Might not these diseases be nature's way of tapping us on the shoulder to let us know that these activities are misuses of our bodies? Certainly, it is a good news, and we have to be grateful to medical science, that we now know which of our activities contribute to engender these diseases so that we can change our behavior. Governments seem to have gotten that message in regard to tobacco and alcohol. For example, on every pack of cigarettes, there is a warning that smoking causes cancer, and there are warnings on every bottle of alcohol that it may be injurious to your health, but not yet in terms of homosexual behavior!

Why are there no warning signs regarding the Sodomitical and other sexual behavior when it is likely far more dangerous for a homosexual to engage in homosexual activity than it is for him to smoke and drink? What is utterly mind boggling is that instead of putting danger signs to homosexual acts, it is promoted!

3. "The government should ensure all public education programs include programs designed to combat lesbian/gay prejudice....Institutions that discriminate against lesbian and gay people should be denied tax-exempt status and federal funding."
4. "Public and private institutions should support parenting by lesbian or gay couples."

Number 3 & 4 are also happening in some states. For instance, the state of New Jersey have already began removing tax-exempt status from Church related ministries that refuse to provide "commitment ceremonies" to homosexual. This, of course, is aggravated by the Supreme Court recent ruling to legalize same sex union. In Massachusetts, Catholic Charities, Catholic Charities' adoption services was forced to shut down because it refused to assign children to homosexuals for adoption.

Way back in 1972 the homosexual activists laid down their demands in their "1972 Gay Rights Platform." Here are two of their central demands:

1. "Repeal all laws governing the age of sexual consent." This should send a chill down the spine of any parent. It would legally allow pedophiles and homosexuals who were so inclined to access children and teenagers so long as those children "consented" to having sexual intercourse.
2. "Repeal all legislative provisions that restrict the sex or number of persons entering into a marriage unit." This, of course, entails redefining marriage. The Obama administration and other European countries had been ramming, for many years, into the throat of the other members of the United Nations to change the language of the family. From "family," singular, which limit to a husband and wife, that is, a man and a woman, to "families," plural, which include all forms of families, that is, homosexual unions. For them the singular "family" is discriminatory.

It is clear as a noonday sun that homosexual activists wanted that LGBT movement be universal and protected by civil law. Throughout society, they demand that homosexual behaviors not only be "tolerated," but "celebrated," as their euphemistic slogan supposes: "celebrate diversity." They have masked their true political agenda by facilely hijacked the language of the "genuine" civil rights movement through the crafty and disingenuous rhetoric of "tolerance" and "diversity."

And yet what is amazing is that they could not tolerate anyone who believes the Biblical directive that human sexuality is a gift from God, embedded in human nature, to be shared between husband and wife within the bonds of marriage. They branded anyone who believes the Bible directive as “homophobic,” “hateful,” or “discriminatory.”

The noted homosexual activist and pornographer Clinton Fein addressed the “gay” agenda in 2005 article candidly titled, “The Gay Agenda”:

- On “hate crimes” laws: “Hate crime laws are just the beginning. Once those are passed either federally or in all 50 States, begin campaign to eliminate homophobia entirely.”
- On “hate thoughts” and “hate speech” laws: “Homophobic inclinations alone, even without any actions, should be criminal and punishable to the full extent of the law.”
- On “influencing public policy”: “Make sure that gay representation permeates every level of governance.”
- On “same – sex marriage”: “Demand the institution and then wreck it. James Dobson was right about our evil intentions. We just plan to be quicker than he thought.”
- On “gays” in the Church: “Reclaim Jesus. He was a Jewish queer to begin with, and don’t let anyone forget it.”

The homosexual lobby’s primary objective is to radically redefine the foundational institutions of legitimate marriage and the nuclear family by unraveling God’s natural design for human sexuality. In so doing, they hope to elevate their own spiritual and biological counterfeit and establish a sexually androgynous society wherein natural distinctions between male and female are dissolved.

Moreover, as with every major political movement, the homosexual lobby is pushing strongly a specific agenda. It is often called the “gay agenda.” At its core is a concerted effort to remove from society all traditional notions of sexual morality and replace them with the post-modern concept of sexual relativism, that is to say, when it comes to sex, there is never right or wrong. All sexual appetites are “equal.” If it feels good, do it. Of course, this creates cultural and moral anarchy!

Unequivocally, the homosexual lobby’s goals have been clearly defined for decades but for any goal to be successfully achieved, clever stratagem and sound methodology must be diligently applied. Accordingly, in their manuscript, “After the Ball: How America Will Conquer its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90’s” (1989, Doubleday/Bantam), Harvard educated marketing experts Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen meticulously laid out the homosexual lobby’s blueprint for success in what is widely regarded as the handbook for the “gay” agenda.

They concocted a tripartite approach that the homosexual lobby has masterfully implemented in subsequent years: Desensitization, Jamming, and Conversion.

Kirk and Madsen summarized their approach this way:

- a) Portray gays as victims, not as aggressive challengers.
- b) Give potential protectors a just cause.
- c) Make gays look good.
- d) Make victimizers look bad.

On Desensitization: "Desensitization," wrote Kirk and Madsen, "means subjecting the public to a 'continuous flood of gay – related advertising, presented in the least offensive fashion possible.' If 'straights' can't shut off the shower, they may at least get used to being wet.'"

As previously mentioned, "glamorizing" and "normalizing" homosexual conduct in public schools is a full time endeavor. But the schools: elementary, high school, and colleges/universities, represents only one field of battle in the "cultural war" over America's body, mind, and soul. We have to be aware that this "cultural war" is spreading in our world.

With the ample supply of ammunitions from a willing and obsequious liberal mainstream media and a like-minded Hollywood, societal desensitization has been greatly achieved.

Blockbusters like Tom Hanks' Philadelphia, the late Heath Ledger's Brokeback Mountain, and television programs like Will and Grace and Ellen represent a modern – day fairy tale, creating a dishonest and sympathetic portrayal of a lifestyle which is emotionally, physically, spiritually sterile.

Reality is replaced with fantasy. Gone are references to, or images of, the millions of homosexual men wasting away in hospice due to behaviorally transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS and Syphilis. Of course, unnatural behaviors engender natural consequences, as the Scripture says: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption."

Gone also are references to, or images of, men and women trapped in the homosexual lifestyle who aimlessly seek to fill a spiritual and emotional void through promiscuous and irresponsible sexual encounters.

The homosexual group, GLAAD, even offers awards to the television networks that most effectively carry the homosexual lobby's agenda. The more distorted and positive the portrayal of homosexual conduct and the more frequently the

networks show such portrayals the more likely networks are to win the coveted awards.

"Homosexuals should be portrayed as the 'Everyman'," as Kirk and Madsen put it. "In no time," they said, "a skillful and clever media campaign could have the gay community looking like the veritable fairy godmother to Western Civilization." It sounds very prophetic!

On Jamming: "Jamming" refers to the public smearing of Christians, traditionalists or anyone else who opposes the "gay" agenda. Kirk and Madsen wrote: "Jam homo-hatred (i.e., disagreement with homosexual behaviors) by linking it to Nazi horror." They add: "Associate all who oppose homosexuality with images of 'Klansmen demanding that gays be slaughtered,' 'hysterical backwoods preachers,' 'menacing punks,' and a 'tour of Nazi concentration camps where homosexuals were tortured and gassed.'"

They also proposed: "In any campaign to win over the public, gays must be portrayed as victims in need of protection so that straights will be inclined by reflex to adopt the role of protector....The purpose of victim imagery is to make straights feel very uncomfortable."

However, the most substantial and revealing admission came when they said: "Our effect is achieved without reference to facts, logic, or proof." Therefore, the words like "homophobe" and "heterosexism" were drawn from thin air, not because they had substance, but because they were effective jamming tools. Anyone who holds traditional values relative to human sexuality suddenly became a "homophobe," a "hatemonger," a "bigot." In this case, not even the Vatican and other churches are safe!

They also asserted that "Gays can undermine the moral authority of homophobic churches over less fervent adherents by portraying them as antiquated backwaters, badly out of steps...with the latest findings of psychology.

Against the atavistic tug of 'Old Time Religion' one must set the mightier pull of science and public opinion....Such an 'unholy' alliance has already worked well in America against the Churches, on such topics as divorce and abortion....That alliance can work for gays." It did work pretty well!

On Conversion: In the words of Kirk and Madsen "Conversion" means, "conversion of the average American's emotions, mind, and will, through planned psychological attack, in the form of propaganda to the nation via the media." They daintily added: "In the early stages of any campaign to reach straight America, the masses should not be shocked and repelled by premature exposure to homosexual behavior itself. Instead the imagery of sex should be

downplayed and gay rights should be reduced to an abstract social question as much as possible. First let the camel gets his nose inside the tent – and only later his unsightly derriere!”

Hence, as Kirk and Madsen both astutely understood and startlingly admitted, homosexual activism is truly, truly a big game of “hide the ball.” In order to achieve a sweepingly acceptance of “gayness,” they had to “remove” the focus from what homosexuality really is, that is, a deviant sexual conduct, and shift it onto the craftily manufactured specter of ‘gay civil rights.’”

In order to cut through the heavy sugarcoating of the LGBT movement, one need only consider what two men must actually do in order to “consummate” a so-called “gay marriage.” Kirk and Madsen understood that. Most people are repulsed by the mechanics of homosexual conduct, but everyone is for “civil right.”

Of course, in reality, the homosexual lifestyle has nothing to do with civil rights and everything to do with conduct. For this reason, the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, John Roberts, hit the nail on the head when he concluded in his 29 pages dissent of the ruling on Same – Sex Marriage: “If you are among the many Americans – of whatever sexual orientation – who favor expanding same –sex marriage, by all means celebrate today’s decision. Celebrate the achievement of a desired goal. Celebrate the opportunity for a new expression of commitment to a partner. Celebrate the availability of new benefits. But do not celebrate the Constitution. It had nothing to do with it.”

In anticipation of the coming of Pope Francis to the United States in September, the homosexual group, GLAAD, in conjunction with Dignity USA, wrote an open letter to Pope Francis dated June 25, 2015 inviting him to meet with LGBT Catholics and their family members during his visit.

It prefaced by saying: “Like millions of others, we are eagerly anticipating your Pastoral Visit to the United States. Some of us will be among the crowds that will greet you in person. All of us will be following your travels and praying that this visit helps bring better unity to the Body of Christ.” It also says: “Some of us write as Catholics, or as leaders of Catholic Organizations, and others on behalf of the many Catholics among our constituents.”

Here are some endorsing organizations and individuals who signed the letter: Catholic for Choice, Chicago Women-Church, Corpus U.S.A., A Critical Mass: Women Celebrating Eucharist, Latino Equality Alliance (LEA), Latino GLBT History Project, Roman Catholic Womanpriests USA (RCWP-USA), Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference, Charles Davis (Ecumenical Catholic Communion), Justin Tanis (Managing Director – Center for Lesbian and

Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry), Dr. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Krister Stendahl Professor of Divinity, Harvard University), Francis De Bernardo (Executive Director, New Ways Ministry), Sr. Jeannine Gramick (Executive Coordinator, National Coalition of American Nuns), etc.

The letter goes on to say: "Many LGBT people and family members have experienced a resurgence of hope for full acceptance in our Church as a result of your words and reports of personal meetings with LGBT people. We see your visit to the U.S. as an opportunity for you to hear from us how central our faith is to our lives, and to work together towards creating a Church where all families know that we are truly loved and welcome. Currently, our Church's teaching and pastoral practices surrounding LGBT people are causing an enormous pastoral crisis, as well as upholding systemic, institutionalized discrimination against LGBT people and our families.

"In the U.S. and around the world, we are experiencing alienation from the Church, higher rates of poverty and violence, and discrimination in employment, housing, educational opportunities, and access to health care. LGBT youth are particularly vulnerable, with nearly half of the LGBT young people in the U.S. considered to be at-risk. Lacking support at home, at School, or from faith communities, LGBT youth suffer bullying, experiencing depression, self-mutilate, attempt suicide, use drugs, become homeless or enter foster care at rates far higher than non-LGBT youth. This is a crisis that the Church can help to address through effective pastoral care and programs that provides love and support for these youth."

The letter continues to give statistics and the "rapidly rising support among Latinos as greater numbers of Latino LGBT come out. Latino Catholics have felt new support, which is reverberating into their large circles of families and friends. According to the Public Religion Research Institute, 'about six in ten white (61 percent), Hispanic (60 percent), and other non-white Catholics (60 percent) support allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry legally.' At times, these Catholics families feel unwelcome in our Church, as they fear or experience condemnation of themselves or their loved ones. This is something that pains us all."

"All of these concerns are important to us as Catholics, and we know they are important to you. We ask that you meet with representative of the LGBT community and our family members to hear our stories of perseverance, hope, and struggle. We believe your personal attention to our concerns could help hasten greater justice, in the U.S. and across the globe."

Considering the stance of the crafter of this letter and those who endorsed it in regards to the teaching of the Church on "homosexuality" and other moral

issues, it would not be implausible to assert that they are implicitly asking Pope Francis to change the Church's teaching on the immorality of homosexuality, because "Our Church's teaching and pastoral practices surrounding LGBT people are causing an enormous pastoral crisis, as well as upholding systemic, institutionalized discrimination against LGBT people and our families."

The Apostolic Nuncio to the U.S. recently sent a letter to the superiors of Contemplative Communities in the U.S. asking for prayers for Pope Francis' Apostolic Journey to Cuba and the United States. Attached in the letter was Pope Francis' itinerary to both countries. The U.S. itinerary, however, did not show any meeting with the representative of the LGBT group.

It did include a visit to "Our Lady of the Angels" School and meeting with children and families of migrants in New York (Harlem), Meeting for Religious Freedom with the Hispanic community and other migrants at the Independence Mall in Philadelphia, and visit to detainees at Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility in Philadelphia. Hence, it would cause a gnawing disappointment for the LGBT group not to be able to have a meeting with Pope Francis.

I am inclined to think that sooner or later Pope Francis will lose confidence among this group, because it is morally certain that he will never cave in to the demands of this group, especially the demand to alter the Church's teaching on homosexuality, as had already been signaled in his speech during his visit to the Philippines in January of this year saying that "the family is threatened by growing efforts to redefine the very institution of marriage"; and in his daring remarks in a book in which he was quoted saying that "'gender theory', which holds that gender is a social construct, is one of the great modern dangers to humanity, like nuclear weapons."

Carl Siciliano, a former Benedictine monk and the founder and Executive Director of the Ali Forney Center, America's largest center for homeless lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) in New York City, laid down "explicitly" in his open letter to Pope Francis posted May 8, 2015, what GLAAD, in conjunction with Dignity USA, and the signers of their letter, had "implicitly" demanded from Pope Francis in regards to the Church's unwavering teaching on homosexuality.

We will produce the entire letter here and read carefully how identical is its tone, style, and tenor with the letter written by GLAAD and Dignity USA, and also notice how their letters steadfastly followed the "homosexual lobby's blueprint for success" laid out by Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen in what is regarded as "the handbook" for the gay agenda.

The very common, uniform, and consistent themes are: the portrayal of LGBT as victims, suffered bullying, alienation from the Church, experiencing depression,

discriminated by Church/religious people, attempting suicide, self-mutilating, associating all who oppose homosexuality to “homophobe,” a “hatemonger”, a “bigot,” “antiquated backwaters, badly out of steps with the latest findings of psychology, giving potential protectors a just cause, making victimizers look bad, etc. Of course, if the writer is a Christian, “Redeeming Jesus.”

Here's the letter of Carl Siciliano: (His 2nd open letter to the Pope).

“Your Holiness,

Last year on Palm Sunday I wrote an open letter to you in the New York Times to implore you to bring an end to the Church's teaching that homosexuality is a sin. I invited you to visit the Ali Forney Center, the world's largest organization dedicated to homeless LGBT youths. I hoped that if you met the young people in our care, many of whom were rejected by religious parents who believe that homosexuality is evil, that you might recognize the catastrophic harm caused by such a belief. While you have not responded, I continue to hope you will take up my invitation, and more importantly, end this harmful teaching.

“My hope has been strengthened by learning that you will come to New York City this September as a prelude to your participation in the World Conference of Families. What a remarkable opportunity for you to call on Families to love and cherish their LGBT children. I hope that such a call might be inspired by your listening with compassion to our youths tell of being driven from their homes by parents who believe that being LGBT made them sinful and evil; that witnessing their suffering would awaken you to the terrible harm caused by religious condemnation of homosexuality.

“Youths usually become homeless because they are not safe in their homes, often when their parents suffer from mental illness, or substance abuse. Poverty is usually a factor. But the reason our LGBT youths cite most often for their homelessness is the religious belief of their parents. Religious opposition towards LGBT people contributes significantly to why an LGBT youth is almost eight times more likely to become homeless than a heterosexual youth.

“I hope that you might listen with compassion to our youths tell of the abuse they suffered in their homes. Some youths tell of being beaten or strangled by parents. Others suffered psychological torment; some tell of being forced to recite condemnatory biblical passages late into the night, others tell of their parents saying that God was disgusted by them, that they were abomination.

“I hope that you might hear how they suffer after being driven from their homes; hear of the terror of being a homeless youth. How they are so often cold and hungry. How they are frequently sexually exploited. How they are often mocked and harassed and brutalized for being LGBT, even in shelters. How they often struggle with despair. How some are brought to the brink of suicide. And how too many LGBT youth do in fact take their lives.

“I hope that if you listened to our youths with compassion, you might share my horror at how the message of God’s merciful love in the Gospels has been deformed by religious hostility towards LGBT people, a hostility which destroys the bonds between so many parents and their LGBT children.

“Many people, even religious people, have difficulty believing in a God of love. In primitive times some attempted to appease what they believed to be a hostile, vengeful god by sacrificing their children, giving them over to be slaughtered on altars. The Bible is full of condemnation for this vile practice; the prophets cried out that the true God wants compassion and mercy, not child sacrifice. Yet even today, too many parents sacrifice their children in the name of religious beliefs; sacrificing them, not on altars, but rather to suffer homelessness and destitution in the streets.

“The teaching that homosexuality is evil and sinful has a toxic impact, making many parents unable to love their LGBT children. As hard as it is to see our youths suffer homelessness, it is even harder to see their young hearts broken by being denied their parents’ love. How could a loving God want a teaching that provokes such cruelty? How could a teaching inspired by God’s merciful love provoke scores of children to be abused and abandoned?

“You are the world’s most influential religious leader. You could protect many youths from harm by teaching that there is nothing wrong with being LGBT, that there is nothing wrong with LGBT children. Doing so would lessen the epidemic of LGBT youth suffering homelessness, who number 200,000 in the United States alone. We are overwhelmed trying to find resources to care for the enormous numbers who come to the Ali Forney Center needing shelter and support. Many LGBT youths languish on the streets, far more than ours and the other youth shelters can accommodate. Last winter was very cold in New York City, it was painful to see many LGBT teens suffering in the cold.

