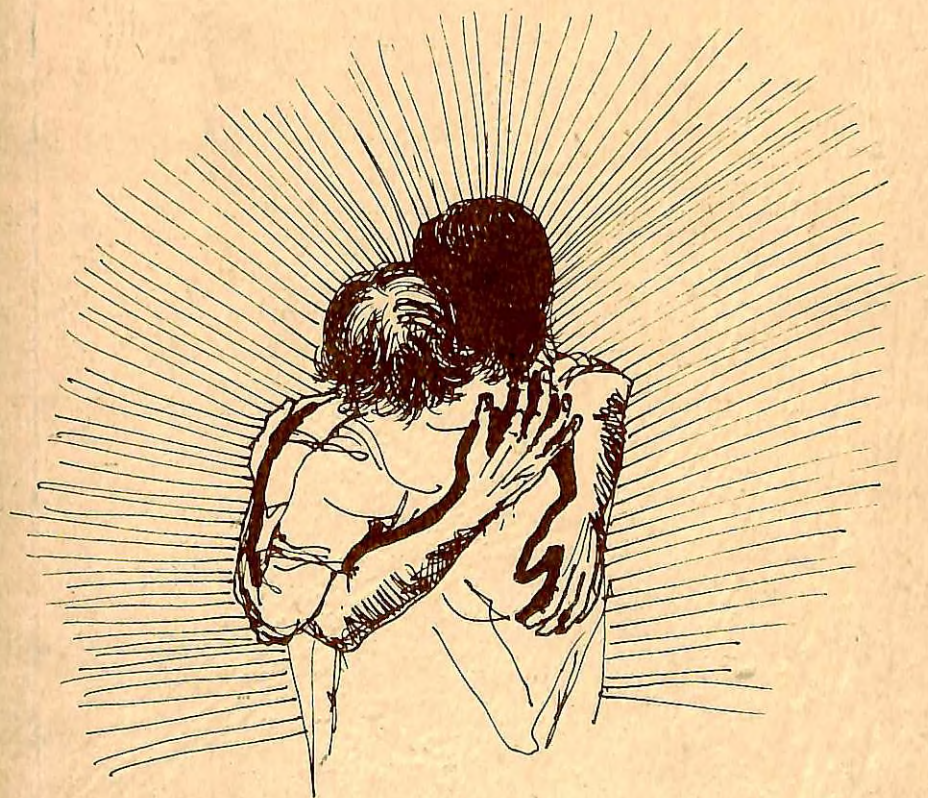


*Joy
Eternal*



Devout Reflections

SAINT ALPHONSUS

Bi-Centenary Edition, 1987

M

V

Joy Eternal

Devout Reflections

by

SAINT ALPHONSUS

An Adapted Version

Bi-Centenary Edition, 1987

Imprimi Potest : Kevin O'Shea, C.Ss.R.
Provincial Superior,
Province of Canberra.
5th January, 1987.

Imprimatur : The Most Rev. Leo Morris Clarke, D.D.
Bishop of Maitland.
17th February, 1987.

Scripture Text : "The Scripture quotations in this
publication are from the Revised
Standard Version of the Bible, Catholic
Edition, copyrighted 1966 by the
Division of Christian Education of the
National Council of the Churches of
Christ in the USA."

Illustrations : Gary Boyle, C.Ss.R.

Printed by : Newey and Beath Printers Pty. Ltd.
10 Belford Street,
Broadmeadow, N.S.W. 2292

ISBN 0 949807 50 8

PN 671 90



1988, 3996
(B 4061)



Saint Alphonsus De Liguori

1696 — 1787

Doctor of the Church
Patron of Confessors

Founder of the Redemptorists

ENCOUNTERING THE WORD:

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

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

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

From *Steps Along The Way*
by Susan A. Muto.

(Reprinted with permission)

FOREWORD:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pat Corbett, C.Ss.R.

1 August, 1987.

REFLECTIONS:

| | |
|---|----|
| On The Thought Of Eternity | 1 |
| We Are Pilgrims On Earth | 3 |
| Love The Lord With All Your Heart | 6 |
| The One Who Prays Is Certain Of Salvation | 9 |
| The Way To Holiness | 12 |
| On The Necessity Of Mental Prayer | 16 |
| Some Helps To Meditation | 18 |
| On Prayer Before The Blessed Sacrament | 22 |
| On Lukewarmness | 25 |
| On Dryness Of Spirit | 28 |
| Helps To Holiness — Desire And Resolution | 31 |
| I Must One Day Die | 33 |
| Thy Kingdom Come | 35 |
| Behold The Wood Of The Cross | 38 |
| The Cross Is Our Salvation | 42 |
| Love Is The Answer | 46 |
| His Mercy Is Everlasting | 50 |
| On Confidence In God | 52 |
| On Resignation To The Will Of God | 54 |
| On Joy Eternal | 58 |
| The Thoughts Of One About To Die | 60 |
| Longing For The Beloved | 64 |
| Jesus, The Good Shepherd | 68 |
| On The Happiness Of Heaven | 72 |
| On The Love Of Solitude | 74 |
| On Detachment | 79 |
| On Solitude Of Heart | 82 |
| To Behold God Is The Happiness Of Heaven | 85 |
| In God Alone True Peace Is Found | 87 |
| Let Us Keep God Always In View | 89 |
| On Purity Of Intention | 92 |
| Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit | 95 |
| On A Life Of Solitude | 97 |
| Sighs For Our Heavenly Home | 99 |

On The Thought Of Eternity

The great thought:
this was the name given by Saint Augustine
to the thought of eternity.
This thought caused saints to count
all the treasures of the world as nothing.
This thought inspired many to live as hermits,
and sent even kings and emperors from the world
to live as monks in cloisters.
This thought gave many martyrs
the courage to suffer torture and death.

