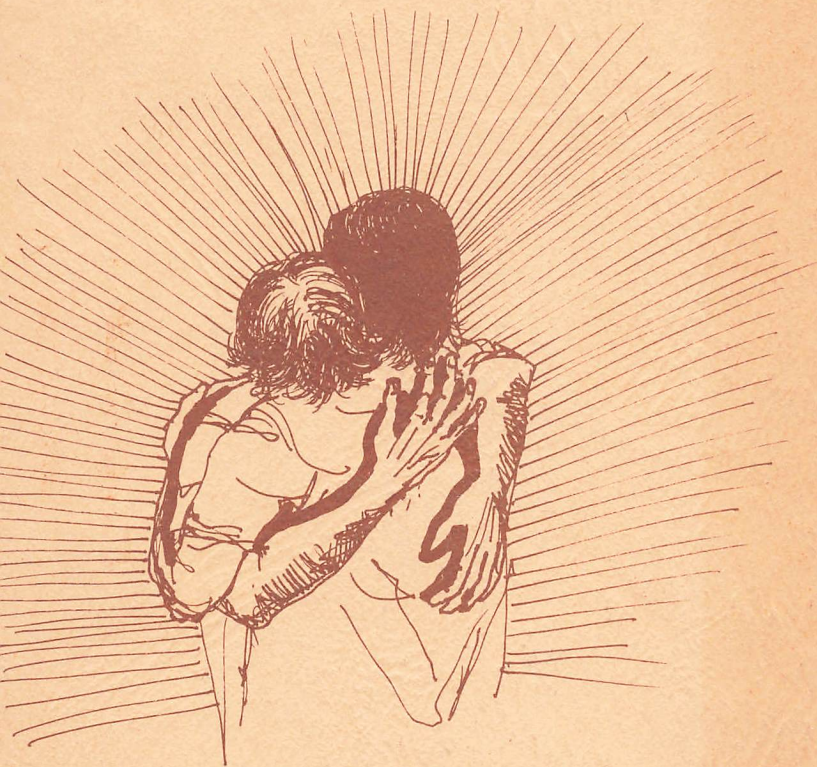


*Joy
Eternal*



Devout Reflections

SAINT ALPHONSUS

Bi-Centenary Edition, 1987

Joy Eternal

Devout Reflections

by

SAINT ALPHONSUS

An Adapted Version

Bi-Centenary Edition, 1987

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Saint Alphonsus De Liguori

1696 — 1787

Doctor of the Church
Patron of Confessors

Founder of the Redemptorists

ENCOUNTERING THE WORD:

The right spirit for spiritual reading is to encounter the text. The wrong spirit is to go counter to it. This would mean that from the start I judge the text by my own limited standards. I am eager to fit it into my narrow perspective. I judge it by preconceived categories. I say, for instance, "it is too old to be any good." "The language is archaic." "I can't see anything in it that is relevant for today's active world." . . .

The disciple, by contrast, wishes to encounter the message of the text. The text is for him not an invitation to criticism, but a spiritual discourse that can guide his life. From the start, the disciple is open to and values what is great in the text. He allows the text to manifest to him the fullness of its excellence without uttering any critical remarks. Such remarks may belong to a study of the text, but they are not to be part of one's spiritual reading.

The aim of such respectful reading is to discover the richness of thought in the text — to open up its every nuance and light, though the disciple knows that however much he discovers while reading, the Holy Spirit, through the text, can always communicate a new and deeper message.

From Steps Along The Way
by Susan A. Muto.

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FOREWORD:

To anyone encountering Saint Alphonsus for the first time, it may be helpful to explain something of the purpose and method of his ascetical writings. Alphonsus wrote not so much to inform our minds as to put fire into our hearts, and to leave us fast-bound in love to Jesus Christ.

Alphonsus, a skilled musician, takes a simple melody, states it clearly and then weaves many variations around it that add to its beauty, but never strays too far from the original melody. His whole aim is to make these basic themes of our faith not only ring more clearly in the mind, but echo more deeply in the heart. For it is to the heart that Alphonsus speaks, leading it to make its own loving response to God.

Joy Eternal is an adapted and re-arranged version of one of Saint Alphonsus' last works: *Riflessioni Divote*. He wrote it when he was 78 years old, still a bishop, but broken in health and crippled with infirmities. Alphonsus sent a copy to a friend with this note:

I send you two little works, the first of which may assist you in meditating on the Passion of Jesus Christ; I myself make use of it every day. I read, likewise, every day, something in the second book, entitled: *Devout Reflections*. I should wish you to do the same; for I have composed it especially for those who desire to give themselves entirely to God.

I have tried to reproduce here the heart of Saint Alphonsus; a heart on fire with the love of God and confident of salvation for all those who put their trust in God, and who are faithful to prayer. For at the heart of these devout reflections there is a quiet confidence and the hope of joy eternal. This phrase appears many times, but especially in Reflection 20:

When we reach heaven
our state is changed.
There will be no more toil, but rest,
no more fear, but security,
no more sadness or weariness,
but gladness and
Joy Eternal.

