

# “LOVE ALONE COUNTS”

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## PREFACE

I like to think that the articles in this book are the brief summary of all the other books and articles that I have written. For this reason I have placed them first among my writings even though the material contained in this book was written later than some of my other writings

Most of the chapters in this book appeared as short articles in the N. Z. Marist Messenger. The introduction, 'Love Alone Counts', was the first article written. It can serve as a general introduction to the whole book.

An effort is made to tease out the implications of the Introduction in the first twelve chapters of the book. I kept the chapters short so as to suit the readers of the Marist Messenger. These twelve chapters are interconnected and they are intended as a blueprint for leading the full Christian life. Because they fit together and are interconnected I thought it better to call these twelve chapters 'Book I'.

The next sixteen chapters contain, for the most part, further reflections on love. They do not have the same cohesion as the chapters in Book I. For that reason I called these sixteen chapters 'Book II'. However, most of the topics treated are dealt with in the context of love.

Finally, most of what I have written in both books is implicitly contained in the following quotation from Vatican II.

"The Lord Jesus sent the Holy Spirit on all people to inspire them from within to love God with their whole heart and their whole soul, with all their mind and with all their strength and that they might love one another as Christ loved them." Vatican 11, Document on the Church, n.40

## INTRODUCTION

### LOVE ALONE COUNTS

Paul tells us that he could give all his goods to feed the poor and deliver his body to be burnt but if he had no love it would profit him nothing (1 Cor. 13). The day before St. Therese died, her sister, Celine, asked her for a final message. The dying saint replied, "I have said everything....LOVE ALONE MATTERS." St. John of the Cross assures us that "a little of this pure love is more precious to God, more precious to the soul and of more benefit to the church, even though it seems to be doing nothing, than all other works put together." When Vatican II deals with the call of all Christians to holiness it identifies holiness with loving God with our whole being and loving our neighbour as Jesus loved his disciples.

The church has always believed that Mary and Joseph are the greatest of all the saints. But Mary and Joseph seem to have been very ordinary people. It is clear from the gospel that they did nothing very spectacular in the town of Nazareth. The people of the town dismissed Jesus with the words, "isn't this the son of Joseph?" "Isn't Mary his mother?" In what did their holiness consist if they never did very much? Undoubtedly it was God's work but they cooperated with him and loved him with their whole heart. They heard the word of God and kept it. Furthermore, Mary and Joseph, because of their love, contributed more to the growth of the church than did any of the apostles. The whole point in this first section is to demonstrate that love alone counts.

### WHAT IS LOVE?

In our culture we generally associate love with a pleasant feeling. If this feeling is absent we assume that love is absent. We also often identify love with being nice to others and making life pleasant for them. Again love is something more than a relationship with our neighbour. Love is total unselfish commitment to pleasing God. Jesus tells us to love God with our whole heart, with our whole soul, with all our minds and all our strength. He calls this the first and greatest commandment. Love, then, is above all a loving personal relationship with God. But it includes giving ourselves to our neighbour because this pleases God. Commitment to God means that we have to search at all times for his will in our lives, and implement it so as to please him. In practice one of the chief ways of loving God will be to love the neighbour in the way that God wills and in order to please God, not for our own satisfaction. We love the neighbour truly when we love him/her in the way that Jesus loved his disciples. He made the greatest possible sacrifice on their behalf by laying down his life for them. He sought primarily their highest good, viz. their eternal salvation. Thirdly, Jesus laid down his life for the highest good of his enemies. Finally, he did all this because it was pleasing to the Father. If we want to know what love is Jesus is our model.

### AFFECTIVE AND EFFECTIVE LOVE

There are two dimensions to love, the affective and the effective. If a man assures his wife that he loves her but continues to do things that displease her, he is not being real. His love must show itself in deeds. Our love of God must show itself in loving action. If I go

to mass and sing out God's praises and assure him of my love and then spend the rest of the week offending him by my life, my love is not real because my affective love is not reduced to loving action. Jesus tells us that it is no use saying, "Lord, Lord...." unless we do the will of the Lord. But the opposite is also true. Paul tells us, "I may distribute all my goods to feed the poor" and do many other good works but if I have no love, that is a desire to please God, it profits me nothing. It should be clear from this that prayer and good works, affective and effective love, must go together in our lives. They must not be separated. When genuine affective love is present it will manifest itself in deeds. The deeds in turn increase the affection. This holds for human love and divine love alike. There is a danger of reductionism in our relation with God. Prayer and meditation are often practiced today but we hear little about denying ourselves so as to please God in all our choices and actions. But our good actions are of little value unless they proceed from love.

### HAVE WE FORGOTTEN THE PRIMACY OF LOVE?

If love alone matters one would expect that Christians would be totally focused on love. But are they? It seems to me that love is largely forgotten, historical studies, scientific studies, biblical exegesis, social studies, specialisation in all branches of theology abound, but I have never heard of anyone specialising in love. I have never seen a seminar on love advertised. My formation was mainly intellectual and not explicitly oriented to love. Again a tremendous amount of time and energy is devoted to discussions, meetings, committees, finance, buildings, but the purpose for which all these things exist is seldom mentioned. The whole structure of the church, her hierarchy, her seminaries, religious institutes, her laws, etc. exist solely to foster love. Yet we seldom explicitly and consciously focus on love. Are we forgetting the primary purpose of Christianity, the primary obligation of the individual Christian? Surely, when the consistory of Cardinals met in Rome some years ago, and reminded us of the need to re-discover the church's vocation to holiness, they were talking above all of our need to re-discover our vocation to love. Let us repeat once again the words of St. Therese, "LOVE ALONE MATTERS".

### LOVE ALONE COUNTS

Love alone counts because the whole visible church, with its hierarchy, law, preaching and sacraments exists to lead all humankind to love God. The question we wish to address here is, how do we form ourselves and others so that, in practice, all our energies are directed to loving God? "Without a vision a nation perishes (Pr.29, 18)". So also individual Christians need a vision. Otherwise they will perish or at least fail to love God wholeheartedly. Our job as Christians is not so much to formulate personal visions as to internalise the vision that Jesus left us. He told us to love God with our whole being; this is his vision. How do I internalise this vision so that I am totally committed to it? We offer the following suggestions with a view to internalising the vision of Jesus.

### NEED FOR MOTIVATION

We will not commit ourselves unreservedly to the love of God unless we are strongly motivated. This motivation is needed to make the initial commitment but this is not sufficient. In order to persevere in our commitment we will need ongoing motivation. Motivation can come from very many sources. We suggest the following helps. There are many other sources of motivation that we cannot mention in a short article.

### SCRIPTURE

“Listen, O Israel, the Lord, your God, is one God. You must love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength. Let the words I enjoin on you today stay in your heart. You shall tell them to your children and keep on telling them, when you are sitting at home, when you are out and about, when you are lying down and standing up. You must fasten them on your heart as a sign and on your forehead as a headband. You must write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates”

(Deut. 6, 4+).

Scripture is telling the Jews that they must get this commandment into their minds and hearts. They must internalise it and never forget it, think of it, value it and live it always and everywhere. Observant Jews recited the above commandment morning and evening and wore it on their foreheads. This helped them to internalise it and live it. Our spiritual lives would be greatly enriched if we kept this commandment always before us.

## LEARNING FROM SECULAR METHODS OF EDUCATION

Let us suppose that a young man wants to become a medical doctor. He has a clearly defined goal in life. He will have to go to medical school, attend lectures, study prescribed books, do personal study, write papers, get tips from doctors, listen to cassettes, watch videos, attend medical seminars and do practical work in hospitals. All these activities, reading and study are focused on a single goal, becoming a good medical doctor. Focusing all one's time and energy on the goal is the key to success. Simultaneously with aiming at a definite target the student will have to forego other interests. He might like to study law, or farming, or accountancy but all these must be put aside if he is going to be a good doctor.

If we are going to love God with our whole heart we will have to imitate the medical student, just mentioned. Like him we need a clear vision of what we want to achieve. Then we go for it with every fibre of our being. We keep the goal constantly before our eyes as recommended in Deuteronomy. We organise our time so as to achieve the goal of total love of God. We distance ourselves from other interests. Our reading is focused constantly on the goal. This means reading books that stimulate us to love God. If we can find a school of charity we attend it. Ideally seminaries, parishes, religious houses are expected to be schools of love that lead us effectively to the fullness of charity. In practice the purpose of their existence is often overlooked. Constant focusing on the target is important. As we said already we can learn from our medical student to attend lectures on charity, to read books that will stimulate us to charity, to use cassettes and videos that stir up our love and to practice prayer consistently. The interior guide, the Holy Spirit, will speak to our hearts and empower us on the journey. God hungers for us more than we hunger for him. Our main role is to cooperate with God, living in us.

## CONVERSION OF IGNATIUS LOYOLA

The conversion of Ignatius serves as an example for all Christians. Ignatius was a soldier and was wounded in battle in the north of Spain. He was taken off the battlefield with a broken leg. He had to remain in a primitive hospital for five months until his leg was finally healed. Initially, Ignatius found the hospital boring. He was lying on his bed most of the day with nothing to do. He was a worldly man with little interest in growing in the love of God. In his boredom he asked for some light reading so as to pass the time. They could only offer him as reading a book on the lives of the saints and a life of Christ. Reluctantly he began to read these holy books so as to pass the time. It wasn't long before he felt himself getting mildly interested in the exploits of the saints. But he was still very much in love with the world. However, further down the track he began asking himself, "why couldn't I do what Blessed Dominic did and what Francis did?" He was now well on the road to God. Eventually he got

to the stage where he gave himself totally without reserve to the Lord. In other words he was determined to love him with his whole being for the rest of his life.

Given similar conditions, the same thing could happen to any Christian as happened to Ignatius. If a Christian is exposed only to the word of God, day after day, and if other words and values no longer enter the mind and heart, then any Christian, with God's grace, will end up totally committing themselves to God. Why then doesn't the church abound with people like Ignatius? One reason surely is that we get sidetracked by materialistic values and the word of God is choked and bears no fruit.



## CHAPTER I

### WE NEED A VISION FOR OUR LIVES

“Without a vision a nation perishes” (Prov. 29, 18).

In this first article I would like to propose a vision for our lives. We all need some worthwhile goal in our lives towards which we can direct all our energies. Having a meaningful purpose in life keeps a person happy and healthy.

In searching for a vision I will use the insights of two great doctors of the church. St. Augustine perceived that all humans were restless and unfulfilled. This led him to utter the famous words. “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts rest not until they rest in you”. St. John of the Cross offers us a marvelous insight into human nature when he writes, "the soul is an infinite capacity for God."

Both saints put their finger on our deepest need, which is our need to possess God. If the soul is "an infinite capacity for God", then only God can fill it. If we fill our heart and soul with things less than God we will still be unfulfilled.

Since we desperately need God to fill our emptiness it logically follows that we should love and desire him with our whole heart.

### GOD’S PLAN FOR EACH PERSON

“THE LORD JESUS SENT THE HOLY SPIRIT ON ALL PEOPLE TO INSPIRE THEM FROM WITHIN TO LOVE GOD WITH THEIR WHOLE HEART AND THEIR WHOLE SOUL, WITH ALL THEIR MIND AND WITH ALL THEIR STRENGTH AND THAT THEY MIGHT LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS CHRIST LOVED THEM.”

- Vatican 11 document on the Church, n.40

When reading the documents of Vatican 11 this statement made a profound impression on me. What really hit me was the fact that Jesus is giving his Holy Spirit to ALL people. Until I read that I tended to think that only Christians and people of good will had the Holy Spirit. But it seems that people of bad will also have the Holy Spirit who, presumably, is trying to bring about their conversion. This was definitely an eye-opener for me.

But the above quotation is extremely important from another point of view. It spells out most clearly the Holy Spirit’s agenda for every human being. He wants to lead each and all of us to perfect love of God and of neighbor. Therefore, we can say without hesitation that the primary vocation of every human being is to love God with one’s whole being and to love the neighbor as Jesus loved his disciples.

Many people may be very far from the fullness of love, but, whether they are far or near, the Holy Spirit wishes to lead them on, step by step, to perfect love. This is the vocation not only of nuns, priests and religious; it is everyone’s vocation. There are six billion people and the Holy Spirit is trying to lead each one to love God in six billion different ways.

When it comes to formulating a vision for our lives our first concern must be to internalize God’s vision for us. To love God is not one option among many that we are free to ignore if we feel like it. We were created to love God and if we fail to do so we are utter failures no matter how successful we may be in the eyes of our friends. On the other hand those who love God with their whole being are a huge success even though they may appear insignificant to our jaundiced eyes. St. Therese puts this well, "what God wants is our love, not our works", certainly not works without love.

Another very important doctrine, embodied in the above quotation, is the consoling truth that the Holy Spirit is active within us. He is inspiring us, leading us and guiding us from

within. He knows where he is taking us; he wants to lead us to perfect love. He wants to help us on the way. Without his help we can do nothing but he requires our free cooperation. Since we enjoy the Spirit's help we can face the challenge of loving God with great confidence.

The fact that the Holy Spirit is leading us to perfect love places a tremendous responsibility on our shoulders. If the Holy Spirit lives in me, if he has a certain agenda for me and if he requires my cooperation in fulfilling his agenda I have no option except to respond as well as I can to what he desires. If I am to live out my human vocation properly I will have to tune into the Spirit at every stage of my journey. I am never free to do as I like; I must always do what the Spirit likes.

The above quotation is also a wonderful guideline for recognising the Spirit's guidance in my life. If he is leading me to love God then he will produce in me the desire to please God. If he is leading me to love my neighbour he will stir up in me the desire, in so far as I can, to try and bring about the neighbour's true good. This is what love of neighbour is about. The point I am making is that we can often be reasonably sure what the Spirit desires of us when the church assures us that he is leading us to love God and our neighbour.

In subsequent articles some of the above spiritual truths will be dealt with in greater detail.

To sum up this first article: We all need a vision for our lives. This gives one's life meaning and brings some measure of fulfilment. But before we start thinking of particular vocations we must take very seriously the primary vocation to love God, which belongs to every human being. This is spelt out in the quotation from Vatican II, given above. Most of the articles in this series will try to tease out what is involved in loving God with one's whole being.

## CHAPTER 2

### WHAT IS THE LOVE OF GOD?

"I always do the things that please the Father" (Jn. 8, 29).

In the first article we pointed out that every human being is bound to journey towards love of God and neighbour and that the Holy Spirit is helping each one on the journey.

The first question a thinking person will ask is – what do you mean by the love of God? Some time ago an Anglican minister, who was a devout Christian, asked me this question. It made me think.

There is a problem with the word 'love'. It can have twenty different meanings, depending on the context in which it is used. Running through the various meanings there is nearly always the idea of a pleasant feeling. As for me when I hear a sermon about loving God and people the first thing that enters my mind is that I must have a feeling of love. Often, due to various factors I have little feeling. Occasionally I may have strong feelings. In this case I tend to think that I have a great love of Jesus and of people.

Love of God and of neighbour is primarily and essentially a commitment of the will. It may or may not be accompanied by feeling. Jesus, on the cross, showed the highest love of God and of human beings but he had no feelings of love. Very often our love will also be without feeling.

In order to answer the question – what is the love of God? – I offer the following definition and I will comment on it.

**LOVE OF GOD IS THE GOD-GIVEN UNSELFISH COMMITMENT TO PLEASING GOD IN ALL OUR DELIBERATE DESIRES AND CHOICES.**

Let us note first that this definition only covers the love of God. A different definition will be needed for love of the neighbour.

Love of God is **GOD-GIVEN**. Only God can give us the grace to commit ourselves to pleasing him. The desire to please God and commitment to pleasing him in our life choices is one of the most precious graces that the Holy Spirit can give us. We must never imagine that we can love him by our own efforts.