“In so many ways your papacy has been a witness to the message of love at the heart of the Gospels. You have proclaimed that love is the measure of our faith. You have cried out that we must especially show love to the poor, the abused, those who are outcast. I hope that you will visit the Ali Forney Center and open your heart to our youths; for none are poorer, more abused, more cast aside, more deprived of love than our homeless LGBT youths.

“I pray that their witness might inspire you to reform our Church’s treatment of LGBT people, helping to bring about a world where parents look at their LGBT children, not with shame or condemnation, but with love. That they will embrace them. I pray that in so doing you can bring our Church even closer to the

embrace of God, who is the supreme good, who is all-loving, who is all-merciful, who would never want us to harm a child.
Sincerely, Carl Siciliano”

Who would not be moved by this letter!? There’s so much good in it. For instance, the work itself of providing shelter to homeless LGBT youths, the acknowledgment that God is the “supreme good,” “all-loving,” “all-merciful,” “who would never want us to harm a child.”

The message of love is also present. On the other hand, it lodged a complaint against the Church’s teaching on the immorality of homosexuality by saying: “The teaching that homosexuality is evil and sinful has a toxic impact, making many parents unable to love their LGBT children.” Thus imploring Pope Francis “to bring an end to the Church’s teaching that homosexuality is a sin.”

In his first open letter to Pope Francis posted April 13, 2014, Carl Siciliano boldly wrote the Pope saying: “I write in behalf of the homeless LGBT youths I serve. I ask you to take urgent action to protect them from the devastating consequences of religious rejection, which is the most common reason LGBT youths are driven from their homes. At the heart of the problem is that the Church still teaches that homosexual conduct is a sin, and that being gay is disordered. I hope that if you understand how this teaching tears families apart and brings suffering to innocent youths, you will end this teaching and prevent your bishops from fighting against the acceptance of LGBT people as equal members of society.”

He also said: “The Roman Catholic Church is the largest and most influential Christian organization in the world. By teaching that homosexual conduct is a sin, and that the homosexual orientation is disordered, it influences countless parents and families in societies across the globe to reject their children. In the name of these children, and in light of the love and compassion at the heart of the message of Jesus, I ask that you end this teaching.

“Jesus Christ is never recorded as having said a word in judgment or condemnation of homosexuality or of LGBT people. He spoke of a loving, compassionate God, and commanded his followers to act with love and compassion. Jesus spoke of God as a loving parent would never abandon his children.”

One thing is very obvious in Carl’s letter to Pope Francis, namely, the Catholic Church is the “culprit” of all the innumerable ills LGBT people around the globe suffered because of its teaching that homosexuality is a sin. However, it is not farfetched to assert that no reasonable moral person be persuaded to believe that even if the Catholic church, God forbid, will abandon its teaching on the

immorality of homosexuality, as other Christian denominations did by caving in on “same-sex marriage,” the LGBT people, especially the youths, will no longer experience depression, nor attempt suicide, nor suffer bullying, nor self-mutilating, nor become homeless, nor discriminated or rejected by any people of religion or by parents or by any church denomination.

It raises, though, a legitimate question whether those “religious parents” who rejected their homosexual child are “really” religious in the truest meaning of the word, because the “truly” religious parents are very likely more receptive of their homosexual child, or are they just “religious” by name?

Of course, the truly religious parents will make a clear distinction between “homosexual person” and “homosexual activity.” It is homosexual activity that is wrong, because it does not and could not fulfill the goal of human sexuality, which is unitive and procreative.

So, what is the standard we should use to measure things regarding man’s nature and end, and how do we discern what is in accord with it or against it? The Greek philosopher, Aristotle, has this to say: “In order to find what is natural we must look among those things which according to nature are in sound condition, not among those that are corrupt.” He also said: “Thus the human being to be studied is one whose state is best, both in body and soul – in him this is clear.”

Hence, it is clear, on the ground, that the “goal” realized as condition is present in its complete actuality, meaning it has reached its perfection. Therefore, since we perceive what a human person is in its fullness, we can apprehend what its privation is. For instance, eye experts such as optometrists and ophthalmologists can tell us with certainty that 20/20 vision is the best for the eye and blindness, its privation, is the worst. Thus with 20/20, the eye has reached its complete actuality. It is perfect as an eye.

So, in respect to a human person’s sexual powers, which are unitive and generative by nature, the one whose state is best would be “man as husband and father,” just for a woman it would be as “wife and mother.”

Since homosexuality cannot actualize sexual potential because homosexual acts can neither be unitive nor procreative, therefore, homosexual behaviors are disorders and homosexual dispositions are privations. Like a congenital blindness or deafness, homosexual dispositions are not part of what a human person is in its essence. Congenital blindness or deafness is accidental, not essential quality.

In that case, there is something lacking that ought to be there. For example, the ear ought to be able to hear and the eye to see. The further a thing is from its perfection, the more defective or corrupt it is, just as blindness is the furthest defect of the eye. "Evil is the privation of the good," said our heavenly friend, St. Augustine. Thus privation of the good cannot itself be good!

Let us give a concrete example of a "truly religious" and "loving" person who is receptive to homosexual person, but make a very clear distinction between the "person" and the "action." Let us look at the famous phrase of Pope Francis which reverberated in the homosexual movement throughout the world: "Who am I to judge." This was a response to an interview with reporters on a flight back from Brazil during the World Youth Day whether there was a "gay lobby" in the Vatican.

Pope Francis said: "If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge?" The distinction between the "person" and the "action" is crystal clear that homosexual orientation is not sinful, but homosexual acts are sinful. Although "homosexual orientation" is not in the proper order, but it is not sinful. Homosexual orientation is tantamount to "concupiscence."

Concupiscence is an "inclination" to sin, but in itself is not a sin. It is when we acted it out that makes it sinful. It is a residue of the sin we inherited from the Fall of our first parents. The Fall disorganized our human faculties, making us as we are now, with an inclination toward evil, with a will reluctant to do good, and with a tendency to rationalize evil.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that "By Baptism all sins are forgiven, original sin and all personal sins, as well as punishment for sin. In those who have been reborn nothing remains that would impede their entry into the kingdom of God, neither Adam's sins, nor personal sin, nor the consequences of sin, the gravest of which is separation from God. Yet certain temporal consequences of sin remain in the baptized, such as suffering, illness, death, and such frailties inherent in life as weaknesses of character, and so on, as well as an inclination to sin that Tradition calls concupiscence, or metaphorically, "the finder for sin" (*fomes peccati*); since concupiscence 'is left for us to wrestle with, it cannot harm those who do not consent but manfully resist is by the grace of Jesus Christ.' Indeed, 'an athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules'" (#'s 1263, 1264).

Thus concupiscence by itself is not sinful unless we acted it out. Although concupiscence will remain with us, very likely, until death, it can be regulated by a sincere prayer and the reception of the sacraments, especially the Mass and the sacrament of reconciliation. Praying the rosary is also a great help. Of course, self-discipline too is very essential.

Therefore, as Pope Francis said: "If a person is gay and seek God and has good will, who am I to judge?" What will be the consequences if Pope Francis will say, "since homosexual orientation, though disorder, is not sinful in itself, there is nothing wrong with homosexual action, therefore, it is right to have sex with other men?" We don't have to be a straight or LGBT or a Christian or Jew or Muslim or atheist or agnostic to know its consequences.

The recent sexual scandal that racked the Church to its deepest fiber bore an unequivocal witness if homosexual action will be given an unrestrained approbation!

After the Boston Globe disseminated the story on priestly sexual abuse in 2002, the American Bishops organized an independent panel to study the issue. When the panel, National Review Board, released its findings in 2004, the attorney who headed the study, said: "There are no doubt many outstanding priests of a homosexual orientation who live chaste, celibate lives, but any evaluation of the causes and context of the current crisis must be cognizant of the fact that more than 80% of the abuse at issue was of a homosexual nature."

Moreover, the panel explicitly said: "we must call attention to the homosexual behavior that characterized the vast majority of the cases of abuse observed in recent decades."

Furthermore, Dr. Richard Fitzgibbons, a Psychiatrist who has spent many years treating sexually abusive priests, goes further, saying: "Every priest whom I treated who was involved with children sexually had been involved in adult homosexual relationships."

In his letter to Cardinal Dolan, posted March 20, 2012, Carl Siciliano wildly said: "We have looked with terror at the spectacle of numerous bishops having enabled the abuse of thousands of children by failing to remove sexual predators from the ranks of the priesthood. As people come to better understand your role in the terrible suffering caused by homophobic parents turning on their children, you and other religious leaders who aggressively fight the acceptance of LGBT people will similarly be seen as demonstrating a reckless indifference to the welfare of children."

Now that the Church had learned a very hard lesson of the consequences of homosexual activity, it is really mind boggling that Carl Siciliano would demand that Cardinal Dolan and Pope Francis "will bring to an end" the teaching of the Church on the immorality of homosexuality and will proclaim that there's nothing wrong with it!

Is Carl Siciliano trying to convince the Catholic Church that, under the influence of lust, a gay person, given all opportunity, will abstain from homosexual intercourse with minors? Is Carl trying to persuade the Catholic church that "married gay couples," given all opportunity, if they met someone more attractive than their partner, will abstain homosexual intercourse with that person?

There's a very simple principle in philosophy which says: "Nothing is enough to a person of whom enough is too little." Dr. Richard Fitzgibbons testified to the veracity of this principle when he said: "Every priest whom I treated who was involved with children sexually had been involved in adult homosexual relationships."

It sounded that those priests who were involved sexually with children were no longer contented with having sex with adults. They need more higher dosage! Therefore, how can homosexuality be right when all the evidences show that it is wrong?

Carl Siciliano also said in his letter to Pope Francis, posted April 13, 2014: "Jesus Christ is never recorded as having said a word in judgment or condemnation of homosexuality or of LGBT people." It is true that there is never a recorded saying of Christ in the entire New Testament as having said a word in judgment or condemnation of homosexuality or LGBT people, but it is also equally true that his foremost apostle to the Gentiles, St. Paul, "explicitly" condemned homosexuality.

If St. Paul can say, "it is no longer I that live, but Christ who lives in me," and also, "he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him," hence, it is very clear that St. Paul has the mind of Christ; therefore, what he said in condemnation of homosexuality was sanctioned by Christ, because if it was against the will of Christ, Christ would not have let St. Paul said it! It would also make St. Paul a liar, God forbid, because he said that it is no longer he that live, but Christ who lives in him.

In other words, St. Paul was an instrument Christ used to lay down a moral foundation on human sexuality. This is very clear as St. Paul continues to say: "Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own, you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

Since homosexual activity is immoral, so how can be God glorified in one's body!? Is Carl Siciliano unaware that more than 80% of the "sexual predators" were homosexuals? Is he not also aware that it was by acting out their

homosexual inclination which brought incalculable havoc to the Church? He himself condemned the "sexual predators," so how can he assert that there's nothing wrong with homosexual conduct and even wanting the Church to proclaim it!? It's so amazing! It will probably make the eyes of Lot protrude!

God can be glorified in the life of a homosexual person if they "seek God and has good will," but could not and would never be in homosexual action because, without any shadow of a doubt, it is immoral as shown by its fruit in the scandal that racked the Church to its deepest fiber.

Scripture itself bears witness that St. Paul is in accord with the Spirit of Christ, because Christ Himself said: "I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it you."

Since Christ Himself is the Truth, as He said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life," and the Spirit whom He will send is Himself the "Spirit of Truth," and since Christ and the Holy Spirit are one, and whoever "is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him," therefore, it is unequivocal that St. Paul is telling the truth that homosexuality is wrong.

In other words, it is the Holy Spirit Himself bearing witness to his spirit, because he "is united to the Lord," hence, "becomes one spirit with Him"; therefore, St. Paul is in total agreement with the Spirit of Christ in condemning the immorality of homosexual activity.

Moreover, Christ Himself bestowed full authority to the Church to bind and loose, in particular, all matters of morality, as He Himself said: "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Since the Church teaches that "Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity [see Gn. 19: 1-29; Rom. 1:24-27; 1Cor. 6:10; 1Tm.1:10] tradition has always declared that 'homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.' They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved," thus it binds this teaching as morally true. Since the Church is given full authority to bind and loose, therefore, this teaching is also bound in heaven.

Of course, Carl Siciliano wanted the Church to loose this teaching in his open letter to Pope Francis, posted 04/13/2014, he said: "There are biblical writings

endorsing conduct now recognized as wrong; passages endorsing the rape of enemies' wives and the murder of their children, endorsing slavery and even genocide. None of those biblical instructions are maintained as Church's teachings, as they are recognized to be cruel and immoral, and reflective of the ignorance of more primitive times.

"I ask you to recognize that the condemnation of homosexuality is also cruel and wrong, and rooted in a primitive, obsolete understanding of human sexuality. I ask you to join the growing number of church communities and religious denominations who have chosen to welcome and embrace us with love and acceptance."

This contention ought to be clearly examined in order to see to what extent it is true and to what extent it is utterly false. Let us examine his "purported biblical passage" "endorsing the rape of enemies' wives...." Never ever even one entry of "rape" occurred in the Old and New Testaments such as in the following Concordances:

1. Cruden's Complete Concordance to the Old and New Testaments by Alexander Cruden, Zondervan Publishing House
2. Harper's Topical Concordance, Compiled by Charles R. Joy, Harper and Brothers Publishers
3. The Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments, Revised Standard Version with Concordance
4. Complete Concordance to the Bible Dauay Version, by Rev. Newton Thompson, S.T.D. and Raymond Stock, B. Herder Book Co.
5. The Concise Concordance to the New Revised Standard Version, edited by John R. Kohlenberger III, Oxford University Press
6. The New World Dictionary – Concordance to the New American Bible, World Bible Publisher

Therefore, it is utterly false that the Bible endorsed "the rape of enemies' wives. It is true that there is a passage in the Bible, mainly in the Old Testament, wherein God commanded the destruction of men, women and children, and even properties. This command was such that disobedience to it cost Saul his kingship. This passage is in the first book of Samuel chapter 15: "And Samuel said to Saul, "The Lord sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore hearken to the words of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'I will punish what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way, when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.'"

As it turned out, Saul did not carry out this command completely for he spared Agag the king of the Amalekites, and the best of the sheep and of the oxen

and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them; all that was despised and worthless they utterly destroyed. Of course, Saul gave a seemingly reasonable excuse for sparing the best of the sheep and oxen in order to sacrifice them to the Lord.

However, Samuel said to Saul: "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. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king."

In the view of prophetic circles, obedience to the word of Yahweh is absolutely primary and outweighs all other considerations. Saul was anointed to deliver Israel from the Philistines, and now conflict with the Philistines looms up. An important aspect of Israelite warfare in Samuel's time was the ban, which required that all the spoil taken in victory be devoted to the Lord, that is, be completely destroyed as a holocaust or sacrifice. Saul owes Samuel absolute obedience because Samuel is the voice of God for him.

As the Lord's anointed, Saul is to wage the holy war; for such it is. The opponent makes that clear. Amalek is a Bedouin tribe from the steppes of the deep South and was Israel's chief enemy during the time in the desert, as the saying in Ex. 17: 16 shows: "The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." Amalek, then, is the adversary of the Lord. This people is regarded by the tradition as the opponent, which first and most obvious sought to deny Israel entry into the Promised Land.

Therefore the victory over Amalek is expressly a victory of prayer (Ex. 17: 8ff) and thus of the Lord; and the answer to anyone who puts himself in opposition to God 'with a high hand' can only be the ban.

Therefore, in disobeying God's command Saul proved himself to be not after God's heart. Samuel grieved over Saul; and God repented that He had made Saul king over Israel. Here we have the theologically important concept of the repentance of God: God is not slavishly bound by His own decisions, but is almighty to such an extent that He is Lord even of them.

Just as He takes the action of men into consideration in His decisions, so that omnipotence never means that man is deprived of his responsibility, so, too, the election of the king is not irrevocable. God can at any time lay aside the instrument which He is using if it appears to Him to be neither tried nor suitable. Samuel's grieving over Saul can likely mean that he is attempting to make God change His mind. Samuel pleads for Saul as does Abraham for Sodom, but Samuel fall in with the will of God and agree with Him (cf. The Old Testament

Library, I and II Samuel A Commentary, by Hanz Wilhelm Hertzberg, trans. By J.S. Bowden).

Noticed, that what has been approved in the Old Testament had been loosened in the New Dispensation, because even in holy war we don't wish that infant and suckling be killed. Therefore, the Church exercised the full authority given to her to bind and loose. Hence, Carl Siciliano is right in saying that this biblical instruction is not maintained as a teaching of the Church.

Now let us look at and examine slavery. Yes, it is true that slavery was already existence in the Old Testament. However, slavery under the Hebrews was as mild as was possible in that age. No Hebrew could become permanently the slave of another Hebrew, but must be freed when he had paid the debt for which he was sold; in the seventh year of his service whether the debt was paid or not; and in the year of Jubilee, whatever the time he had served. Gentile slaves were mostly war captives, or purchased from regular slave-dealers. These could be freed at the will of the master, but there was no law requiring it (cf. Cruden's Complete Concordance to the Old and New Testament, by Alexander Cruden, A.M.).

In the New Testament, a good number of slaves became Christian. It is not right to say that St. Paul endorsed slavery. It is more right to say that he tolerated it, for he even advises the slaves that if they have the chance to obtain their freedom then they have to take advantage of that opportunity. What is important for St. Paul is that a person is united with God either he is a slave or not.

In his first letter to the Corinthians Ch. 7: 21-24, he said: "Were you a slave when called? Never mind. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity. For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. So, brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God."

Thus the distinction between toleration and approbation is clearly drawn. The Church never move from toleration of slavery to legitimization of slavery. As a matter of fact the Catechism of the Church laid out clearly its teaching on slavery: "The seventh commandment forbids act or enterprises that for any reason – selfish or ideological, commercial, or totalitarian – lead to the enslavement of human beings, to their being bought, sold and exchanged like merchandise, in disregard for their personal dignity. It is a sin against the dignity of persons and their fundamental rights to reduce them by violence to their reproductive value or to a source of profit. St. Paul directed a Christian master to treat his Christian slave 'no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother,... both in the flesh and in the Lord' [Philemon 16]" (#2414).

There is an overwhelmingly tremendous difference between the case of slavery and the case of homosexuality. In the case of slavery, there was a time, both in the Old and New Testaments, that it was not seen as “a sin against the dignity of persons,” hence was not condemned as sinful. St. Paul himself, though he was free from all men, have made himself a slave to all, that he might win more people to Christ (cf. 1Cor. 9: 19). “For as many of you were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3: 27-28). Hence. What is substantial is that a person is united to Christ.