I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to a number of people for the help they have given in preparing this edition; to Shirley Egan for producing the basic draft, to my confreres, Sam Boland, Max Barrett and Paul Bird for their comments and suggestions, and Gary Boyle for the illustrations, and to Rona Crawford for typing the final text.

In this bi-centenary year of the death of Saint Alphonsus, it is my hope that one of its blessings may be a renewed interest in the writings of this great saint.

Pat Corbett, C.Ss.R.

1 August, 1987.

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On The Thought Of Eternity

The great thought:

this was the name given by Saint Augustine
to the thought of eternity.

This thought caused saints to count
all the treasures of the world as nothing.

This thought inspired many to live as hermits,
and sent even kings and emperors from the world
to live as monks in cloisters.

This thought gave many martyrs
the courage to suffer torture and death.

We are not created for this earth.

God placed us in the world
so that by our good works,
we may inherit eternal life.

The return you get is sanctification,
and its end, eternal life. Romans 6:22

If we succeed, we shall be happy forever.
If we fail, we shall be forever miserable.

We will be happy if we strive to live
as though we may shortly die,
and enter eternity.

It is by faith that we live in the grace of God,
not absorbed by the love of natural things
but, rather, keenly aware of the reward
which God promises to those who love him.

Augustine also said,
the one who believes in eternity,
and yet does not love God,
is either mad or has lost faith.

Saint John Chrysostom relates that gentiles
when they saw christians committing sin,
called them fools.

If you believe in eternity and still sin,
you are fools.

Saint Teresa of Avila often repeated:

My children, one soul, one eternity.
We have but one soul, and if that is lost,
it is lost forever.

Let us pray often this prayer of the apostles:

Lord, increase our faith! Luke 17:5

Saint Gregory wrote
that they who meditate on eternity
are neither puffed up by prosperity,
nor cast down by adversity.
They desire nothing in the world,
so they shall fear nothing from the world.

When we have something to suffer,
whether it be sickness or some distress,
let us think what our sins have deserved.
In this way every cross will seem light to us,
and we shall thank the Lord, and say:

Lo, it was for my welfare
that I had great bitterness;
but thou hast held back my life
from the pit of destruction,
for thou hast cast all my sins
behind thy back. Isaiah 38:17

*PRAYER O my God, you know my sinfulness
but notwithstanding this,
you command me to hope,
and hope I will.
A humbled and contrite heart, O God,
you will not spurn.
I have failed you in times past,
but now I love you above all things.
Jesus and Mary have pity on me.*

We Are Pilgrims On Earth

As long as we are in this life,
we are so many pilgrims
wandering far from our true country
which is heaven.

There God awaits us that we may rejoice
in beholding his beautiful face.

We know that while we are at home in the body
we are away from the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:6

Before the redemption, the way to God was closed;
but Jesus Christ has opened to us the gates
by which we can have access, as children,
to God our Father.

You are fellow citizens with the saints,
and members of the household of God. Ephesians 2:19

O Lord, I am a pilgrim upon this earth.
Teach me to keep your precepts,
which are the road by which I may reach heaven.

How can he who loves God
desire to go on living
in this vale of tears,
in continual bitterness,
in anxieties of conscience,
in peril of being condemned?
How can he help sighing to depart
and unite himself to God in a blessed eternity
where there is no danger of ever losing him?
The saints have continually had this prayer
upon their lips: Thy kingdom come!
Quickly, O Lord, quickly take us to thy kingdom.
Let us hasten and not cease to press onwards
till we are safe in that blessed harbour of rest
which God prepares for those who love him.

Saint John Chrysostom says
that the runner in a race
does not notice the spectators,
but runs on ever increasing his pace
as he nears the goal.
So we, in our time here on earth,
should strive for the prize — eternity.

Lord, may thy kingdom speedily come
so that united eternally to you,
and loving you face to face,
we shall no longer have fear
or be in danger of losing you.

In the pain of our earthly problems,
let us take comfort
in the joy of the reward
God prepares for us.

Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy,
for behold, your reward
is great in heaven. Luke 6:23

*PRAYER Behold, O God, my heart is ready.
I am ready to accept whatever sufferings
you allow to come to me.
I am content even to be deprived
of spiritual consolation, provided only
that you do not deprive me of yourself,
and of the opportunity to love you forever.
I love you, my God, my love, my all.
I shall live forever;
I hope I shall love you forever.*



*In you alone I find
all that I can seek or desire*

Love The Lord With All Your Heart

Saint Teresa says that God bestows
a great favour on us
when he calls us to love him.

You shall love the Lord, your God,
with all your heart. Matthew 22:37

At least let us say to him:

Yes, O Lord, I love you more
than all the honours of the world,
more than all its riches.
I love you more than everything I possess,
more than myself.
Let others seek what they will;
I will seek nothing but you alone,
my love, my all.
In you alone I find
all that I can seek or desire.