Love of God is **UNSELFISH**. St. Paul says that love does not seek its own advantage (1 Cor. 13, 4). If we desire to get something out of our love it is not God that we love but ourselves. Love seeks only to please the Beloved. Jesus, the perfect model of true love, tells us that he always does what pleases the Father. He didn't seek his own comfort but faced the cross because it pleased the Father. The martyrs followed in his footsteps. They offered their lives so as to please God, despising their dreadful sufferings. If we are to live a life of love we too will have to forget about what pleases ourselves and think only of what pleases God. Love is **UNSELFISH**.

Love of God is a **COMMITMENT**. This means that, led by the Spirit, we take our human vocation very seriously. After much reflection, prayer and God's help we definitively decide that we are going to try and please God in all the big and little decisions of our life. Such a commitment is a serious definitive decision that we try to live out day by day, never withdrawing our resolution. We are supposed to make this kind of commitment every time we receive the Eucharist. We probably do it often during fervent prayer. We will have to feed and nourish this commitment continually.

A commitment **TO PLEASE GOD**. I think that it helps to use the word "please" because it is less liable to misunderstanding than the word "love". It was for this reason that I chose the text of John (8, 29) as a heading for this article. In that text Jesus says, "I always do the things that please the Father". When we love someone we want to please that person. Jesus loved his Father and as a consequence wanted to please him at all times. Doubtless,

Jesus was led by the Spirit. We should expect the Spirit to lead us in a similar way. "The love of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us" (Rom. 5, 5). The desire to please God is a wonderful sign of the action of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Perfect love requires that our desire to please God be unselfish. We are not seeking any advantage for ourselves. St. Bernard points out that "love is its own reward".

IN ALL MY DELIBERATE DESIRES AND CHOICES: Love is within us and is usually not seen by those around us. If we deliberately desire or choose to do a good action so as to please God we are exercising the love of God. Underlying all external actions are deliberate desires and choices. Both are free activities of the human will. It is with the will, empowered by the Holy Spirit, that we love God. Feeling may or may not accompany our voluntary choices.

Those who wish to love God with their whole heart will have to monitor their desires at all times. All kinds of desires, good, bad and indifferent, are experienced in our conscious mind. The will usually has the power to indulge in these desires or to reject them. If one is committed to loving God he/she can only deliberately desire what pleases God. Other desires must be rejected. St. Francis de Sales says: "To love and desire anything except in God and for God is to love God less." This means that a life of love requires that we love and desire all things only to the extent that God wills.

The definition of love, given here, is more a definition of a life of love at its best. We may feel that we are far from this kind of love. But this need not discourage us. Rome wasn't built in a day. We are on a journey to the fullness of love and we have an infallible guide, the Holy Spirit, to help us and empower us on the way. What is important is that we keep on travelling. If we do fall let us get up again and continue on the journey. It has been said that a good Christian is one who falls and gets up again, who falls and gets up again and who falls and gets up again.

## CHAPTER 3

### INTERNALISING THE VISION

“If love (of God), as good seed, is to grow and bring forth fruit in the soul each one of the faithful must willingly hear the word of God and with the help of his grace act to fulfil his will.”

-Vatican 11 Document on the Church, N.42.

“Hear, O Israel, the Lord, our God, is one only God. You shall love the Lord, your God with your whole heart... Let the words I enjoin on you today stay in your hearts. You shall tell them to your children and keep on telling them, when you are sitting at home, when you are out and about, when you are lying down and when you are standing up. You shall fasten them on your head as a sign and on your forehead as a headband. You must write them on the doorposts of your house and of your gates.” (Deut. 6, 4 – 9).

We have seen in previous articles that all human beings need a vision for their lives. The Holy Spirit has a vision for each one of us. What we really need to do is to tune into the Spirit who is leading us to love God with our whole heart. Ideally this should be our vision since it is the primary purpose of our existence.

But there is a problem. Most Christians are aware that we are created to love God. But this truth has not penetrated into their hearts. It has not been taken seriously in practice. We all need to be alerted to our primary vocation. The saints made love their aim (I Cor. 14, 1). This was how they differed from us. They loved God with their whole being.

The two quotations, that I have given as an introduction to this article, stress the need to internalize God’s word and to hear it in depth. Unless we take it seriously it will produce no fruit. Deuteronomy contains the clue to internalizing God’s word. We have to be exposed to it again and again and again.

#### LEARNING FROM SECULAR METHODS OF EDUCATION

We have already mentioned in the Introduction how we can learn from secular practices. Allow us to repeat here what we have already said.

Let us suppose that a young man wants to become a medical doctor. He has a clearly defined goal in life. To achieve this goal he will have to go to a medical school, attend lectures, study prescribed books, do personal study, write papers, get tips from other doctors, listen to cassettes, watch videos, attend medical seminars and do practical work in hospitals. All these activities, reading and study are focused on a single goal – becoming a good medical doctor. Focusing all one’s time and energy is the key to success. Simultaneously with aiming at a definite target, the student will have to forego other interests. He might like to study law, farming or accountancy but all these will have to be put aside if he is going to be a good doctor.

If we are going to love God with our whole heart we will have to imitate the medical student, just mentioned. Like him we need a clear vision of what we want to achieve. Then we go for it with every fiber of our being. We keep the goal constantly before our eyes as recommended in Deuteronomy. We organize our time so as to achieve the goal of total love of God. We distance ourselves from other interests. Our reading is focused constantly on the target. This means reading books that stimulate us to love God. If we can find a school of charity we attend it. Ideally seminaries, parishes and religious houses all exist to lead their members to the love of God. In practice the purpose of their existence is often lost to sight. Constant focusing on the goal is important. As we said already we can learn from our medical student, to attend lectures on charity, to read books that stimulate us to love, to use cassettes and videos that stir up charity and to practice prayer consistently. The interior guide, the Holy Spirit, will speak to our hearts and inspire us on the journey. He hungers for our love more

than we hunger for God. All the above suggestions are made so as to cooperate better with the Spirit in our hearts. `

## INTEGRATING OUR PRIMARY AND SECONDARY VOCATIONS

When ordering their lives towards the love of God, it will be necessary for Christians to integrate their primary vocation with their secondary vocation. A person may be a mother, a father, a nurse, a worker etc. In the ideal situation people who love God perfectly will fulfil their secondary vocation all the better because they will do it in the way that pleases God. All things will be done in love. We are not saying that it is easy to achieve perfect integration. St. Thomas More seems to have achieved it. He gave God first place in his life. He loved the king, his wife and family in the way that God wanted him to love them.

The danger for most people is that their secondary vocation takes on an independent life of its own. It consumes all one's energies and is not properly integrated with one's love for God. Indeed it can happen that God is forgotten in peoples' lives.

To sum up this article – unless we focus our attention on God's word and on other values only to the extent that they are necessary to live our vocation we will not internalize God's word in practice. If we do not internalize his word we will not tune into the Holy Spirit's agenda for us and we will not grow in love. Unless one practices focused spiritual reading, study and prayer and exercises strict discipline in the use of the communications' media it is extremely unlikely that a 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian will be able to grow in the love of God to any great extent.

## CHAPTER 4

### MOTIVATION

In the first article I pointed out how the Holy Spirit is leading us to perfect love. In order to commit ourselves to a vision of this kind we need to be very strongly motivated. Our motivation will have to be kept alive at every stage of the journey. We are motivated by values.

We spoke in the last article about internalizing the values of Jesus and above all internalizing the supreme value of loving God. Values will not motivate us unless they are internalized. If we have internalized moral values due to our formation and the practice of virtue we will tend to act morally. If, with the help of the Holy Spirit, pleasing God has become our supreme value, it will govern our whole inner and outer life. It will urge us to be vigilant over our desires and choices so as to please God. It will stimulate us to practice the moral virtues so as to please God. It will govern how we use our time, our money and other resources. We will want to follow Paul's advice – "let all things be done in love". In a word if the desire to please God takes a deep hold of us it will revolutionize our whole life.

To provide ongoing motivation for the practice of love we need to keep on practicing it, reading about it, meditating, perhaps writing about it and above all learning about it in prayer. Since the Holy Spirit pours love into our hearts he is the one who will give us the desire to please God. He will urge us on to seek God's will at all times and to implement it so as to please him. If our whole life is ordered solely to love God and everything else for his sake the motivation to practice love will be kept alive by the Holy Spirit. We can never doubt his love for us.

We will now examine in more detail motives and desires

### MOTIVES AND DESIRES

Love of God is largely a matter of the motivation underlying our actions. Therefore, a life of love demands that we be constantly aware of the motives and desires that prompt our choices. From the moral and spiritual angle I like to distinguish four kinds of motivation and desire.

#### 1: SINFUL MOTIVATION AND DESIRE:

Some motives generate sinful desires and I sin if I yield to such desires. If, moved by hatred, I deliberately desire to hurt another, I sin. Notice how the motive generates the desire. Internalized values, both true and false, will also generate desires. It is up to us to monitor our desires and refuse consent to those that are sinful. We only sin when we deliberately desire what is sinful. To reject sinful desires is an act of virtue. Sinful desires are more commonly called "temptations."

#### 2: NATURAL MOTIVATION AND DESIRES

My choices are naturally motivated when I follow my likes and dislikes, without caring whether they are reasonable or not, without caring whether I am doing God's will or not. Nearly all motivation, that inclines us to selfishness, can be reduced to likes and dislikes. These likes and dislikes generate desires. These desires should be discerned by reason and should not be willed unless they are reasonable. To reason correctly one needs to have the mind of Christ.

When living at the natural level I simply do what I like and avoid what I dislike. I do not usually perceive my choices as sinful. I feel that it is morally O.K to act as I do. But perhaps it is not morally O.K. God has given us reason and we should be guided by it in our

moral choices and not by feelings. All deliberate choices springing solely from natural likes and dislikes have very little value in God's sight and are often sinful. Paul would say that both sinful and natural desires spring from the "flesh".

3: MORAL MOTIVATION

At this level I desire to do what is morally right. Whether I like it or not, I try to make the most reasonable choice in the situation. I choose, as best I can, according to right reason, enlightened by faith. When I act at this level I am practicing what I call "implicit" charity. I am not necessarily thinking of God but I desire to do the morally right thing.

In practice all who sincerely try to do what is right, are morally motivated.

4: BEING MOTIVATED BY LOVE:

The highest level of motivation occurs when I consciously choose some action so as to please God. I call this 'explicit' charity.

In this case I recognize some course of action as God's will and I choose to carry it out so as to please him. If we have internalized the value that only love of God counts, we will want to please him. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. If we are habitually committed to pleasing God the Holy Spirit will urge us very frequently to put this commitment into practice. St. Therese found all kinds of ways of practicing love.

As one advances in love the conscious desire to please God becomes increasingly the main desire underlying our actions. Jesus said, "I always do the things that please the Father" (Jn. 8, 29). Presumably Jesus consciously sought to please his Father in all his deliberate desires and choices.

Conclusion: Internalized values, good and bad, motivate us. Sometimes an internalized value will generate a desire. It is up to us to monitor our desires and only implement those that are reasonable. Christian formation should be geared towards impressing on the minds and hearts of Christians moral values, and above all the value of love. 'Without love all the virtues are a heap of stones.' – Francis de Sales.

We often have mixed motives and unconscious motives. But if love is fully alive the main desire of our life will increasingly be to please God. This desire will tend to increasingly control all our other desires. "Let all your acts be done in love" (I Cor. 16, 14).



## CHAPTER 5

### BEING CONVINCED THAT GOD LOVES ME

“We know and believe in the love that God has for us (I Jn. 4, 16).”

We spoke in the last article about the motivation needed to continue loving God throughout life. Motivation comes from having internalized moral values, especially the value of the love of God.

But there is one motive for loving God that outweighs all other motives put together. It is the amazing fact that God loves us so much and has proved this love in so many ways. One could quote innumerable places in Scripture that tell us of his love for us. The whole bible is the story of God’s love for his people. The passion and death of Jesus, the gift of the Eucharist, the divine indwelling all cry out to us – “behold how I love you.”

We are writing these articles for people who desire to love God with their whole heart. We should remember that such a desire is not produced in our hearts solely by our own efforts. If we experience this desire it is only because God has first loved us and by his Holy Spirit has implanted this desire in our hearts. “We only love him because he first loved us” (I Jn. 4, 19).

There is no doubt about God’s love for each of us. But unless I am personally convinced of his personal love for me the doctrine of his universal love will leave me unmoved. I would like to deal with two aspects of God’s love for me.

- 1: The need to be convinced of his personal love for me and also for every human being
- 2: How do I acquire this conviction?

**THE NEED TO BE CONVINCED THAT GOD LOVES ME**     If I am convinced that God loves me, this gives me my deepest identity. I should no longer have an identity crisis. I may not have many natural gifts; I may have less than those around me, but, if God loves me as I am, this gives me great value. I don’t have to carry around a low self-image. I am inferior to no one except to those whom God loves more.

If God loves me it logically follows that I must be precious in his eyes; otherwise he wouldn’t love me. Therefore, I must be precious in my own eyes and love myself in a healthy way.

If God loves us we are very secure. God will be at our side to support and sustain us and bring us victory no matter what trials encompass us. We can even face death with confidence in God’s great love.

Again it is only a small step from being convinced that God loves us to the conviction that he loves all men and women in the same way that he loves us. And if he loves all people it logically follows that I must love them also.

Being convinced that God loves us is at the root of the whole Christian life. How can I thank him sincerely unless I first of all have an unshakeable faith in his love for me? How can I pray unless I am convinced that the Father loves me and is only too willing to give what is good for me. When I ask the Father for what I think I need and he doesn’t grant it, how can I accept his refusal, unless I am convinced that God’s apparent refusal is really an act of love? Every act of faith in God and of love of God flows out from the deep unshakeable conviction that God loves me. This is not just one doctrine of our faith among others. It is absolutely essential and fundamental. It lies at the root of our faith, hope and charity. Intellectual assent to this dogma is not enough; it is just a beginning. So that faith in God’s love for me may influence my whole spiritual life it must be a deeply held conviction. This conviction must be nourished and deepened all through life. Out of this conviction will flow a deep affective and effective love of God. Out of this conviction will come the energy to return love for love, to

love God with our whole heart. Out of this conviction will come a loving communion in prayer with one whom we know loves us.

#### HOW TO ACQUIRE THE CONVICTION THAT GOD LOVES ME

This conviction is a wonderful gift of God. But there can be no doubt that he wishes to bestow it on us. It is inconceivable that a God who gives us his only Son and the Holy Spirit would not also give us the conviction that he loves us.

For our part we must prepare ourselves to receive his gifts by spiritual reading and prayerful meditation. St. Thomas says that "nothing is so calculated to stir up our conviction that God loves us as the contemplation of the horrible sufferings he endured out of love for us. One of the hymns we sing has the words: "Love so amazing so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

Who can prayerfully contemplate the crucifix without being deeply affected by Jesus' prodigal love?

The fact that God loves me is a doctrine of my faith to which I must give unquestioning assent. A powerful way of keeping alive and nourishing our faith in his love for us is to thank him in all situations. This makes sense because in all circumstances, no matter how painful they are, God is working for my good, often in ways that I do not understand. "It is right and just always and everywhere to give thanks." Let us thank God always whether we feel thankful or not. If we are suffering we will not feel thankful but we can still thank God because we believe and know that always he is doing the most loving thing in our regard. "Always be thankful" (Col. 3, 15).

## CHAPTER 6

### GOD DWELLS IN ME

“Do you not know that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit?” (I Cor. 6, 19).

“Those who love me will keep my word and my Father will love them and we will visit them and make our home in them (Jn. 14, 23).”

“The risen Christ dwells in you; love him there, adore him there” (Jn. of the Cross, Sp. Cant., 1, 8).

These articles are addressed to people who wish to love God with their whole heart. If we have this ambition it is natural for us to ask – "where is God so that I can love him?" St. John of the Cross asked himself this question. "Where is the Beloved?" His answer was that the Risen Christ dwells in us; "love him there and adore him there." He is truly within us but he is "hidden" and we must reach out to him in the darkness of faith.