Though the Church tolerated the institution of slavery, but it consistently asserted the equality of both master and slave before God and sought to mitigate the evils of servitude. However, the Church went to the heart of the matter when the unfolding of the history of slavery proves itself as “a sin against the dignity of persons and their fundamental rights to reduce them by violence to their reproductive value or to a source of profit.” The slave trade, especially in the 17th and 18th century bore witness to this.

The case of homosexuality is utterly different because right from the beginning, both in the Old and New Testaments, it was already condemned as sinful. It was never ever even tolerated! Therefore, the burden is on Carl Siciliano and those who advocated homosexuality to prove that it is not wrong, that is, “intrinsically disordered.”

The ultimate litmus test would remain as ever: whether homosexual acts will be able to fulfill the goal of human sexuality, that is, to produce life.

Until it can be proven it is absolutely morally certain that those who championed homosexuality will be “asking” without receiving, “seeking” without finding, and “knocking” at a door perpetually shut.

It is thoroughly false that the Church’s condemnation of homosexuality is “rooted in primitive, obsolete understanding of human sexuality,” because until this present time, with the incredible advancement of modern technology, never was it known that a sexual intercourse of homosexual persons engender a child. It is the heart of the matter. Homosexual acts are “contrary to the natural law.” They close the sexual act to the “gift of life.”

The Church never condemned Homosexual persons, thus “They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided.” What it “explicitly” condemned is homosexual act.

Carl Siciliano and those who advocated homosexuality never made a distinction between a homosexual person and homosexual action. For them it is in one package: homosexual person equals homosexuality. Here's the logic of their argument: since it is not sinful, by itself, to be a homosexual person, therefore, for them, it is not sinful to engage in homosexual activity!

In order to achieve a sweepingly acceptance of "gayness" they removed the focus from what homosexuality really is, that is, a deviant sexual conduct. As the two Harvard educated marketing experts Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen both astutely understood and startlingly admitted, homosexual activism is truly a big game of "hide the ball." "First let the camel gets his nose inside the tent – and only later his unsightly derriere!"

It also false what Carl Siciliano said in his first open letter to Pope Francis posted April 13, 2014 that "Jesus spoke of God as a loving parent who would never abandon his children." There's never even one of a recorded saying of Christ speaking of God who would never abandon or forsake or cast or reject his children. As a matter of fact Christ spoke of Himself being abandon by God: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

There are passages in the Old and New Testaments wherein God Himself abandoned His people, because they abandoned Him first by worshipping other gods, and following their own desires. The first chapter of St. Paul's letter to the Romans tells clearly that "God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error."

It is true that Christ speaks of God as a "loving" Father who is "merciful" and ready to "forgive." The parable of the prodigal son loudly bore witness to this. But a question can be asked: "What if the prodigal son, after wallowing in sexual promiscuity, never repented and dies in that state?" Of course, this is an area of morality. We will leave the answer to this to moral theologians!

It is also obvious that the prodigal son wanted an unrestricted freedom to follow his heart's desires. It is good that he did not blame others of his tragedy. Had he blamed others instead of taking full responsibility of his action it would have been morally impossible for him to reach repentance.

We are all sinners whether we like it or not and we commit sin in words, thoughts, and actions; but there are actions that are essentially sinful though done in secret such as fornication and adultery. If these actions are condemned as sinful though they are done by a male and a female, hence, still in accord with nature and the complementarity of opposite sexes, how much more of homosexuality which is obviously not in accord with nature!

To have the Church proclaim that it is not sinful is just mind boggling; it is tantamount to calling evil good, and good, that is, the teaching of the Church, evil. In this case there will be no more Absolute Truth. The Church will no longer have any authority in matters of "Faith and Morals," thus "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles.

However, Christ promised to be with the Church till the end of time and not even the gate of hell could prevail against her. Also the Holy Spirit guides the Church into all the truth, for He takes what belongs to Christ and imparts it to the Church.

The hardest thing, really, to sort out is when truth and falsehood are so mixed up. It is true that it is not sinful, by itself, to be homosexual, just as "concupiscence" by itself is not sinful, but it is utterly false to assert that to indulge in concupiscence is not sinful; thus it is utterly false to uphold that to indulge in homosexual action is not sinful.

It is one thing to state that there is no logical barrier to the affirmation of absolute truth; it is quite another to actually affirm it. Such an affirmation can be based upon only one source; the question of truth must come in the end to the question of Revelation.

God revealed Himself to us in Scripture and nature. Since both Scripture and nature affirmed that homosexual action is wrong, therefore, to avow that it is right is totally erroneous. Natural law is so clear in this. People world over have an intrinsic ethical intuition that certain behaviors are wrong because they are unnatural.

Human beings perceive intuitively that the natural sex partner of a human person is another human person, not an animal. The same rationale applies to the case of homosexual action. The natural sex partner for a man is a woman, and the natural sex partner for a woman is a man. Hence, people have the corresponding intuition concerning homosexuality that they do about bestiality – that it is wrong because it is unnatural.

Natural law reasoning is the basis for almost all standard moral intuitions. For example, it is the dignity and value that each human person naturally possesses that makes the needless taking of human life or infliction of physical, psychological, and emotional pain immoral. This gives rise to a host of specific moral principles, such as the unacceptability of murder, rape, kidnapping, physical and emotional abuse, and so forth.

The modern arguments in favor of homosexuality have thus been insufficient to overcome the evidence that homosexual activity is against divine and natural law, as the Bible and the Church, have always held.

The conventional wisdom maintains that there is a universal pedophilia crisis in the Catholic Church. Popular as this position is, it is empirically wrong: the data shows it has been a homosexual crisis all along. The evidence is clear, though there is a reluctance, especially in the liberal media and among those who advocated homosexuality, to let the data drive the conclusion.

It has been established that homosexuals are disproportionately represented among child molesters. Correlation is not causation; it is an association. Hence to say that there is a correlation between homosexual orientation and the sexual abuse of minors is not to say that being homosexual makes one a molester. On the other hand, it makes utterly no sense to pretend that there is no relationship between homosexuality and the sexual abuse of minors.

Can we imagine if robbers would propose that a state has to proclaim that robbery is not wrong, so that robbers can freely rob banks without qualm of conscience!?

The only way they can disseminate this teaching is to change the meaning of robbery; to have a public official who is sympathetic to robbers introduce it in legislation; to have the mass media and advertising agencies promulgate it; educate children in elementary schools and students in high schools, and even colleges, that there's nothing wrong in robbery, it's okay to be a robber. To crown it all, they will trumpet throughout the whole world that they are the "enlightened ones"; that the condemnation of robbery is rooted in a primitive, obsolete understanding of thievery!

Robert Kelly, a graduate of Georgetown University and the Claremont Graduate University; a former senior Advisor for information strategy from 2002-2006 for the Secretary of Defense; a former director of the Voice of America from 2001-2002, and served in the U.S. White House as a Special Assistant to President Ronald Reagan from 1983-1985, wrote an article in the Inside the Vatican, June-July 2015 issue entitled "From Toleration to Totalitarianism" – The New Gnosticism of the Homosexual Movement.

It is Robert Kelly's contention in this article that the "homosexual movement is a form of Gnosticism." He quoted the German-born political philosopher, Eric Voegelin, who said: "All Gnostic movements are involved in the project of abolishing the constitution of being, with its origin in divine, transcendent being...."

In this case, Robert Kelly's contention is true. This is what the homosexual movement is doing. They are abolishing the true nature of marriage which derived its origin in God the transcendent Being, then replaced it with a more modern one: "same-sex marriage."

The truth that the true nature of marriage is between a man and a woman alone which God had ordained from the beginning had been thoroughly discredited by those who must obey the dictates of the "spirit of the age," the "enlightened ones" who claimed to possess "gnosis," that is, "knowledge"; but it is impossible to extinguish the thirst for truth which God has implanted in the human person to lead them to Him, and which can only be satisfied in the acceptance of His Revelation.

Before the dawn of the modern age the life of man was largely conditioned by the virtues of obedience, submission, and respect: to God, to the Church, to the lawful earthly authorities, but to the "enlightened ones" in our modern age this Old Order is but a horrible memory of some dark past rooted in a primitive, obsolete understanding of man from which the modern man has been "liberated."

Friedrich Nietzsche once said: "Who wishes to be creative must first destroy and smashed accepted values." It sounds working well in the homosexual movement! Robert Kelly also quoted Paula Ettelbrick, a lesbian advocate, who proclaimed that "transforming the very fabric of society...and radically reordering society's view of reality" is the goal of the homosexual movement. "This is a typical Gnostic rhetoric about constructing a substitute reality," asserts Robert Kelly.

He goes on to quote Eric Voegelin who said: "Gnosticism has produced something like the counterprinciples to the principles of existence; and, insofar as these principles determine an image of reality for the masses of the faithful, it has created a dream world that itself is a social force of the first importance in motivating attitudes and actions." Robert Kelly rightly observes that "such counterprinciples are active and evident in every aspect of the promotion of the homosexual cause."

This reminds us of what the two Harvard educated marketing experts Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen had laid out in the homosexual lobby's blueprint for success in which they concocted a tripartite approach that the homosexual movement has masterfully implemented. One of which is "Desensitization." "Desensitization," wrote Kirk and Madsen, "means subjecting the public to a 'continuous flood of gay related advertising, presented in the least offensive fashion possible. If 'straights' can't shut off the shower, they may at least get used to being wet.'"

With the ample supply of ammunitions from a willing and obsequious liberal mainstream media and a like-minded Hollywood, societal desensitization has been greatly achieved. Blockbusters like Tom Hank's Philadelphia, the late Heath Ledger's Brokeback Mountain, and television programs like Will and Grace and Ellen represent a modern-day fairy tale "image of reality," a "dream world" of a lifestyle which is emotionally, physically, and spiritually sterile. Reality is replaced with fantasy. Yet, it is now a "social force," especially in the legalization of "homosexual union," that motivates "attitudes and actions."

Robert Kelly also underscored that "as a society we have moved from the point where the rationalization for homosexual behavior has been accepted as normative to the point where the rationalization will now be imposed and enforced, legally and by social forces at large, on everyone."

It is very telling how he alluded to the analysis of Eric Voegelin of the Nazi movement as a form of Gnosticism. He said: "it is not a stretch to point to Nazi Germany in 1935 as an analogy to current events and their similarly Gnostic nature. That is when the Nuremberg Laws were passed, stripping Jews of their German citizenship and forbidding marriage between non-Jews and Jews. No doubt, there were still many fine and upstanding people in Germany at the time, including many Catholics, but from then on they had to keep their mouths shut about the Nazi racial superiority teachings because they were state law.

"Anyone who thinks that we are involved in a denial of reality any less profound than that of 1935 Germany is kidding themselves. Success for the homosexual dream requires the obliteration of the real and the removal of those who insist on the existence of reality. Gnosticism does not accept the evidence of reality. It is not a matter of what Gnostics do not know, but what they refuse to acknowledge."

In essence, then, it is right to say that the Gnostic is not interested in conforming his mind to reality but in conforming reality to his wishes. Although extinct as an organized religion, Gnosticism is the invariable element in every major Christian heresy, by its denial of an objective revelation and its disclaimer that Christ

established in the Church a teaching authority to interpret decisively the meaning of the revealed word of God (cf. Catholic Encyclopedia).

One of the most common charges leveled against the Gnostics by patristic writers was immorality, made more heinous because the Gnostics defended their practice. St. Irenaeus of Lyons says of them in a memorable passage: "As gold sunk in filth does not lose its beauty but preserves its own nature, the filth being unable to harm the gold, so they say of themselves that even if they be immersed in material deeds, nothing will injure them nor will they lose their spiritual essence. Therefore 'the most perfect' among them do unafraid all the forbidden things of which Scripture tells us that 'they who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God'" (Adv. Haer. 1.6. 2-3).

What if these "forbidden things," especially, "homosexuality" will be legalized or the Catholic Church has to proclaim that there's nothing wrong with it? It would be enough to make Christ weep again!

We have to maintain that many Christian ideas are used or misused by the Gnostics; Gnosticism remains essentially a form of paganism. Its Christian elements are on the surface only. The language and images of Christianity are used, but the essence of the Christian message is ignored completely. Gnosticism was assuredly one of the worst dangers ever faced by Christianity, one of which the efforts of the Church Fathers managed to overcome successfully only after a prolonged struggle.

Since homosexual movement is a form of Gnosticism, thus a heretical movement, therefore the Church and its bishop has to struggle with it, especially in the United States in which "homosexual marriage" is now legalized, endorsed and sanctioned by the Supreme Court.

However, it is my hope that one day this law*¹ will eventually be abolished. I may not live to see the day when it will be realized, but it is highly possible once there will be a president and a Congress that will repeal it, or possibly it will just be dissolved by itself as what happened with the Nuremberg Laws of 1935. We may wait for several years or a century or so, but it is worth expecting.

In the early history of Christianity, there was a virtual law in the Roman Empire which forbade anyone to be a Christian. It took almost 300 years to repel this law when Emperor Constantine rose to power and decreed an Edict of toleration at Milan in 315 which made Christianity a lawful religion. Within this period, waves of sporadic persecution against the Christians were sweeping from province to province, which varies in severity, according to the whims of

¹ Also Abortion

the emperors or governors. It was in this period that martyrdom was knocking at the door of every new born Christian child and all Christians in general. There were lots of martyrs but there were also many apostates.

The virtual law in the Roman Empire which forbade anyone to be a Christian and Nuremberg laws of 1935, certainly has a certain parallel in the ruling of homosexual marriage. People of religion, especially Christians, had been dragged to court for refusing to "take pictures," to "make cakes," or to "cater" a homosexual wedding.

A fresh example happened last week, end of August 2015, a county clerk in Kentucky, Kim Davis, was dragged to court and ordered by the Judge to be put to jail for refusing to issue a marriage license to a homosexual couples because of her religious conviction. The latest report is that she is now in jail.

Of course, the dissenting U.S. Supreme Court Judges on the ruling of same-sex marriage last June had expressed their concern of the implications this decision may have on a social level for those who oppose same-sex marriage. For instance, Justice Samuel Alito wrote in his dissent: "The majority attempts, toward the end of its opinion, to reassure those who oppose same-sex marriage that their rights of conscience will be protected. We will soon see whether this proves to be true. I assume that those who cling to old beliefs will be able to whisper their thoughts in the recesses of their homes, but if they repeat those views in public, they will risk being labeled as bigots and treated as such by governments, employers, and schools."

Similarly, Justice Clarence Thomas wrote in his dissenting opinion that the majority's decision has "potentially ruinous consequences for religious liberty." Furthermore, chief Justice John Roberts, who read his dissenting opinion in court, said that the mention of religious protections in the majority opinion was inadequate. "The majority graciously suggests that religious believers may continue to 'advocate' and 'teach' their views of marriage. The First Amendment guarantees, however, the freedom to 'exercise' religion. Ominously, that is not a word the majority uses."

Justice Roberts goes on to mention the problems that may rise in religious organizations including religious schools and religious adoption agencies. "There is little doubt that these and similar questions will soon be raised before this Court," he wrote. "Unfortunately, people of faith can take no comfort in the treatment they receive from the majority today."

Isn't this very telling? Kim Davis is the first one who was to eat the "fruit" of the majority's ruling on same-sex marriage. She refuses to eat the "forbidden fruit," so was put to jail!

The advocates of same-sex marriage are now clamoring to strip the Catholic Church and other Churches of their tax-exempt status if they will refuse to obey the law of the land!

Robert Kelly hit the nail on the head when he said: "as a society we have moved from the point where the rationalization for homosexual behavior has been accepted as normative to the point where the rationalization will now be imposed and enforced, legally and by social forces at large, on everyone."

It is so mind boggling that the advocates of homosexual marriage griped bitterly that homosexual people are discriminated just because they are homosexuals, but now they are the ones discriminating those who do not agree with them. From being discriminated they are now the discriminators!

Dr. Jose Rizal the national hero of the Philippines wrote two novels entitled "Noli Me Tangere" and "El Filibusterismo." Although the revolutionaries in the Philippines got their inspiration from these two novels to revolt against Spain, but Dr. Jose Rizal explicitly opposed the idea of revolution and to do with all his power to prevent it. He strongly wanted a "reform" in the Philippines through "Education" not through "bloody revolution" because of the grave danger that, he said, "the slaves of today will become the tyrants of tomorrow."

What happened to Kim Davis is just the beginning of the struggle between the "people of faith" and the "ruling" of same-sex marriage. Both sides have their own arguments. Of course, same-sex marriage is in the upper hand for it is now the law of the land, but those who regard same-sex marriage as a blatant immorality considered it as an unjust law, therefore, not bound to obey it but rather have a duty to oppose it.

Unlike the Germans and the Catholic bishops, in general, during the promulgation of the Nuremberg laws who were silent and so afraid of the Nazi party, the advantage of the "people of faith" in the struggle of the ruling of same-sex marriage is that they are not afraid to voice out their opposition regardless of the consequences. The Catholic bishops in the United States are very unified in defending the teaching of the Catholic Church that marriage is only for a man and a woman as intended by God from the very beginning.

There are several Christian denominations that already caved in to the ruling of same-sex marriage. This certainly, made Christ wept again and spin the imagination of St. Paul. This is very disturbing, but not surprising for it is not something new. Many so called Christians apostasized during the time of persecution; many churchmen embraced the heresy of Arianism because it was promulgated by the Emperor. Are we then surprise that there are Christian

denominations who espoused same-sex marriage because it is now the law of the land, and besides, supported by the president of the United States itself?

The late Cardinal George of Chicago is often quoted as saying: "I expect to die in bed, my successor will die in prison and his successor will die a martyr in the public square. His successor will pick up the shards of a ruined society and slowly help rebuild civilization, as the Church has done so often in human history."

Let us revisit the case of Caitlyn/Bruce Jenner, because with her profile raised by her national Coming Out as a trans woman in April 2015, s/he became one of the most recognized LGBT person in the world and arguably the most famous and the most visible face of the homosexual movement. She had more than 2 million followers in Twitter surpassing President Barack Obama.

Jenner's announcement came at an unprecedented time for trans visibility including the Supreme Court's ruling in favor of same-sex marriage. Her/his April 2015 20/20 interview with ABC news reporter Diane Sawyer had 20.7 million viewers, making it television's highest-ever rated news magazine telecast among adults 18-49 and adults 25-54.

In her/his acceptance speech of the Arthur Ashe Courage Award Bruce/Caitlyn Jenner vowed to do whatever s/he can to reshape the landscape of how transgender are viewed and treated. Just weeks after Jenner's acceptance speech, the state of Oregon publicly announced that 15 year olds are now allowed to get a sex-change operation. Many Oregonians, of course, were stunned to learn that they can do it without parental notification and the state will even pay for it through its Medicaid Program, the Oregon Health Plan.