Among all our friends
where can we find one more faithful,
or one who has loved us
as much as God has loved us?
Let us then pray constantly:

Draw me after you;
let us make haste. Song of Songs 1:4

For if you do not draw me, O Lord,
I cannot come to you.

Saint Augustine tells us
that one who has God has everything,
and one who has not God has nothing.

What does it profit a rich man
to possess many treasures,
if he has not God?
What does it profit a king
to have many kingdoms,
if he has not the grace of God?
What does it profit a learned man
to understand science,
if he knows not how to love God?

In the midst of the miseries
and troubles of this world,
who can console us better than Jesus?

Come to me all who labour,
and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28

A heart that loves only this world
cannot be content.

Our Lord warns us to walk
while the light favours us,
for if the night overcomes us,
we are unable to do anything.

Walk while you have the light,
lest the darkness overtake you. John 12:35

Let God be our treasure, our love.
Let all our desire be to love and praise him.

*PRAYER O my God and my only good,
come, take possession of my heart.
My Jesus, I wish to love you
with all my heart, so that one day
I may come to dwell with you forever
in the kingdom of the blessed.*

*O holy Virgin! aid me
with your powerful prayers.*

The One Who Prays Is Certain Of Salvation

Prayer is necessary for salvation;
and because God desires
that we should be saved
he has commanded us:

Ask, and it will be given you. Matthew 7:7

Jesus says that we ought always to pray.
He does not say
it is useful, or fitting,
but we ought always to pray.

Alone, we are nothing;
but united with God,
we can achieve anything.

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves
to claim anything as coming from us;
our sufficiency is from God. 2 Corinthians 3:5

Temptation may be strong
but God's help is always there for us.
We need only ask for it.
Saint Paul assures us:

God is faithful,
and will not let you be tempted
beyond your strength. 1 Corinthians 10:13

God is very ready to give us his help
but we must ask for it in prayer:

But I perceived
that I would not possess wisdom
unless God gave her to me —
so I appealed to the Lord
and besought him. Wisdom 8:21

As Saint Thomas Aquinas teaches
it is good for us to direct our prayer
through the saints,
for they have great power with God.

And Saint Bernard writes
of the special place of Mary
among the saints.

Through thee we have access to the Son,
O thou finder of grace,
Mother of salvation.
Through thee, may he receive us
who, through thee, was given to us.

Jesus says to us
that whatever we ask of him,
if we have confidence,
shall all be given to us.

Let us then with confidence
draw near to the throne of grace,
that we may receive mercy
and find grace to help
in time of need. Hebrews 4:16

Therefore I tell you,
whatever you ask in prayer,
believe that you receive it,
and you will. Mark 11:24

If we repent of our sins
and ask forgiveness,
and seek salvation from the Lord,
he will give these gifts to us
joyously and abundantly.
Therefore, even to our last days,
we should have our lips
ever opened to pray:
My God, help me.
My God, have mercy.
Mary, have mercy.
If we cease to pray,
we shall be lost.

*PRAYER O my God! this grace I ask
above all others, and I ask it
through the merits of Jesus Christ.
Grant that throughout my life,
and especially in time of temptation,
I recommend myself to you,
and hope for your help
through the love of Jesus and Mary.
O holy Virgin, obtain for me this grace.*



O that I had wings like a dove . . .

The Way To Holiness

To become holy,
a soul must give itself to God
without reserve.

Saint Jerome writes that Jesus
is jealous of our hearts.
He loves us exceedingly,
and desires to reign there alone.
Having given his life for us,
does he not deserve to be
loved by us with all our hearts,
and without reserve?

There are some called by God
to become saints
but, because they do not give
him their whole love,
they do not become, and
never will become, saints.

We must detach ourselves
from the things of the world.
Saint John of the Cross says:

Every thread, whether thick or slender,
hinders the soul from flying to God.

O that I had wings like a dove;
I would fly away and be at rest. Psalm 55:6

Many desire to fly towards God,
but held by worldly cares
they do not fly,
but remain attached to earth.