We are not created for this earth.
God placed us in the world
so that by our good works,
we may inherit eternal life.

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

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

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

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

Augustine also said,
the one who believes in eternity,
and yet does not love God,
is either mad or has lost faith.
Saint John Chrysostom relates that gentiles
when they saw christians committing sin,
called them fools.

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

Saint Teresa of Avila often repeated:

My children, one soul, one eternity.

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

Let us pray often this prayer of the apostles:

Lord, increase our faith! Luke 17:5

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

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

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

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

We Are Pilgrims On Earth

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

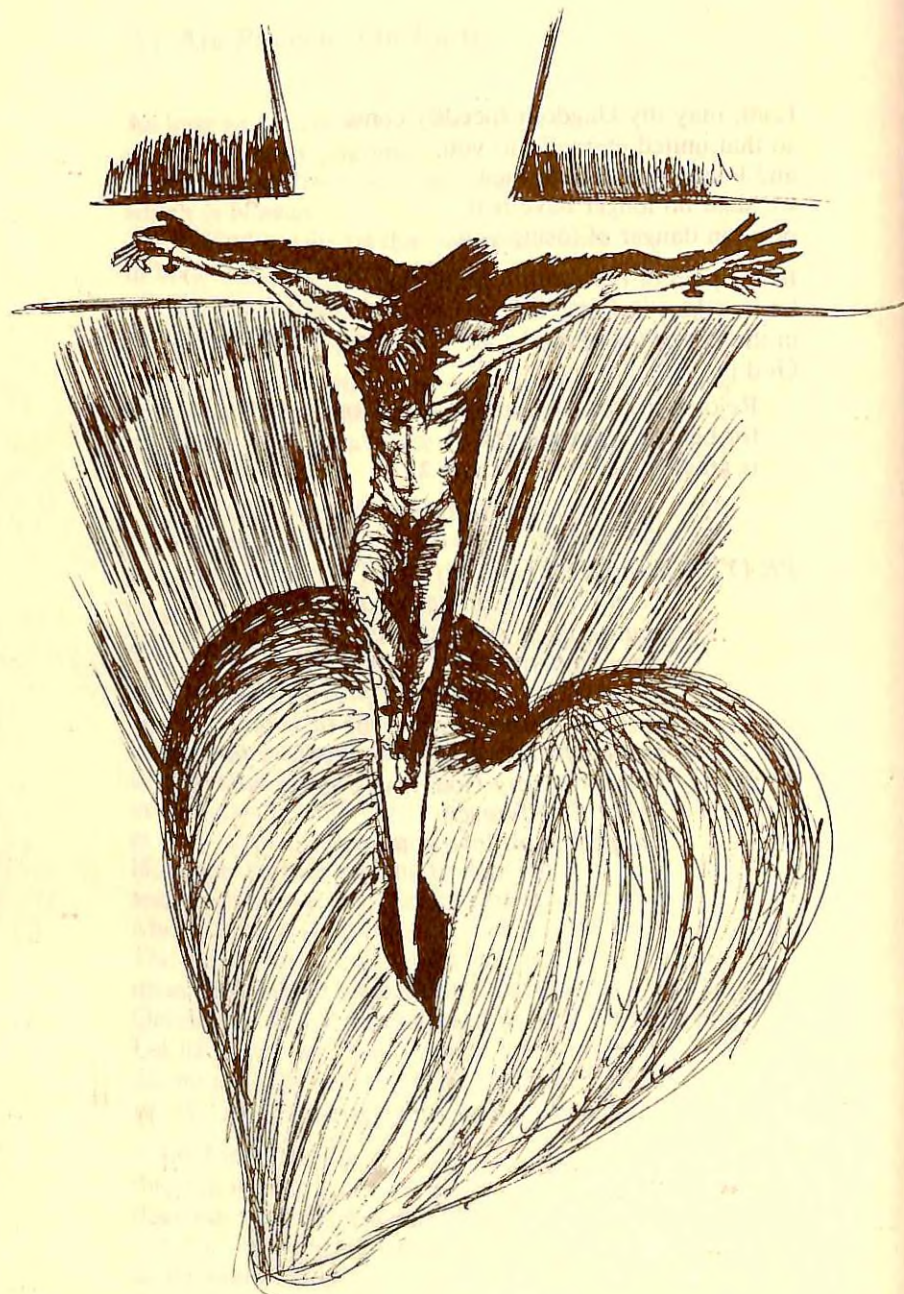
Saint John Chrysostom says
that the runner in a race
does not notice the spectators,
but runs on ever increasing his pace
as he nears the goal.
So we, in our time here on earth,
should strive for the prize — eternity.

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

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

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

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



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

Love The Lord With All Your Heart

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

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

At least let us say to him:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A heart that loves only this world
cannot be content.

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

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

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

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

O holy Virgin! aid me
with your powerful prayers.

The One Who Prays Is Certain Of Salvation

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

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

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

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

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

Temptation may be strong
but God's help is always there for us.

We need only ask for it.

Saint Paul assures us:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



O that I had wings like a dove . . .