St. Augustine laments in his Confessions that he made the mistake of seeking God outside himself and he got trapped in material things. Later he found him within himself.

#### IMPORTANCE OF THE DIVINE INDWELLING

The importance of the divine indwelling cannot be exaggerated. We cannot live by faith if God doesn't first live within us, moving us to faith. We cannot love God and our neighbors unless the love of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us (Rom. 5, 5). We cannot pray unless the Holy Spirit, living within us, "bears testimony to our spirit that we are the children of God and enables us to say, 'Abba, Father'". We cannot perform any supernatural acts of virtue unless God is within us "who enables us to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2, 13). We will know nothing of spirituality unless we have the Holy Spirit "whom the Father will send in my name. He will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have told you" (Jn. 14, 26). Our spiritual reading will be fruitless unless the inner teacher is at work. Jesus is present in the Eucharistic assembly, in the word, in the minister of the Eucharist, in the consecrated species, in our neighbor, in creation etc. but we will not recognize him unless God, living within us, manifests him to us. Many people had daily contact with Jesus but they failed to recognize him. But Peter recognized him, "you are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16, 17). But Jesus assured him that it was not flesh and blood that revealed that to him but the Father, living within him. God was working in Peter but he did not realize it. So too he can be at work in our hearts without our realizing it. At this point it must be clear that the divine indwelling is at the very heart of Christian spirituality.

#### IMPLICATIONS OF THE DIVINE INDWELLING

1: PRAYER: John of the Cross reminds us that the risen Christ dwells in us and that "we should love him there and adore him there." Fr. John Venard says that this summarizes John's spirituality. In prayer he would have us lovingly recollect ourselves and attend to the Lord in our hearts. St. Francis de Sales also favors this method of prayer. This is not an optional

method of prayer, one amongst many others, but our primary Christian obligation. God wants union with me. I am not free to say, 'No'. If I want to love him with my whole heart I will hasten to do his will and out of love make the necessary sacrifices.

John of the Cross (Living Flame, 4,14) has this to say about the divine indwelling. "It should be known that God dwells secretly in all souls and is hidden in their substance. For otherwise they would not continue to exist. Yet there is a difference, a great difference in his dwelling in them. In some souls he dwells alone and in other souls he does not dwell alone. Abiding in some he is pleased; abiding in others he is displeased. He lives in some as though in his own house, commanding and ruling everything; and in others as though a stranger in a strange house where they do not permit him to give orders or to do anything.

"It is in the soul where less of its own appetites and pleasures dwell where he dwells more alone, more pleased, and more as though in his own house, ruling and governing it. Thus in this soul in which neither any desire, nor other images or forms, nor any affections for created things dwell, the Beloved dwells secretly with an embrace, so much the closer, more intimate and interior, the purer and more detached the soul is from everything other than God. His dwelling is in secret there because the devil cannot reach the place of this embrace nor can our intellect understand how it occurs."

2: MY RESPONSIBILITIES: The Lord lives in my house. I, and no one else, am responsible for making him welcome. I alone can clean up my heart and make it a worthy temple for the Lord. I will need the Lord's help to do this but other people cannot clean my house for me. There are many dimensions to my personal vocation in life but it seems to me that my primary vocation is to love and adore the Lord in my own heart. If I fail in this matter all my other activities will be like dead wood. He hungers for my love; shall I ignore him? He knocks at my door; shall I close my ears to his knocking? God dwells in my heart; shall I introduce ungodly images, ideas and desires into his temple? He is all holy; shall I allow my heart, where he dwells, to be unholy? There is no greater reason for purity of heart than the fact that my heart is God's home. Out of love and respect for him I should do my utmost to keep it spotless.

## CHAPTER 7

### PRAYER AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE LOVE OF GOD

Once again let us recall that we are called to love God with our whole heart. We were created to love God and it is our primary vocation in life. In this article we will reflect on the relation of prayer to the love of God. Let us recall again that love is expressed mainly in the desire to please God.

In order to understand how love and prayer are connected let us use the example of a happy marriage. Let us suppose that the wife visits her husband, whom she loves sincerely, in hospital and sits by his bed for an hour, saying very little, because her husband is too sick to talk. What is she doing? Is she wasting time? Certainly not! Everyone knows that she loves her husband just by sitting with him and silently giving her time to him. Indeed in giving him her time she is giving herself.

A devoted wife loves her husband affectively and effectively. When she sits beside him silently in his illness she is practicing especially affective love. When she works for him, washing clothes and preparing meals etc. she is practicing effective love.

In our relationship with God we also need to practice both affective love and effective love. We practice effective love when we take up various good works so as to please God. We practice affective love when we sit in his presence, praising him, thanking him, adoring him and loving him. We can even love him affectively in silence, without saying anything. The very essence of prayer is to give our time to the Lord. Just as a loving wife spends an hour by the bed of her sick husband, loving him so, when we give our time to the Lord we give ourselves to him and practice affective love. Externally we are doing nothing. We may seem to be wasting time. But in our heart we have made the decision to give some time to the Lord. In doing this it is not so much our time that we give as our love and ourselves.

In our prayer we often use words to stir up our love, our spirit of adoration, our praise etc. At other times we just sit silently with the Lord. The value of our prayer depends on the depth of our commitment to pleasing him. This is something not easily measured. But the truth is that our prayer is as good as is our love. If we are living a life of love in which we try to please God at all times our prayer will be really authentic. Prayer is merely one dimension of our life of love but an essential dimension. It is a necessary practice for fostering love.

In our life of love there must always be affective and effective love; they complement each other. In a good marriage the spouses must spend quality time with each other, just enjoying each other and loving each other. This is affective love. But they must also perform little services for one another. This is effective love. For a successful marriage each spouse has to think chiefly of pleasing the other and forgetting oneself. All these dynamics operate also in our love for God.

There has to be affective and effective love. Either by itself is not sufficient. In married life, if the husband assures his wife that he loves her but continues to do things that displease her, his love is not genuine. Similarly, if he works hard for the family but shows no affection, his love is imperfect. Perhaps he is only working to fulfil his own needs. His work may be an end in itself.

Similarly in our relations with God we must practice affective and effective love. They complement each other and give life to each other. Prayer without good works is dead. Good works, without love, are dead.

Prayer is the gift of ourselves in affective love to the Lord. It doesn't necessarily mean that we will experience ardent feelings. There is question of a decision of the will and often there are no feelings. Unless we practice affective love of God in prayer our activity and our work will soon be disconnected from the love of God. We may be very busy and do great work but we are probably operating out of natural motives, rather than out of the love of God.

Paul tells us that we can do good works galore but, without love, they are of no value (I Cor. 13). Without prayer love will gradually die. In order to survive and grow love must be expressed both affectively and effectively.

Unselfish love is at the heart of a good marriage. There will be an excellent marriage if each spouse is totally committed to pleasing the other and never insists on one's own advantage. Similarly in loving God we need to be totally committed to pleasing God and never seek our own advantage. We please him by singing his praises from our heart, by putting all things aside so as to give him all our attention and love. This is what constitutes prayer – the channeling of all our attention and affectivity to the Lord. When we carry out external activities to please the Lord we do not give him all our attention and affective energy because we have to give ourselves to the job on hands.

#### PRAYER MUST BE ROOTED IN THE LOVE OF GOD

Francis de Sales says that prayer, without love, is of no value. Vatican 11 (Doc. On Church, N.42), having mentioned various "means of attaining holiness", such as "the Eucharist, prayer, self-denial etc" insists that "charity rules over all the means for attaining holiness, gives life to them and makes them work..."

In conclusion both our activity and our prayer must be inspired by love. Either of them without love is useless. Both together, without love are useless. They are not genuine. If we make love our aim (I Cor. 14, 1) everything will fall into place. Otherwise both our works and our prayers could be empty external performances.

## CHAPTER 8

### AFFECTIVITY

Let Christians take care 'to guide their affections rightly. Otherwise they will get thwarted in their search for perfect charity...by a fondness for riches... Let those who use this world not get bogged down by it.' - Vatican II, Doc. On the Church, 42.

The first and greatest commandment is to love God with our whole heart, our whole soul, all our mind and all our strength (Mk. 12, 30). Jesus wants us to direct all our love to God. Does this mean that we do not love our neighbor? that parents do not love their children? that we do not love our friends? Vatican II answers these questions when it says that charity means that we love God above all things and our neighbor because of God. (ibid. N. 42). There should be no dichotomy between love of God and love of neighbor. Indeed love of neighbor is at its best when we love him/her because of God. There are not two virtues of charity (love of God and love of neighbor). There is only one virtue of charity, viz. love of God. By this one virtue we love God above all things, and we love the neighbor and everything else to the extent that God wills. It follows that true love of the neighbor is an act of the love of God. Indeed all our deliberate desires and choices should be acts of charity because they should be chosen mainly to please God. "Let all things be done in love" (I Cor. 16, 14). The saints in heaven love God with their whole being and all other things according to God's will. The Holy Spirit is leading each of us towards this perfection of charity.

The spiritual journey is an affective journey. The tiny child loves only itself and all other things for its own sake. This tiny child has the Holy Spirit, who will lead it along the laborious journey away from complete self-centredness to complete God-centredness. This will mean constant self-denial so as to please God throughout the whole journey. The Holy Spirit is leading us to always prefer God's will to our own natural desires. All along the road our rule of life must be that of Jesus. "Not my will but your will be done (Lk. 22, 42)". Perfect love requires that we follow this rule in all our deliberate desires and choices, big and small.

### MISUSE OF AFFECTIVITY

In the quotation given above Vatican II tells us "to guide our affections rightly". This is a tremendous challenge. How do we meet it? As we said above the Holy Spirit is leading us to love God first and other things only for his sake. In practice few of us have reached this exalted state of love because our affective energies are not all directed to God. It seems to me that we misuse our affectivity in two ways.

### BEING TRAPPED IN INORDINATE ATTACHMENTS

John of the Cross, Ignatius of Loyola and other great spiritual masters warn us about inordinate attachments. An attachment is inordinate when we love something that God wants us to give up. Being trapped in sin and refusing to repent is the most obvious example. The rich young man in the gospel was trapped by love of wealth (Mk. 10 17+). Pilate, the Scribes and the Pharisees were trapped by love of power and by envy. This inordinate attachment motivated them to murder Jesus. In our own lives we can be over attached to a job, to a person, to money, to sport, drugs, liquor etc. We can be snared by our affections, and when the Holy Spirit prompts us to do some good work we are prevented from cooperating because we love something excessively. When we are over attached to anything, we love that thing more than God. Perhaps we give God everything except some small insignificant idol. Perfect love will not admit of any exceptions. We must gladly give him whatever he wants even if it costs us our life.

The opposite of over attachment is freedom. Growth in freedom is an ongoing challenge. The spiritual journey is a never-ending quest for greater freedom, so that we are able to say 'yes' always to the inspirations of the Spirit.

Unless we are vigilant new forms of slavery can develop. Often we do not realize how enslaved we are until we are asked to change. Ideally we should be pliable instruments in the hands of God and ready to fulfil his will at all times. Often when God asks us for something we may have difficulty in saying "yes". Jesus found it hard to face death but, despite his repugnance, he freely embraced it because he valued God's will above his own life. He is our exemplar of true detachment and freedom.

### DISPERSAL OF OUR AFFECTIONS

The Holy Spirit is leading us to love God with all our affectivity, and to love other things only in God and for God.

How far do we disperse our affective energies over very many interests without ever stopping to think whether we love these things for God's sake or for own selfish pleasure? If we give ourselves excessively to the media our affectivity is channeled in a thousand directions. One wonders if we have any love left for God. St. Francis de Sales says that our affectivity can suffer the same fate as the mighty river that was made to disappear in the desert when the king of Persia channeled it into hundreds of tiny streams. I suspect that many in our world are interested in so many things that they have little affective energy left for God. Yet God wants all our affectivity. "You shall love the Lord with your whole heart", not with a diluted watery love.

It is important to remember that our affections will follow the thoughts and images that we assimilate from our environment. If we exercise no discipline over what enters the mind our affective energy will be scattered in all directions, because the heart tends to follow the head.

The remedy for this sad situation was discussed in article 3 where I dealt with internalizing God's word and the school of love. Dispersion of our affectivity can also be controlled by following a Rule of Life. This will be dealt with in article 11 of this series



## CHAPTER 9

### THE SACRAMENT OF THE PRESENT MOMENT

In the first article of this series we saw how the Holy Spirit is leading each human being to the perfect love of God and of neighbor. All of us would like to be in tune with the Holy Spirit and practice this love to which he is inviting us. But one may ask, "how do I practice it? Do I have to spend long hours in prayer? Frequent the church? Fast and scourge myself for my past sins? Where do I find God so that I may love him? Do I have to wait 'til I have reared my family or until I have retired from my job and have more time"?

The response to all these questions is that I must find and love God **HERE AND NOW**, not when I have finished my work, not only when I go to church or when I pray but **NOW**.

Fr. De Caussade was a famous spiritual writer of the 18<sup>th</sup> century who invented a wonderful expression to impress on us the doctrine I have just stated. He speaks of the "Sacrament of the Present Moment". We are all familiar with the seven sacraments. For us, who are blessed with faith, a sacrament is a sacred rite where we encounter God in love. We meet Jesus in the Eucharist, in the sacrament of reconciliation and in the other sacraments. They are all holy sacred rites in which we give ourselves to Jesus and he gives himself to us.

Without in any way playing down the special sacredness of the seven sacraments we can also apply the term "sacrament" to every situation in life. Wherever I am, at home or travelling, working or praying, etc. God is present and "God is love" (I Jn. 4, 8). The Holy Spirit is in me, and the situation, in which I find myself, has been providentially planned by God from all eternity. Nothing happens by chance. Everything is part of God's loving providence. Therefore, every situation is a kind of sacrament. God is actively present and lovingly present, desiring his own glory and the highest good of human beings at all times and in all places. The Holy Spirit is working in all circumstances. His job is to inspire me to love God perfectly, and to love myself and my neighbor because of God. He is trying to fulfil his agenda for me wherever I am. He sanctifies all things if I cooperate.

The most important aspect of every life situation is not what I am planning to accomplish but the agenda of the Holy Spirit. What he intends is obviously the best. Faith assures us that God is love. If he is love he is always trying to do the most loving thing in me if I cooperate.

Here are a few quotes from de Caussade: "What is the secret of union with God? There is no secret. It can be found anywhere. It is offered to us at every moment no matter where we are... God's action pervades all creation. If only people knew how easily they could grow in love! Let them say 'yes' to God and obey his will from moment to moment. What God wants now is the most important challenge to be faced here and now. If I choose to do what he doesn't want now I'm wasting my time. What was the best thing for us to do a moment ago is no longer the best thing. God is now asking for something new and only this and nothing else will please him. Work, prayer, devotions etc. are all nothing unless God wills them."

Like St. John we have to 'believe in God's love for us'. Not only does he love us, but he loves us most when we have most need of him, that is, when we are overwhelmed with multiple troubles. When tempted we need most help and God will certainly help us in our need. St. Paul has consoling teaching for us when we are burdened with trials. He tells us to bring our worries to God in prayer, giving thanks, and the peace of God, which is beyond our understanding, will keep our minds and hearts in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4, 6+).

We are told to always and everywhere give thanks to God (Ephes. 5, 20). We say this also in the Preface of the mass. The best way to respond to a situation that is naturally

disagreeable is to thank God and keep on thanking him. All circumstances are holy in so far as God providentially wills them. He is in every situation, acting lovingly for my greater good. Even the most painful experiences are sacraments of the love of God. My faith should urge me to always thank him for he always loves me. That is surely the most important aspect of every human situation.

When all my plans are thwarted by my own stupidity and that of others and I feel angry and disappointed the Holy Spirit of love is inspiring me not to grumble, not to complain but in faith to thank God for his help. In painful situations we will not feel thankful. We will feel angry and hurt but thanksgiving is an act of faith, not of feeling. When we thank God in our pain, we ignore our feelings and live by faith. We are our real authentic selves when we force ourselves to rise above feeling and live by faith. We believe and know that God loves us and he supports us powerfully in our trials.