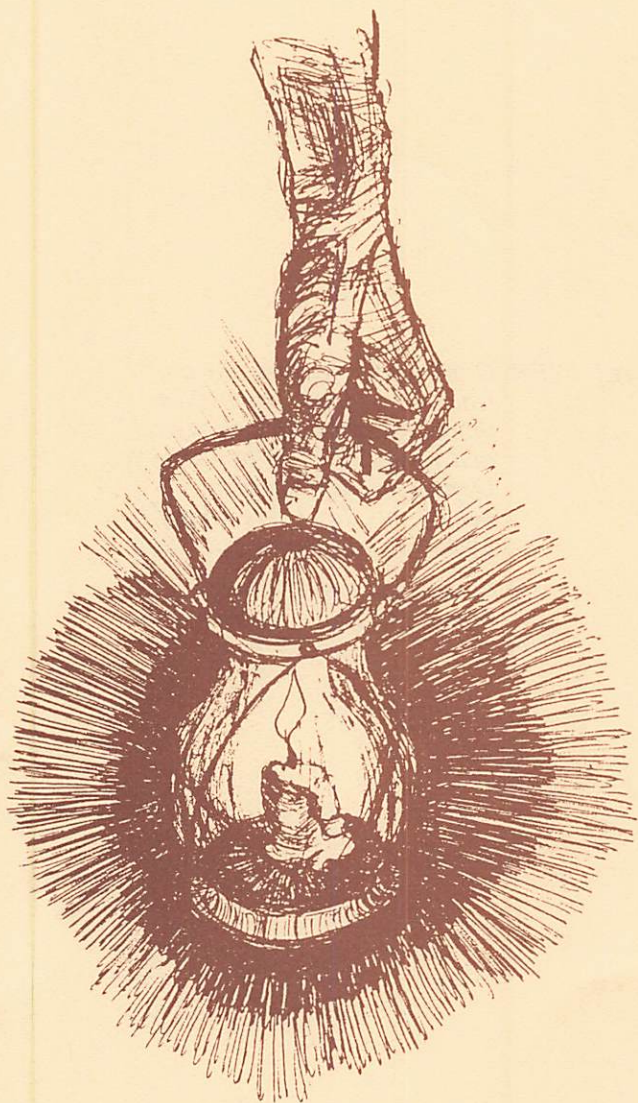
To gain all,
we must give all.
To possess God,
we must leave all that is not God.
Then, indeed, we can say to him:
My Jesus, I have left all for you;
now give yourself all to me.
Let others speak of riches and pleasures,
but let us turn to God,
and from deep in our heart
say to him:
My God, and my all!

There are three steps on the road to holiness:

1. to be aware of our defects
and to try to overcome them.
2. among things which are good,
always to choose that which is
most pleasing to God.
3. to receive from the hands of God
with peace of mind and thanksgiving
even things which are displeasing to us.

*PRAYER O my Jesus, my love, my all,
teach me to know from which
things I ought to detach myself,
and what I must do to please you.
O my beloved Redeemer,
behold this day I give myself
all to you without reserve.*

*O my own mother Mary,
obtain this grace for me.*



*Mental prayer is the lantern
which lights our journey.*

On The Necessity Of Mental Prayer

Mental prayer is the lantern
which lights our journey
to eternity.

The eternal truths cannot be seen
with the eyes of the body.

If we do not meditate
then we walk with difficulty
the way of salvation.

In meditation,
our own difficulties and defects
become clear to us.

Here too, we find the strength
to resist temptation
and to practise virtue.

He who practises meditation, is

like a tree
planted by streams of water,
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither. Psalm 1:3

Meditation is the wine cellar
in which the soul drinks deeply
of divine love.

Thus it loses its feeling
for worldly things.

In meditation, the soul retires
to converse alone with God.

He made me there upon his breast recline.
There wisdom sweet he did to me impart.
There too, I gave without reserve my heart
and pledged myself the spouse of love divine.

John of the Cross

Let us therefore, attach ourselves
to meditation,
for God will abundantly compensate
the weariness
we may experience in it.

*PRAYER Pardon me, my God, my slothfulness,
my little love.*

*What treasures I have lost
by so easily abandoning
mental prayer.*

*For the future give me the grace
to converse with you on earth
for I hope to converse with you
for ever in heaven.*

*O holy virgin Mary
assist me in prayer.*

Some Helps To Meditation

To meditate well we must know
why we meditate.

We meditate in order to unite
ourselves with God.

Good acts of the will unite us more closely
with God than do good thoughts.

The acts of love, says Saint Teresa,
are those which keep the heart
inflamed with holy love.

Secondly, we meditate in order to obtain
from God the grace to advance along
the way of salvation,
and the light to lead us to holiness.

The best fruit of meditation
is the exercise of the prayer of petition.

To obtain certain graces,
it will not suffice simply to pray!

It will be necessary to insist
and, as it were, compel God
to grant them.

In your meditation, be careful to ask
for perseverance, and for his love.

Truly, truly, I say to you,
if you ask anything of the Father
he will give it to you in my name.

John 16:23

Let us then pray and pray always.

Let us pray for ourselves;

let us pray for others,

especially unbelievers and sinners.

O Lord, make them know you,
make them love you.

Salvation is not one single grace
but a chain of graces,
to which must correspond
the chain of our prayers.

Thirdly, we do not meditate
for the sake of spiritual consolation,
but rather to learn
what God requires of us.

Speak, Lord,

for thy servant hears. 1 Samuel 3:9

Those who meditate
for spiritual consolation alone
may all too easily leave off
if consolation ceases.

It is true that God consoles
his faithful disciples during meditation,
and that he gives them some foretaste
of the delights which he prepares in heaven
for those who love him.

Those who love the things of this earth
are unable to comprehend this.
They despise the things of heaven.
O, if only we could experience these delights!
How surely we would shut ourselves away
to converse alone with God.