The Way To Holiness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

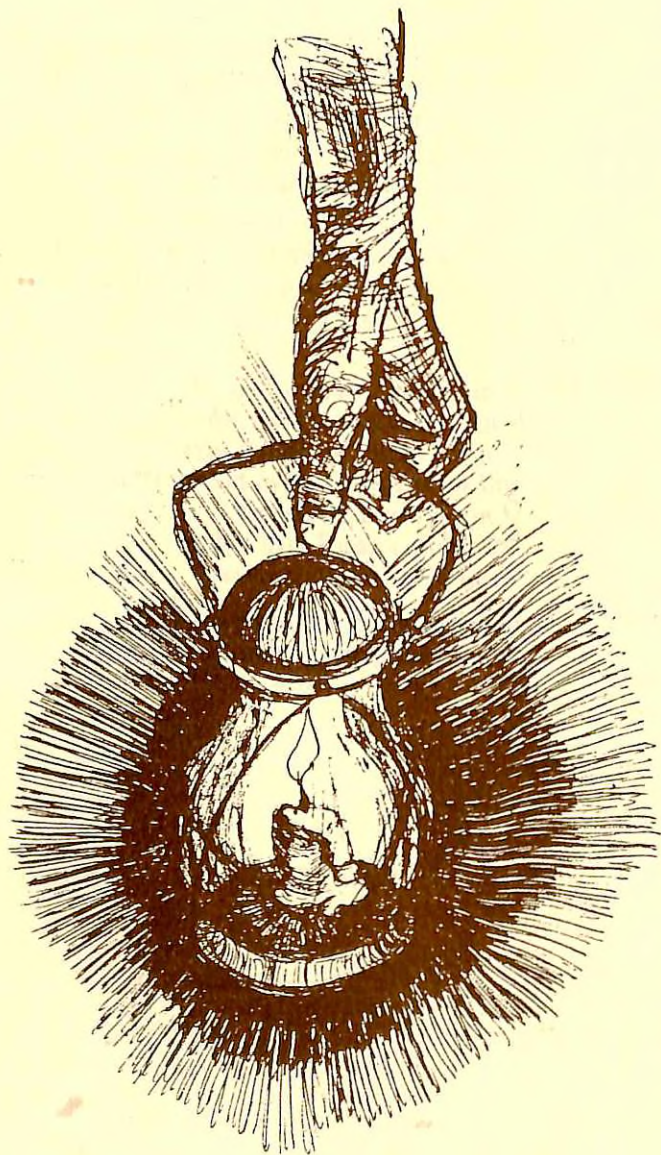
To gain all,
we must give all.
To possess God,
we must leave all that is not God.
Then, indeed, we can say to him:
My Jesus, I have left all for you;
now give yourself all to me.
Let others speak of riches and pleasures,
but let us turn to God,
and from deep in our heart
say to him:
My God, and my all!

There are three steps on the road to holiness:

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

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

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



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

On The Necessity Of Mental Prayer

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

The eternal truths cannot be seen
with the eyes of the body.
If we do not meditate
then we walk with difficulty
the way of salvation.

In meditation,
our own difficulties and defects
become clear to us.
Here too, we find the strength
to resist temptation
and to practise virtue.

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

Meditation is the wine cellar
in which the soul drinks deeply
of divine love.
Thus it loses its feeling
for worldly things.

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

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

John of the Cross

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

*PRAYER Pardon me, my God, my slothfulness,
my little love.
What treasures I have lost
by so easily abandoning
mental prayer.
For the future give me the grace
to converse with you on earth
for I hope to converse with you
for ever in heaven.
O holy virgin Mary
assist me in prayer.*

Some Helps To Meditation

To meditate well we must know
why we meditate.

We meditate in order to unite
ourselves with God.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Truly, truly, I say to you,
if you ask anything of the Father
he will give it to you in my name. John 16:23

Let us then pray and pray always.

Let us pray for ourselves;
let us pray for others,
especially unbelievers and sinners.
O Lord, make them know you,
make them love you.

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

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

Speak, Lord,
for thy servant hears. 1 Samuel 3:9

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

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

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

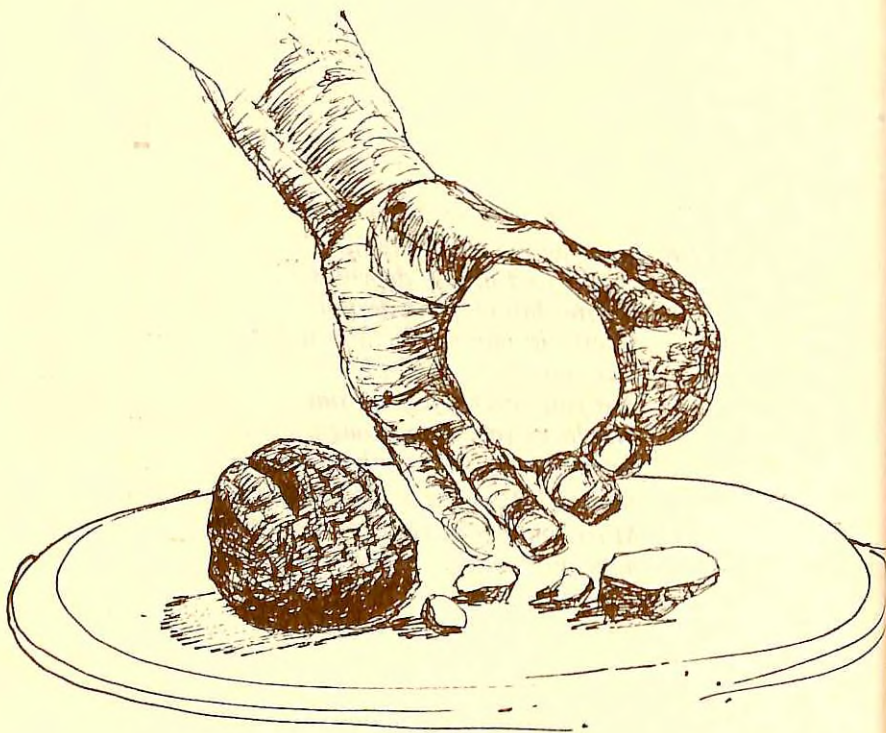
The soul pours forth to him
its affections, its desires,
its fears, its petitions;
and God speaks to the heart
causing it to know his goodness,
the love which he bears it,
and what the soul must do to please him.