It seems to me that thanking God is the most effective of all responses to the troubles of life. Accepting them, resignation and holy abandonment are all good responses but they are not so positive as thanksgiving. Thanks in a difficult situation is a tremendous act of faith in God's love for us when appearances and our negative feelings seem to indicate that he does not love us.

## CHAPTER 10

### LOVE OF NEIGHBOUR FOR GOD'S SAKE

We have seen in article one that we have been given the Holy Spirit who is leading us, not only to love God but also to love our neighbor as Jesus loved people (Doc. On the Church, 42). Christ's love of neighbor is put before us as the standard to be achieved with the help of the Holy Spirit. Vatican 11 defines charity as the virtue "by which we love God above all things and the neighbor because of God." The Council does not want us to make a division between love of God and love of neighbor. True Christian love of the neighbor is practiced so as to please God and bring about the highest good of our neighbor.

Since Christ is the exemplar set before us by Vatican 11 I will discuss in this article the characteristics we find in Jesus' love of the neighbor. I think that the following are the chief qualities in Jesus' love of neighbor.

#### 1: JESUS LOVED HIS FATHER FIRST.

Our love for others will always be imperfect unless we are totally committed to loving God first. Christian love demands of us that we love God first and then that we love the neighbor in the way that God wills and for God's sake. We love him/her mainly so as to please God. Our love for people will be all the better when we love them in God. Again I repeat that love of others will be very imperfect and may even be sinful, unless we love them in God and so as to please God.

#### 2: JESUS SOUGHT THE HIGHEST GOOD OF THOSE HE LOVED

We always seek the good of those we love but Jesus made sure to confer on his friends the greatest of all goods. He sought to unite them to God in this world and in the next. Jesus wouldn't have become man and there would be no Christmas, no death and no resurrection if he merely had a temporal agenda. He made no effort to overthrow the Romans or to build up the national economy. He was mainly interested in people's spiritual wellbeing.

Vatican 11 is telling us to love people as Jesus loved them. We will have to admit that we fail to do this unless we make some effort to lead them to closer union with God. How can we claim to love others as Jesus loved them if we make no effort to unite them to God? It is true that we love others but seldom in the way that Jesus loved them. We contribute to their temporal needs but often forget their eternal needs. Sad to say the last thing that most of us want to talk about is God and his interests.

#### 3 JESUS' LOVE COST HIM HIS LIFE

Love that doesn't cost much isn't worth much. Love that costs nothing is probably worth nothing. Jesus made the highest possible sacrifice, not to make life easier for us, but to achieve our greatest good. "Because he laid down his life for us we should lay down our life for one another" (I Jn. 3, 16). He laid down his life, not to make his friends more prosperous, but to unite all of us to God in this life and in the next.

When challenged by this kind of unconditional love we do well to ask ourselves, - in what does love consist? Speaking for myself, I wonder if my love for others is for this world only. Fear often stops me from a higher form of love even when opportunities offer themselves.

In John's letter, already cited, the apostle argues that we should lay down our lives for one another because Jesus laid down his life for us. What he says is quite logical and he doesn't intend it to be taken metaphorically but literally. He challenges us to literally and truly die for our neighbor after the example of Jesus. We are forced to admit that our ideal of love and our practice of it are light years away from the unselfish and unconditional love of Jesus.

#### 4: JESUS DIED FOR FRIENDS AND ENEMIES ALIKE.

John says that he laid down his life for his friends (Jn. 3, 16). But Paul goes further and reminds us that he laid down his life for his enemies. He argues that we might be willing to lay down our lives for a good person. What really proves Jesus' love for us is that he died for us when we were still enemies (Rom. 5, 8). I have to ask myself, am I willing to lay down my life for people who turn me off, or who are not naturally attractive? These are the enemies!

#### 5: JESUS LOVED ALL PEOPLE

Jesus was not selective in his love. His love extended, not merely to a select group of apostles and friends, but to all people. He loved all and wants all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2, 4). Doubtless he loved his friends but he also loved his enemies; he loved his relatives, especially his mother, but he also loved those who were not relatives; he loved his own people but he also loved all other peoples. He loves black people, brown people and white people. He loves Africans, Asians, Americans, Auzzies and Kiwis. There are no exceptions. Vatican 11 tells us that Jesus has given each of us the Holy Spirit who is leading us to a similar love.

Are we big enough to let our hearts expand beyond our own family, beyond our own parish, beyond our own country to the ends of the earth? In our global village we are all one in Christ and we all have his Spirit. All people are our brothers and sisters and all are entitled to our love.

If we ever suffered from any illusion that love is easy we have only to compare our love with that of Jesus.

## CHAPTER 11

### A RULE OF LIFE

In these articles we have said repeatedly that the Holy Spirit is leading us to the perfect love of God and that we must cooperate with him. But how do we do this in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Many of us who desire to live the full Christian life in the modern world find ourselves living in a very secular materialistic society. We are surrounded by the attractions of our culture, which often pull us away from God. We may be living with people who are not interested in loving God. We may belong to a Christian family and a Christian parish. But these communities can only give us limited help in the pursuit of perfect love. The question that arises in the circumstances described is – how can Christians love God with their whole heart in an uncongenial environment that offers very little help, and a great deal of hindrance?

Christians, who are truly seeking God, to a large extent, will have to take personal responsibility for cooperating with the Holy Spirit on the journey of love. They will need to create for themselves a more helpful environment that will support and stimulate them on their journey. They need guidance, instruction and stimulation.

If we are serious about practicing the love of God as perfectly as possible we cannot continue to live in a secular world and identify, without question, with its values and practices. I do not mean that we must change our place of residence. This might be desirable but it would frequently be impracticable. By "change of environment" I mean that we must distance ourselves in mind and heart and act from the materialistic values of our culture.

Basically each person needs a Rule of Life. This Rule of Life will enable us to exclude from our hearts the false values of the surrounding culture and at the same time fill our hearts with the values of the gospel. Jesus warns us that we cannot be slaves of God and money (Mt. 6, 24). We can expand this statement and say that we cannot give our heart inordinately to any creature and also to God. What I mean is that no creature should be loved selfishly but only for God's sake.

A Rule of Life will necessarily contain negative and positive precepts. The negative precepts will help us to overcome the temptations of our environment and keep us from being enslaved by creatures. Positive precepts and practices will stimulate us in our quest for a deeper love of God.

This article is focusing mainly on a personal Rule of Life and a personal timetable. Each person is unique, has a different vocation, different talents, different limitations and different opportunities. Yet each one is called to perfect love and each has to order one's life to the fullness of love.

An important consideration in drawing up a personal timetable is each one's secondary vocation. Some are very busy working most of the week, and also rearing a young family. Others have retired and they have a lot of time on hands. But everyone's Rule of Life will have to meet the challenge of using one's time in the way most pleasing to God. Busy people cannot exempt themselves from this challenge. There is a danger that very busy people will get their priorities wrong. It is easy to forget God and push him to the sideline if one is very busy in a wide variety of activities.

Retired people have a different challenge. They have a lot of time on their hands but they have the duty to use it in the way that most pleases God. Using time in this way calls for a lot of spiritual maturity. "Let all things be done in love" (I Cor. 16, 14). Otherwise our works are useless. The work of the dynamic young person must be rooted in the love of God; so also the slower activities of the elderly must be done for the glory of God. Otherwise they have no value.

Perhaps the main element in a Rule of Life will be a timetable. Following a timetable helps us to live unselfishly and avoid self-indulgence. When we act unselfishly we are usually

acting in the spirit; at least the motivation is O.K. Presumably what we choose to do will also be worthwhile.

It is not easy to make practical suggestions about a personal Rule of Life that will help everybody since people differ so much. Here are a few tentative suggestions.

1: It helps to have a fixed time for rising. I have seen many spiritual ideals come to nothing because people lie on in bed much longer than is necessary. This means that prayer and spiritual reading are omitted and we are operating naturally, not spiritually. We will usually need to retire in time so as to be able to rise early.

2: Spiritual reading that leads to internalizing gospel values is the root of all growth in charity. What is important is that we make our own Christ's values with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Prayer, reading, study and meditation all help us take into our hearts the values of Jesus. This is often achieved by prolonged focusing on some value until it grips us. The first value, that we need to internalize, is that God loves us and wants our love in return.

3: In practice we will not internalize gospel values unless we distance ourselves from non-gospel values. If we are really serious about practicing the perfect love of God we must exercise discipline in the use of the media. Perhaps listening to the news for ten minutes each day would suffice to keep us in touch with current affairs.

4: Other helps that could be considered in a personal Rule of Life are a spiritual director, membership in a prayer group, simple lifestyle, inspiring cassettes and videos, participation in parish activities, helping the needy etc.

The aim of a Rule of Life is to order our life as perfectly as possible to the unselfish love of God and neighbor.

## CHAPTER 12

### ST. THERESE OF LISIEUX - MODEL OF LOVE

In this final article on the love of God I will try to portray a living exemplar of love in practice. I have chosen St. Therese for this purpose.

Therese tells us in her autobiography that she was very keen to discover her role in the Body of Christ. After much reflection she decided that she belonged to the heart of the church. "My vocation is to be love at the heart of the church."

Her whole spirituality can be summed up in the one word "love". "I never refused anything to Jesus since I was three." She never knew a legal morality or a service based on obligation. Her relationship with God was always loving and personal. When singing Ps. 119, she used to recite the verse. "I have kept your law for the sake of the reward." But she used to add mentally, "you know, Lord, that I never serve you except out of love." Again she says, "God will always do my will in heaven since I always did his will on earth." She once corrected a novice for missing opportunities for showing love. Her whole spiritual life is summed up in love. "If you find yourself too tired to pick up a thread but nevertheless do so out of love for Jesus you gain much more merit than if you were to perform a much more remarkable deed in a moment of fervor."

In this quotation she draws together three characteristics of her 'Little Way'. A weak person who does a little thing out of love does far more than a strong person who does a great deed with less love. Therese once said to a lay sister. "Your life is one that is humble and hidden. But remember that nothing is small in God's eyes. Do all that you do out of love." "What God wants is our love, not our activity."

### THE NEED TO PRACTICE LOVE

We can talk a lot about love but we must find ways of practicing it. Unless we constantly consciously exercise love it could die a slow death. So as to grow in love we need to find ways of exercising it

In this respect Therese is a great model for us. We have seen above how she transformed all her acts, even the least of them, into acts of love. It seems that she seldom lost consciousness of God's presence and always acted in a way that would please him.

She walked slowly and did not give way to her natural energy. She never gave nature an inch, She ate everything, whether she liked it or not. Indeed no one knew what food she liked. She didn't mix her food so as to satisfy her sense of taste. She suffered severely from cold but she never complained or showed in any way that she was cold. She showed most love to the nuns that she liked least. At school she was persecuted for four years by an older girl, and she bore it in silence. All these practices were hidden and unnoticed by others. She lived by the principle –"love feeds on sacrifice." None of the above practices would have any value except that they were the small ways in which she expressed her burning love for Jesus. She was desperately in love and she had to find ways of expressing it. These little sacrifices kept her love fully alive.

Some of us, who love ourselves excessively, can be motivated habitually by our natural likes and dislikes. Therese, on the contrary, waged unceasing war on her natural inclinations and tried to please Jesus in all that she did.

For her the Rule and the wishes of the Prioress were accepted without question as God's will. She was utterly faithful to the Rule and obedient to her superiors but she went far beyond obedience to rules and precepts in expressing her love for God. From her childhood she developed the habit of making little sacrifices for the love of Jesus. She continued to make these sacrifices all her life. This was her chief way of expressing her love. She was not interested in accumulating merit or climbing ladders. She just wanted to love Jesus "unto

folly", and by her sacrifices, made in love, save 'souls'. She was completely unselfish, always concerned with pleasing God and the salvation of her neighbour. Her 'Little Way' meant making little sacrifices with great love and going against her natural inclinations to please Jesus.

How can we in the post Vatican 11 church express and nourish our love of God at all times? Should we, like Therese, go against our natural inclinations for the love of God? Is the 'Little Way' for everybody? Therese was convinced that her way was the only way and that it was for everybody. Which is the better, to be guided by nature and follow our likes and dislikes, or like Therese, be guided by unselfish love, which is nourished by little sacrifices? She is now a Doctor of the church. She offers us a way of holiness and we would be foolish to ignore it. Besides there is no other way except the way of love. "Whether we eat or drink or whatever else we do, let all be done for the glory of God" (I Cor. 10, 31)"

## Book II



## CHAPTER 13

### HOW DO WE KNOW GOD'S WILL?

I cannot say how frequently I have been asked this question by sincere Christians who desire to live in close union with God. When people ask this question they usually have in mind external activities. Often they are worried about some major decision such as the choice of a vocation in life or the spending of a large sum of money. Is it God's will for them to undertake extra work when they are already overburdened? Undoubtedly it is right to initiate a serious discernment process of prayer, reflection and seeking of counsel when making major decisions in one's life. It is surely God's will that we make a serious effort to discover his will and then come up with a responsible decision and implement our decision.

The theologian, Lonergan, speaks of 'transcendental precepts' that must be applied by a responsible person when making any decision. Let us not be put off by his big words. He is merely talking about precepts that must be observed in making every decision so as to make sure that we act responsibly. What are these universal practical moral precepts? Lonergan gives four precepts but I think that we can reduce them to three.

- 1: we should study the proposed choice as fully as necessary.
- 2: we should make a practical moral decision.
- 3: let us be responsible and implement the decision.

These precepts must be observed in making all decisions, big and small.

When searching for God's will we can easily overlook some areas of our lives in which we are called to do his will. God desires that we do his will, not merely when we are making big decisions, but in all our decisions, big and small. The lives of most of us consist of routine activities and duties. We are seldom faced with big decisions. If we are "little people", engaged in humble work, how do we know God's will for us? We have the Holy Spirit and he is leading us from within to perfect love of God and neighbor (Doc. on Church, N.40). It is God's will for us to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. This will mean being faithful to the duties of our state in life. It may mean being a responsible parent and conscientiously fulfilling the work we are called to do. Different people are called to do different jobs but all are called to love God and the neighbor for God's sake. This challenge faces us not just during work hours but at all times and in all places. For example, we must seek God's will when deciding how to use our free time, our money and other resources.

St. Therese says that God doesn't want our works; he wants our love. She obviously means that God wants all things to be done in love (1 Cor. 16, 14). Indeed, in searching for God's will in our lives, we must make sure that we are trying to please God in the various activities that we undertake. We are wasting our time if we do good works for selfish motives. Spiritually, we are safe, at least as regards our inner dispositions, when we desire to do what is morally right. Better still if we do our work, motivated by the explicit desire to please God. This motive will greatly enrich our moral choices. 'Let all things be done in love' (1 Cor. 16, 14).

Francis de Sales gives a good practical tip on seeking God's will. He asks the question, how do you discover God's will if you have no assigned work to do, and you have free time on your hands? He suggests that we ask ourselves, what can I do in this situation that will give most glory to God? Without spending too much time on discernment, he suggests that we choose some good work and go ahead and do it. He would say that this is God's will for us. We might choose to visit a sick person, do some spiritual reading, help someone in need or we might even take some much needed rest, or recreation etc. The point is that we firstly choose a good work and secondly that we implement it so as to please God.

The good work is accomplished out of love. Both what we choose to do is good and the motive is good.

When seeking God's will in our lives we have to look at both the external and the internal. It is not enough to do a good work; it must be done for the right motive. St. Therese claims that she always acted from the motive of love. Jesus says in the gospel, "I always do the things that please the Father" (Jn. 8, 29).

Aquinas also gives us a very helpful tip about doing God's will when he tells us that all our decisions should conform to right reason. They should be reasonable; it should be a "reasonableness", illuminated by faith. God has given us reason to direct our lives and it is his will that our choices should conform to right reason. It should be noted that we are not likely to act reasonably in a consistent way unless we have the mind of Christ.