The soul pours forth to him
its affections, its desires,
its fears, its petitions;
and God speaks to the heart
causing it to know his goodness,
the love which he bears it,
and what the soul must do to please him.

These delights, however,
are not often experienced.
Therefore let us humble ourselves
and accept the dryness often experienced
in meditation.

Even if this dryness lasts through life,
let us not abandon mental prayer. Saint Teresa

It is enough then to say:
Lord help me! Have mercy on me!

PRAYER Lord, let me not complain
when I find myself deprived
of consolation, for I do not
deserve it; nor can I claim it.
It is enough for me to know
that you never reject anyone
who loves you. It is enough
for me to say with truth:
My God, I love you, I love you.
Mary, mother of God,
have pity on me.



*Did he not leave himself for us
to be food for our spirit . . .*

On Prayer Before The Blessed Sacrament

Meditation, wherever it is made,
pleases God.

But it seems that Jesus
especially delights in prayer
made before the Blessed Sacrament.
Did he not leave himself for us
in this sacrament
to be food for our spirit,
and to be present
for all who seek him?

We cannot all make pilgrimages
to the places where Jesus lived,
but the Lord who died for us
on the cross of Calvary
now dwells in person,
in the tabernacle — waiting.

We need not await a command
as we would of an earthly king,
to enter his presence —
he is waiting for us
to lay before him our wants
and to seek his help.

So that we may taste
the sweetness of his presence,
it is good to empty ourselves
of earthly desires.

Be still and know
that I am God. Psalm 46:10

What pleasure is found in spending
a long time before the altar
where the Lord dwells!
What heavenly sweetness the Lord
allows us to taste and enjoy!

What should we do in the presence
of the Lord in the Eucharist?
We should stay there, not to enjoy
sweetness and consolation,
but to give pleasure to God
by making acts of love, saying:

O my God, I love you
and desire nothing but you.
Grant that I may always love you;
then do with me and all I possess
as you please.

These acts of love,
even when made without sensible delight,
please God greatly.
For good people often have to bear
with distractions and dryness in prayer.

As for distractions,
of these we must not make much account.
It is enough to drive them away
when they come.
Do not on this account leave off prayer.
Saint Francis de Sales said:

If, in meditation, we do nothing
but drive away distractions,
our meditation would be of great profit.

And as for dryness:
This is the greatest pain
for those given to prayer,
for we find ourselves without
any sensible desire of loving God.
Added to this, at times, is the fear
of being separated from God
because of our sins.
There is the feeling
of being in utter darkness
without any way of escape.

At such times let us unite our desolation
with that which Jesus suffered
on the cross.
If we can say nothing else,
it is enough to say,
at least by an act of the will:

My God, I desire to love you.
Have pity on me;
Leave me not.

PRAYER Of one in deep affliction.

*My God, I love you tenderly
though I feel you far away.
I will seek you ceaselessly
lest from you I stray.*

On Lukewarmness

There are two kinds of lukewarmness:
one which can be avoided,
and the other which cannot be avoided.
Unavoidable tepidity is endured
even by good people
because, through natural weakness,
they cannot avoid falling
into some slight fault.
From such defects, none is free.
God himself permits these imperfections
in order to keep us humble.

Such people often find themselves without fervour,
full of weariness and disgust in their devotions
and, at such times of dryness,
they are more apt to fall into many defects.

Let not those who find themselves in this condition
leave off their usual devotions,
nor lose courage, nor believe they have fallen
into lukewarmness.

Let them renew their resolution
to give themselves wholly to God,
and let them have confidence in him
for he will console them.

There is a true
and deplorable lukewarmness
when souls fall into venial sins
which are quite voluntary,
and when they grieve little for them
and take even less care to avoid them.
Saint Teresa used to say:

May God preserve you from wilful sins,
however small.

Unhappy are those souls that make peace with sins,
even when venial!
They will go from bad to worse;
for passion — gaining ground —
will easily blind them;
and when one is blind
it is easy to fall down a precipice.
Let us fear to fall into voluntary tepidity.

Though it is difficult for a lukewarm person to amend, there are remedies:

1. make a resolution to escape from this unhappy condition.
2. remove the occasions of falling.
3. with fervent prayer, ask the strength to come out of this deplorable state.
4. and do not cease praying until delivered from it.

*PRAYER O Lord, have mercy on me.
I find myself without love,
without confidence,
and without good desires.
O my Jesus, abandon me not.
Reach out your hand
and draw me from the depths
of this lukewarmness
into which I have fallen.

O holy Virgin, pray to Jesus
for me.*



*With aridity and temptation
God makes trial of those who love him.*

On Dryness Of Spirit

The true love of God
does not consist in feeling
spiritual consolations,
but in having a resolute desire
to do whatever God wills.
For this reason, we apply ourselves to prayer,
even though we do it without relish
and in the midst of a thousand temptations,
and in weariness of spirit.