One of the many residents, Lori Porter of Parents' Rights in Education, said about the decision: "It is trespassing on the hearts, the minds, the bodies of our children. A life-altering decision like that to be done unbeknownst to a parent or guardian is mindboggling."

The decision to cover sex-change operations specifically was made by Health Evidence Review Commission (HERC). Members were appointed by the governor and paid by the State of Oregon. With no public debate, HERC changed its policy to include cross-sex hormone therapy, puberty-suppressing drugs and gender-reassignment surgery as covered treatment for people with "gender dysphoria," formally known as "gender identity disorder."

Gender dysphoria is classified by the American Psychiatric Association as a mental disorder in which a person identifies as the sex opposite of his or her birth. It is rare, affecting one out of every 20,000 males and one out of every 50,000 females. According to a 2008 study published in the Journal of the American

Academy of and Adolescent Psychiatry, "Most children with gender dysphoria will not remain gender dysphoric after puberty."

A 2010 Murad study concluded that "very low quality evidence suggests sex reassignment...improves gender dysphoria and overall quality of life." The authors admitted that the evidence was "sparse and inconclusive."

Furthermore, Dr. Paul McHugh, who led the John Hopkins Psychiatric Department, and still practices, said that Oregon's policy amount to child abuse. "We have a very radical and even mutilating treatment," he said, "being offered to children without any evidence that the long – term outcome of this would be good." "A sex-change operation, especially for young people with gender dysphoria is never appropriate. We can help them if we begin to explore with them and their families what they were fearing about development, what they are fearing about being a young boy, a young adolescent appropriate to themselves."

What is mindboggling is that instead of exploring with these children and their families what they are fearing about their sexual development, they are being indoctrinated in schools, elementary and high school, that to be a transgender is perfectly normal! Isn't this very telling?

This reminds us, once again, of the transgender statue of the demon Baphomet with two little children at his knee gazing up at him worshipfully. Without any shadow of a doubt he is the super power behind this modern heretical homosexual movement, a very subtle form of "gnosticism."

I will not be surprise if any of the advocates of the homosexual movement will read what is said here will hate and curse me to death, and will call me names. They will "dig a pit in my way." My hope and prayer is that they will not fall into the pit themselves.

I have to say explicitly, loud and clear, that I do not condemn homosexual person. With St. Paul, what I am explicitly condemning is homosexual action. "Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtue of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection" (#2359, Catechism of the Catholic Church).

Undoubtedly, this is very difficult and challenging for the majority of them but not impossible with God's grace. If they will try and do the best they can, then, they too, can say with the Psalmist: →

Icon # 575 = Steadfastness of Heart

"My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast! I will sing and make melody! Awake, my soul! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn!"

When a person experienced conversion, and grows in one's relationship with God, it follows that one's heart will become steadfast. In other words, steadfastness of heart has to be developed. As beings made in the image and likeness of God, steadfastness has been implanted in our heart, but it has to grow and develop otherwise it will never blossom and reach maturity. It has to pass through many trials and tribulations.

It begins first with exercising little patience, bearing little pinpricks, saying a childlike prayer to God; then, once it is fully developed it becomes steadfast, that is, loyal, faithful, immovable.

Martyrs are good example of steadfastness. They were firmly rooted in their loyalty and faithfulness to Christ in the face of death and suffering. They were faithful in bearing little pains; hence, they were also faithful in much.

Their generosity in giving their lives for Christ was simply the expression of the steadfastness of their hearts. It would be hard to imagine them all the days of their lives as constantly malicious, convincingly resentful, and adamantly perfidious. If they had been, their sufferings and tortures would have stripped the skeleton bare.

The crisis and tribulation in our lives indicate most accurately the level of our steadfastness. If our spirit is cramped all our lives by malice, resentment, and infidelity, it is likely that we be only the more cramped when life pushes us into a corner. Whereas if our spirit has been steadfast, faithful, and loyal, then, it will be attracted to whatever and wherever God will lead it.

In this case, we will be likened to an iron which is attracted to a magnet. Just as an iron will move towards the magnet, so long as the iron is not full of rust, so our will be attracted to the will of God, so long as we are not full of self-will and other vices.

We can say that our heart is steadfast when we habitually thwart temptation and other evil desires once we perceived them. The best way to perceive them is to train ourselves in what is good, right, and true. If we practice goodness and exercise fairness in our dealing with others, and are truthful, then, our heart, as if by intuition, can detect what is contrary to these virtues. In other words, we will be able to discern the movement of the spirit within us.

We have to assert though that steadfastness of heart does not absolutely mean that we will no longer fail in our observance of God's commandments, especially the greatest two commandments: the love of God and the love of neighbor.

The primary reason for this failure, of course, is not out of malice but simply because we don't have a permanent state in this present life. It is only when we are admitted to the beatific vision that not even the slightest fluctuation can ever be think of. Our will be firmly fixed in all that is good, noble, right, and true; absolutely one with will of God.

Our life here on earth is indeed a preparation for the next life. There will be an unending joy and gladness to all who are faithful to their vows either that of marriage or celibacy; to all who firmly fixed their desire to enter the kingdom of heaven; to all who did not allow themselves to be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine and ideology crafted by the cleverness of men, by their slyness in deceitful wiles; to all in the service of God: singing and making melody to the Lord, spending time in prayer at the dawning of the day; to those who repented of their sins before they die; and to people of good will.

With gratitude in their hearts for all that God had done in their lives, they humbly cry out: →

Icon # 576 = The Benefit of Saying Thank You

"I will give thanks to thee, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to thee among the nations."

Since everything that we have, especially our life, is from God, thus it is just proper that we should thank Him for it. When we were children we were taught by our parents to say "thank you" whenever we receive something. When we are growing up we also express gratitude even to stranger who gave us direction and to all who did something positive to us and for us. We even send "thank you card" to express our appreciation.

It is not implausible to assert that to say "thank you" to God not only for the good things that happen to us, but also of the negative things, is the best antitoxin for depression. Of course, this does not happen overnight. This attitude has to be cultivated, saying thank you to Him from time to time. It makes us aware of His presence from moment to moment even in our crowded time.

We will begin to be aware that there are many things, even little things, that we should be grateful for; then, little by little we will develop an attitude of

gratefulness that enables us to say "thank you" Lord when adversity comes our way.

Even in human relationship, gratefulness has lots of benefits. It lightens the heart not only of the person who says it, but also of the person to whom it is expressed. Our own experience will tell us that to say "thank you" or "thanks be to God," makes us more peaceful and makes other people buoyant. Their face lits up when we say "thank you" to them. It will also remove from us any feeling of discontent. It makes us more amiable to one another.

In relation to God, gratefulness attracts more graces. The more we are grateful to God "for everything" the more we will receive His benevolence. If we find it very hard to refuse someone who is very grateful, who acknowledges even the little help we offer, how much more of God who is infinite goodness and whose resources are boundless!

God will never refuse anything that is good for us, for He acts according to the principle of love. And His love, too, is infinite because He is Love. The lifeblood of love is always to desire the good of the beloved.

Gratefulness is a gesture of reciprocating God's love for us. In return, it influences us to be helpful to those who are also in need of help, especially if it is in our power to do so. Experience is a good evidence that we feel uplifted when they, too, expressed their gratefulness to us. It is part of human nature to like people who are grateful and quite cautious to people who are ungrateful. However, we are still bound to love them in imitation of God who makes His sun shines on all people regardless of one's attitudes.

Saying "thank you" to God is also a mark of our affiliation with the prophets, the saints, and Christ himself, as for example the prophet Daniel thanked God, saying: "To thee, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for thou hast given me wisdom and strength, and hast now made known to me what we asked of thee...."

Our good friend, St. Paul, too expressed his gratitude to God for the propagation of the Christian faith, saying: "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world."

The priest, too, in celebrating the Eucharist the "Ultimate Thanksgiving" for all that Christ has done for our salvation declares, on behalf of the people of god, the gratitude due to God: "Therefore, O Lord, as we celebrate the memorial of the saving Passion of your Son, his wondrous Resurrection and Ascension into heaven, and as we look forward to his second coming, we offer you in thanksgiving this holy and living sacrifice."

And above all, the Lord Jesus gave thanks to the Father for hiding the things of heaven to the proud and worldly wise, but made it known to the humble and to babes of evil: "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will."

If we have a modicum of humility we will be inclined to give thanks to God for everything wither pleasant or unpleasant things, and for all the people who bring goodness and love, making the most awful situations bearable, and keeping hope alive. All the burdens we carry are not just ours. The sins that come up in us is not just our sin, it is the sin of the world. The joy, peace, and happiness that come up in us are not just our personal beatitude. It is the beatitude of all creation renewed by the glory of God. All we can do is accept and give thanks.

With all the angels and saints, and all the redeemed, we have to lucidly aver throughout the whole universe, to the highest heavens and over all the earth: →

Icon # 577 = The GPS of Love

"For thy steadfast love is great to the heavens, thy faithfulness to the clouds. Be exalted, O God above the heaven! Let thy glory be over all the earth!"

Our heavenly friend St. Isaac of Syria said that "God acts towards us in ways He knows will be advantageous to us, whether by means of things that cause suffering, or by way of things that cause relief, whether they cause joy or grief, whether they are insignificant or glorious: all are directed towards the single eternal good." To those who believe in God, and that God is Love, it would not be too mysterious to grasp the reason for this because love essentially desires the good of the beloved. And the highest eternal good is God Himself.

If our end, our ultimate goal, is to have been created and raised to the order of grace in order to be united with God for all eternity, and give glory to Him, it is just logical and natural that whatever earthly goal we may desire, there is sheerly nothing that can give us supreme happiness and joy except God.

Our other heavenly friend, Blessed Bishop Fulton Sheen patently concurred it when he 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."

For this reason, we have to gloriously proclaim: "Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let thy glory be over all the earth!"

Since God is the supreme good, love of Him must take precedence of the love we owe ourselves. As too He has promised to love all who love Him and to love them the more as they love Him more purely, we can be certain that in exerting all our strength to love Him for Himself, in that pure love we shall discover again and more abundantly all that we seem to have sacrificed to Him.

Thus our whole attention should constantly be fixed on the most essential thing, and the beginning and the round-about of all our thoughts should be strenuously called back to this very thing, that is, the recollection of God. Unless our mind turns about the love of God alone, it either adopts or rejects the character of all our thoughts in accordance with what we might call the proven "compass (GPS) of love," we will never build with proven skill the structure of the spiritual building whose architect is no other than our good friend, St. Paul, nor will we possess the beauty of that house which the blessed king David wanted to present to God in his heart, when he said: "Lord, I have loved the beauty of your house and the place where your glory dwells;" rather, we will foolishly build in our heart an ugly and despicable house for the Holy Spirit – one that will collapse time and again for not founded on solid rock, and we will not be honored of our hospitality to the blessed Guest, but we will be mournfully oppressed by the downfall of the building.

To give ourselves totally to God in order to be the object of His good pleasure and benevolent kindness in everything internal and external is undoubtedly, a great and solid foundation. Once this foundation is being laid, our primary duty is to spend all our life in rejoicing that God is God, abandoning ourselves completely to His good pleasure and Divine providence, doing the ordinary task that is assign to us without any desire to adorn this task with irrelevant marvels.

Good works, no matter how little and insignificant they are, done heartily because of the belief that they are done to Our Lord Jesus is the infallible sign of the presence of faith, the beating of life in the soul.

From moment to moment, while waiting for the second coming of Our Lord Jesus in His full glory and majesty, we have to raise up our voice and say: "For thy steadfast love is great to the heavens, thy faithfulness to the clouds. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let thy glory be over all the earth!"

The self-knowledge flashed upon all human beings, poor and great alike, those of lowly station in life and in high places, by the glance of the Lord Jesus on the Day of Judgment will in one moment unclthe the soul of all untruthfulness and clothe it in its vesture of immortal truth, for nothing hidden that will not be made known or covered that will not be revealed.

All human being who make themselves as gods instead of giving glory and homage to the One true God, will be questioned: →

Icon # 578 = Question posed to Judges

Psalm 58 (57)

“Do you indeed decree what is right, you gods? Do you judge the sons of men uprightly? Nay, in your hearts you devise wrongs; your hands deal out violence on earth.”

To be a Judge is certainly not an easy task. His/her duty, of course, depends on his/her jurisdiction. Since there are different kinds of judges, such as: Municipal Court Judge, administrative law judge, general trial court judge, and appellate court judge, we will just limit ourselves to the basic qualities necessary for a judge.

These qualities will help us see and know whether a judge is good or not. If a judge has these following qualities, we can fairly say that he/she is a good judge: a) He/she has a “judicial temperament.” The importance of this quality is such that it encompasses both the ability to apply the law to the facts and to understand how a judicial decision will affect the human persons appearing before the court. It is the ability to communicate with counsel, jurors, witnesses and parties calmly and courteously, as well as the willingness to listen to and consider what is said on all sides of a debatable proposition.

He/She should have a fair amount of patience, open-mindedness, courtesy, tact, courage, firmness, understanding, compassion, humility, and common sense. These qualities should be demonstrated consistently. He/she should be able to handle personal stress without unloading on others; should recognize that to be a Judge is not only stressful but a position of public trust with its work conducted largely in public view.

b) He/she must also be intelligent in order to know and apply legal rules, analyses and procedures to different facts and circumstances, and the ability quickly to perceive, comprehend, and understand concepts and ideas.

c) He/she should demonstrate a personal standard of ethical conduct that stands out among the general populace, and be mindful and abide by ethical principles in the areas of legal Ethics and Professionalism.

d) He/she must possess Courage and Integrity: Courage to do what the law requires him/her to do even though the course that has to be followed goes against the grain, and Integrity which is not being influenced by the identity, race, gender, religious affiliation, political status, wealth or relationship of the party or lawyer before him/her. More basically, not to do what he/she know to be wrong.

e) Lastly but not leastly, he/she should be of the best character, and should have a good reputation in every professional and residential community. His/her personal background should be free of references to immaturity or indiscretion, should be free of a history of substance abuse or substance dependence, and free of indications of domestic violence, publicly unacceptable conduct and the like.

Of course, the goal of all these qualities is to provide fairness, respect, and dignity to the people who come before him/her, so that all may have the opportunity to seek justice and fairness towards all without prejudice.

This sounds very lofty and demanding. One thing is certain: all these qualities are participation of the qualities of God Himself. He imparts His qualities to rational beings so that all of us, especially judges, will be able to act justly to one another, giving what is appropriate to each one – fairly administering justice.

Of course, it would be devastating if a judge lacks these qualities. Even to lack one of these qualities is already very detrimental, because it can undermine the sense of justice. Take for example if a Judge is lacking in integrity. This lack of integrity will certainly lead to dishonesty. If a Judge is dishonest, then corruption will inevitably follow. Hence, justice will be mangled.

The Lord Jesus said that “nothing covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.” Hence, if the Judge is dishonest, sooner or later, it will be revealed. It will be manifested by his/her actions. For instance, when dishonest parties or lawyers appear in court and break laws and commit perjury the Judge fails to act. It makes us wonder why the failure to act. There must be a reason behind it. Is it possible that the Judge might have accepted bribe?

A Judge that can be bought and sold will be likely an accessory to crime by ignoring it. A dishonest Judge can ignore evidence, twist rules and procedure, obstruct the record, retaliate, manufacture facts or ignore others, allow infirm claims or dismiss valid ones, deny admission of evidence prejudicial to the

avored party, suborn perjury, mischaracterize pleadings, engage in ex parte communication and misapply the law.

A Judge who is honest 99% of the time would not only be useless but also detrimental. His 1% dishonesty is a disease equals our 100% of conviction. People's right to a fair trial does not go away just because nine out of ten did they get one. Justice, certainly, cannot tolerate exceptions. Just like a police officer, a priest, or a bank teller, if they cross the line once, have to be held accountable.

But the ultimate irony is that the only way to bring criminal charges against a corrupt Judge is to ask another Judge for permission to pursue the corrupt Judge. But it is utterly unlikely that this will happen. As long as the subjects of the investigation (Judges) are the gatekeepers of the investigation, it is very likely that there will be no investigation at all. What criminal would not desire the power to block and investigation of their own crime? It is hard to imagine a more fundamental or structural conflict of interest than that.

So, what shall we do? If we cannot obtain justice on earth, then we have to recourse to the Supreme Judge of heaven and earth the God of the whole universe who will question the Judges on earth who acted like gods: "Do you indeed decree what is right, you gods? Do you judge the sons of men uprightly? Nay, in your hearts you devise wrongs; your hands deal out violence on earth."

Since these Judges devise injustice in their hearts, what recompense will they expect from the God of heaven and earth – the Supreme Judge who judges uprightly each person according to his/her deeds?

Judgment will be two-fold. We will be judged at the moment of our death, which is the Particular judgment, and we will be judged on the last day of the world, which is the General Judgment when the Supreme Judge will gather all the people in the world, both living and dead, and will separate them as a Shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

The first judgment, that is, the Particular, is because we are a person and are, therefore, individually responsible for our free acts; our works will tail us. The second, that is, the General judgment, will be because we worked out our salvation in the context of a social order and the Mystical Body of Christ; therefore we must be judged by our repercussions upon it.

The particular judgment will be tantamount to an evaluation of ourselves as we really are. In each of us there are several persons: there is the person others think we are; there is the person we think we are; there is the person we really are. In

a blink of an eye, at the sound of the last trumpet, when the split second of judgment comes, we will take off our mask and see ourselves as we really are.

Now what are we really? We are what we are, not what other people think of us, not by our emotions, our feelings, our likes and dislikes, but by our choices. The decisions of our free-will will be the content of our judgment.

Our judgment will not be based on our background or social position, but on the way we lived, the choices we made, and whether we obeyed the commandments of God. We should not think that at the moment of judgment we will argue our case. We will not plead any extenuating circumstances; we will not demand for a change of venue, nor for a new jury, nor allege an unfair trial. We will be our own judge. We will be our own jury; we will pass our own sentence. God will merely seal our judgment.

What is judgment? From God's point of view, judgment is recognition. Two souls appear before the sight of God in that split second after death. One is in the state of grace, the other is not. The Judge looks into the soul in the state of grace and sees there is a resemblance of His nature, for grace is the participation in Divine Nature.

Just as a mother knows her child because of the resemblance of nature, so, too, God knows His own children by resemblance of nature. If we are born of Him, He knows it. Seeing in that soul His likeness, the sovereign Judge, Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ says unto it: "Come, you blessed of My Father. I have taught you to pray, 'Our Father.' I am the natural Son; you the adopted child. Come into the kingdom I have prepared for you from all eternity to eternity."

The other soul, not possessing the family traits and likeness of the Blessed Trinity, meets entirely different recognition from the Judge. As a mother knows that her neighbor's child is not her own, because there is no participation in her nature, so, too, God seeing in the sinful soul no participation of His nature, can only say those words which signify non-recognition: "I do not know you," and it is a most terrible thing not to be known by God!