Reaching out for immediate pleasure, without caring whether or not it is reasonable or pleasing to God, is not God's will. Indeed this is the essence of sin, viz. seeking our own pleasure unreasonably. Following our likes and dislikes, even when they incline us to unreasonable choices, means that we are not responding morally to our situation; we are not seeking God's will.

Conclusion: In trying to discover God's will in our lives we must take care that both the exterior action and the interior motive conform to God's will. As regards the exterior action it is God's will that we do our best to discover what is the most reasonable choice in our situation. As regards the interior motive it is God's will that, like Jesus, we act out of love for God (Jn. 8, 29), or at least that we are trying to make the morally correct choice.

## CHAPTER 14

### DISCERNMENT OF DESIRES

It seems to me that nearly all of the discernment of what is going in our minds can be reduced to what I call our 'likes', 'dislikes' and desires that spring from my likes and dislikes. Desires are the most fundamental of all. All my desires need to be discerned so that I will only implement good desires; evil desires must be rejected.

All desires are rooted in love of some kind. The 'love' might be sinful, natural, moral or the love of God. Each type of 'love' will generate desires. These desires can incline us to choices that are sinful, or natural, or moral or spring from the love of God. Since the desires that spring up in our hearts can draw us to act in many different ways, good and bad, they must always be subjected to discernment before we embrace them and implement them.

In dealing with desires in the spiritual life it helps to understand the causes of our desires. Have you noticed that every feeling and emotion generates a desire? Cold generates the desire for heat; hunger the desire for food; anger the desire to fight; fear the desire to withdraw; love the desire to possess; hate the desire to reject, etc. Sometimes we do not see clearly why we desire some object.

The causes of our desires are not only feelings. Desires spring from our nature. By nature we desire life in all its forms, seeing, hearing, knowing, activity, rest, comfort etc. Desires spring up from our many natural needs.

Many desires are due to our culture. It imparts to us a set of values and needs that are good, bad and indifferent. These values and needs often generate in us both healthy and unhealthy desires. Our family upbringing and our religious formation also condition us to desire many things, both good and bad. The causes of our desires are very complex and often difficult to trace,

What is most important about desires is that we be aware of them and subject them to discernment. They always need to be discerned since they incline us to both good and evil choices.

In every day language we do not always distinguish between indeliberate involuntary desires and deliberate voluntary desires. We use the word 'desire' for both and this causes confusion. The distinction is very important for our spiritual lives. The truth is that all of us experience many involuntary desires that are both good and bad. These desires need to be discerned before we embrace and implement them. The bad desires must be rejected; the good desires may need further discernment. A desire may be good but does God want me to embrace it and implement it?

I think that most of us tend to desire what we like and reject what we dislike, without very much discernment. If some gross desire, e. g. the desire to murder, enters our mind we will notice it immediately and reject it. But there are many lesser desires that we often embrace, assuming that such desires are no harm. We easily harbour desires for what we like and harbour hatred for what we dislike, without worrying whether such mental attitudes harmonise with God's will or not. Harboured desires of this kind is contrary to the fullness of divine love.

The fullness of the love of God demands:

- 1: that we only entertain desires for what is certainly God's will.
- 2: that we reject desires that urge us to choices that are certainly contrary to God's will.
- 3: that we remain indifferent to things about which we are not certain whether or not they are God's will for us. We neither deliberately desire them nor do we deliberately reject them. We try to remain indifferent until it becomes clear whether they are God's will for us or not.

As I said above it is contrary to the fullness of divine love to deliberately desire things about which we are not certain whether or not they are God's will. Love of God requires that we try to please God in all our deliberate voluntary desires. When we desire things about which we lack certainty we are not trying to please God. We are trying to please ourselves and we do not care whether our desires are pleasing to God or not; we are just being selfish.

If we wish to love God with our whole being we must desire what God likes, not what we ourselves like; we must reject what he dislikes, not what we dislike.

Our desires can be called 'good' if they urge us to true love of God, true love of the neighbour and true love of ourselves. However, it doesn't necessarily follow that, because a desire is good, I should embrace it and implement it. There are innumerable good things that any one of us can do but no one person can do everything, nor is any one person called by God to do everything. We must try and discover what good deeds God desires of us and implement these and only these.

How do we know when a desire comes from the Holy Spirit? This is a question that sincere Christians will often ask themselves as they try to tune into the Spirit from moment to moment. Surely this desire to obey the Spirit comes from the Spirit. But how do we know what the Spirit wants of us when there are no assigned duties and we have free time? It is not easy to give a definite answer to this question but here are some principles that will help. Do what you think will give most glory to God (de Sales). Do what is most reasonable (Aquinas). Do not miss opportunities for loving God (St. Therese). Let us keep our priorities right. Act responsibly. "Let all things be done in love" (1Cor.16,14).

Summary: All our desires need to be discerned spiritually. We should deliberately desire only what seems most pleasing to God in the situation. After appropriate discernment acceptable desires need to be implemented.

## CHAPTER 15

### HOLINESS

- Pascal tells us that the world recognises three levels or orders of greatness.
- the order of bodies, in which wealthy people, very beautiful people and those of imposing presence stand out
  - the order of intelligence and genius in which artists, writers and scientists are distinguished
  - the order of holiness in which, after Christ, the Virgin and the saints are outstanding (Pensees, 793 Br.).

Pascal says that almost an infinite distance separates the second order from the first, but an "infinitely infinite" distance separates the third from the second, the order of holiness from that of genius. Gounod, the musician, tells us that "one drop of holiness is worth more than an ocean of genius." One reason for this is that holiness endures forever whereas the other two types of greatness cease at death. Furthermore, the other two levels of greatness are useless without holiness. In Paul's words all our achievements count for nothing, without love (1 Cor. 13).

Pope John Paul II has frequently exhorted us in his public speeches and elsewhere to pursue holiness. He put this ideal before nearly one million young people in Toronto. In his letter for the new millennium he tells us that "holiness is the perspective in which the whole pastoral work of the church should be situated." He teaches that we are made holy by Baptism but this "gift must be expressed by a commitment that should govern the whole Christian life."

These statements of the Pope need to be analysed, explained and internalised. In the first place he is telling us that all the church's activity, such as teaching, preaching, liturgy, putting up buildings, organising functions, parish councils, seminaries, religious institutions etc. are all intended ultimately to foster one single value viz. holiness; all exist to make people holy. Indeed the church itself has only one ultimate function viz. to make us holy. The Pope is telling us that we must always keep holiness before our eyes and never lose sight of it. He expects us, not merely to pay lip service to holiness but to have a deep "commitment" to it. It is the whole purpose of the church's existence. Therefore, unless we are committed to the pursuit of holiness we are not in tune with Christ and his church.

Mother Teresa says, 'today the church needs saints. This calls us to combat our attachment to comfort, which leads us to choose a comfortable and insignificant mediocrity. Each one of us has the possibility to be a saint and the way to holiness is prayer. Holiness is for each of us a simple duty.'

### TEACHING OF VATICAN II ON HOLINESS

Lumen Gentium (Doc. Of Vatican II) deals with the universal call to holiness. (Chap. 5, N.N. 39 – 42). "In the church everyone is called to holiness (N. 39)." "This is the will of God, your sanctification (ibid)." "This holiness is manifested by those who strive for the perfection of charity (ibid)." The Council then mentions those who practice the "evangelical counsels", thereby implying that they especially are called to take seriously the vocation to holiness.

Jesus did not just invite us to holiness, but "he sent the Holy Spirit on all people that he might inspire them from within to love God with their whole heart, soul, mind and strength (Mk. 12, 30) and that they might love one another as Jesus loved his disciples (ibid N. 40)." It

is to be noted that *Lumen Gentium* in several places identifies holiness with the perfection of charity. 'Charity' must be understood primarily as the love of God and secondarily the love of people and things for God's sake. Charity urges us to please God in all our thoughts, words and actions.

By our Baptism we are sanctified and made holy. We receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and the 'seed' of charity (n.42). But this seed has to grow by the exercise of all the virtues. All these must be practiced out of love. "Let all things be done in love (I Cor. 16, 14)." "If the seed of charity is to grow we must willingly hear the word of God and with his grace act to fulfil it" (N.42). We need to hear both God's general word in our reading, study etc. and his specific word in each unique situation. We must use the gifts we have received for the glory of God and the service of the neighbour (40).

Holiness, or the perfection of charity, will be manifested in different ways by different groups in the church (N.41). Bishops, priests, the married, labourers and the sick are specifically mentioned. All are called to holiness but they express it in different ways. Indeed we can go further and say that people are called to express the same love of God in six billion different ways.

N. 42 seems to deal with the practical question, how do we become holy? What must we do? We are told in the first place that we have the Holy Spirit and he gives us charity (Rom. 5, 5). If this seed is to grow we must willingly hear (internalise) God's word and implement it. This is the most fundamental condition for growth in holiness; it is essential and non-negotiable.

In the second paragraph other means of holiness are proposed. They are not all of equal importance but they are the normal means to holiness in the church. Liturgy, the Eucharist, the sacraments, the practice of virtue, self-denial, etc. are mentioned. But the document insists that "charity must rule over all the means of holiness;" it alone gives them life.

The document seems to insist repeatedly on the primacy of love. Yet at the same time there is almost equal stress on practicing this love by prayer, good moral behaviour, by the exercise of our gifts, perhaps by practicing the evangelical counsels. Charity does not exist in a vacuum. Each Christian is called to exercise it according to his/her opportunities and vocation in life.

In the final paragraph of N.42 we are told that all of us must "guide our affections rightly". This is a very important counsel. Nothing so hinders growth in charity as disorderly affection for things other than God.

## CHAPTER 16

### “THE WAY TO HOLINESS IS PRAYER”

This quotation is from Mother Teresa of Calcutta who was recently beatified. We might ask, "what does she mean by 'prayer'?" In this short article we will speak of 'prayer', as understood by St. Teresa of Avila. She defines prayer as 'loving communion with one whom we know loves us.'

Again we might ask what 'holiness' is? We will identify it as perfect love of God and of one's neighbour for God's sake. This is how 'holiness' is understood by Vatican II. (Document on the Church, N. N. 39 – 42).

Prayer, as understood here, is a consequence of knowing that God loves us. Just as two young lovers can spend hours, enjoying each other's company, if each knows that he/she is loved by the other, so loving communion with God becomes easy and delightful if we are convinced that God loves us.

Prayer starts not with us but with God. He has loved us with an everlasting unending love, whether we realise it or not. He is the 'Hound of Heaven' who pursues us at all times, begging for a return of love. "He stands at our door and knocks" (Rev. 3, 20). What does he want? – a return of love. God loved us first (I Jn. 4, 19). This is part of our faith and must be embraced with our whole heart. Believing, knowing and being convinced that God loves us is the foundation of all holiness.

There is a delightful incident in the life of the late Cardinal Hume that powerfully illustrates this truth. Soon after he was appointed Archbishop of Westminster, he was interviewed by a reporter for the British Press. The reporter asked him, "Archbishop, how do you see your new job?" He replied, "as Archbishop my role is simple. I have only one job to do, to persuade people that God loves them."

Some readers may well wonder if they are really convinced that God loves them personally. They may say, "he loves good people but not me." "If he loves me why did he allow such and such a disaster to overtake me?" To counteract these doubts and difficulties we must remember first of all that we are dealing here with a very important article of our faith, just as important as any of the articles in the Creed. Just as we wouldn't for a moment doubt God's existence, so we shouldn't entertain any doubt whatever about God's love for us. We are dealing with a fundamental truth of our faith and it must never be called into question.

There will be times in our Christian life when we feel that God doesn't love us. We feel horrible and we are tempted to imagine that he has abandoned us, or that he is unconcerned about our misery. In a word we feel depressed and miserable. How should we respond to such feelings? Even though we feel the opposite this is the time when we should make a special effort to make acts of dry faith in God's love for us. It is the will that counts, not how we feel. Indeed when we feel miserable he is lovingly present in a hidden way supporting us. Our misery gives him the opportunity to exercise his greatest mercy. Nay more, when we are in deep trouble he loves us so much that he gives us most grace to cope with our problem. Times of suffering and temptation are the occasions of his greatest graces.

Prayer, then, is communion with one whom we know loves us. This knowledge at times will be a knowledge of pure faith, without feeling; at other times a feeling of God's love may flood our hearts. Thus our communion with God may be experienced as an exercise of pure faith or as delightful and consoling. It is well to realise that one can be in deep loving communion with God even when there is very little feeling of communion. This was the type of communion with his Father that Jesus experienced on the cross.

Prayer is the exercise wherein we especially practice our affective love of God in the form of acts of love, praise, adoration, thanksgiving etc. Unless love is expressed and exercised it dies. We do this especially in prayer, with or without feeling. It is the place where we open the door to the One who is always knocking. In prayer our affective love is nourished

and grows. "The love of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us" (Rom.5,5).

As we practice prayer consistently our affective love of God grows deeper. Marmion assures us that God gives himself to us in the measure that we give ourselves to him.

But this love that grows in prayer, is dynamic. Love wants to please the Beloved, not just during prayer but always and everywhere. Love doesn't cease when we rise from prayer but it continues to be the driving force that governs all that we say and do throughout the day. The search for God's will, and implementing it so as to please him, become the main driving forces in one's life. When love is strong one is habitually concerned about how to please the Beloved.

The love of God, nourished in prayer, urges us to love God as fully as possible and to love one's neighbour and oneself for God's sake. The practice of prayer will ensure that love of self and of neighbour is not divorced from the love of God. The love of oneself and one's neighbour are only different forms of the love of God. Both our love of self and neighbour can be imperfect, unless they are rooted in our love for God. Prayer will serve to keep our affections focused on God and on all other things for his sake.

We can conclude then by affirming that Mother Teresa is 'spot-on' when she teaches that prayer is the way to holiness or to perfect love.



## CHAPTER 17

### MULTIPLICITY

“Unceasingly I hesitated and turned away from you, the One and Only; I lost myself in multiplicity.” - St. Augustine, Confess. 2, 1.

“It is clear that the human heart strives all the more intensely for any one thing the more it is withdrawn from multiplicity. For this reason our heart is directed to God all the more perfectly the more it withdraws its affections from temporal things. Increase in charity is proportionate to diminution of earthly desires. When love is perfect no earthly desire remains.” - Aquinas

‘On the Perfection of the Christian Life.’

“We must renounce all useless desires because the soul wastes its energy when it scatters itself over many desires – like the river, when divided by the king of Persia into many channels, lost itself altogether in the desert. Surely all the hopes of our nature should be united into a single intention, that of loving God only. To desire something for any reason other than God is to desire God less.”

“Spirit of St. Francis de Sales”, p.3 by Camus

“The saints frequently retired into solitude so that, freed from secular cares (i. e. multiplicity), they might give themselves more earnestly and more wholly to the love of divine things.” –ibid. p.3.

From the above quotes it is obvious that Augustine, Aquinas and Francis de Sales are all very wary of multiplicity. Augustine repents of the fact that he got lost in multiplicity. He is referring to his life before his conversion. He neglected God and gave his heart over to the pleasures of this world. He considered that in his day there were multiple pleasures that claimed his attention and affections. Doubtless there are always multiple things to which human beings can give their hearts.

But the multiplicity that caused Augustine’s downfall could almost be called ‘simplicity’ in comparison with the multiplicity in which we are immersed in today’s world. Augustine had no T.V. to project an infinite number of images on to his imagination, thereby stirring up affections of all kinds. He didn’t surface the internet which can also consume much of our affective energy. The printed word in its many forms, unless used with much discernment, can channel our attention and affections in all directions. Advertisements can brainwash us into desiring many unhelpful pleasures. Travel also exposes our mind and heart to good, bad and indifferent sensations. Perhaps this is the real problem – good, bad and indifferent sensations are being presented to us in one glorious mix to a degree unknown to former generations.