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

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

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

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



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

On Prayer Before The Blessed Sacrament

Meditation, wherever it is made,
pleases God.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRAYER Of one in deep affliction.

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

On Lukewarmness

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

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

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

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

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

Saint Teresa used to say:

May God preserve you from wilful sins,
however small.

Unhappy are those souls that make peace with sins,
even when venial!

They will go from bad to worse;
for passion — gaining ground —
will easily blind them;
and when one is blind
it is easy to fall down a precipice.

Let us fear to fall into voluntary tepidity.

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

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

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



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

On Dryness Of Spirit

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*PRAYER O Jesus, my hope and only love of my soul
I do not deserve consolation.
My Saviour, I accept every suffering
but take not from me the desire
to love you.
Take from me everything
but not yourself!
Miserable as I am,
I love you more than myself.
And I give myself wholly to you.
Give me strength to be faithful to you.

O holy Virgin, hope of sinners,
I place my confidence in your intercession.
Help me to love my God,
For it is he who created me,
and redeemed me.*

Helps To Holiness — Desire And Resolution

Holiness means loving God.

To love God, we must first
desire to love him.

If we do not want something, we will
certainly go to little trouble
to obtain it!

So it is with love of God.
He that has small wish
to advance in divine love
will become lukewarm
and, continuing this tepidity,
will soon fall totally away from God.

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

Saint Teresa assures us:

God leaves no desire
without its reward.

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

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

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

The devil has no dread
of irresolute souls.

Resolutions:

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

PRAYER Jesus, my saviour, help me.
I am resolved truly to love you,
and to leave all to please you.
Help me to free myself from everything
that hinders me from belonging wholly to you
who have loved me so much.

By your prayers, O mother Mary,
which are so powerful with God,
obtain for me this grace
to belong wholly to God.

I Must One Day Die

Remember, you are dust
and unto dust shall return.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lay up your treasures
in heaven. Matthew 6:20

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

Let us ponder often the Lord's words:

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

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

PRAYER Preparation For Death

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thy Kingdom Come

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thy kingdom come.

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

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



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

Behold The Wood Of The Cross

The promise of salvation
is found in the cross.
There we find also
the true love of God.
Jesus died on his cross
for us.

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

This is the way to heaven,
to peace,
to the end of suffering —
if we can accept our cross,
and carry it with good will.
If we cannot do this,
we can never escape
the weight of our cross.
O Lord, may I conform
with your plan for me
saying always with Jesus:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

The Cross Is Our Salvation

Let us reflect on these words of Jesus:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Saint Francis de Sales says:

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

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

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

Love Is The Answer

Love is as strong
as death. Song of Songs 8:6

In death,
we are separated from friends,
from riches, from honours,
and from all wordly pleasures.

Many saints have stripped themselves
of all the world had to offer
and fled into the desert,
there to think only
of loving God.

If a soul is detached
from all earthly love,
it becomes filled
with divine love.

Saint Francis of Assisi
continued a whole night
in an ecstasy of paradise,
continually repeating:

'My God and my all.'

Sometimes in spite of all our prayers
and devotions, we seem unable
to find God.

You will not always find
spiritual sweetness,
for only from time to time
does God excite a longing
for the boundless delights
of paradise;
but you will taste that inner peace
which excels all sensual delight.

The peace that passes
all understanding. Philippians 4:7



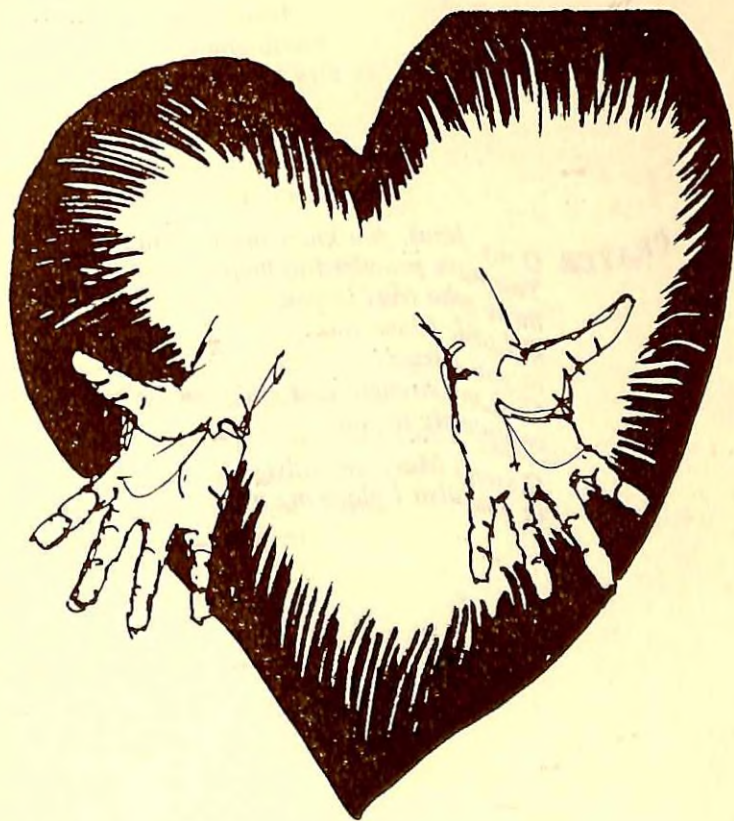
Love is as strong as death.

Saint Teresa says:

Detach your heart from creatures,
then seek God
and you will find him.
If we would find contentment
in this world,
it will be by stripping ourselves
of the goods of this world.
Thus will we become rich
in divine love.

Having been asked
why he gave all his goods
to the poor,
a holy man took from his pocket
the book of the Gospel.
'This' he said,
'has robbed me of everything.'