Such is the judgment from the Divine point of view. From the human point of view, it is also a recognition, but a recognition of fitness or unfitness. For example, if we are so dirty and grubby, and a very distinguished guest is announced at the door, we will be in no condition to stand before such an eminent personage.

The same is true of a soul stained with sin. It sees, on one hand, God's Majesty, His Purity, His Brilliance, and on the other hand, it sees its own baseness, its corruption, its sinfulness, its unworthiness, everything – to the depths of its being,

for as the Lord Jesus said: "Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known."

The soul, on that day, does not entreat nor argue, it does not plead a case – it sees; and from out of the depths of its being comes its own judgment. Hence, it would be unimaginably terrible for Judges in this present world who pervert justice under cover of law, for they themselves will be judged by the Supreme Judge – the God of heaven and earth. Their guilt will be like a worm that will never die – just keep on gnawing their conscience.

King David had a foretaste of this when he said: "My offences truly I know them; my sin is always before me." Of course, David's sin was forgiven because he repented, thus the guilt that was gnawing his conscience also died. But it would be inconceivably horrible to earthly Judges and to anyone who die in a state of sin.

If we would be in this state, it would be eternally better if we had not been born. Can you imagine if your guilt will be gnawing your conscience every second, without slightest pause, not just for 23 hours a day and good for 150 trillion years, then will stop, but for trillion and trillion and trillion to the infinite power!

Even those who live false peace, founded on false maxims: "Everybody is doing it," know that there are things they would be ashamed to do if their associates learned of them. Yet if everything a "false-peace conscience" does is good, why not let everybody see it? If there is no fixed wrong, there should be no sense of shame.

False consciences may sometimes stop deluding ourselves if we recall that one day we shall all be judged by God; His judgment will not be based on the verdict of the conscience we made for ourselves, but on the conscience God gave us – the conscience of our innocent youth, before it was perverted by sin; the conscience as it was before we warped it by false education; the conscience which we considered as wrong the sins we now justify; the conscience before it was polluted by license and mixed with selfishness; the conscience before it became "broadminded" and gave to right and wrong equal value. This conscience will dig and search from our consciousness all its hideous leprous mass of sins on the Day of Judgment.

"For as the Father has life in himself, so he granted the Son also to have life in himself, and has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man." The Lord Jesus is the Word of God – the whole Being of the Father made flesh. Hence, as the Word of God is Co-conscious with every human person.

Thus He penetrates to the deepest depths of our being, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Before Him no creatures either material or spiritual, angels or demons or humans, are hidden but all are open and laid bare. Therefore, He can judge perfectly and render absolute justice, giving each one their due according to what they have done in the body: either they use the parts of their body as instruments of doing good or evil.

The word that He has spoken will act as Judge on everyone either those who accept Him and receive His sayings or those who reject Him and do not receive his sayings on the last day. As no immediate divine judgment greets the first forays of those who do evil into the life of sin, they gradually cultivate a false knowledge of God to complement their false self-knowledge. They suppose that God is a god of mercy but not of justice, a god willing, or even unable, to punish their sins.

Thus liberated from the healthy fear of God, they assert their own will over God's will, delivering themselves over entirely to the delightful satisfaction of their worldly desires and wrongdoings.

However, by the inescapable law of divine justice, their repeated sins ensnare them in the inescapable bonds of sinful habit. Voluntarily enslaved to the pursuit of corruption and all that can never quench their inborn orientation for God – as someone made in the image and likeness of God, they lead a life of restless self-imposed misery, wandering from one dissatisfying debauchery to the next displeasing dishonesty, never finding God in whose image and likeness they were made and in whom alone they would have found their happy rest and eternal bliss.

What more can we say? Of course, it's even harder to hear and understand the following words: →

Icon # 579 = Does The Wicked go Astray From the Womb?

“The wicked go astray from the womb, they err from their birth, speaking lies. They have venom like the venom of a serpent, like the deaf adder that stops its ear, so that it does not hear the voice of charmers or of the cunning enchanter.”

How can the wicked go astray from the womb and err from their birth when they are still too small to make a deliberate decision to do evil things? Is this an existential straying? For this to happen a seed of wickedness must be sown first in the womb. The womb of a woman is like a garden or a field or a pot of soil; the semen of a man is like a seed.

Thus the sexual intercourse between a man and a woman is like planting or sowing a seed; the period of pregnancy is like the sprouting and development of the seed; and the birth of the child is tantamount to the fruit.

Hence children are often referred to in Scripture as “fruit of the womb” or “fruit of the body,” as for instance in Psalm 126, it says: “Truly sons are a gift from the Lord, a blessing, the fruit of the womb;” and in Psalm 131, it says: “The Lord swore an oath to David; he will not go back on his word: ‘A son, the fruit of your body, will I set upon your throne.’”

It is interesting to notice that although David is a man and certainly would not give birth, but the son to be born is referred to as “the fruit of your body.” Although it sounds intriguing, but it is not too hard for our mind to understand because the seed that he sown in the woman was potentially to become a fruit. Thus an apple seed is potentially an apple fruit. Therefore, it is right that his son is attributed as “the fruit of your body.”

Another example is in the New Testament. When Elizabeth heard the greeting of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the babe in her womb leaped for joy; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!”

Of course, these are just the beginnings, the inchoate destiny of the child. We could not absolutely say that a child that has been sown in wickedness, as in cases of rape, will be straying all the days of his/her life – till death. Far be it! All things has to be considered before a child reached its final destiny. The child has to make choices along the way till he becomes an adult capable of exercising freedom.

If a child already manifested a certain mischievousness even while still small, this can become a character which is built little by little, over days, weeks, months, and years, with thousands of small seemingly significant acts of stubbornness, using one’s freedom as an opportunity for the flesh to gratify its desires. Somewhere along the line, human nature became bungled, and it has all the earmarks of having been upset by a false use of freedom.

Since this perversion of human nature is universal, that is, since it affects human nature, not just the child’s or mine or your personality exclusively, it must be due to something that happened to human nature itself as its very origin, and since it is not an animal in its origin but has all the earmarks of being deliberate and the result of a free choice, therefore, it must not be a part of God’s original work but must have come into being through some tendency to evil.

Moreover, since evil is not merely a by-product of a bad environment, but is endemic in the heart of the human person, hence it cannot be explained except on the basis of a universal fracture of some great moral law to which we are all bound.

Accordingly, since the external senses offer another danger to all of us, thus if we really want to side with God we will do the best we can to mortify our eyes and desires from those things which might lead us to temptation. As we turn our eyes from a too brilliant light lest it destroys our vision, so we have to divert our eyes and desires from evil, lest we find it too attractive. This is what is most challenging to a person who from childhood had demonstrated a pronounced display toward evil, no self-discipline at all.

The principle of self-discipline is not the hygienic one, which prevents only the physical effects of evil. The Lord Jesus concentrates on the elimination of the evil at its source before it ever gets into the mind or will. So if we are to integrate our personality, there must be a deliberate shutting off of those sensations which cannot contribute to our well-being.

It is true to say that not until a nobler, finer love is found can we control our vices or overcome our mediocrity. In total conversion, souls who were formerly addicted to sin, like our heavenly friend St. Augustine, no longer want any craving for their old sins, but rather dislike.

As the eye blinks at dust, so the completely converted soul blinks at evil. Sin is not fought; it is rather no longer wanted. Love casts out not only fear but also sin. The great tragedy of life, however, is that so many people have no one to love. As a man in love with a noble woman will give up all that displeases her, so a soul in love with God gives up all that she/he knows deliberately that might wound that Love.

When there is no ruling principle or master enthusiasm to take over the soul vacated of its ego, the emptiness can be preempted by some other force that is also evil. Casting out the unclean spirit of unclean habit is not enough unless there is new possession by a cleaner spirit of good attitude. Nature abhors vacuum.

Aelred Graham, a Benedictine monk in England has this to say: "Those who are spectacularly evil often succeed in achieving their immediate objectives, at any rate for a time; but they are not to be envied by anyone who chooses to think about human nature. Not that they necessarily suffer from bad conscience that is conventionally attributed to notorious wrongdoers. There is not much evidence to suggest that ruthless despots like Hitler and Stalin endured any agonies of remorse.

“The lesson of history appears to be that, once the ego has been encased in a coat of unscrupulousness of the required thickness, reproach and criticism are directed outward upon other. But, by the same token, happiness is demonstrably excluded from such lives. The sense of well-being produced by right functioning is replaced by the invariable accompaniments of self-centered activity; that is to say, the insensitiveness, frustration, insecurity, suspicion, and fear that go with a loveless and essentially parasitic existence.

“In the long run God always gives us what we want. Those who want self can have self; and to have self, alone and uninterrupted, is roughly the equivalent of damnation. Those who want God can have God; in other words, they can lose the egoistic self in the higher self – it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me – and this, of course, is salvation.”

Hence, if the wicked, from early days of their lives, persist in evil deeds, the voice of conscience becomes weaker and weaker by frequently “overriding” what it tells them. Their evil deeds blunt or numb their understanding of truth, giving them moral lies of their actions which does not properly manifest the wickedness of their actions due to their conscience being “heavily coated with the salve of sin.”

“Hardened” is precisely the word needed to express what happens to the wicked’s conscience: it becomes hard like a callous, because it has been abused and misused.

There are two kinds of consciences: First, there is the one God gave us, and there is also the one we may have made for ourselves. Guided by the first, we recognize that God has not only implanted in us a desire to make a journey to the Heavenly City, the New Jerusalem, the kingdom of God, but that He has given us a map of how to get there.

Following our self-made conscience, we may deny there is an eternal destiny in life, may throw away the map, call any mood we feel the right mood. Owners of such false consciences are the ones who boast that “my conscience is at peace.”

Here are some examples: Dives has false peace, Lazarus true peace; the foolish virgins slept because they had peace, but it was false peace; the foolish man who kept the one talent was at peace, but his was only peace of mind; the man who built his house on sand was at peace – until the storm came, even robbers are at peace when they got their spoils.

In false peace, the conscience is dead; the eye of the soul is blind; the ear of the soul is deaf; the hands of the soul are paralyzed. False peace accompanies

the false conscience we have forged with our misdeeds. No wonder, then, that the wicked are “like the deaf adder that stops its ear, so that it does not hear the voice of” the Holy Spirit persuading them to repentance.

There are three steps in molding false conscience: 1st, the conscience is dulled; 2nd, the conscience is numbed; and 3rd, the conscience is killed. Stealing is here taken as an example, though any other sin would do just as well. At the first temptation to steal, the inner voice of conscience recalls the seventh commandment: “Thou shall not steal.” The ego answers: “This pen is of no great value, and the owner will never miss it anyway; he has at least a dozen others. And in any case, I will steal only this once.”

This is the inception of the dulling of conscience. Next follow the stage of numbing – the voice of conscience speaks: “You ought not do this. You said you would never do it again. Stealing will become a habit if you do it often enough.” The ego answers: “I guess I am built that way. How can I help it? Anyway, I heard one of my teachers say that we were not free, but were ‘determined’ to be the way we are. Since I am inclined to steal, I probably inherited a tendency toward stealing from my grandfather. Also, I may have an inferiority complex due to a repression of my ego by my reactionary parents, who lived before progressive education: it is perfectly natural for me to compensate for it, by the extension of my ego in the acquisition of property.”

After such a rationalization and a further theft, the last stage is reached: the killing of conscience. The voice of conscience no longer speaks out loud; it faintly whispers: “stealing is still wrong.” The ego answers: “Who decides what is right and wrong except myself. My body is mine, I have a choice. Why should anyone tell me what is right and wrong? How do I know there is a God? Conscience is a residue of social taboo and totem. I have heard of some primitive tribes that do not consider stealing a wrong, anyway, one has to live his/her own life. Stealing is wrong only if you get caught.”

At the end of this trial of rationalization the “conscience is hardened as if by a searing iron” (1Tm. 4:2), and a false conscience is born. Few people can, in the first act of self-indulgence, foresee the calloused thief. Thus the little infractions of youth become the grave rebellion of maturity.

It is the people with false conscience who try the hardest to escape consciousness through alcoholism, drugs, sex, and various pleasures, or through the throwing of the self on the psychoanalytic couch which is for rent to those who will pay to hear a denial of their guilt.

A troubled, remorseful conscience which has not yet killed the voice of God – or which has not yet yielded to those charlatans who would deny the reality of sin –

has always within it a token of life, as king David's had. Thus there is hope for everyone regardless of how wicked he/she may be so long as he/she still hates his/her evil. The worst thing that could happen to a person in this world is not sin, but the denial of sin by a false conscience because that attitude makes forgiveness impossible. In this case, the teeth and fangs of wickedness cozily grow.

We can only hope and pray that before they wrought havoc to the soul of other people that: →

Icon # 580 = Spiritual Dentistry

"O God, break the teeth in their mouths; tear out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord! Let them vanish like water that runs away; like grass let them be trodden down and wither."

Our good friend, St. Peter,² likens the devil to a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. This description, of course, is also applicable to the other demons who, too, are like lions roaming around the world in search for their preys. No wonder, then, that we have to pray that God will break the teeth in their mouths and tear out their fangs; and we will add: "also their claws!"

We really need still to be extra cautious in spite of their broken teeth and uprooted fangs and claws, because they are still very dangerous and strong enough to assault us. They are no respecter of any person. Even the Lord Jesus was assaulted by their king, no other than Lucifer, in the wilderness. Of course, what we mean by "assault" here is temptation.

Our Lord Jesus is our role model in not yielding to temptation. By His grace to help us, channeled through prayer and the sacraments, we too are given the power to resist temptation. The Scripture encourages us, saying: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you."

Temptation is tantamount to broken teeth and uprooted fangs when we are tempted but not led to temptation. When we think of the story of Our Lord's temptations, we can for practical purpose, when applying them to our own experience, think of the devil simply in terms of those evil suggestions and impulses, rising up within us, with which we are familiar.

"The life of man upon earth is a warfare," and temptation is the actual clash of arms in which its issues are decided. Hence, whether we like it or not we have to

² Mistakenly thought it was St. Paul who said it.

wrestle with these lions. For us who are still tyro in the spiritual life, unskilled in spiritual combat, unlike David and Samson, we have to ask God for help that He breaks the teeth of these lions and uproot their fangs and claws, that is to say, that He would never allow us to be tempted beyond our strength, but with the temptation He will also provide ways of handling it constructively.

We have to assert strongly that left to ourselves and with the teeth, fangs, and claws of these lions intact we will be killed right away when assaulted by them, that is to say, we yielded to temptation to do sinful thing in spite of its consequences.

It is intriguing to notice that the lions are still young which insinuate that when evil or impure or any negative thoughts surface in our mind we have to dash them right away against the rock, which of course, is Christ; that is to say, we have to beseech Him to break their teeth and uproot their fangs and claws. We should not entertain them because in doing so they will grow and become big and strong. They will likely to overpower us.

The 1st letter of John tells us 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" (1Jn. 3:8). It is obvious, thus, that it was the Lord Jesus' mission to dispossess the Devil, "to break the teeth in their mouths; tear out the fangs of the young lions," and to establish the kingdom of God in place of the kingdom of darkness and evil.

The two are perceptively contrasting realities; and unless we really recognize the horror of the Devil's dominion and the other demons' teeth, fangs, and claws, we can never have a proper understanding and a sense of gratitude of the deliverance which came to us through Our Lord Jesus.

The Devil and the other demons cannot do us spiritual harm except by inducing us to harm ourselves, as our heavenly friend, St. Teresa of Avila, says: "They are enemies who can make a direct attack only upon those they see giving in to them....These devils keeps 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 defense. This is the great pity of it."

She also said: "I realize so clearly now how little power the devils have, if I am not fighting against God, that I am hardly afraid of them at all: for their strength is

nothing unless they find souls surrendering to them and growing cowardly, in which case they do indeed show their power" (from her autobiography).

The Evil and the other demons has pretty well persuaded some people in our world that they should not accept the authority of Christ and His Church, because they would be weakening their reason. They suggest that any limitation upon reason is due to a sinister cause. The cunning error of the Devil and the other demons is that continuance in loyalty and love means discontinuance in mental growth. To the Devil and the other demons, to persevere in loyalty to Christ, to His Church, or to a wife or country or to an ideal, is a hallmark of slavery and a lack of freedom.

"Lucifer performed no criminal action," says our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux, "he was guilty of no evil deed, his only sin was a proud thought, and 'in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,' he was precipitated down in irreparable ruin."

The lamentation of the prophet Ezekiel and that of Isaiah teach very clearly that several princes among their number fell. Among them we recognize the prince of Tyre, otherwise known as Lucifer, who rose in the morning, being lamented with a doleful plaint. "You were perfect in your ways from the day of your creation, until iniquity was found in you. In the multitude of your doings your inner part were filled with iniquity, and you sinned. And I cast you down from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you in the midst of the stones of fire, O protecting cherub. In your beauty your heart was lifted up; in your beauty you lost your wisdom. In the multitudes of your iniquities and in the iniquity of your doings you polluted your holiness" (Ezek. 28: 11-18).

The prophet Isaiah also says: "How did you fall from heaven, Lucifer, you who rose in the morning? How did you fall to the ground, you who wounded nations? You who said in your heart: I will go up to heaven, I will set my throne above the stars of God, I will sit on the mountain of the covenant, in the sides of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High" (Is. 14:12-14).

The letter of Jude speaks of the same reality: "The angels who did not submit to his rule but who left their dwelling he has kept in eternal chains, in darkness, until the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6). Again, in the words of our father St. Bernard: "Lucifer preferred to reign over others in misery rather than to be subjected with others to God in happiness" and "to rule over the sons of darkness rather than to share the lots of the sons of light."

It is not farfetched to say that some people grant genius and fervor and even certain nobility to a Pierre Joseph Proudhon the first person to declare himself

and anarchist, to a Karl Marx, and to a Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, but theirs is the nobility of Lucifer, the first among the angels who, wishing to be even more than he was, fell from that exalted position into the bottomless abyss.

Their vision, in which some would see a profounder kind of Christianity, is the vision of the Reign of Antichrist, the Satanic imitation and inversion of the kingdom of God. They are prophets of Satan, refusing to use their talents in the humble service of God: "They have waged war against God with His own gifts."

It is our on-going supplication that God break the teeth, uproot the fangs and claws of anarchism, communism, and nihilism, that they be "vanished like water that runs away; like grass be trodden down and wither."

Our freedom has been given to us to choose between the true God and ourselves, between the true path to deification wherein the "self" is humbled and crucified in this life to be resurrected and exalted in God in eternity, and the false path of "self-deification" which promises exaltation in this life but ends in the bottomless Abyss.

These are the only two choices, ultimately, open to our freedom; and upon them have been founded the two kingdoms, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Man, which may be discriminated only by the eyes of faith in this life, but shall be separated in the future as Heaven and Hell.