There is no comparison between modern multiplicity and that with which Augustine had to cope. If Augustine, who was an intellectual giant, "got lost in multiplicity", how much more easily can a modern person get lost in multiplicity?

After his conversion we know that Augustine gave his heart wholly to God. Eventually he became a bishop. This would have involved him in even greater multiplicity than he experienced in his previous life. How did he cope with this increase in multiplicity? Presumably, when he gave his heart wholly to God, he ceased to love other things except in God and to the extent that it was God’s will for him. I am not suggesting that this was easy. He would have had to practice much self-denial so as to follow Christ.

But with God's grace, having fallen in love, he stayed in love. This enabled him to cope with the increase in multiplicity.

One of his main ways of focusing heart and mind on God was by writing. His writings are voluminous. As far as I know there are about thirty huge volumes of Migne attributed to St. Augustine. All of these writings would be mainly about God. Writing was one of the main ways in which he focused his mind and heart on God. There is a lesson here for us moderns. As we said above, people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century live in the midst of multiplicity. It will not harm us, if, like Augustine, we keep our minds and hearts focused on God.

Presumably, after his conversion Augustine was in love with Jesus and he loved other things only because of Jesus. If we can fall in love with God and stay in love we will not be swamped by the multiple pleasures around us. However, in order to stay in love with the "One and Only", it will be necessary to focus our attention and affection on God. This will involve a withdrawal from unnecessary multiplicity. "We cannot love God and money (Mt. 6, 26)". We cannot give all our affection to God and at the same time give it all to multiple interests and pleasures. We would be naïve if we imagined that we could love God, without denying ourselves, without often giving up our own selfish desires and preferences. The truth is that the multiple pleasures of our culture often attract us strongly and they will draw us away from God, often unconsciously, unless we perceive what is happening to us, and practise self-denial. Unfortunately, young people, growing up in the modern world, are often enslaved by its false values, without realising what is happening to them. The young are especially vulnerable because they are not able to constructively criticise the values presented to them. There is a danger that they will internalise good, bad and indifferent values without distinction.

To sum up I suggest that multiplicity is one of the greatest challenges facing modern Christians. We need to get our act together and get our priorities right. If we fall in love with God and stay in love it will solve all our problems.

## CHAPTER 18

### LOVE OF GOD AND CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

“Let all things be done in love” (I Cor. 16, 14)

“If charity is to grow Christians must constantly apply themselves to prayer, self-denial.....love perfects all the means of holiness.” (L. Gent. 42).

When Vatican II deals with the universal call to holiness in its Document on the Church, it identifies holiness with growth in love or charity. Charity, which is the unselfish commitment to pleasing God in all our voluntary acts, is the one absolute value in the Christian life. It alone gives value to all the activities of the church.

John Paul II tells us in his encyclical for the new millennium that all the church’s pastoral efforts should be situated in the context of holiness (or charity).

St. Therese of Lisieux teaches that to pick up a straw out of love for God is a much more meritorious act than to do a much greater work with less love. It is the degree of charity underlying our activity that gives it most of its value in God’s eyes. “God sees the heart” (I Sam. 16, 7).

This applies also to prayer. Its value in God’s eyes is determined by the degree of love we bring to it. Francis de Sales tells us that prayer without love is useless. The quotation given above from Vatican II has similar teaching.

Different forms of prayer are not so important as the charity with which we pray. All forms of prayer are good. Different forms are appropriate for different situations. In this respect the Eucharist has a unique excellence. The Rosary is highly valued by Catholics and in today’s world innumerable people practice some form of ‘contemplative prayer’ and ‘meditation.’

When praying there is always the danger that we attach too much importance to the particular form of our prayer, and too little to the degree of charity with which we pray. Even the Eucharist, without charity, will do me no good whatever. But the Eucharist offers a lot of help in its prayers and readings; they serve to stir up charity in those who are present. But can we say the same thing always about ‘contemplative prayer?’

Is it always immersed in the love of God? Let me explain first what I mean by ‘contemplative prayer.’ Contemplation has many meanings with which I cannot deal in a short article. ‘Contemplative prayer’, as treated of in this article, means a type of prayer in which we use techniques that tend to generate a deep inner silence, a state of almost pure consciousness. There are all kinds of techniques in use. Perhaps the most common one is the repetition of a word (mantra). Christians usually use words like ‘Jesus’, ‘Father’, ‘Abba’, ‘maranatha’, often in conjunction with other techniques such as rhythmic breathing, attention to one’s breathing, sitting with a straight back, sitting in the lotus posture etc. What all techniques have in common is that they lead us into deep inner peace and quietude. The mind almost becomes a blank. Sometimes this is called ‘meditation’ especially in its secular forms.

‘Time Magazine’ says that about ten million people in the U.S.A. practice ‘meditation’. Many people take it up solely as a means to human development. It has been scientifically proved that ‘meditation’ has many therapeutic effects. It is good for one’s health; meditators get fewer heart attacks, less cancer etc. than non-meditators. The point is that many people in our world are using ‘meditation’ solely as a means to personal development. Even people who do not believe in God ‘meditate.’ It is practised largely outside the context of charity. It is even possible for one who is separated from God by sin to practice ‘meditation.’ The article in ‘Time Magazine’ scarcely mentioned God.

Christian meditation and contemplative prayer can lead us also into deep inner peace. It too can bring us better bodily health. The tranquillising of mind and heart will benefit both body and soul. How then does Christian contemplative prayer differ from secular

meditation, or Buddhist meditation? The psychological experience of inner peace and silence is largely the same in secular meditation and in contemplative prayer but the motivation is entirely different or should be different.

Secular meditation is taken up so as to enjoy better health. Christian meditation is practised so as to please God, so as to dispose oneself for a God who desires union with us. Christian meditators and contemplatives give themselves unreservedly to God in contemplative prayer. We do the same when we participate in the Eucharist or we should do so. Neither our contemplative prayer nor our Eucharist is genuine unless we are trying to give ourselves wholly to God without reservation. Both, and indeed all prayers, are inauthentic to the degree in which we make reservations in our commitment to God. For our prayer to be truly genuine, we must try to please God, not just at prayer time, but at all times. Genuine prayer is the highest expression of a life of unselfish love.

“Let all things be done in love” (I Cor. 16, 14). Contemplative prayer is no exception. Those who pray best are those who pray with most love. We can pray in very many ways, and all ways of praying are good if appropriate to the situation. Any prayer becomes pure gold if done with great love; any prayer without love is "sounding brass and tinkling cymbals."

Conclusion: “Make love your aim” (I Cor, 14, 1) at all times but especially when praying. The value of both contemplative prayer and vocal prayer will depend on the love we bring to them.

## CHAPTER 19

### BEING IN LOVE

St. Therese once remarked, "I have no difficulty in remembering the Lord's presence. When you are in love with a person he/she is never far from your mind. I don't know if I have ever been three minutes without thinking of God."

Several of the nuns, who testified at her beatification, gave it as their opinion that Therese always seemed to be in God's presence. Indeed her behaviour served to keep her constantly aware of God. In her desire to please God she never yielded to natural impulses such as walking too fast, satisfying her curiosity, choosing the work she liked or the food she liked, associating only with the nuns she liked, complaining etc. All this self-denial was practised out of love. Her love was expressed and kept alive by all these practices. It would be hard to say which came first, her love for God or its manifestation. Both nourished each other; her affective and effective love were complementary. She was in love and she stayed in love.

"Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than falling in love in a quite absolute final way. What you are in love with seizes upon your imagination and will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you will do in the evening, how you will spend your weekends, what you will read, who you know, what breaks your heart and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love and stay in love and it will decide everything!" This quotation is attributed to Fr. Arrupe, former general of the Jesuits. "Love God and do what you like." (St. Augustine).

Lonergan writes as follows, "a person who falls in love is engaged in loving, not only when attending to the beloved, but at all times. Besides particular acts of love there is the prior state of being in love which is the source of all one's actions. So mutual love is the intertwining of two lives. It transforms an 'I' and 'thou' into a 'we', so intimate, so secure, so permanent, that each attends, imagines, thinks, plans, feels, thanks and acts conscious of both" (Method in Theology, p.33).

"Being in love with God, as experienced, is being in love in an unrestricted fashion. All love is self-surrender but being in love with God is being in love without limits or qualifications or conditions or reservations." *ibid*, p. 105

The person who deliberates and chooses moral good lives within a certain horizon. If that person falls in love the horizon is changed and transformed.

Love changes silver into gold. Love is dynamic and produces a harvest of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and self-control. Love transforms all our actions into itself. Love includes and 'transvalues' all moral values. The moral person, who falls in love with God, undergoes a new conversion. This love may be broadened, deepened, heightened but not transcended. Above moral activity stands loving activity; above loving activity there are no further heights to climb. Love is the summit. The moral conscience of one in love deliberates, judges, decides and acts with the easy freedom of those who do all good because they are in love.

Being in love is a dynamic state in which one experiences God's grace, working within. This state is the source of acts of love, hope, faith, repentance and so on. In performing these acts God always takes the initiative and invites us to act lovingly; Lonergan calls this initial grace 'operative grace.' When we tune into God's initiative and perform a good act God co-operates with us; Lonergan calls this 'co-operative grace'. Let us put all this in simple language! We love God only because he first loves us (1Jn. 4, 19). We love him only because he enables us to do so. "Without me," says Jesus, "you can do nothing" (John 15, 5).

## WE ONLY LOVE WHAT WE KNOW

We are often told that we only love what we know. According to this theory knowledge must always precede love. However, when we are dealing with falling in love and being in love there is often no proportion between the knowledge and the love. Indeed love can be blind; we see this in everyday life. If we love sin knowledge will not always prevent us from sinning. But the major exception to the above theory occurs when God's love floods our hearts. In this case we can no longer analyse our experience in terms of knowledge and love. They are so closely intertwined in a single experience of being in love that it is impossible to say whether knowledge precedes love and causes it, or whether the love causes the knowledge. Love can often follow the progression of cause and effect but "the love of God is also poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us" (Rom. 5, 5). One and the same experience fills us with knowledge and love at the same time. The love helps us to know God and knowing him helps us to love him. When God's love floods our hearts we experience loving communion with God.

Thus we can be said to love God with our whole heart but this is not enough. We must also love him with our whole mind. In order to achieve this we must internalise God's word and with his grace implement it so as to please him in appropriate moral choices. Indeed loving him with our whole mind will mean putting on the mind of Christ and living out his gospel.

Let us conclude this article on being in love by referring again to Arrupe's words, "fall in love and stay in love and it will solve all our problems." I suggest that we stay in love by practising loving communion with God in prayer, by habitually trying to discover God's will in all our decisions and by being motivated in all our choices by the desire to please God.

## CHAPTER 20

### DO CHRISTIANS NEED THE CHURCH?

A recent study in Britain showed that only 10% of those surveyed belong to a definite church. However, 71% claim to have had spiritual experience and to be interested in spirituality. Other studies in the western world have shown a similar trend. People are searching for spiritual experience but hesitate in committing themselves definitively to any church. They want to keep their options open. Reluctance to make a definitive commitment of any kind is one of the signs of the times. Simultaneously, there is a widespread thirst for spiritual experience. People try to satisfy this thirst in many ways, some of which are far from ideal. Thus many dabble in the occult and in Satanism; others practice meditation that is often divorced from faith in God; others join fundamentalist Christian sects. Some try to love and serve Jesus in their own individual way, without being accountable to anyone. An increasing number study theology at university.

This whole trend raises a number of questions for the established churches. Is the Holy Spirit leading people away from structured Christianity to more free forms of worship? Can people love God in a deep way without belonging to a church? Are churches really necessary? How do Christians and the church as a whole respond to this situation? Obviously the church doesn't seem credible to many people. They perceive it as irrelevant and not helpful in their search for spiritual experience. So they avoid it and go their own way.

Before we can dialogue with the 'unchurched' we need to be clear and certain about our own Christian vision. Essentially, we Catholics, and probably all Christians, believe that the Risen Christ has given the Holy Spirit to all human beings to lead them to perfect love of God and neighbour (Doc. on Church, N.40). The Scriptural basis for this belief is that Christ died for all and wants all to be saved (I Tim. 2, 4+). It follows that he must give the Holy Spirit to all. If we believe this, it logically follows that we must tune into the Spirit and commit ourselves as fully as possible to unselfish love of God and neighbour. This is not a commitment that any human being is free to ignore. This is the purpose for which God created each of us, viz. to know, love and serve him. I like to call this the 'primary vocation' of every human being. I believe that if we take this vocation seriously and do our utmost to implement it, everything else will fall into place. This is merely another way of affirming Augustine's insight, "love God and do what you like." St. Therese also gave expression to this teaching on her death-bed, when asked for one final message. She replied, "love alone counts."

Although the Spirit is leading each one to perfect unselfish love, we still need the church to teach us how to co-operate with the Spirit. The church is the servant of the Spirit. This is true of the church in general and all her various parts, such as the parish, the diocese, seminaries, religious houses etc. All these exist to help people grow in unselfish love. All the church's activity has only one ultimate goal viz. to lead all people to an ever deeper love of God. The church can rightly be called a 'school of love.' It nourishes love in its members by its teaching, its institutions, by its laws, by the printed word etc.

In practice we cannot grow in unselfish love and persevere in it if we rely solely on our own personal resources. We need to be formed in love from infancy and we need encouragement all through life. The church nourishes us as we take our first steps in love; she provides teaching and stimulation as we proceed on the journey; she lovingly warns us of pitfalls; she helps us to solve the difficult moral issues in our society. In order to love God we must be moral people. Her laws serve a dual purpose. On the one hand they positively foster love, e. g. the church requires us to participate in the Sunday Eucharist which is the feast of love. Other laws are aimed at protecting us from sin that could destroy love. In a word we are

called to love, and in order to fulfil this vocation we need to belong to a school of love. Otherwise we are likely to go astray.

The vocation to unselfish love is not easy to implement. By nature we are selfish and we are likely to lead selfish lives unless we take every precaution not to do so. Our primary vocation is to be unselfish. Love will always mean forgetting oneself so as to please God. So as to consistently practice this love we need the church's help and we need to orient our lives towards unselfish love. Otherwise we will not practice it. So as to arrive at the summit of love, in addition to the church's help, it will be necessary, I think, to draw up a personal Rule of Life, orientated to perfect love of God and neighbour. Such a rule will be a great help provided we faithfully adhere to it.

In a word, if selfishness is to be replaced by unselfishness at all times, we will need rules and laws that help us to always forget ourselves and strive only to please God. If by dialogue we can convince the 'unchurched' of their duty to grow in unselfish love, it will only be a small step after that to convince them that they need help to achieve this goal. The church, being a school of love, is best able to lead people to unselfish love. Therefore, we all need the church. This is not to deny that the church and the various groups within it will have to strive constantly to be more effective schools of love.



## CHAPTER 21

### COMMITMENT FOR LIFE

We live in a world where people have great difficulty in making long term commitments. Lifelong commitments present special difficulties. Very many people choose to keep their options open and shy away from marriage, the religious life and the priesthood. Commitment to these vocations for life is seen as too demanding. Various arguments can be brought forward to justify the avoidance of lifelong commitments. It is not my intention in this short article to discuss the pros and cons of committing oneself for life to marriage, the religious life and the priesthood.

My purpose is to draw attention to one commitment that is more fundamental than all other commitments. This is no short-term commitment but one that lasts for life. This basic commitment to which I am referring obliges every human being. No one is free to postpone this commitment, much less ignore it altogether. We have a moral obligation to seriously face up to this commitment and no valid reason can be brought forward to excuse one from it. At this stage the reader is probably wondering what commitment I am talking about. I am referring to God's purpose for the life of each human being. We are morally bound to commit ourselves to God's purpose for our lives. What is this purpose? We do not know all the details but we know enough to make a very important commitment. God's purpose in creating us was that we might know, love and serve him with our whole being. We can simplify this by saying that God made us that we might love him with our whole heart.