When there arises in our hearts
a love for something which is not of God,
or not loved for the sake of God,
we should say:
'Depart, there is no room here for you.'
This is that complete renunciation
so much recommended by the Lord.
Self-love makes it appear
that nothing is good,
unless we find our own satisfaction.
Rather we should pray:
Let me lose everything,
provided I please God.



*... Mercy proceeds
from the depth of the heart of God.*

*PRAYER O my Jesus, you know my weakness.
You have promised to help
those who trust in you.
O Lord, I love you,
in you I trust.
Give me strength and make me belong
completely to you.
O sweet Mary, my advocate,
in you also I place my trust.*

His Mercy Is Everlasting

God's desire to give us
his graces
is much greater than our desire
to receive them.
God is infinitely good
and has an infinite desire
to share his goodness with us.
This is the reason
for his great compassion
for our miseries.
God is bountiful in his mercy.
He is

The God who shows me
steadfast love. Psalm 59:17

Chastisement is a work
not according to the heart of God,
for as Saint James tells us:

Mercy triumphs over judgment. James 2:13

Therefore, in his mercy
God sent his own Son, Jesus,
to die for us on the cross,
and so deliver us,
from eternal death.

All this happened,
Saint Luke tells us:

Through the tender mercy
of our God, Luke 1:78

implying that mercy proceeds
from the depth of the heart of God.

What more could a friend do
to show his love,
than to say:

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

Yet this is what God says
to each of us.

If we repent
and turn back to God,
he will embrace us
with great joy.
With what joy he embraced
the lost sheep.
With what love he welcomed
the prodigal son.
For penitent souls are often
more fervent in loving God
than those who, being innocent,
have yet grown lukewarm
in their security.

*PRAYER O my Jesus,
since you have had so great patience
in waiting for me,
and so great love in pardoning me,
I resolve to love you very much.
O my Jesus,
when shall I begin to be
as grateful to you,
as you have been gracious to me.
My Saviour, I will love you
with all my heart.
O Mary, O mother of mercy,
draw me entirely to God.*

On Confidence In God

The mercy of Jesus to us
is wonderfully great.
For our greater good
he desires us to hope in his mercy
with a lively confidence,
trusting in his promises.

Therefore, do not throw away
your confidence,
which has a great reward. Hebrews 10:35

If fear of divine judgment
seems to diminish our confidence
in God's mercy,
let us pray thus:

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God. Psalm 42:5

God has declared that he protects
and saves all who trust in him.
O what great promises the holy scriptures
make to those who put their trust
in God.

If we feel lost through our sinfulness,
scripture tells us
to go with great confidence
to the feet of Jesus,
and there we will find pardon.

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

Let us not wait until he is seated
on the throne of judgment . . .
Let us go quickly now
while he is on his throne of grace.
God's pardon does not depend
on our deserving it;
rather it depends on Jesus' promise
to pardon those who repent.

Be firm then, not wavering
in confidence.
When anything seems especially difficult
to overcome, let us pray:

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

We will not always feel assured
in our confidence;
it is sufficient that we have the will
to trust in God
because he is good and faithful.

*PRAYER O Eternal God, I well know
that I am poor in all things.
I can do nothing, I have nothing
save what has come to me
from your hands.
Therefore, I pray:
Lord, have mercy on me.
Pardon me, and grant me
holy perseverance,
together with your love,
and the grace to pray.
O Mary, my great advocate,
help me with your prayers.*

On Resignation To The Will Of God

My food is to do the will
of him who sent me. John 4:34

In this mortal life,
food is that which preserves our life.
Jesus declares it is his food
to do the will of the Father.
This also ought to be the food
of our soul.
Our life consists in doing
the divine will.

The faithful will abide
with him in love. Wisdom 3:9

Those who love God
unite themselves with his will.
In every adversity which afflicts them,
they have ever on their lips
and in their hearts:
Thy will be done.

God desires only what is best for us.

This is the will of God,
your sanctification. 1 Thessalonians 4:3

Let us take care to unite our will
to the will of God.

Whoever does not act thus
will never find peace.

Agree with God and be at peace;
thereby good will come to you. Job 22:21

In the hymn to the will of God,
we sing:

Thou makest crosses soft and light
and death itself seem sweet and bright.
No cross nor fear that soul dismays
whose will to thee united stays.
O will of God! O will divine
all, all our love be ever thine!

Behold the excellent counsel of Saint Peter:

Cast all your anxieties on him
for he cares about you. 1 Peter 5:7

Let us leave to God the whole care
of our salvation;
for whoever places complete confidence
in God, is certain of eternal salvation.

For I will surely save you . . .
because you have put your trust
in me. Jeremiah 39:18

If we truly desire salvation
and perfect union with our God,
we will say with the psalmist:

Teach me, O Lord, to do thy will
for thou art my God. Psalm 143:10

If we fast or give alms
we give of our own possessions;
but if we give our will,
we give our whole self.
Let us strive therefore,
to say to the Lord:
Lord, having given you my will,
I have nothing more
to give you.

This is the most acceptable gift
we can give to God,
and he pours abundant grace
on those who give it.
However, to be perfect
this gift has two conditions:
It must be without reserve,
and it must be constant.
Let us, then, day by day,
renew the total gift of our will
to the will of God.

PRAYER Receive, O God,
the gift of my entire will
and of my liberty.
I do not deserve
that you should accept this gift;
so often have I been unfaithful.
But I hear you command me
to love you with all my heart,
and therefore, I am sure
you will accept it.
I resign myself wholly to your will.
Make me love you,
and then dispose of me
and all that is mine
as it pleases you.
I am in your hands;
do what you know to be best
for my salvation.
O mother of God, do you obtain for me
holy perseverance.