It is clear to which of them modern civilization belongs, with its Promethean effort to build a kingdom of the world in defiance of God; but what should be clear enough in earlier modern thinkers becomes absolutely explicit in Nietzsche. The old commandment of "Thou shalt," has become outmoded; the new commandment is "I will."

Is this not a replica of the Luciferic "I will go up to heaven, I will set my throne above the stars of God, I will sit on the mountain of the covenant, in the side of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High?"

And what can we say about Proudhon, the founder of anarchism, who is allergic of authority? Let us hear his own words in a subchapter called "What is Government? In which he wrote: To be GOVERNED is to be watched, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, regulated, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, checked, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who have neither the right nor the wisdom nor the virtue to do so. To be GOVERNED is to be at every operation, at every transaction noted, registered, counted, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorized, admonished, prevented, forbidden, reformed, corrected, and punished. It is, under pretext of public utility, and in the name of the general

interest, to be placed under contribution, drilled, fleeced, exploited, monopolized, extorted from, squeezed, hoaxed, robbed; then, at the slightest resistance, the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, vilified, harassed, hunted down, abused, clubbed, disarmed, bound, choked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed; and to crown it all, mocked, ridiculed, derided, outraged, dishonored. That is government; that is justice; that is its morality.”

Proudhon in so many words actually invoked Satan: “Come to me, Lucifer, Satan, whoever you may be! Devil whom the faith of my fathers contrasted with God and the Church. I will act as spokesman for you and will demand nothing of you.” This will probably make one’s hair stand!

What can we say of Karl Marx? It has been said that it makes no difference what we believe, that all depends on how we act; but this is meaningless, for we act upon our beliefs. Joseph Stalin of Russia, Mao Tse Tung of China, and Pol Pot of Cambodia, to name a few, acted on the ideology of Karl Marx who was “fervent” in his advocacy of “revolutionary terror,” – what was the result? The numbers are staggering: over 66 million wiped out under communist regimes in the former Soviet Union; between 32 million and 61 million killed in Communist China; and between 1 to 3 million, roughly 2.7 million, killed by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

For this reason, it is just right and fitting that we have to join the Psalmist in imploring God, saying: “O God, break the teeth in their mouths; tear out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord! Let them vanish like water that runs away; like grass let them be trodden down and wither.” If they will still crawl or attempt to crane their heads, then, →

Icon # 581 = The Snail

“Let them be like snail which dissolves into slime, like the untimely birth that never sees the sun.”

In his sermon on Psalm 90, our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux said: “It is a necessity for men to fall occasionally, so long as they live here below; but while some are bruised by their fall, others are not, for the Lord put His Hand under them. However, there is this important difference between the fall of the just man and the fall of the wicked, that the former is supported by the hand of the Lord and consequently rises again stronger than ever; whereas the latter when he is fallen ‘shall rise again no more,’ because he falls either into the pernicious shame or into utter shamelessness. For either he will endeavor to justify what he has done, and this is the shame that brings sin,’ or he will harden his forehead.

Surely our sins 'work together unto good' for us when they render us more circumspect and humble. Is not he who falls upon humility supported in his fall by the hand of the Lord?"

So, what will happen if our failures and sins does not render us more circumspect and humble? Undoubtedly, we will be like the snail that just keep on crawling, that is to say, our thoughts and desires will just be on this world and the things of this world, crawling on the pleasures of sin – making the parts of our body as instruments of wickedness, dissolves into slime of everlasting sorrows and miseries.

St. Bernard also said: "Nevertheless, just as 'the wicked shall see and shall be angry, he shall gnash his teeth and pine away,' for the blessed shall be called up to heaven before the reprobate are cast down into the dungeons of everlasting fire in order that the latter may be more fiercely tormented by the sight of the glory they have lost, so 'the just shall see and shall rejoice,' beholding the misery from which they have escaped. For, plainly, the thanksgiving of the just would not be so magnificent, unless along with the inconceivable happiness which they enjoy, they also beheld 'the reward of the wicked,' from a participation in which, as they faithfully and gratefully remember, it is only the pure mercy of the Redeemer that has saved them. Neither would the wicked be consumed with such envious rage, if they did not see the just ascending before their eyes to the kingdom of unutterable bliss, while they groan to hear themselves condemned to the stench, the horror and the everlasting fires of the infernal pit, and to all the long agonies of a death that is immortal."

Truly, if this would be the eternal destiny for any person, "it would have been better for that person if she/he had not been born" – "never sees the sun." Moreover, →

Icon # 582 = Retribution Beyond the Grave

"Sooner than your pots can feel the heat of thorns, whether green or ablaze, may he sweep them away! The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked. Men will say, 'surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth.'"

St. Bernard added: "Yet this is not the only benefit of the just shall derive from seeing the reward of the wicked. The same sight shall give them at last perfect security. For they shall no longer have cause to fear anything from the malice either of wicked men or of apostate angels, after beholding them falling, a thousand at their side, and ten thousand at their right hand."

The book of Revelation tells us that when the Lamb opened the fifth seal, John saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne; they cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth (Rev. 6: 9-10)?"

Of course, the righteous know that it is not theirs to execute vengeance because vengeance belongs to God, thus they do not want to rob God of His prerogative, as our good friend St. Paul said: "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says, the Lord.'"

The justice of God demands that He should avenge the blood of those who were killed for His name's sake and "for the witness they had borne." "Do you not know that you are God's temple," says our good friend, St. Paul, "and that God's spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are."

Once we recognized that the moral order is grounded on justice, then retribution beyond the grave becomes a necessity. It is morally intolerable that by the mere act of dying a notorious murderer or an impenitent wicked person should gloriously escape justice. It is unthinkable that the same destiny will be in store for the martyr and the persecutor; Hitler and John the Evangelist, the Marilyn Monroe and Mary Magdalene.

Wickedness and vanity may seem to promise a magnificent prize in this present world, a pinnacle of fame and a summit of power, but to lean on them is to be hoisted on high only to be cast down lower than one's position was before. Nowadays there is a strong current which venture to endow wickedness and all sorts of evil equal platform with righteousness and virtues. It lobbies in the public square that evil and immorality should have as wide circulation as goodness and right.

The book of Ecclesiastes hit the nail on the head when it says: "I saw under the sun that in place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness. I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for he has appointed a time for every matter and for every work" (Ecc. 3: 16-17).

"Do you suppose that they 'who are glad when they have done evil and rejoice in most wicked things,'" said our father St. Bernard, "Do you suppose that such persons have the knowledge and the remembrance of the Lord's future coming" (Sermon for Christmas Eve)? He also said: "Thou shall consider with your

eyes, and shall see the reward of the wicked. That, my brethren, will no doubt be a bitter torment for the damned, the crown and consummation of all their evils. For we may suppose that it would be some consolation to them if, in their sufferings, they could escape the knowledge, or at least avoid the gaze of those whom in life they had maliciously persecuted.”

Here is a clear picture of what the Day of Judgment will be, when all people – the living and the dead, shall behold the Majesty, Glory, and Power, of God and the rigor and severity of His judgment upon the wicked, and His goodness and kindness upon the righteous. The self-knowledge flashed upon us by the glance of the Lord Jesus on that Judgment Day will in one moment, in a blink of an eye, unclothe the soul of all untruthfulness and clothe it in its vesture of immortal truth.

The utter self-abasement caused in us by the ravishing beauty and grandeur of the Godhead will be the ultimate truth of our created nature: it will be glory upon glory to joy upon joy, to peace upon peace, and happiness upon happiness for the righteous, but pain upon pain, to torment upon torment, to sorrow upon sadness, to agony upon distress, to affliction upon anguish, and misery upon despair to the wicked who died unconverted, for God will render judgment to every person according to his/her works, to what he/she has done in the body: “to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, God will give eternal life;” but for the wicked, “for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil...but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good...” “and many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt,” said the prophet Daniel.

The king of the prophets and apostles, no other than the Lord Jesus stamped His divine seal to this truth when He 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.”

All nature testifies to the necessity of judgment. Everywhere nature reveals itself as passing verdict on those who refuse to obey her laws. We need only to look around us in the hospitals, prisons, and asylums to see that nature, like a judge seated in judgment, is squaring her accounts with those who violate her laws. Take for example, if the body abused itself by excess, nature takes vengeance and passes the judgment of disease and infirmity. If a fragment of a star breaks from its central core and swings out of its orbit, nature passes the judgment that it shall burn itself out in space.

“Do not be deceived,” says our good friend, St. Paul, “God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.” Hence, the day of harvest time, that is, the day of reckoning must come.

Take another example, just as once a year each business person must balance his/her accounts, so too the Day will come when every human soul must balance its accounts before God. For life is like a cash register, in that every account, every thought, every word, and every action, like every sale, is recorded and registered. And when the business of life is finally done, then God pulls from out of the registry of one's soul the slip of one's memory on which is recorded one's merits and demerits, one's virtues and one's vices – the basis of the judgment on which shall be decided eternal life or eternal death.

One may falsify one's accounts until the day of judgment, for God permits the wheat and the cockle to grow unto the harvest time, but then, “at harvest time I will tell the reapers: Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.” Thus whether people like it or not, there is no escaping the truth: “It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Heb. 9: 27).

The final condition necessary is the reformation of one's life. Just as there are some people who dare not open a letter from a bank, because they are apprehensive their bank balance is overdrawn, so there are some people who will not dare investigate the truths of Divinity, lest the immorality and dishonesty of their false way of life be made manifest. Once the truth about the overdrawn bank balance is known, it will inevitably create an obligation; and while obstinate refusal to open the letter does not in any way increase the balance, it defers the judgment, puts off the unpleasant task.

To face our sins is never easy, but to defer the moment of judgment, through cowardice and irresponsibility, is to prolong one's unhappiness and guilt. Certainly, all souls receive actual graces, that is, letters of reminder from God. However, many are afraid to let these messages penetrate their conscious minds. In doing so, one suffers its consequences because a conscience burdened with the guilt of unacknowledged sins is fearful of Divine Judgment.

On the other hand, God in His infinite Mercy and Love gave us two remedies for such unhappiness: one is the Sacrament of Penance which blots out sins and lightens the future by our hope for Divine Mercy through continued repentance, and the other is the amendment of our lives. If we avail to these two remedies, then we will be counted among the righteous, for the righteous are simply the sinners who repented, who turned away from their wickedness, as God says

through the prophet Ezekiel: "But if a wicked man turns away from all his sins which he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the 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, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?"

And what will the converted sinners get who changed their allegiance from slavery of sin to slavery of righteousness? Of course eternal life, as our good friend, St. Paul, says: "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus Our Lord."

Thus they will be happy with God forever! We, too, if we turned away from our sins and strive daily to grow in virtues and keep God's command, will be counted among them and among the righteous in the kingdom of heaven where we will see clearly and intuitively God Himself as He is in Himself, that is, we will see His essence, His attributes, and the three Divine Persons. The first instant of this "seeing" lasts forever, like eternal morning, eternal spring, eternal youth.

The happiness and joy of that instant will never pass away. Its newness, its freshness, will be eternally present. As the "Seeing" will be always new, so likewise the joy and beatitude which flow from this "Seeing."

The joy of God's kingdom truly exceeds our imagination and understanding, for they are greater or more magnificent than they are imagined or conceived to be, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him."

Do we still want to know the recompense of the righteous so as to long for it with all our heart, mind, strength, and soul? We shall name few: our senses will find a pure and ineffable joy in the humanity of the Lord Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the choir of saints and angels, the breathtaking beauty of the renovated world, the chants of adoration and thanksgiving in the city of God.

The love of God in heaven is nothing but the perfect of charity, whereby the soul transcends itself, without cessation it loves God more than itself; it passes beyond itself, and enters into a state of uninterrupted ecstasy. We see the measureless depth of the soul, in particular our will, our capacity for spiritual love, which God alone, seen face to face, can satisfy. As God necessarily loves His own infinite goodness, so our love, arising from this "Happy Seeing," can never be interrupted or lose its fervor.

Moreover, the righteous belong to the family of God. The Blessed Trinity, seen clearly and loved sovereignly, dwells in them as in a living tabernacle, as in a temple of glory, endowed with sharp knowledge and love. They are conformed in unflagging good; they can no longer commit even an atom of venial sin; every wish of their heart is inspired by the potent power of love of God.

Furthermore, this impossibility of sinning is very concrete. The righteous have no longer the power of choosing to do evil actions; they cannot but love God. The ultimate cause of impeccability is the freedom from sin or the state of grace in which at his/her death the human soul passes into the final state, that is, into the state of unchangeable attitude of mind and will.

These are just a tiny fraction, a very few, of the recompense of the righteous, for the whole world is too small to contain all of them. This, truly, is the value of the human soul. No wonder, then, that Lucifer and the other demons would do all in their power to draw us away from God. But we will stick to God no matter what, and pray to Him, saying: →

Icon # 583 = Three Winds: The World, The Flesh, and the Devil

Psalm 59 (58)

“Deliver me from my enemies, O God, protect me from those who rise up against me, deliver from those who work evil, and save me from bloodthirsty men.”

In his sermon for Christmas Eve, our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux pointed out that “so long as we live, we are exposed to three winds of the greatest power and malignity, namely: the world, the flesh, and the devil, which endeavor to extinguish the light of our conscience by blowing in upon our hearts evil desires and illicit motions, and suddenly bewildering us in such a manner that one can scarcely tell ‘whence he comes or whither he goes.’”

Let us scrutinize these three enemies of our soul so as to be on guard when they rise up against us. The Scripture earnestly warns us against them. Of the world, it says: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world.”

In Scripture, however, the “world” has a dual meaning. The first, of course, is what the letter of John had pointed out. It has to do with “values” that are antithetical to the “standards” set up by God to help us attain eternal salvation. Take for example, the lusts of flesh, of the eye, and the pride of life. They all

suggest all kinds of immoralities and vanities and arrogance. They are so contrary to the values espoused by God, such as: modesty, simplicity, humility.

The other meaning, of course, is the created world – the physical world where we live in. The Lord Jesus Himself refers to these two meanings of the “world” when He said that His disciples are “in the world,” but they are not “of the world,” even as He is “not of the world.” “He was ‘in the world,’ and the world was made through Him, yet the world knew Him not.”

Of course, the world that did not know Him is the world whose values are antagonistic to His’. Judas’ downfall is a doleful confirmation of this great principle: The Lord Jesus and world are mortal enemies. “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

In the words of our heavenly friend, St. Teresa of Avila: “I knew perfectly well that I have a soul, but I did not understand what that soul merited, or who dwell within it, until I closed my eyes to the vanities of this world in order to see it.”

The monastic concept of the world is that all things created are good provided it enables us to orientate ourselves to God. This way of seeing the world is that all that happens to us in our daily life reveal the mystery of God’s love for us. Religious seekers claimed that we must go apart, break our addiction to the world and live in another way before we return to the world. In this way we can be fully “in the world” but not “of the world,” that is, no longer trapped by it.

To perfectly triumph over the world is not the work of a moment; thus we need to follow faithfully in the footsteps of the God-Man, the Lord Jesus and His servants, that is, the saints, by generous fidelity in lesser trials, and so we shall deserve divine help in more severe conflicts.

If the soul takes care to know itself, it will “recognize that it is created in the image and likeness of God,” therefore, should not “follow the likeness of God’s enemies” who are also its enemies, in giving itself to self-indulgence and the desires for the passing vanities and pleasures of this world.

Of the flesh, the Scripture says: But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires, for we are called to freedom but not to use our freedom as an opportunity for the flesh. Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. Our good friend, St. Paul, warns us and all people that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (cf. Rom. 13:14; Gal. 5:13, 19-21).

What can be said of the “world” can also be said of the “flesh,” that is, the flesh has also a dual meaning; one, of course, is our physical body, and the other has also to do with “values”.

It is right to assert that the consequence of those whose lifestyle is highly marked with a too close intimacy to “fleshy values” is never to understand the spiritual, because “the unspiritual man,” says our good friend, St. Paul, “does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” He also said: “walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would.”

Positively, then, there's a benefit in this conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, because it obliges us to maintain an equilibrium between presumptuous spiritual ideals, on the one hand, and excessive fleshly yearning on the other, that is to say, the desire of the spirit does not let our mind and heart into unrestrained freedom to do what we want even to the detriment of our soul nor does the weakness of the flesh, for instance – one is infirm, permit the spirit to be inflated with unreasonable desires for virtue.

In other words, the conflict between the flesh and the spirit compels us to the noble practice of discretion. If it were removed there is an inevitable danger that a complacent repose would cozily take its place.

The proper balance which results from this struggle between the flesh and the spirit open up a healthy and temperate path of virtue and teaches us to proceed along the royal road of discretion.

Because of the special presence of God in our soul, our body now becomes the Temple of the Holy Spirit, thus not to be defiled by sins against purity or temperance. The Church always sees one's body as a living tabernacle.

Since the body is one day to become a more holy Temple of God after the resurrection, it is especially compelling that we treat it with respect and not deliver it to forces of destruction.

Let us listen to this counsel of our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux on how to relate to our own body: “I would not advise you to have hatred even of your flesh. On the contrary, I would have you to love it, as given you to be your helper in this life, and the associate of your immortal felicity in the next. Let the soul love the body in such a manner that the spirit shall not seem to have been turned into flesh. Yes, my brethren, let the soul love her body; but let her love her own soul

much more clearly. Let Adam by all means love his Eve, yet not in such a way as to be more willing to obey her voice than the voice of God."

And finally, of the devil the Scripture says: "Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world."

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

It's so amazing how much power bestowed on us against the devil if we are in good standing with God, because God's assistance fights with far greater strength and vigor on our behalf than the multitudes of our enemies, that is, the other demons that combat against us.

For God is not only the inspirer of good things but also our protector and deliverer. It is obvious, then, that no person be deceived by the devil except the one who has freely chosen to hand over to him the assent of his/her will. Thus it is evident that a person transgresses because when evil desires assail him/her, he/she does not at once resist and oppose them, for it is written: "Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you."

Therefore, let us humbly implore the Lord to deliver us from our enemies and to protect us from those who rise up against us, that the filial fear of God and the love which cannot fail may remain fixed in us, making us wise in all things and keeping us ever unharmed from the enemies' assault.

For with this protection and deliverance it is highly implausible for anyone to be handed over to the enemies of our soul and those who work evil, for the Lord who is compassionate and merciful does not disdain to be the hope of those who put their reliance on Him; He does not refuse to show Himself the Protector and the Liberator of those who really trust in Him. Let us be on guard then against our enemies, that is, Lucifer and his other devils: →

Icon # 584 = Causes of Persecution

"For lo, they lie in wait for my life; fierce men band themselves against me. For no transgression or sin of mine, O Lord, for no fault of mine, they run and make ready."