Probably most people who believe in God (about 70% of the population), will agree that we are made to love God. So one might ask, where is the problem? The fact that 70% accept that we are created to love God doesn't mean that all these people will commit themselves wholeheartedly to this project. How many will sit down and reflect on it seriously? "I am created to love God; this is the primary purpose of my existence; I must take it seriously. How do I love God in my situation? What does love of God mean? Who will teach me to love God? How do I order my life so as to fulfil my primary vocation in life? What are the implications of this vocation? etc."

The big problem is one of commitment to the unselfish love of God. Probably very few get around to making this commitment the main purpose of their lives, and persevering in it until death. All of us are obliged to devote ourselves to the love of God all through our lives. This is the primary vocation of every human being. Love of God 'transvalues' all values (Lonergan). It is the only value worth pursuing in life. At the end of the day we will be judged, not by our achievements, but by our love. It is the only treasure that we can bring with us into the next world.

However, in practice there is a major problem. It seems that few people are totally committed to love God with their whole heart. Many give intellectual assent to the supreme value of love but go no further. Obviously we are dealing with a big problem.

#### HOW DO WE SOLVE THE PROBLEM?

There are innumerable helps available to help us to commit ourselves to unselfish love and persevere in our commitment. Our first resource is the Holy Spirit. The Risen Christ gives the Holy Spirit to every human being to lead him/her to perfect love (Doc. on the Church, N.40). The church itself exists to lead us to the unselfish love of God and of neighbour for God's sake. We have the Bible and innumerable spiritual books that inspire us on the way. Other people, who are seriously trying to travel the road of unselfish love can stimulate and encourage us. Above all, I think that a person cannot consistently pursue unselfish love unless he/she draws up a personal Rule of Life, orientated to perfect love of God and neighbour. This

rule will be a great help, provided we faithfully adhere to it. Jesus is the great exemplar of unselfish love, which he manifested especially on Calvary.

Many schools of love exist that are intended to lead people to unselfish love; these schools enjoy varying degrees of success. The Christian family, the parish, the diocese, seminaries, noviciates, religious houses etc. are all supposed to be schools of love. But we must ask, "are they always effective schools of love? Are those who run these schools totally committed to loving God? If they are not so committed how can they stimulate others to devote themselves to this supreme task? "

#### HINDRANCES IN PURSUING THIS COMMITMENT

It would seem that few take seriously their primary vocation, as human beings, to the unselfish love of God. Why is this? A general answer to this question is that love calls for constant self-denial and self-denial is not easy. Many of us prefer self-indulgence and our culture encourages us constantly in this direction.

Self-denial is the other side of love. Love means that we habitually do what pleases God. Implied in this is that we habitually refrain from doing what pleases ourselves. To practice love we have to consistently forego sinful and selfish desires. Love of God is death to self. Commitment to love is commitment to self-denial. "Unless you take up your cross daily and follow me you cannot be my disciples." Calvary was at one and the same time a great act of unselfish love and a great act of self-denial. "Unless you give up all you possess you cannot be my disciples" (Lk. 14, 31).

There are many other hindrances that we cannot deal with here. However, speaking generally, we can say that the innumerable distractions of modern life often undermine a serious commitment to our primary vocation. Surely this is a great pity.

Finally I would say that the one who commits oneself wholeheartedly to unselfish love, will receive a hundredfold in this life and life everlasting in the next. Such a one will find life here below fulfilling and highly meaningful. He/she will have no problem with secondary commitments because such a one always seeks only what pleases God. If we focus our attention on unselfish love all other problems will be solved. In the words of Arrupe, "fall in love and stay in love and it will solve everything."

## CHAPTER 22

### WHAT IS OUR VOCATION?

Some time ago a man remarked to me, "I think that my son might have a vocation." He was obviously thinking of a vocation to the priesthood or religious life. This is one meaning of the word 'vocation' but it also has a wider meaning. The word 'vocation' really means a call and especially God's call to us. God may call us to fulfil a role in the church or in secular society but he also calls us from moment to moment. Indeed he is always calling out for our love. The Holy Spirit is always inviting us to love God and our neighbour for God's sake. This is our primary vocation and it is common to all human beings. It is also the most important activity that God requires of us. God created all of us to love him and we all have a vocation to love.

Our vocation has two dimensions, the interior and the exterior. We are called primarily to love God with our whole heart. All human beings should make this love their primary goal in life. This is their most important duty, whether they realise it or not. It is also the activity that will bring them most fulfilment in this life and in the next. It is the most valuable activity that humans can perform; it is useful for themselves, for the world and for the church. Because of its importance it should always be kept in mind and never forgotten. One wonders how many people are aware that loving God is their first duty in life.

But love of God must also have an exterior dimension. It must govern our thoughts, words and actions. Love that is not expressed in appropriate actions will die. No two people are called to express their love in the same way. However, we are all called to some external activity. People usually define their vocation purely in terms of external activity. They will tell you their name and in the next breath they will tell you what they do by way of work. They may also mention their marital status. They tend to identify their vocation solely with the external.

We should be aware of the limitations of identifying our vocation with our role in life and the work we do. We can easily overlook the more important dimension of our vocation, viz. the interior love that God expects of us. It can be forgotten because it is internal and not seen. It can be overlooked because love of God is not sufficiently stressed in our Christian education. There are seminars and courses on all aspects of the Christian life but I have never heard of a seminar being held on how best to love God. The various courses offered to Christians are seldom linked up with charity. I think that this needs to be remedied. Are we forgetting about the most important dimension of the Christian life? Not only is love the most important quality in our choices but no decision of the will has any value without love. (I Cor. 13).

We have pointed out that there are two dimensions to every vocation, viz. the interior love of God that must be incarnated in exterior actions. Ideally the inner spirit and its outward expression should always be present. They need one another and complement one another. If I truly love I will express it in word, in deed and in omission. Love that is not expressed soon dies. But exterior actions can easily get divorced from love. It often happens that work, begun out of love for God is continued for natural motives. We can pursue personal interests, without any reference to God. 'My job' can become the sole focus of my life. I define myself in terms of what I do externally, 'I'm a nurse, a farmer etc.' and forget that my work is of little value in God's sight unless done out of love. How wonderful it would be if we always acted mainly so as to please God! We need to make a constant effort to get our motivation right and keep it right. Moral motives are good but the motive of love far transcends that of morality. Love turns silver into gold.

### HOW DO WE KEEP OUR MOTIVES PURE?

The primary role of the Holy Spirit within us is to rectify our motives; he is leading us to perfect love. We co-operate with him by filling our minds with the word of God and excluding alien words. We also co-operate with him by constant prayer, by vigilance over our desires, by spiritual reading and suitable study, by the exercise of the moral virtues out of love. An important element in this co-operation will be drawing up a Rule of Life orientated to perfect love of God and neighbour. An important element in this rule will be a daily timetable.

Finally let us never forget that the most important dimension of our vocation is the intensity of our love for God. Without love all our activity is sounding brass and tinkling cymbals (I Cor. 13). Consequently every effort must be made to grow in love.

## CHAPTER 23

### THE HUMAN VOCATION

What does it mean to be human? Modern psychology would probably answer this question from the viewpoint of natural science. While recognising the value of this approach I would like to offer an answer that takes account of Christian revelation.

Why did God create each human being and what does he expect of each one? A very short answer that highlights God's chief purpose, is to say, "God created us to love him here and hereafter." This is his ultimate goal for each human being. Undoubtedly implied in this are other dimensions of the divine purpose. It is the Creator's intention that each human being should develop at the physical, emotional, intellectual and moral levels. But the summit of human growth is achieved only when all these levels are crowned with love, viz. when one loves God with one's whole heart, one's whole soul, all one's mind and all one's strength' (Mk. 12, 30).

It must be pointed out that God does not intend one level of growth for non-believers and a higher level for Christians and those who believe in God. All are called to the fullness of love and the Holy Spirit is given to everyone to journey towards the summit of love (L.G. 40). Christ wants all to be saved and he died for all (I Tim. 2, 4+). In practice God's plans are often thwarted because we do not always co-operate with the Holy Spirit. Consequently many never grow up in the intended manner.

It is also important to tease out the implications of loving God with one's whole being. If God wishes to lead each of us to the summit of love he also wishes that each one should fulfil the necessary conditions for making this journey. It is God's will that we use the helps available for growth. So it is necessary to spell out more fully what are the necessary conditions for growth. It is part of the human vocation to be aware of these conditions and fulfil them.

The first requisite for growth is God's help. "Without Christ we can do nothing" (Jn. 15, 5). Christ has given each one the Holy Spirit to lead him/her to perfect love. Even non-believers receive the Holy Spirit, whether they realise it or not. Prayer is an important element in our co-operation with the Holy Spirit. The gospels tell us repeatedly to ask for help and it will be given.

God has also planted in each one the 'seed' of charity. Therefore, all have the God-given potential for growth in love. But this seed will only grow when we willingly hear the word of God and with his grace act to fulfil it (L.G. 42). If hearing and internalising God's word is essential for growth in love it follows that all human beings are obliged to order their lives so that in practice they can internalise the word of God and implement it. Unless we follow a suitable Rule of Life our life will not be ordered to internalising God's word and we will not grow in charity. When the word is internalised it expresses itself in prayer and good works, in affective and effective charity. Paul puts all this doctrine in other words when he says, "faith (i. e. total commitment to God) comes from hearing the words of Christ" (Rom. 10, 17).

In our Rule of Life we need to make a special effort to fill our minds with gospel values so that we will be conditioned to exercise love of God habitually. Prayer, suitable spiritual reading and study all help to purify the mind and heart.

At the same time we will need to practice wise discernment before we embrace some of the values and practices of our culture. Culture is a mixed bag of good, bad and indifferent values. If we embrace all these without discernment we will get trapped in our own selfishness and we will be unable to practice the self-denial required for love.

Implicit in the human vocation is a struggle against all the forces that tend to draw us away from the love of God. My own selfishness is probably the most fundamental obstacle to love. Habitual love of God is only possible when I try to prefer God's will to my own selfish desires in all my choices. This calls for a great deal of self-denial. Indeed love and self-denial

are proportionate to one another. The greater the love the greater the self-denial. The death of Jesus was at once a supreme act of love and an act of the highest self-denial. An act of love that costs us little is probably of little value.

If the human vocation requires us to love God with our whole being and other things only for God's sake it follows that we should love nothing more than God. In other words a disorderly attachment to anything is incompatible with the fullness of love. An attachment is disorderly when I refuse to give up something that God wishes me to give up. The human vocation requires that I be free so as to obey God always.

God can also be pushed out of my heart if I get too interested in all the happenings of the world around me. All my affective energy can be wasted on trifles so that there is little left for God.

To sum up, the Holy Spirit lives in every human being and wishes to lead each one to perfect love. In order to successfully co-operate with him, we need to regulate our lives so as to hear God's word and implement it out of love.

## CHAPTER 24

### A SCHOOL OF LOVE

I am a Cistercian monk and I have spent most of my life in a monastery. Some readers may wonder what a monastery is. Some will have read history at school and will have some knowledge of monasticism and how it influenced the church and the world in past centuries. Others may have seen old monastic ruins in different parts of the world and associate monasteries with an age long past.

But what is a monastery? I think that the Cistercian Founders described it perfectly when they called it a 'School of Love.' They saw monasteries as places where one learned the theory and practice of the love of God. The purpose of this article is not to advertise the monastic life but to reflect on our need for schools of love in the world today.

#### DO WE NEED SCHOOLS OF LOVE IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY?

All human beings have the Holy Spirit and he is leading them to perfect love of God and neighbour (L.G. 40). As we look around the world we can see a great deal of love but there is also much evil. It seems that the Holy Spirit's agenda is not being fully implemented because we humans are not co-operating. Experience teaches us that children, who grow up in a materialistic milieu, will probably be very materialistic even though the Spirit is trying to lead them to perfect love. Unless they are placed in an environment where love is taught and practised they will probably never grow up to be loving people. In other words unless they are taught in a school of love they will never arrive at perfect love. The primary school of love should be the Christian family. This needs to be supplemented by other schools of love such as the parish, the diocese and the universal church. Seminaries, noviciates, religious houses and other church groups can also be seen as schools of love. The various schools of love are not all equally effective. One has only to think of the family to which St. Therese of Lisieux belonged. Surely it was an ideal school of love. How would she have developed if she had been put in an orphanage as a two-year old and had never known the love of her parents and sisters?

The Holy Spirit wishes to lead all to perfect love but we must co-operate with him. All Christian groups have as their primary purpose and obligation to be schools of love so that, working with the Holy Spirit, they will lead their members to love of God and neighbour. Our Christian life is "sounding brass and tinkling cymbals" unless we are motivated by love and the desire to please God (I Cor. 13).

Therefore, we desperately need effective schools of love so as to lead people to the only purpose for which they were created.

#### HOW SHOULD A SCHOOL OF LOVE FUNCTION?

In answering this question we can learn a great deal from secular methods of education. Let us suppose that a young man wants to become a medical doctor. In the first place he has a clearly defined goal for his life. To achieve this goal he will have to go to medical school, attend lectures, study prescribed books, do personal study, write papers, get tips from doctors, listen to cassettes, watch videos, attend medical seminars and do practical work in hospitals. All these activities, reading and study are focused on a single goal, - becoming a good medical doctor. Focusing all one's time and energy on a clearly defined goal is the key to success.

Simultaneously with aiming at a definite target the student will have to forego other interests. He might like to study law, farming, or accountancy but all these will have to be put aside if he wishes to become a good medical doctor.

The medical school itself is totally orientated to the education of medical doctors who will have the knowledge and skills necessary to promote the health of the community.

Ideally those who run the medical school and those who attend it are unshakeably committed to a definite goal.

A school of love should also be very clear about its goal. Love of God is the highest of all human values. This is the value to which the Holy Spirit is leading us. Love 'transvalues' all other values. Love alone brings a human being to perfect maturity. Those who run a school of love and those who are students in this school need to be very definite about their goal and its supreme value. It is easier to commit ourselves unreservedly to the love of God if we are convinced that "love alone counts". Physical, intellectual and moral growth are important but without love, says St. Paul, they are nothing at all (I Cor. 13).

An effective school of love needs to orient all its studies, teaching, activity etc. to growth in the love of God. Love must be constantly kept before the eyes of the students. Nothing else matters in God's eyes. In a school of love no opportunities for exercising love should be allowed to pass. The school's lifestyle should always nourish love. A culture of love should be fostered in the school. If love is to grow in the hearts of the students they will have to internalise again and again God's word and with his grace act to fulfil it (L.G. 42). They will have to give themselves generously to loving communion with God in affective prayer.

A school of love will need a community Rule of Life that helps the community to practice love. But this is not enough. In addition to a community rule every individual will need a Personal Rule of Life to lead him/her on the journey to perfect love.

A school of love needs, not merely to study love itself, but also all the exercises necessary for practising love. We have pointed out that internalising God's word, prayer and a rule of life are necessary. Love also requires focused reading and study, the practice of the moral virtues, self-denial, discernment of our desires and actions and regulating our affectivity.

Summary: the church today needs more than ever to create effective schools of love so as to lead its members to the fullness of the love of God.



## CHAPTER 25

### EVERYONE NEEDS A PERSONAL RULE OF LIFE

A Rule of Life is necessary so as to fulfil God's purpose for one's life. What is this purpose? God desires our love. He has given the Holy Spirit to each of us to lead us to perfect love (L.G. 40). Therefore, each of us is obliged to co-operate with the Holy Spirit to realise God's purpose for our lives. We are unlikely to fulfil God's wishes unless we regulate our use of time, money etc. by a personal Rule of Life.

Let us listen to the teaching of Ignatius of Loyola on God's purpose for our lives.