With aridity and temptations
God makes trial of those who love him.
Even if the whole life
should be passed in dryness,
let us not leave off prayer.
The time will come when all will be
abundantly rewarded. Saint Teresa

In times of desolation,
the masters of the spiritual life
teach us to persevere in acts
of humility and resignation.
There is no better time for learning
our own helplessness, and our misery,
than when we are dry in prayer,
wearied, distracted and disgusted,
without any sensible fervour,
and even without any apparent desire
of making progress in divine love.
At such times let us say:

Lord, have mercy upon me.
Behold how powerless I am
to make even a good act!
O my God, is it your will
to keep me thus in darkness,
thus in affliction?
May your will be done.
I desire not to be consoled;
it is enough for me to remain here
solely to give you pleasure.

Let us thus persevere in our prayer
for the appointed time.

In prayer, the greatest pain
is not so much dryness, as a darkness,
in which we find ourselves
stripped of all good desires,
and tempted against faith,
and against hope.

Sometimes we experience
violent attacks of temptation,
and such distrust,
that we are in grievous fear
of having lost the grace of God;
and it seems to us,
as if on account of our sins,
God has already driven us away from him,
and abandoned us.

At such times even solitude torments us,
and mental prayer seems to us
a kind of hell.

At such times we must take courage,
and we must know that these fears
of having yielded to temptation or to despair
are indeed fears and the torment of the spirit,
but they are not voluntary acts,
and thus are not sinful.

We must not trouble ourselves in these times
to attain a certainty
that we are in the grace of God.

You want to know and be sure
that God loves you;
but at this time God does not choose
to let you know it!

You want to see,
and God does not will that you should see!
Abandon yourself, therefore,
at such times into the arms
of the divine mercy.

Tell God that you desire nothing
but him and his will,
and fear not.

How dear to God are these acts
of confidence and resignation,
made in the midst
of this terrible darkness.

For forty-one years,
Saint Jane Frances de Chantal
suffered these interior pains.
She seemed to herself to be like
a sick person overwhelmed with diseases,
incapable of turning herself to another side;
dumb, so as not to be able
to explain her sufferings;
and blind, so that she could see no way
of escaping from the depths of her misery.
Saint Francis de Sales used to say of her
that she was like a deaf musician,
who sang most admirably,
but had no pleasure in her voice,
because she could not hear it.

When we find ourselves tried with dryness,
we must not lose courage,
no matter how much we may feel
overwhelmed by darkness,
but we must trust in the blood of Jesus,
and resign ourselves to the divine will,
and let us pray thus:

*PRAYER O Jesus, my hope and only love of my soul
I do not deserve consolation.
My Saviour, I accept every suffering
but take not from me the desire
to love you.
Take from me everything
but not yourself!
Miserable as I am,
I love you more than myself.
And I give myself wholly to you.
Give me strength to be faithful to you.
O holy Virgin, hope of sinners,
I place my confidence in your intercession.
Help me to love my God,
For it is he who created me,
and redeemed me.*

Helps To Holiness — Desire And Resolution

Holiness means loving God.
To love God, we must first
desire to love him.
If we do not want something, we will
certainly go to little trouble
to obtain it!
So it is with love of God.
He that has small wish
to advance in divine love
will become lukewarm
and, continuing this tepidity,
will soon fall totally away from God.

On the other hand,
whoever aspires after holiness,
and makes daily efforts to advance,
will, little by little, attain it.

Saint Teresa assures us:

God leaves no desire
without its reward.

But let us not trust to our own efforts
to advance in holiness,
but hope for all from and through God.
He will give us strength
which, of ourselves, we do not possess.

I can do all things in him
who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13

Many desire holiness
but never take the means to gain it!
They want to do great penance
and practice great prayer,
but such desires are mere fancies.
Saint Teresa often said:

The devil has no dread
of irresolute souls.

Resolutions:

Let us then fix our minds on the ways of God.
Let us resolve to meditate each day
on the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Let us resign ourselves in peace
to God's plan for us.
Let us endeavour, in the time remaining to us,
to give all to God.
Jesus has given himself to us;
may God help us to give ourselves to him.

*PRAYER Jesus, my saviour, help me.
I am resolved truly to love you,
and to leave all to please you.
Help me to free myself from everything
that hinders me from belonging wholly to you
who have loved me so much.
By your prayers, O mother Mary,
which are so powerful with God,
obtain for me this grace
to belong wholly to God.*

I Must One Day Die

Remember, you are dust
and unto dust shall return.

This is the prayer of the Church
on Ash Wednesday: a reminder
that we must one day die.

One person may live a long time,
another a short time
but, sooner or later, for each one,
the day of death will come.

When that day arrives,
possessions and wealth
will be of no concern to us,
nor of any consolation.
That will be the moment
on which our eternity depends.

If we are guided by this thought
throughout our lives,
how unimportant will be
the amassing of wealth.
Rather, we will strive for holiness,
and to be great in that life
which will never end.