It has been said that Lucifer and the other devils are so filled with envy and jealousy of us human beings because we are destined to inherit what they have lost. For this reason, it is not a surprise that they "lie in wait" for our lives. Of course, aside from envy and jealousy they also "hated" us with all their being.

In his sermon on Psalm 90, our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux likens the devil to a "basilisk." He says: "The basilisk is the most baneful and abominable of all irrational creatures. It is said to carry its venom in its eye. Do you wish to know what this venomous eye, this evil eye, this fascinating eye, signifies spiritually? Believe me, it is the vice of envy. For what is it to be envious but to look with an evil eye? Were the devil that seduced our first parents not a basilisk, death would never have entered the world by his envy."

We have example in Scripture how envy can usher to grievous criminal offense. Take for instance the case of Cain and Abel. Cain was so envious of Abel because God regarded Abel's offering and not his. The consequence, of course, is the first murder recorded in history. The primordial case of the devil was even more reprehensible because it was the cause of the ingress of death into our world, for God created us human beings for incorruption and made us in the image of His own immortality, but through the seething envy of the devil death entered into our world.

Another example is the case of King Ahab who was so envious of the vineyard of Naboth to the extent that he sank into deep depression when Naboth refused to give him his vineyard and because it was his inheritance. King Ahab so degraded himself that he acted like a petulant child. The story says: "And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food."

It would have been a lesser evil if only it affected him alone, but his less virtuous wife Jezebel pampered him and had Naboth put to death and gave his vineyard to King Ahab. It can really cringe one's stomach because as a king he has lots of vineyards but still he was envious of Naboth's vineyard. His eyes were bigger than his lands.

Envy is one of the Capital sins. It refers to the sadness at the sight of another's goods and the immoderate desire to acquire them for oneself, even unjustly. Envy is considered as a capital sin because it engenders other evils. Our heavenly friend, St. Gregory the Great in "Moralia in Job" pointed out that

“From envy are born hatred, detraction, calumny, joy caused by the misfortune of a neighbor, and displeasure caused by his prosperity.”

Since Lucifer and the other devils are envious of us human beings because our “human nature” was preferred by God than their “angelic nature,” and since it is by pride that they were cast out from the heavenly realm, therefore, it is right that envy often comes from pride. To combat envy, then, we have to train ourselves in the virtue of humility because it is only by the humble that God is glorified.

Let us listen to these words of our heavenly friend, no other than the golden mouthed St. John Chrysostom: “Would you like to see God glorified in you? Then rejoice in your brother’s progress and you will immediately give glory to God. Because his servant could conquer envy by rejoicing in the merits of others, God will be praised” (Hom. In Romans).

How about the hatred of Lucifer and the other demons for us? This, too, is beyond our comprehension. On earth we can only dub it as diabolical, for it crossed the boundary of our imagination. The measureless depths of the human soul reveal themselves in the unregulated love of self, which rises to scorn and hatred of God which Lucifer did. This malice is accompanied by a hate which is inveterate and incomprehensible, even against their greatest Benefactor.

We can see this in certain frightening perversities, as for instance, those of Nero and other persecutors who would not yield even to the constancy and goodness that radiated from the suffering martyrs. In other words, they lie in wait for their lives, fierce persecutors band themselves against them. For no transgression or sin of theirs, except, perhaps, because they bear the name of Christ, for no fault of theirs, they run and make ready to shed blood.

According to the “Status of Global Mission” report which is published by the International Bulletin of Missionary Research there were, on average, 279 new Christian martyrs every 24 hrs over the past decade, such that “the number of martyrs in the period 2000-2010 was approximately 1 million.” The report defines “martyrs” as “believers in Christ who have lost their lives, prematurely, in situations of witness, as a result of human hostility.”

Of course, this does not include the number of Christians slaughtered by the ISIS, “fierce men” banding themselves against Christians and other religious minorities. For no transgression or sin of theirs except their steadfastness in holding on to their belief, “they run and make ready.” Therefore we have to take recourse to the God of Israel who is also the God of Christians made flesh, saying: →

Icon # 585 = Is God Sleeping?

"Rouse thyself, come to my help, and see! Thou, Lord God of hosts, art God of Israel. Awake to punish all the nations; spare none of those who treacherously plot evil."

Humans as we are, we tend to depict God as sleeping when all kinds of evils are rampant in our world. Of course, God does not need sleep as we are because He is a pure spirit. He also knows everything and sees everything that is going on in our world. The Psalmist also said in Psalm 121, "He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep."

So, if God does not sleep, why need to be roused? It is not implausible to say that the answer has a certain parallel to the question: If God knows all our needs before we ask Him, why do we still have to pray? Of course, it is for our own benefit that we expressed all our needs in prayer so that we will learn to appreciate and be grateful to God when our prayer has been granted. The same is true when we ask God to rouse Himself to help us. It is certainly for our own good so that we will highly value His support in our predicaments.

On the other hand, to ask Him to be awake in order to punish all the nations, sparing none of those who treacherously plot evil, is indicative of the Last Judgment when God will gather all the nations on earth and will judge them according to their deeds, as it is written: "to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil...." "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth."

Many know the anxiety of a bad conscience; few know the peace of a good conscience lifted to the Divine level. If God's displeasure is so terrible that it keeps the guilty awake at night, then think of the joys that beckon in His pleasure! If it is misery to be under His wrath, then it is ecstasy to be under His love.

The love of God will be an intolerable torment for those who have not acquired it within themselves, as our heavenly friend, St. Isaac of Syria pointed out: "The sorrow which takes hold of the heart that has sinned against love is more piercing than any other pain. It is not right to say that sinners in hell are deprived of the love of God, but love acts in a double way, as suffering in the reprov'd, and as joy in the blessed."

Here is a transparent picture of what the Day of Judgment is like, when all people shall behold the infinite Majesty of God and the rigor of His judgment upon the wicked and those who treacherously plot evil giving them amazing power to behold their own wretchedness of which they could not be ignorant, for though they see God revealing His love to them, they could not find any place to hide themselves and thus they are utterly confounded.

Just as “the wicked shall see and shall be angry, he shall gnash his teeth and pine away,” for the blessed shall be caught up to heaven before the reprobate and those who treacherously plot evil are cast down into the bottomless dungeons of everlasting fire, in order that the latter may be more fiercely tormented by the sight of the glory they have lost, so “the just shall see and shall rejoice,” beholding the misery and pain from which they have escaped.

Neither would the wicked and those who treacherously plot evil be consumed with such envious rage, if they did not see the just ascending before their eyes to the kingdom of an unutterable bliss, while they groan to hear themselves condemned and punished to the unendurable stench, the unbearable horror, and the eternal fires of the infernal black hole, and to all the unending agonies of immortal punishment.

Some of these people who are still in this world, has not yet graduated to the infernal black hole are scavenging evil deeds to satisfy their vicious desires. Thus:
→

Icon # 586 = The Mouth

“Each evening they come back, howling like dogs and prowling about the city. There they are, bellowing with their mouths, and snarling with their lips – for ‘who’, they think, ‘will hear us’?”

There are several areas where we, human beings, can sin: either in words, thoughts, actions, omissions, or desires, which are contrary to the laws of God. Since sin is not punished right away, the tendency of a good number of people who committed sin is to continue doing it.

It's very seldom that God punished a person right away when that person, say, utters arrogant words. An example is the case of Herod. There's a story in the Acts of the Apostles which tells us that Herod was really angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon who came to him, and having persuaded Blastus, the chamberlain of Herod, they asked for peace, because their country depended on Herod for food.

On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon his throne, and made an oration to them. Of course, the people shouted, perhaps to flatter Herod, "The voice of a god, and not of man!" Immediately an angel of the Lord smote him, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.

By itself, the mouth is neutral. Of course, it has many functions. Undoubtedly, the most important function of the mouth is to express what is in the heart and mind of a person. If a person is grateful what comes out of the mouth are words of appreciation and gratitude. If a person is a larrikin what comes out of the mouth are foul words, bellowing curses with their mouths, and snarling profanities with their lips – for "who", they think, "will hear us?"

But can He who made the ears not hear? Of course, He hears, for if He knows the thoughts and intentions of the heart which are internal, how much more words that come out of one's mouth which are external!

Very often, either the sinners will defend their wrongdoings or have no sense of sin at all. Whereas the saints will not only acknowledge their sin but even vie with each other in proclaiming that they are the greatest of sinner. In the same way obstreperous and rambunctious people will not only bellow curses and obscenities with their mouths, but will even sing vulgar songs with sanctimonious confidence.

Whereas saintly people will not only admit that their lips are unclean, but also desire to be cleansed of it. Take for example the prophet Isaiah who testified, saying: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips...." And our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux also gave testimony, saying: "Oh, if only someone would bring down to me from the altar on high not just one burning coal but a huge fiery globe by which the ingrained and thick rust would be entirely burnt out of my lewd mouth. Perhaps then I should be worthy to repeat in my own very ordinary language those gracious and chaste words of the angel to the Virgin and of the Virgin to him."

In other words, rowdy people who are "bellowing with their mouths," "howling like dogs and prowling about the city," "and snarling with their lips – for 'who', they think, 'will hear us', do not really care about sinlessness and modesty of words. Holy persons, on the other hand, make immediate reparation for every idle word they had uttered and for whatever may have dragged them down from heavenly thoughts.

Therefore, all those who are saintly and those who strive to be holy are struck with compunction because of the weakness of their constitution, and with daily sighs they scrutinize their idle words and indifferent thoughts and the hidden

places of their conscience, humbly cry out: "Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for in your sight no one living shall be justified. For if you, O Lord, should mark our guilt who would survive?"

They consider the righteousness of human beings so weak and imperfect and constantly in need of God's mercy that one of them, that is, the prophet Isaiah – our heavenly friend, whose iniquities and sins God cleansed with the fiery coal of His word that was sent from His altar, said after having contemplated God in wondrous fashion and after having seen the lofty Seraphim and a revelation of the heavenly mysteries: "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people with unclean lips."

Thus he would perhaps not even then have felt the uncleanness of his lips if he had not deserved to know the true and integral purity of perfection, thanks to his having contemplated God. Upon seeing Him he immediately recognized an uncleanness that had hitherto been unknown to him.

Since knowledge of God is very important in the growth of self-knowledge, therefore, it is not esoteric to say that those who are bellowing foul words and snarling obscenities with their lips have no knowledge of God at all, because if they have they would not dare to utter such things.

What rays are to the sun, so words are to the heart and mind of the person. Words tell something of what is in the human person. By our words we will be justified or condemned, as it is written: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits."

By our words people can notice the grace of our inner life or the vice in our morality. The mere denial of the concept of morality does not relieve our guilt: the conscience of the human person will not be bribed so easily, nor fobbed off with a shallow denial of the moral law which is deeply engraved in all our natures. The only real escape from the anxiety of guilt is to restore oneself to union with Divine Righteousness through penitence. Otherwise: →

Icon # 587 = Great Was My Laughter Because of My Lover

"But thou, O Lord, dost laugh at them; thou dost hold all nations in derision."

There's a song in my native tongue, Cebuano, in the 60's entitled: "Kadako sa akong Katawa Tungod sa Akong Hinigugma," which literally means, "Great was my laughter because of my lover." The lyrics go like this:

Kadako sa akong katawa tungod sa akong higugma

Kalit niya akong gibiya-an kay nangita lagi'g sapi-an.
Apan saw ala madugay iyang nadiskobrehan
Nga ang iya sab diay nga gipangita
Pobre sab diay nga hilabihan.

Refrain:

Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha....

The English translation goes like this:

Great was my laughter because of my lover.
She suddenly abandoned me, for she was looking
for a rich man.
But shortly after, she discovered that the man
she was looking for was utterly poor.

The refrain is an expression of derision, laughter.

It is right to say that this song has a certain relevance in our relationship with God. He is the lover of the human soul, but amazingly people abandoned God and looked for another lover, that is, the devil with all its seductive pleasures and the lure of riches, but shortly after, that is, at the moment of death the human soul discovered that the devil has nothing whatsoever, for he too came from nothing and to nothing he shall return, of course, not in terms of existence but in terms of value, integrity, and dignity. He has not value, integrity, and dignity at all, for he will be made a footstool of the Lord, as it is written: The Lord says to my lord: 'sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.'"

The consciousness of the devil and all human souls who sided with him of having by their own deliberate folly forfeited the highest blessings for abandoning God in favor of transitory and delusive pleasures and disobedience of God's commandments humiliates and depresses them beyond measure.

It is not implausible to assert that the human beings who put their allegiance to the devil have no idea of its full extent which cannot be experienced in this present life. Even the most extreme and radical of them, while preferring and serving the demons instead of God, and even invoking them like Joseph Proudhon, has not the spiritual sight necessary to see them as they are.

The Satanic spirit is always disguised in this world; its snares are set along broad path that may seem pleasant, or at least exciting, to many; and Satan offers to those who follow his path the consoling thought and hope of fiendish euphoria. If, despite the consolations of Satan, no follower of his is "truly happy" in this life, and if in the last days, of which the calamities of our century are a small preview, there "shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the

world to this time" – still it is only in the next life that the followers of Satan will realize the full bitterness of hopeless misery.

God will laugh at them for choosing the devil who is infinitely ugly and horrible than God who is indescribably beautiful and delectable. In the life beyond the grave where all illusions about earthly goods have completely gone, where the turmoil of this material world has ceased; where the soul has outgrown the limitations of this mortal life, and realizes with utterly mental keenness unknown on earth the inner truth of things, the loss of God, and the union of the soul and Satan, is a disaster exceeding in extent all that we can now conceive.

They had finally come to their ultimate state in which with all their mental power and the whole energy of their will they either possess God, or losing Him, are aware of complete and everlasting debacle of their existence. Every fiber of their being tends toward God by inward necessity as their lover, God draws them as a magnet draws iron, and their innermost selves thrills with longing for God who is infinite goodness, beauty, and truth, yet they are intimately conscious that their nature is so warped, disfigured, and deformed by their union of the devil that it can never be united to God.

Between themselves and God there is a gulf fixed which no bridge will ever span; nor is God a distant object which they might manage to forget. God is infinitely present to them, but His presence is a torment, not a joy, for holiness is both an object of horror and of desire to those that are in the state of sin.

God loves even such people too much to allow them simply to "forget" Him and "pass away" into nothingness, out of His presence which alone is the source of their existence; He offers them His Love which is a torment to those who have not prepared themselves in this life to receive it. Every instant of their never – ending life they want God and they know that He wants them, yet every instant they feel an irresistible recoil, a disgust, a loathing, and a hatred, which turn them from that which they want.

The utter void and emptiness of their souls made for the enjoyment of infinite truth and eternal goodness causes them immeasurable anguish. Moreover, they are well aware that God is infinitely happy, and hence their hatred and their impotent desire to injure Him fill them with extreme bitterness. And the same is true with regard to their hatred of all the friends of God who enjoy the bliss of heavenly paradise.

On the other hand, the redeemed who sided with God and made Him their strength and fortress will sing praises to Him, they will eternally rejoice for being saved from so great an evil, and the very greatness of the evil avoided adds to the enjoyment of the happiness secured. Unavoidably, they avow: →

Icon # 588 = God is a Fortress

"O my strength, I will sing praises to thee; for thou, O God, art my fortress."

What naturally comes to mind when we hear of fortress is a place that is protected against attack: a fortified place. And who else than God is the safest place to live! "If God is for us," says our good friend, St. Paul, "who is against us?" "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor heights, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." This is how safe and fortified God is!

When God lives in the soul and the soul lives in God, it should abandon itself completely to God's providence. It is not the business of the soul to determine the particular matter of the submission it owes to God, its sole business is to be ready for everything and to submit to everything. He asks only our trust, obedience, and love; the rest is His business. This is the environment inside the fortress of God.

So long as we do not commit a deliberate sin, no matter how trivial it might be, we are very safe in this fortress. No external forces no matter how severe they might be such as: terminal illness, lost of loved ones or properties, and all kinds of trials and sufferings can destroy the rampart of this fortress. Only deliberate sin, and sin alone, has an astounding potency to effect a stunning breach in this fortress.

Deliberate sin is tantamount to going outside this fortress through the breach to be exposed to the savage and gloating enemies of our souls, no other than Lucifer and the other demons.

Take for example the case of Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob. She went out of their camp to visit the women of the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan. The result was that she was raped by Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land.

It is always dangerous for a certain virtue to associate itself, or curious enough to mingle, with vices. Take for example the virtue of chastity which will go out from the camp of purity to consort itself, or snooply enough to socialize with the vices of pornography, immodesty, coquetry, and indecency. It will highly be raped by cupidity the son of Lust the Lecherous, the prince of licentiousness.

Whereas, if it stays in the fortress of God, live an ordinary life, doing simple jobs, spends time in prayer, and sing praises to him, it will, unequivocally, be saved. Our saving fortress and bulwark are not exterior things such as can be enjoyed even in the outside world, but an interior fortress of both mind and heart: of mind in the expulsion of unnecessary thoughts and cares and in the attempts to make God its primary concern; of heart in lamentation and constant humble-heartedness in God's sight as in the search for gradual self-detachment from all creatures and subsequent attachment to God alone.

As our detachment increases, we will feel a greater attraction to God, to prayer and recollection, and to the practice of every kind of virtue. For, when a heart is empty, God fills it and straightway all things we do are done easily and gladly, because they are done with love, which makes all hard things easy and all bitter things sweet.

God can never forsake the residents of His fortress who entrust themselves utterly to His infinite mercy; nothing happens in this world that is not guided by His providence which turns all things to the advantage and exceeding benefit of those who reside there. Hence, with confidence they affirm: →

Icon # 589 = Looking in Triumph on One's Enemies

"My God in his steadfast love will meet me; my God will let me look in triumph on my enemies."

Once we arrived at the other side of the grave: the airport or terminal of life, God is there waiting to meet us. Of course, the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, and all the saints and angels are there, too, to greet us.

While we are still preparing for our final departure from this present life, we have to put all our trust in God, 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 trust in His Providence, and who unreservedly abandon themselves to His paternal solicitude.

How such trust and utter self-surrender bring interior serenity, and bring release from an infinite multiplicity of cares and worries that are so disturbing and vexatious! Yet as we cannot reach this state all at once, but only by slow degrees and by almost imperceptible advances, we must yearn for it ceaselessly, implore God for it, and perform spiritual exercises to secure it.

Thus let us make it a habit to accept everything God's hand offers us, and to bless Him unfailingly in all things and for all things. If in this way we welcome His designs, our greatest difficulties will profit us most.

Our good friend, St. Paul, declares 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."

It is right to say that God's generosity is shaped according to the capacity of human faith in such a way that He can say to one person: "Be it done to you according to your faith; but to another: "Go, and be it done to you as you have believed"; while to another: "Be it done to you as you wish"; still to another: "Your faith has saved you."