*O Jesus, my beloved Lord,
I seek for nought but thee!
My God, to thee I give myself—
Do what thou wilt with me.*



*No more sadness, or weariness
but gladness and
Joy Eternal*

On Joy Eternal

This earth is for us
a battlefield
where we have to fight and conquer
in order to be saved.
But when we reach heaven
our state is changed.
There will be no more toil but rest;
no more fear but security;
no more sadness, or weariness,
but gladness and
Joy Eternal.

With the hope of such great joy,
let us animate ourselves
to fight until death,
and never give up
until our struggle is ended,
and we possess a blessed eternity.

A patient man will endure
until the right moment, and then
joy will burst forth for him. Sirach 1:23

So now is the time for pruning the vine
and cutting off everything
which hinders us on our journey
to the land of the blessed.

But cutting off causes pain
so we have need of patience.
God, however, is faithful!
He promises that he will be our reward,
a reward infinitely greater
than any suffering.

Blessed are those who endure trial,
for when they have stood the test,
they will receive the crown of life
which God has promised to those
who love him. James 1:12

He has promised the crown of glory
to those who love him humbly.

You will obtain the unfading
crown of glory. 1 Peter 5:4

Let us, then, love God
and let us strive to be humble.

However, beware of self-love
which intrudes itself into all our works,
even into our prayers and meditations.
Few are the devout souls
who do not fall into this defect.

PRAYER O my Jesus, I am one of those
who, in my devotions, has been seeking
my own satisfactions.
I wish to love you
without any interested motive,
but I am weak.
You must give me strength
to accomplish it.
Make me love you,
and I ask for nothing more.
O Mary, my mother, by your prayers
keep me ever faithful to God.

The Thoughts Of One About To Die

O Jesus, my redeemer,
who in a few moments
will be my judge,
have mercy on me!

Some would terrify me by saying
that there is no salvation for me!

O Lord, how many are my foes!
Many are rising against me;
many are saying of me,
there is no help for him
in God. Psalm 3:1

But I will never cease to trust
in your goodness, and say:

But thou, O Lord,
art a shield about me,
my glory,
and the lifter of my head. Psalm 3:3

O comfort me and make me feel
you are my salvation.

Say to my soul,
"I am your deliverance!" Psalm 35:3

Especially, I pray you
through the sadness you felt
when your soul was separated
from your most holy body,
to have mercy on my soul
when it shall leave mine.

It is true,
my sins have often displeased you,
but now I love you above everything.
I love you more than myself,
and I grieve with all my heart
for the offences I have committed.
The death you endured
and the great mercies you have shown me,
make me confidently hope
that, when I appear before you,
you will give me the holy kiss of peace.

Trusting entirely in your goodness,
O my God, I abandon myself
into your loving arms.

PRAYER In Preparation For The Hour Of Death

*O my God, I offer you my life,
and I am prepared to die at any hour
that may be pleasing to your holy will.
Your will be done! Always, Always,
your will be done!
I only beg you to help me
through this hour.
Have mercy on me, O God!
according to your great mercy.*

*I desire to die, that I may prove
I love your will more than my life.
I desire, above all, to die in order
that I may come to love you eternally.*

*O my Jesus, I accept death,
and all the pain that may accompany it,
for love of you,
and joyfully I say with Saint Francis of Assisi:
May I die for love of your love
who died for love of my love.*

*I adore you, my God, who created me.
I believe in you, Truth Eternal,
I hope in you, Infinite Mercy,
I love you, Supreme Goodness.*

*O Jesus, Son of God, have pity on me.
My Saviour; save me.
Let it be my salvation
to love you eternally.*

*O mother of God, and my mother Mary,
you have obtained so many graces from God
during my life; I thank you for them
with all my heart.*

*O abandon me not in this hour of my death,
in which I have yet greater need
of your prayers.*

*Saint Joseph, my patron and my father,
help me in this hour.*

*At last, my Jesus crucified,
at the moment when I must breathe
my last breath, receive my soul
into your arms.*

*You are my God and my all,
and what else can I desire but you.*

*Whom have I in heaven but thee?
And there is nothing upon earth
that I desire besides thee.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion for ever. Psalm 73:25*

*Trusting in your mercy, I say:
In you, O Lord, have I hoped;
I shall not be confounded for ever.*

*O Mary, you are my hope.
Hail our hope.
To you, therefore, I say again,
In you, O Lady, have I hoped.
I shall not be confounded for ever.*



*He is like the sun
behind clouds*

Longing For The Beloved

While we are at home in the body
we are away from the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:6

Those who in this life
love God above all else,
are like pilgrims
sighing for their departure
to the country of the blessed.

They know, indeed, that their beloved
is ever present with them
but he is, as it were,
hidden behind a curtain
or better, he is like the sun
behind clouds,
only occasionally sending forth
rays of splendour.

Moreover, these beloved ones
have a bandage over their eyes,
and this prevents them from seeing
him whom they love.

They continually sigh to behold him
face to face, to become more charmed,
and more inflamed with love for him.

Often they sweetly complain to the beloved:

O only love of my heart!
Since you love me so much,
and have wounded me with holy love,
why do you hide,
and not let me see you?
I know you are infinite beauty.
I love you more than myself
though I have never yet beheld you!
Show me your fair countenance.
I long to see you unveiled,
so that I may think
only of loving you,
my highest good.

And yet, for them,
the sun is still behind the clouds;
his fair face is concealed behind a veil,
and there is still the bandage over their eyes,
so they cannot gaze on him face to face.

What will be their joy
when the clouds shall disperse,
when the curtain shall be withdrawn,
and the bandage taken from their eyes,
and the fair countenance of the beloved
shall appear unveiled!

Then in the clear light they shall see
his beauty, his goodness, his greatness,
and the love which he has for them.