If we have faith,
we will often meditate on death,
judgment and eternity;
and we will endeavour to live
only for God.

Let us, therefore, live as pilgrims
and heed Christ's words:

Lay up your treasures
in heaven. Matthew 6:20

Let our comfort be
to have loved Jesus Christ,
and to have endured the trials
of this life for love of him.

Let us ponder often the Lord's words:

Be you also ready
for at what hour you think not
the Son of man will come. Luke 12:40

It is useful, therefore,
to repeat often this prayer:

PRAYER Preparation For Death

*Behold me, my God, ready to embrace the death
you have destined for me. From this moment
I accept it. O my Jesus, I unite the suffering
of my death to the pain and agony which you,
my Saviour, endured in your death.*

*I accept the time, whether it be soon,
or after many years. I accept the manner,
whether with warning or suddenly.
In everything, I resign myself to your will.
Give me strength to suffer all with patience.*

*I thank you, my God, for the gift of faith.
I thank you for many lights and graces
with which you have drawn me to your love.*

*I do not deserve to hear those words:
Well done, good and faithful servant;
enter the joy of your Lord. Matthew 25:21*

*but your death gives me hope
that I shall be admitted to heaven,
to love you eternally, and with all my being.*

*I love you with all my heart;
I love you more than myself.
Grant that I may love you always,
then do with me what you will.*

*Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for me
now and at the hour of my death.
Jesus, Mary and Joseph be with me
at the hour of my death.*

Thy Kingdom Come

If we love God
we will be secure in that love
and know that, in dying,
we go to enjoy him —
to be with him forever
in the kingdom of the blessed.

He who abides in love, abides in God,
and God abides in him. 1 John 4:16

If then we repent of our sins
and have trust in Jesus,
we will not fear death.
If we give ourselves to God
and are ready to lose everything —
even life itself rather than lose him —
then we can be sure
of eternal salvation.

The Son of man came to seek
and to save the lost. Luke 19:10

In so many passages of scripture,
God tells us he desires
not the death of sinners,
but that they be converted, and live.

If the wicked turn away from their sins,
they shall surely live;
they shall not die. Ezekiel 18:21

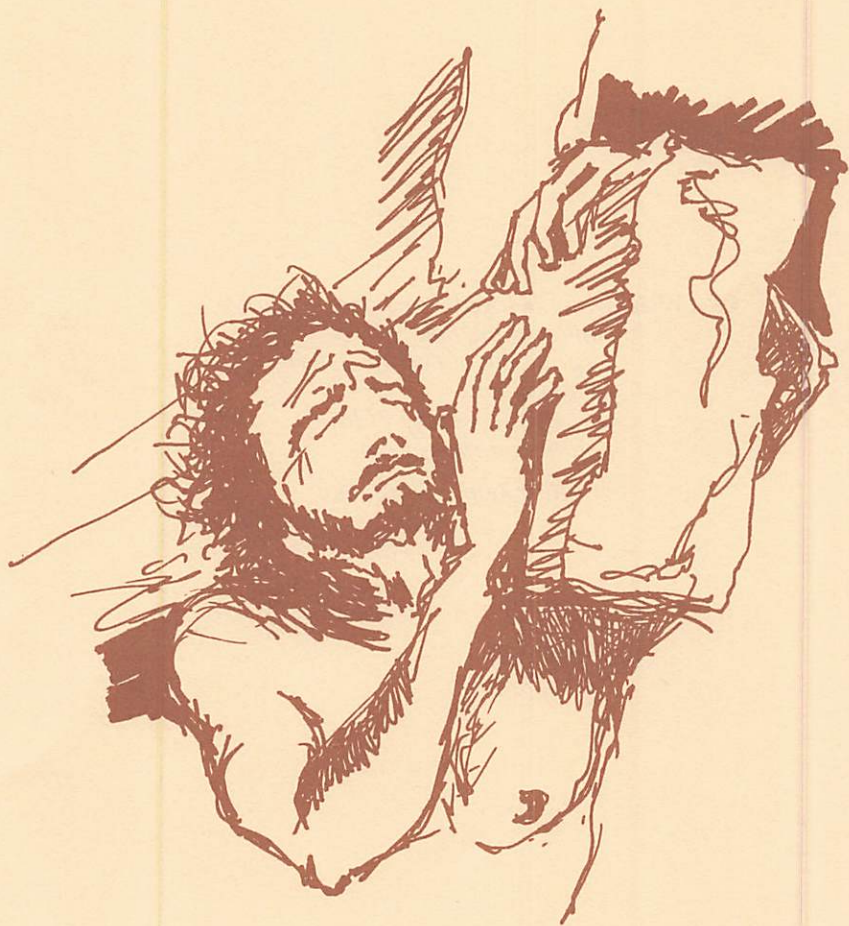
Whoever called upon him
and was overlooked. Sirach 2:10

Moreover, if we hate our sin,
it is a sure sign from God
that we are pardoned.
Jesus taught us to pray:

Thy kingdom come.