When we look out of ourselves in loving faith we will be amazed how our lives will be remarkably simplified; and when our interior life is reduced to a single operation of grace, it is then that the steadfast love of God will meet us, as a foretaste, even in this present life.

Therefore, we must look out to God, pass over to Him, lean upon Him, learn to be one with Him, and let love of Him burn away all self-love, so that our union with Him may be effected; for away from God all is untrue. Moreover, God and the soul form a world by themselves; and unless we live an inward life in this world, these operations of grace will escape unperceived.

Like the oxygen we breathe, we need an interior life and an intimate relationship with God, like taking in clean air for renewed strength, in order to fight against evil desires and the passions which sweep through us. We must, if we are to look in triumph on our enemies at all, arrive at the experiential knowledge and love of God which we reach through Our Lord Jesus, since in Him with so much hope we are assured of our victories, as our good friend, St. Paul triumphantly declared: "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

Thus every step we take under His auspices is a victory! For God's help fights with far greater strength on our behalf than the multitudes of enemies that struggle against us, because God is not only the One who suggests good things but also their patron and promoter.

Truly, in His steadfast love God supplies for the salvation of the human race in innumerable different manners and in inscrutable ways. 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 proclaim that the Lord is not only protector and savior but also our helper and supporter.

The goodness of God means that He gives us what we need for our perfection, not what we want for our pleasure and sometimes for our destruction. He could never let us suffer a pain, or a reversal, or experience sadness, if it could not in some way minister to our perfection. If He did not spare His own Son on the Cross for the redemption of the world, then we may be sure that He will sometimes not spare us.

A true Christian is aware of the transitory and relative character of all suffering, and in the midst of it he still feels himself sheltered by the all-powerful love of God which is graciously steadfast. Despite the trials and sufferings he may encounter, the soul clings to God with a serene confidence, realizing that all the assaults of the enemies, all their seduction, are powerless to damage him/her, since it was by the Cross that Christ Jesus the Lord redeemed the world. However, in order that the soul will not fall into complacency, it steadfastly beseech God that all its evil desire and duplicity be cut off: →

Icon # 590 = Killing the Enemies of the Soul

<p>“God kill them lest my people be seduced; make them totter by thy power, and bring them down, O Lord, our shield!”</p>

In one of His teachings, the Lord Jesus told His disciples, and us too, not to be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But He warned whom to fear: “Fear Him who, after he has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I tell you fear him!” Certainly, it is right to say that it is legitimate to implore God to kill all our vices and evil desires lest our virtues be seduced; to make them totter and bring them down.

Our heavenly friend, St. Francis de Sales, pointed out the importance of not burdening our hearts with desires for useless and superfluous things. He made an analogy of stags: “When stags have grown too fat,” he said, “they hide themselves because they know that they are out of condition and would not be able to run very fast if pursued; so if we burden our hearts with desires for useless and superfluous things we cannot run easily and freely in the ways of God.”

Since the external senses offer another danger to us, thus we have to mortify our eyes from those things which might seduce us. As we turn our eyes from a too

brilliant light lest it destroy our vision, so we have to divert our eyes from evil, too, lest we find it too seducing.

Moreover, just as the kingdom of the devil is gained by conniving with the vices, so the kingdom of God is possessed by purity of heart and spiritual knowledge by exercising virtues. And where the kingdom of God is, there without a doubt eternal life, and where the kingdom of the devil is, there without doubt are death and hell. Hence, we should make every effort then, so that our inner man too may reject and dispose of all the wealth of the vices that we have accumulated in our former way of life, and beseech God to exterminate them and make them totter so that they will no longer be a source of seduction to us.

Once the vices of the inner person have been conquered and our mind has been established in tranquility it will be possible to enjoy unceasing prayer. Accordingly, we have to be convinced that zeal for prayer is a protection against seduction and a bulwark in time of temptation: "Watch and pray," says the Lord, "that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

"Let us rest assured," says our heavenly friend, St. Alphonsus Ligouri, "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.'"

Moreover, we have also to repulse passionate thoughts and do not allow them to loiter in our heart and linger there, because passionate thoughts settling in the heart revive passions; and instead of us killing them, they will kill us. Therefore, as soon as they come near, from the first moment of their appearances in the mind, we have to hasten to strike them down by the bullet of prayer, crying out: "God kill them," lest my meager virtues "be seduced"; "make them totter by thy power, and bring them down, O Lord, our shield!"

Would God be deaf to answer our supplication if we sincerely desire to live a virtuous life? By no means! His desire for our sanctification is far greater than our wish to be sanctified, for He Himself had expressed His desire: "Be holy, as I the Lord your God am holy!" Undoubtedly, sanctification is not our own doing; it is God's work in us; it is owing to His grace working in our lives. Of course, our main role is to cooperate with Him, for He will never transgress our freedom.

We have to train ourselves to listen to Him, for we cannot hear Him when He speaks to someone else. We can hear Him only if we are being addressed. But how can He address us if we do not have time for Him? Thus we have also to allocate our time for Him. In the words of Dag Hammarskjöld, the former

Secretary General of the United Nations: "How can you expect to keep your powers of hearing when you never want to listen? That God should have time for you, you seem to take as much for granted as that you cannot have time for Him."

Do we wish to live according to the Gospel, so that our vices and evil desires will eventually be killed, or tottered, and brought down? Then we have to live in a pure and complete abandonment to the action of God in our lives. The Lord Jesus is the sovereign organ of that action. To let God do what He wills and to do what He demands of us, that is the Gospel, the whole of Scripture and the ordinary law.

Let us therefore, entrust the work of our sanctification to God who knows the means to produce it. These all depend on a special protection and operation of Divine Providence; they usually come about incognito and through those very things we dislike most and expect least. However, the Great God – the Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit will console us and give us in the midst of our struggle an intimate assurance that we have nothing to fear provided we allow Him to act and abandon ourselves totally to Him.

We have only to be still and let Him fight for us, for the enemies of our souls are also His enemies. Thus He will surely have them killed, as He guaranteed, saying: "As for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me." This command will be promptly executed, for the Lord Jesus "will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth." Of course, the rationale behind this is that: →

Icon # 591 = Consequences of the Sins of the Mouth

"For the sin of their mouths, the words of their lips, let them be trapped in their pride. For the cursing and lies which they utter, consume them in wrath, consume them till they are no more, that men may know that God rules over Jacob to the ends of the earth."

It is not farfetched to say that pride has a lion's share of the sins of the mouth, such as: lying, cursing, slander, detraction, boasting, calumny, perjury, backbiting, vilification, libel, and the like. Take for instance, boasting. Pride is certainly not stranger to boasting, because boasting is a form of self-exaltation, and "every self-exaltation," says our father St. Benedict, "is a form of pride."

Take also the case of lying. Liars, whether serial or intermittent, are proud people because they are the immediate descendants of the devil whom the Lord Jesus dubbed as a “liar and the father of lies.”

Since humility is truth, therefore, it is right to say that pride is lie. In other words, humble people are truthful people, whereas proud people are liar people. It simply means that they are children of the devil, and their will is to do their father's desires. Of course, the devil has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. Thus when he lies, he speaks according to his own nature.

All the other sins of the mouth mentioned above are also sins against justice and charity; hence they are provoking the wrath of God. It is absolutely not wise to provoke the wrath of God who has power not only to kill the body but to cast the soul into gehenna. Even in the natural level it is not wise to provoke the wrath of an earthly king as what happened to Haman who provoked the wrath of king Ahasuerus. How much more of the divine wrath!

If an idle word will give an account on the Day of Judgment how much more lying, cursing, detraction, and the like! In this case it is far better to practice silence, because if we are silent we already conquered, at least, one third of the territory of the soul. If we avoid all evil deeds and all uncharitable actions, then, the only stronghold left is the thought which, we have to admit, is the hardest of all.

It is certain that without some vigorous and constant effort of eliminating useless thoughts and words, it is quite impossible to achieve true fervor in loving the Lord Jesus. It does not depend on us whether we are more or less assailed by useless thoughts. No soul, no matter how perfect, can pretend to become free from this struggle. We would be deluding ourselves if we believe it would ever come to an end. It suffices for us not to admit such useless thoughts voluntarily.

If they are already there, we have to replace them with thoughts about the Lord Jesus. If we do so, it is very likely that we will be more prudent in our speech. “The science of sciences and the arts of arts,” says our heavenly friend, St. Hesychius of Jerusalem, “is the capacity to master harmful thoughts.”

Just as “what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart” and serves as a window for people to peek into the conduct of a person, so by our words other people can have a glimpse of the grace in our inner life or the vice in our morals.

If the prophet Isaiah was convicted of having unclean lips although, in all probability, he was not culpable of lying or cursing or slander or detraction or calumny or perjury or vilification, and the like, where would those people who

are guilty of all these sins go? If it is very painful to burn our tongue with hot food or hot coffee, what it would be like if one's tongue is burned with fire!?

We would be lucky if there will be a Lazarus who will dip the end of his finger in water and cool our tongue, for we are in anguish in the flame; but what if there is none? And not just for 1 trillion years but for eternity! Do we have to wait till the other side of the grave to know that God is the ruler of heaven and earth?; that each person will be judged according to what he/she has done in the body, how he/she uses the members of his/her body as instruments either for righteousness or wickedness?

If we use our tongue in praising God and of course, striving to make our hearts closer to God, then, it will go well with us for we will be likely allowed to join those who had conquered the beast, and will sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, that is, the 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."

Whereas if we will use our tongue in cursing and lying, and the like, we will be in danger of being thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophets were, and will be tormented by the wrath of God day and night, for "the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." Who in their right mind would want it?! But sin is always a form of "insanity!"

We may demur and ask whether it is really just for God to inflict an everlasting punishment for a fault which is finite. This "objection would be valid," says our heavenly friend, St. Gregory the Great, "if the Supreme Judge were to consider only the deeds men perform without looking into their hearts. To be sure, the sin that a wicked man commits comes to an end when he dies. But, would he not willing to live on endlessly, if that were possible, in order to continue sinning? By not leaving off sinning during his lifetime, he shows his desire to continue to sin forever. The full justice of the Judge, therefore, demands that the wicked, who never wished to be rid of sinning during life, should never be without punishment in eternity."

We might object again, saying: God has merely threatened sinners with eternal punishment to keep them from committing sins. Let us hear once again from our heavenly friend, St. Gregory, the rebuttal of this objection: "If He makes use of empty threats to keep us from injustice, then the promises He makes to lead us

to justice are likewise worthless. But no one in his right mind would entertain such thought.

“If God threatened us without ever intending to fulfill His threat, we should have to call Him deceitful instead of merciful. Almighty God, being a God of love, does not gratify His anger by torturing wretched sinners. However, since He is a God of justice, the punishment of the wicked cannot satisfy Him even if it continues eternally. All the wicked condemned to hell are punished for their wickedness, to be sure.

“Yet, there is another reason why they burn, namely, that the elect may see in God all the joys they experience and may see in the damned all the tortures they escaped. Seeing the terrible punishment for sins which they avoided with God’s help, they become all the more conscious of the eternal debt of gratitude they owe God for the graces they received.”

Since this is the case, it is inevitable then that both the redeemed and the damned will know that God rules over all creatures to the ends of the earth. There will be singing and rejoicing, peace and stillness of heart, and interior satisfaction to all who let God to guide and rule their lives, but to those who adamantly refuse to let God guide and rule their lives: →

Icon # 592 = Philanthropic Charity: Refusing the Demons the Food they need

“Each evening they come back, howling like dogs and prowling about the city. They roam about for food, and growl if they do not get their fill.”

The often quoted adage of St. Augustine, our heavenly friend, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in God,” tells a lot about the dissatisfaction of those who don’t want to do anything with God. Each evening they come back from the saturnalia of their vices and evil desires but would never get their fill of satisfaction, because it is the nature of worldly pleasures never to be satisfied at all.

One only has to see how materialistic cravings and sensual longings, the anxious yearnings, or the insatiable need, for comfort and physical pleasures bring the average person to monotony and eventual failure, for when everything is focused on physical satisfaction and pleasure, the spirit becomes incapable of perceiving spiritual values. Then it is that we cease to be truly human, our lives becoming centered on an existence more animal than human because we do not acknowledge our relationship with our Creator or behave in accordance with our dignity as sons and daughters of God.

It is true to say that as one's desire for pleasure increased, the satisfaction from the pleasure decreased. Take for example the drug addict: to have an equal pleasure, he must increase his dose! Do you think a philosophy of life is wholesome that is based on the principle of diminishing returns? Certainly Not, because if we were made for pleasure, why should our capacity for pleasure diminish with the years instead of increase?

Moreover, have you ever observed that pleasure are always greater in anticipation than in realization? Take the case of Judas: the prospect of thirty pieces of silver was very attractive, but he brought back his thirty pieces of silver. He got what he wanted and it filled him with disgust. Pope Francis has this to say: "The great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience" (Joy of the Gospel).

Therefore, says our canonized heavenly friend, St. Teresa of Avila: "The great foundation which we must lay, if we are to be delivered from the snares and pleasures sent by the devil, is the initial determination not to desire these pleasures, but to walk from the first in the way of the cross. For the Lord Himself showed this way of perfection when He said, 'Take up thy cross and follow Me.' He is our Pattern; and those who follow His counsels with sole aim of pleasing Him have nothing to fear."

The 1st letter of Peter describes the devil as "a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour," that is, "roam about for food." It is not farfetched to assert that the devil, too, growls if he could not get his fill, that is, he could not persuade someone to yield to his seduction. This is also true with the other demons. They roam about, prowling about the whole world seeking for human souls as food to devour, but they growl if they encounter with someone who resists them. Instead of them tormenting us, we are the ones tormenting them if we do not succumb to their suggestion, that is, if we do not give them their food!

Are we then guilty of uncharity because we refuse to give to the devil and the other demons the food they need? By no means! As a matter of fact by refusing them the food they need we are doing a tremendous, a philanthropic charity to our soul, because if we truly love ourselves we will never want to be devoured by the devil or the other demons! Charity begins at home.

Of course, this is not our own doing, but owing to God's grace. Hence we have a fairly good reason to: →

Icon # 593 = The Music of God

“But I will sing of thy might; I will sing aloud of thy steadfast love in the morning. For thou hast been to me a fortress and a refuge in the day of my distress.”

It has been said that music is the language of the soul. Just as there are many kinds of languages and some people speak many languages; so also there are many kinds of music and some people can sing different kinds of music. It is right to say that music has an intrinsic capacity to raise our mood, get us excited, or make us calm and relaxed; it also allows us to feel nearly or possibly all emotions that we experience in our lives.

According to biomusicologists, music entered our world from the time only animals roamed the earth. It is theorized that animals used a form of music to communicate. For instance, the song birds is musical, it sounds like a chant, and is a form of communication among their species. Humpback whales also are said to sing sonatas as a form of communication.

Biomusicologists believe that human brains are wired for music. Certainly, this belief is worthy of honorable credence by the very fact that we are made in the image and likeness of God who is the eternal source of music, that we may be able to sing of His might and will sing aloud of His steadfast love, and join with the angels in singing the praises of God.

We do this when we celebrate the “Sacred Liturgy,” even while on earth, for “in the liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle. With all the hosts of heaven we sing a hymn of glory to the Lord, venerating the memory of the saints, we hope to share their company; we eagerly await the Saviour, Our Lord Jesus Christ, until he our life shall appear and we too will appear with him in glory” (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #8).

“Jesus Christ, high priest of the new and eternal covenant, taking human nature, introduced into this earthly exile that hymn which is sung throughout all ages in the realm above. He joins the entire community of humankind to himself, associating it with himself in singing his divine song of praise” (#83). We have a sample of this hymn at the Incarnation of Christ Himself when the choirs of angels were singing the praises of God: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!”

Do we need another sample of a hymn which is sung throughout all ages in the realm above then introduced into our world to be part of the Sacred Liturgy of the Church? Let us listen to this account of the prophet Isaiah: “In the year that

king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the Seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.'"

Both the "Gloria" and the "Sanctus" are now part of the Sacred Liturgy of the Church, especially at Mass. Hence, every time we celebrate Mass we participate with the angelic hosts in singing the praises of God, singing aloud His steadfast love in condescending to share our human nature that we may also share in His divine nature, for "God's love is satisfied only," says our heavenly friend, St. Therese, "when God stoops down to our nothingness and transform that nothingness into fire." Of course, this is not our own doing but owing to the steadfast love of God for us. Inevitably, →

Icon # 594 = Staying Inside a Fortress

"O my strength, I will sing praises to thee, for thou, O God, art my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love."

It is right to say that the steadfast love of God for us is our fortress. We have only to stay inside this love, for us to be safe. It would be the greatest disaster and ultimate failure of our existence if we will be outside the steadfast love of God, for "I tell you," says the Lord, "many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth."

Moreover, "outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood." What is even more painful is that the steadfast love of God will still be with them outside, the outer darkness, but it will be an intolerable torment for them because they have not acquired it within themselves while still in this present life.

The steadfast love of God is like a double edge sword. It "acts in a double way," pointed out our heavenly friend, St. Isaac of Syria, "as suffering in the reprov'd, and as joy in the Blessed." This is very telling because the Holy Spirit is the steadfast love of God; and we are made to drink of the Holy Spirit, but its effect is different in every person: depression upon depression, pain upon pain, blasphemy upon blasphemy, cursing upon cursing to those who are not in good standing with God while still one earth, but joy upon joy, praises upon praises, strength upon strength to those who took off from this present world in good

standing with God. "They shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

So great is the steadfast love of God for us that His providence not only stands by us but even goes constantly before us. For this reason He is truly our strength and our fortress where we can, like Zechariah, "might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life;" and with the Blessed Virgin Mary our souls, too, will magnify the Lord and our spirits will rejoice in God our Savior, for showing us His steadfast love.

Since God is the supreme good, love for Him must take precedence of the love we owe ourselves. We can be sure that in exerting all our strength to love Him for Himself, in that love we shall discover again and more abundantly all that we seem to have sacrificed to Him.

The outstanding signs that we are not deceived in the matter of our love for God are these: Our desire for all that pleases Him; our ability to suffer and forbear for His good pleasure's sake; our possession of a great horror of sin even in its most trivial form, and our endeavor not to commit deliberate sin.

Indeed the great God who consoles those who rely in Him will give our souls in the midst of our trials and sufferings an intimate assurance that we have nothing to fear provided we make Him our strength and fortress, and entrust ourselves completely to His steadfast love. By making God our strength we will be able to overcome our weaknesses, for we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us.

Just as God brought out His people out of Egypt by the strength of His hand, so also God will bring us out of the enslavement of vices and unhealthy desires and will bring us into a land flowing with milk and honey, that is, a good and upright way of life where God is the center and the ego is at the corner.

On the other hand, if we will not make God as our strength and fortress and is ashamed to sing praise to Him, that could be portent of: →