PRAYER O Death!

*Why do you so long delay to come!
If you come not, I cannot depart
to behold my God.*

*You must open to me the gate,
that I may enter
the palace of my Lord.*

*O blessed country,
when will the day come
in which I shall find myself
within your eternal tabernacles?*

*O beloved of my soul, my Jesus,
my treasure, my love, my all,
when shall come that happy moment
when, leaving this earth,
I shall see myself united to you?*

*O my Jesus, you see the position
in which I am placed,
of being either forever united to you,
or forever banished far from you.*

*Have pity on me; you are my hope;
and your intercession, O my mother Mary,
is my comfort and my joy.*



*And having found it, rejoicing
he places it upon his shoulders.*

Jesus, The Good Shepherd

Jesus said of himself:

I am the good shepherd. John 10:11

The work of a good shepherd
is to guide his flocks to good pasture,
and to guard them from wolves.

But what shepherd,
O my sweet Redeemer,
ever had goodness like yours?
You gave your life for your sheep,
and delivered us from the punishment
we deserved.

To heal us of our ills,
our good shepherd
took upon himself all our debts,
and paid them
in his agony and death upon the cross.

He himself
bore our sins in his body
on the tree.
By his wounds,
you have been healed. 1 Peter 2:24

Saint Ignatius, the martyr
said of Jesus:

My love is crucified.
Other martyrs too, found it sweet
to give their lives for the Lord,
who gave his life for us.

And not satisfied with dying for us,
this good shepherd,
left us his very body
to be our food and pasture.

This good shepherd,
having lost one of his sheep
what does he not do:
what means does he not take
to recover it!
And having found it,
rejoicing, he places it
upon his shoulders
that it may be lost no more.
Then he calls all his friends
to rejoice with him
for his lost sheep is found.

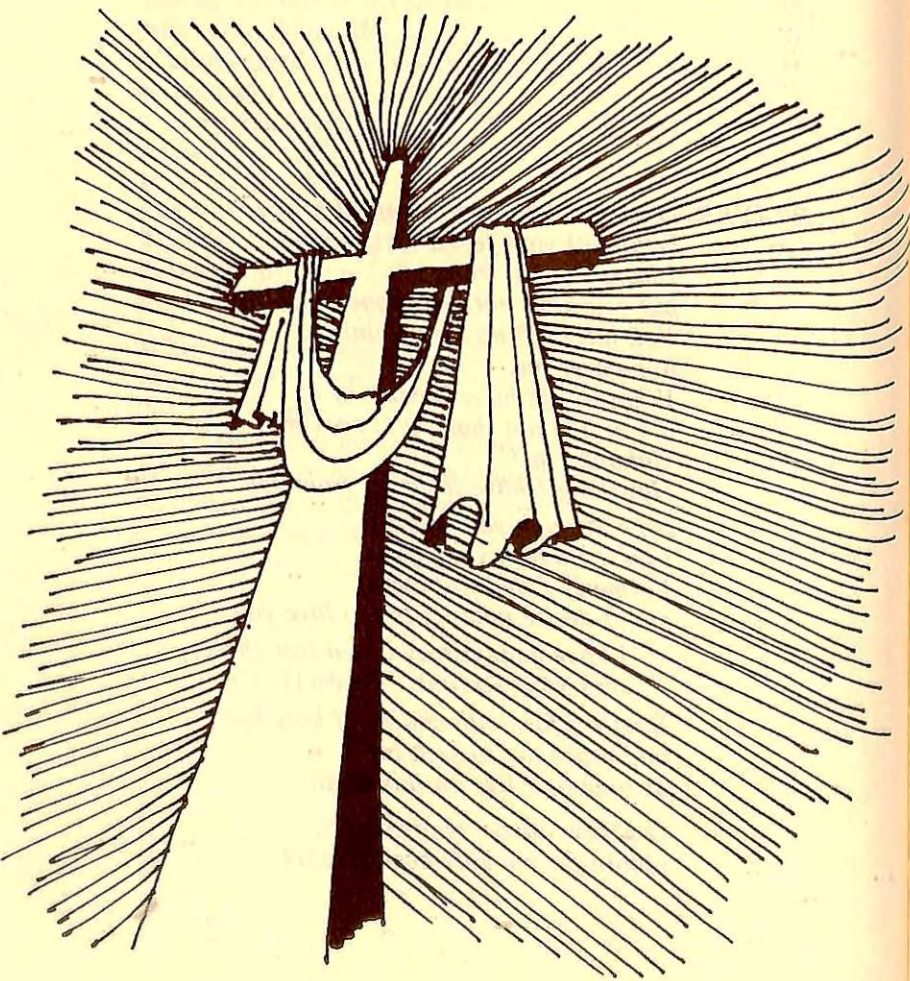
Who, then, will not love
with all their heart
this good Lord,
who shows such love to sinners,
even when they have turned their backs
on him, and lost themselves
of their own accord?

PRAYER O my Saviour, worthy of all my love,
behold at your feet a lost sheep.
I have strayed from you
but you have not abandoned me.
You have left no means untried
to recover me.
What would have become of me
if you had not thought to seek me?
Unhappy me!
How long I have lived far from you.
Now through your mercy,
I trust I am in your grace.
Formerly I fled from you;
now I desire nothing but to love you.

*I have gone astray like a lost sheep;
seek your servant.* Psalm 119:176

*Bind me fast with chains of holy love,
and cease not to seek me
as long as I live on this earth.*

*O Mary, advocate of sinners,
obtain for me holy perseverance.*



*To enter into heaven and meet God
without a veil, face to face —
this will be the joy eternal
of the faithful heart.*

On The Happiness Of Heaven

To enter into heaven and meet God
without a veil, face to face —
this will be the joy eternal
of the faithful heart.