If we pray this prayer earnestly,
how can we also fear
the coming of the kingdom?
For then we shall leave this world
of pain and suffering,
and enter our eternal reward.
Then we shall see our God
face to face
in the kingdom of his love.

*PRAYER O my beloved Jesus and my judge,
condemn me not.
Deprive me not of the power
of loving you
who are so worthy of love,
and have so loved me.
O Mary help me, pity me.*



*If the weight of our Cross
seems too much let us
look upon Jesus crucified.*

Behold The Wood Of The Cross

The promise of salvation
is found in the cross.

There we find also
the true love of God.

Jesus died on his cross
for us.

Can we do less
than die on our cross
for him?

This is the way to heaven,
to peace,

to the end of suffering —
if we can accept our cross,
and carry it with good will.

If we cannot do this,
we can never escape
the weight of our cross.

O Lord, may I conform
with your plan for me
saying always with Jesus:

Yea, Father, for such
was thy gracious will. Matthew 11:26

Whenever the weight of any cross
seems very great,
let these words comfort us:

I consider that the sufferings
of this present time are not worth
comparing with the glory
that is to be revealed to us. Romans 8:18

If the weight of our cross
seems too much,
let us look upon Jesus crucified
and pray to him for strength.
Let us say with Jesus:

Shall I not drink the cup
which the Father has given me? John 18:11

If we allow ourselves
to be ruled by divine love,
we will seek only God.
To know that we are pleasing
to our God
will be enough.

*PRAYER O my Jesus, how consoling the words:
Turn to me,
and I will turn to you. Zechariah 1:3*

*I am confident you will not reject me,
if I desire to love you,
for you are ready to embrace me, saying:
I will turn to you.*

*Receive me then into your grace,
and make me know the great good you are,
and the great love you bear me —
so I may no more leave you.*

*O my Jesus, pardon me.
My beloved, pardon me.
My love, pardon me.*

*Give me your love,
and do with me what you will.
Let the whole world come and offer me its goods.
I protest I desire you alone, nothing more.*

*O my mother, recommend me to your Son.
He gives you whatever you ask.
In you I trust.*



*If anyone would come after me
let them take up their cross daily
and follow me.*

The Cross Is Our Salvation

Let us reflect on these words of Jesus:

If anyone would come after me,
let them deny themselves
and take up their cross daily,
and follow me. Luke 9:23

He says: 'If anyone would come after me'.
He does not say 'to me', but 'after me'.
He wishes us to walk the same road
of thorns and sufferings
as he walked even unto death.

He says 'Let them take up'.
To bear our cross with merit,
we must bear it willingly —
it avails little to carry it by compulsion.

He says: 'their cross'.
To call our sufferings a 'cross'
actually renders them sweet.
In times of consolation, we promise
to endure all for love of him;
yet we cannot endure a headache,
the neglect of a friend,
the ill-temper of a relative.

He says: 'daily'.
Some embrace the cross at first
but, when it lasts long,
they say: 'I can bear it no more'.
We must bear it daily
and as long as God wills.

He says: 'Let them deny themselves'.
Behold, salvation and perfection
consist in these few words:
'Deny yourself'.

He says: 'and follow me'.
We are to walk
in the footprints of Jesus
even unto death.

For to this have you been called
because Christ also suffered for you,
leaving you an example,
that you should follow
in his steps. 1 Peter 2:21

It is sometimes delightful
to hear people speak of peace,
of prayer, of love of God,
but we are not so ready to hear
anyone speak of crosses and suffering.
How dear to Jesus is a soul
which suffers and loves him.
O divine gift!
Gift above every other gift:
to love in suffering
and to suffer in loving.

It is easy to love God
when we are enjoying
spiritual sweetness.
But if this ceases,
and we lose sight of God,
if he deprives us of our
accustomed spiritual consolations,
do we leave off our prayer,
our communion with God,
abandon ourselves to sadness,
or lukewarmness,
or seek comfort
in worldly diversions?
If we do this, we know
that we love ourselves
more than we love God.

But if we love him with a pure love,
and solely because he is worthy of love,
then we will endure
the dryness, the weariness
which we experience,
because God wills it for us
at this time.

Saint Francis de Sales says:

Jesus is as worthy of love
in desolation
as in consolation.

Let us recollect
that in suffering
we suffer for his love,
who has suffered for us.

PRAYER *Eternal Father, Jesus has promised
that whatever we ask you in his name,
you will give it to us.
Behold I ask this of you:
Give me the grace to endure with patience
the pains of this life.
Jesus, pardon me the times
I have not been willing to have patience
in the trials that have come to me.
Give me your love,
for that will give me strength
to suffer for love of you.
Deprive me of everything —
of earthly good, of relations,
of friends, health of body,
of every consolation,
deprive me even of life —
but not of your love.
O most holy Virgin,
obtain for me a love for Jesus Christ
that is constant till death.*



Love is as strong as death.