"We are created to praise, reverence and serve God, Our Lord, and by this means to save our souls. (Others would say more simply that we are created to love God). All other things on earth are created for us to enable us to fulfil the purpose for which we were created, viz. all other things are created for us to enable us to love God. From this it logically follows that we are to use things to the extent that they will help us to attain the end of loving God. Likewise we must rid ourselves of them in so far as they prevent us from attaining our purpose, which is to serve and love God. If we are not sure whether things will help us to love God or not we must remain indifferent to them until it becomes clear whether they help or hinder us in our love of God. Therefore, for our part, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honour to dishonour, a long life to a short one etc....and so in all things we should desire and choose only those things that will help us to attain the purpose for which we were created." This is a slightly adapted version of the teaching of Ignatius.

The logic of Ignatius is impeccable. Basically he is saying that God made us to love him and that one must order one's whole life to attain this goal. "We must use things, e. g. our time, money and our gifts etc. only in so far as they will help us to reach our goal." This means that we must use them solely to help us to love God and for no other purpose. Again he says that we must rid ourselves of things that prevent us from loving God.' His program is so obviously correct that no thinking person can find a fault with it.

The big problem is that we are selfish. We want to use things not to serve God but for our own pleasure. We tend to use things to secure our own temporal happiness rather than to promote God's interests. We prefer health to sickness, wealth to poverty etc. even though what we prefer may not help us to love God. We desire our own security and comfort rather than God's good pleasure. Ignatius would have us "indifferent" to the things of this world if it is uncertain whether or not they will contribute to our love for God. Unfortunately most of us are far from such indifference.

Because we are so selfish and prone to please ourselves rather than God we need a Rule of Life to assist us in realising God's purpose for our life. This purpose is not something to be achieved only at the moment of death. We are called to attain it at all times. Even here and now God desires our love. Our lives should be orientated to love of God from moment to moment. But love of self tempts us in every situation and we can easily spend our lives pleasing ourselves rather than God.

A personal Rule of Life can be a powerful aid in helping us in our struggle against selfishness. If carefully drawn up and adhered to faithfully it will spur us on to live a life of love and not a natural life based on our own comfort. It is surely safe to assert that all Christians who wish to attain the purpose for which they were created need to formulate a personal Rule of Life that will enable them to use all their resources of time, money, gifts etc. in the way that pleases God most.

A daily flexible timetable will be an important element in one's Rule of Life. God gives us the gift of time so as to love him. We are not likely to use it in this way unless we regulate it carefully. It is important to remember that if we have no plan in place to love God at all times by appropriate worthwhile activities we are likely to spend most of our lives in different forms of self-indulgence. Loving God always and everywhere will not just happen of its own

accord. We must regulate our lives to make sure that we do this. If God made us to love him and if he has given us the Holy Spirit to lead us to perfect love (L.G. 40) then surely there is an obligation to order our whole life in this direction. Such ordering can only be done effectively by formulating a personal Rule of Life and adhering to it.

Again and again the gospel urges us to the fullness of love, to leave all things and follow Jesus, to love him with our whole heart, to take up our cross daily and follow him etc. In other words the gospel is always urging us to total love. But the gospel counsels will never be reduced to practice in a consistent way unless we face up to the challenge of regulating our lives so as to implement these counsels. We are unlikely to follow Jesus unless we put in place a way of achieving this. I am suggesting that every Christian, who sincerely wants to live the whole gospel, will have to regulate his/her life so as to achieve this purpose. Unless we have a Rule of Life and a daily timetable ordered towards love, we will not live the full gospel in practice.

It helps to remember that professional people in our society have to follow rules and regulate their time, so as to successfully exercise their professions. Doctors, lawyers and others must rise early in the morning and spend hours helping their clients. They must also spend hours reading and studying so as to achieve excellence in their chosen profession. Is it too much to expect that Christians, who have the greatest of all professions, will show a zeal, comparable to others, in ordering their lives to love of God?

## CHAPTER 26 INADEQUATE NOTIONS OF LOVE

In listening to sermons and in listening to people, talking about love, one can frequently detect confused notions about what constitutes true love. One person asked me, "what do you mean by the love of God?" Another remarked, "I'm not at all sure that I love God." In my opinion both of those people were very sincere Christians and were practising love in a very high degree. However, they could improve their practice if they understood it more clearly. There are many inadequate ideas about love in circulation. It is important that we recognise our misunderstandings and come up with a clear idea of what constitutes true love of God and neighbour. If we clearly understand the nature of love it will be easier to tune into the promptings of the Spirit, urging us to love. A clear understanding will also help us to recognise our failures in love and repent of them. Finally it will help us to formulate a definite vision for our lives.

As an aid to understanding love let us stress what love is not.

1: Love of God and of the neighbour for God's sake is not essentially a feeling. In our culture we tend to identify love with the feeling of love. Love, as understood in spirituality, is not essentially a feeling. Then what is it? Love is a personal unselfish commitment to pleasing God in all our deliberate desires, choices and actions. This is a habitual state, that will express itself in many interior and exterior acts. An act of love is always unselfish and performed so as to please God. A feeling of love may or may not accompany the loving choice. People frequently perform heroic acts of love without having the feeling of love, e. g. one might make a big sacrifice for a person for whom one has little natural affection.

So as to avoid identifying love with feeling I sometimes use the words 'unselfish love' or 'pleasing God' in preference to the words 'loving God'. When we perform good acts, motivated mainly by the unselfish desire to please God, we are acting out of love. Love is experienced in our consciousness as a desire to do God's will simply to please him. Both love of God and of the neighbour must always be unselfish.

2: Love of God must not be identified with love of the neighbour. People often say, "love of the neighbour is the best proof that we love God." "Christianity is all about love of the neighbour." But, I ask, "what do people mean by love of the neighbour?" Do they identify it with a feeling of love for others? Do they mean socialising and being pleasant to others? While recognising the value of feelings and socialising we must try and define the essence of love of the neighbour. I would define it as the unselfish commitment to the neighbour's true good so as to please God.

Theologians and spiritual writers have repeated insistently over the centuries that love of God and love of the neighbour are not two distinct virtues. There is only one virtue of charity, viz. the love of God. The love of neighbour and of all other things must be practised so as to please God. It follows that true love of neighbour is an act of the love of God. It follows also that it is not possible to love the neighbour adequately unless we first love God and this leads us to love the neighbour in the way that pleases God. It leads us to love him in the way that Jesus loved him.

Jesus loved God first; "he always did the things that pleased his Father" (Jn.8, 29). In order to please his Father he committed himself unselfishly to make the highest sacrifice (his life) to procure his neighbour's highest good (eternal life). Jesus' love extended to all people, friends and enemies, those near and those far away. The example of Jesus teaches us what love of the neighbour really means. It means laying down our lives, even for our enemies, even for those at the other end of the world. It means trying to bring about the neighbour's highest good.

3: Love is not to be identified with external acts of love. External acts of love are very important but they must flow out of a heart that is filled with the unselfish love of God and neighbour for God's sake. People will often judge a person's love solely by his/her external actions. One may do a lot of work for the community and be highly esteemed for it. Undoubtedly external actions are important and must be highly esteemed but we must always remember that true love of God and of neighbour must have a twofold dimension. We must have true love of God in our hearts and this love must be expressed in appropriate actions. Actions, without interior love, are of no value in God's eyes. "I can give all my goods to feed the poor but without love (i. e. interior love) it does me no good at all" (I Cor. 13). Probably in Paul's time, and at all times, some do good works for selfish motives, such as the desire to be seen by others, or the desire to seduce someone etc. Genuine love must be interior and exterior at the same time.

Summary: We must not identify love with the feeling of love, nor with love of neighbour imperfectly understood, nor with external acts. Love is the unselfish commitment to pleasing God in all our deliberate desires, choices and actions. This includes a commitment to procure the true good of the neighbour so as to please God. This commitment will express itself in frequent interior and exterior acts.

## CHAPTER 27

### SPIRITUALITIES

How many spiritualities are circulating? Only God, who is omniscient, can answer that question. Each religious order tends to jealously guard its own particular spirituality. Thus we get the following spiritualities, Jesuit, Franciscan, Dominican, Benedictine, Cistercian, Salesian, Marist, Carmelite etc. The laity (single and married), sisters, brothers and priests all try to produce a spirituality that tunes in with their vocation. In addition to this there are spiritualities, based on place, such as European, African and Asian spirituality. Closer to home we speak of Kiwi and Wellington spirituality. There are spiritualities that have their origin in particular saints such as the spirituality of St. John of the Cross, the Desert Fathers, St. Therese of Lisieux and the various founders of religious orders. Even in the Bible there are diverse spiritualities. Indeed each author presents revelation in his own individual way. If we carry this division of spirituality to its logical conclusion we will have to say that there are as many spiritualities as there are human beings.

We live in a world where we know more and more about less and less. There is a great danger that we lose sight of the big picture. I would suggest that most of the saints had no intention of generating a new spirituality. They merely tried to communicate the gospel to their contemporaries. They loved Jesus with their whole heart and tried to pass on this love to others. They may have used new terminology to express age-old spirituality. As Christians we have only one basic spirituality, that of Christ. Paul wasn't impressed with the Corinthians when they promoted different spiritualities. "I am for Paul, I am for Cephas, I am for Apollo." He simply asked, "is Christ divided?"

There is surely a need to recognise and appropriate basic Christian spirituality on which all other spiritualities are built. Scholastic theology and philosophy were helpful in focusing our attention on essentials but didn't always pay enough attention to specific differences. The danger in the modern church is the opposite. We focus so much on accidentals that often we no longer see or grasp the essentials. But one might ask, what are the essentials of Christian spirituality?

Cardinal Hume once said, that he had only one job as Archbishop, to convince people that God loved them. Being convinced that God loves us is a good foundation for all spirituality. If we are convinced that God loves us we will want to return his love.

Perhaps we have here the essentials of all spirituality, viz. God's love for us and our love for him. St. Augustine assures us that "if we love God we can do what we like." It is his way of telling us that love includes the whole spiritual life.

St. Therese on her death bed, told her sister, Celine, "love alone counts." Aquinas teaches that holiness is found mainly in charity. Vatican II, when it deals with the universal call to holiness, states repeatedly that holiness is identical with perfect love of God and neighbour (Vd. L.G.n.n. 39-42). St. Paul loudly proclaims that all our good works are useless without love (I Cor. 13). "Fall in love and stay in love and it will solve all one's problems" (Arrupe).

Perfect love includes all spiritualities; if they are without love they are "sounding brass and tinkling cymbals" (1 Cor. 13). Perhaps what the church needs today is to focus ever more deeply on love. John Paul II reminds us that all the church's pastoral endeavours should be pursued in the context of holiness (or love). We pay a lot of attention to moral issues and this is good. But the moral person, who falls in love, experiences a whole new conversion. He now observes the moral law out of love. Silver is changed into gold. We are created for unselfish love of God. Is it any wonder that those who commit themselves to love receive a hundredfold in this life and life everlasting in the next since they are fulfilling God's purpose for their lives?

If love alone counts, as St. Therese teaches, it logically follows that our whole focus in life should be on growth in love. Do particular spiritualities tend to de-focus us from the

essential? Love is mainly interior and largely a matter of motivation. The interior dimension of spirituality is the same in all spiritualities. Differences in spirituality are mainly concerned with the external acts by which we nourish and express love.

It profits little to theorise about love unless we commit ourselves to love God as fully as possible. Can we persuade people that God loves them and that as a consequence they should commit themselves to love him in return with their whole heart? Commitment to loving God is our greatest need as Christians. A Presbyterian minister remarked to me recently, "you will get about three committed people in a congregation of one hundred." I hope that there are many more than that, but his remark alerted me to the duty we all share of committing ourselves unreservedly to the love of God. John Paul II calls for a "commitment" to holiness (or love). Indeed if we commit ourselves definitively to love, all other problems will disappear. If we persevere in our commitment we shall achieve God's purpose for our lives. We will receive a hundredfold here and life everlasting hereafter.

In conclusion, if we are convinced that God loves us and we radically commit ourselves to love him in return, we will have no need to overemphasise particular spiritualities. We could make Paul's advice our own. He told the Corinthians to commit themselves to love and not to neglect the particular spiritualities. (adaptation of I Cor. 14, 1).

## CHAPTER 28

### WHAT HAVE I LEARNT ABOUT PRAYER?

I started trying to pray when I was about five, which means that I have been on the job for more than sixty years. Furthermore I have been a member of the Cistercian Order for more than fifty years. One would expect me to know a lot about prayer with so much experience behind me. What do I know?

Nothing! The longer I live the less I know. I realise that prayer is a deep mystery. God hungers for union with me and I hunger for union with him. But most of the time I reach out in the darkness of faith with very little consolation. God is infinite – I am finite. How can I know and love an unfathomable mystery? In these few pages I will try and pretend that I know something of God. I will deal with my prayer under four headings.

### PRAYER IS AN EXERCISE OF LOVE

I want to give my life as fully as possible to God. In Jesus' words my ambition is to love God with my whole heart. I confess that I am not always faithful in achieving this goal but I would be less faithful if I didn't keep the ideal before me. I like to see prayer in the context of total love of God. It doesn't make any sense when separated from love. Everyone's love of God has two dimensions – the affective and the effective. Prayer for me is the exercise of affective love. My effective love is practised by seeking out God's will in my daily life and fulfilling it. For me then all my prayer is the fulfilling of the precept to love God with my whole heart. Its only value lies in the fact that it expresses my love for God and nourishes it. This in turn will benefit the whole church and the world.

### THE DIVINE INDWELLING

My faith assures me that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit dwell in my heart. The implications of this belief for my prayer life are incalculable. I carry about in my heart a treasure that surpasses all the wealth of America. I am challenged to foster close communion with the three persons of the Blessed Trinity. Recently I met someone who was planning a world trip. I hope that I didn't throw a damper on his expectations by remarking that he had greater riches in his own heart than he would find anywhere in the world. I consider that the most important aspect of a Christian's vocation in life is to welcome, adore and love the three divine persons within him/her. In my own case I see this as a very personal responsibility for me. No one else can do it for me. This involves frequent loving attention to the God of my heart. It involves a constant effort to keep the Lord's temple clean and worthy of the three divine persons. I consider it a serious duty not to fill the temple of the Lord with junk.

### DISCIPLINE IN MY LIFE OF PRAYER

I think that it is very important for me to regulate my practice of prayer. If I didn't fix regular times for prayer it would get neglected. I have fixed times for daily prayer and I always try to be faithful to these times. Part of my prayer discipline is to have a fixed time for rising in the morning. If I didn't rise at a definite time my whole prayer-life would suffer. The stillness of the early morning is ideal for communing with God.

I believe that I should pray in two ways – formally and informally. By formal prayer I mean having a fixed time and place when I am totally attentive to the Lord and I am not doing other things while I pray. At certain times I find it necessary to withdraw from other preoccupations so as to attend lovingly to the Lord. I consider this discipline

important. Very often my love is completely unfelt. But I choose to be with the Lord in the darkness of faith and this, I believe, is excellent prayer.

By informal prayer, I mean, adoring the Lord in my heart in all kinds of places, on the street, at work, as I lie awake at night, in the car etc. The most important truths, which are the basis of my life of prayer, are, - God loves me, and the Father, Son and Holy Spirit dwell in my heart. I find that the repetition of a simple aspiration can be practised frequently throughout the day wherever I am. Francis de Sales teaches that the repetition of a single aspiration 100 times is better prayer than the recitation of 100 different aspirations. Repetition serves to implant God's love in one's heart at ever deeper levels.

## FAITH

I realise that prayer is all about being loved by God and loving him in return. But I am very convinced that usually this love is not felt. Most of the time my prayer consists in giving time to the Lord. I choose to give him my time and during that time I withdraw my attention from everything else. I reach out to the Lord in faith. I do not feel his presence most of the time but this does not worry me because I know that what is important in prayer is not how I feel, but my faithful daily commitment to the Lord. When I'm tempted to think that there is no love in my prayer I remind myself that the greatest love that this world has ever known, that of Jesus on the cross, was unfelt. It was totally in his will. At the level of feeling he experienced no love. Most of my prayer is a choice of the will to give time to the Lord and feelings are usually absent. The Lord has to give me strong faith so as to persevere in an exercise that brings little sensible consolation.