There, overwhelmed with delight,
we will understand the ways of God,
and the harmony of his decrees.

Especially we shall feel
God's boundless love for us
in coming to share our human life,
and understand what an excess of goodness
is revealed in the mystery of the cross —
God dying crucified;
and in the mystery of the eucharist —
God becoming food for his people.

We will perceive all the graces and favours
bestowed on us, but not understood until now.
We will know that all the losses
and tribulations of this life
had a purpose:
to draw us closer to our God,
and to perfect love of him.

On reaching heaven, our sole desire
will be to see God.
And we will experience the infinite joy
of which, as creatures, we were incapable —
a delight immense and complete,
the same joy which belongs to God.
And so will be fulfilled the words:

Enter into the joy
of your master. Matthew 25:21

Our happiness will not be felt so much
through the delights we experience,
as through the happiness which God enjoys.

They feast on the abundance
of thy house,
and thou givest them drink
from the river of thy delights. Psalm 36:8

Happy from our first entrance into heaven,
we shall, as it were, be drowned in love,
in that boundless ocean of the goodness of God.

This will be our blessedness:
knowing ourselves secure
of always loving God,
and of always being loved by him.
Filled with joy, satiated with delight,
we will desire nothing more.

In this life, let us rejoice
in the blessedness that God enjoys,
and so begin to enter
the joy of paradise.

*PRAYER O my sweet Saviour,
and the love of my heart,
I see myself in this vale of tears,
surrounded by those who seek
to separate me from you.
O my beloved Lord,
never let me lose you.
Allow me to love you
in this life and the next.
O Queen of paradise,
if you pray for me,
it is certain that I will go
to keep you company,
and sing your praises
throughout eternity.*

On The Love Of Solitude

Since God is not found
in the tumult of the world
holy people have always sought for him
in the starkness of the desert,
or in the most lonely of caves,
there to speak to him
heart to heart.

Our Lord once said to Saint Teresa:

I would willingly speak to many
but the world makes so much noise
in their hearts,
that my voice cannot be heard.

Those who do not love solitude
will never hear the sweet sounds
of the voice of the Lord.

Therefore, behold, I will allure her,
and bring her into the wilderness
and speak tenderly to her. Hosea 2:14

When God desires to call someone
to intimacy with him,
he invites such a one
to retire to a quiet place,
and there he speaks to the ears,
not of the body, but of the heart.

Saint Bernard assures us
that he learnt far more
of the love of God
among the oaks of the forest,
than in books or from holy people.
Hence Saint Jerome,
leaving the delights of Rome,
and living in a cave at Bethlehem,
exclaimed:

O solitude, in which God speaks
so intimately to his own.

In solitude,
God allows us to hear
words of love which melt the heart,
and we exclaim:

My heart melted
when my beloved spoke.

We know from experience
that occupying ourselves
with worldly cares
makes us forget God.
At the moment of death
we shall find comfort
not from our worldly pursuits,
but from what we have done
or suffered for God.

O that I had wings like a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest:
yea, I would wander afar,
I would lodge in the wilderness. Psalm 55:6-7

The psalmist desired
to have wings like a dove
that he might leave the earth
and thus give rest to his soul.
But as long as we are in this life,
it is not given us
to leave this earth:
Let us, at least,
take care to love solitude,
and there commune alone
with our God.

PRAYER O that I had thought always of you,
O God of my soul,
and not of the goods
of this world.

*I regret those days in which,
seeking earthly pleasure,
I offended you, my only good.
O that I had always loved you.
Death is near and I find myself
still attached to the world.*

*No! my Jesus,
today I make the resolution
to leave all and give myself to you.
You are all powerful;
hence give me the strength
to be always faithful.*

*O mother of God,
pray to Jesus for me.*



*We must detach ourselves
from everything which is not God
or does not lead to God.*

DETACHMENT, or 'distacco', is a key theme in Alphonsus' spirituality. It is perhaps best translated as unattachment, for in Alphonsus' thought, the idea is a positive one. He was to write:

*To love thee and to give thee pleasure,
I wish to serve thee without self-
interest, without consolation or
reward — only to give thee pleasure.*

Alphonsus ardently loved his family and the members of his Congregation, he loved the beauty of this world — especially music and art: but he would not let any person or any occupation or any created thing distract him from this love of God.

'Distacco', or unattachment, is the way to achieve such a disinterested love. We need to be conscious of this as we read the following reflections.

On Detachment

To love God with our whole heart,
we must detach ourselves
from everything which is not God,
or does not lead us to God.

He is a lover, who loves us,
not for his own interest,
but solely out of his goodness;
and because he loves us exceedingly
he desires that we should love him
with all our heart.

To love God with our whole heart
implies two things:
the first is, to banish everything
which is not for God,
or according to the will of God.
Saint Francis de Sales wrote:

If I knew there was one fibre in my heart
which did not belong to God,
I would instantly cut it out.

The second is prayer,
by which holy love is introduced
into the heart.
But if the heart is not empty,
love cannot enter.

O, how full of goodness and liberality
is God,
to those who seek nothing
but him and his will.

The Lord is good
to those who wait for him,
to the soul that seeks him. Lamentations 3:25

Happy those,
who while still living in the world,
can say with Saint Francis of Assisi:

My God and my all.
I have despised the kingdoms
of the world
and all worldly honour,
for love of Jesus Christ,
My Lord.

Therefore, when anything would enter our heart,
and take a share of the love
that belongs to God,
we must shut the door and say:

Begone,
go to those who desire you:
my heart I have given wholly
to Jesus Christ.

Above all, to attain to perfect love,
we must deny ourselves,
embracing that which is distasteful,
and rejecting that which self-love demands.
Saint Francis de Sales would tell us
to love even virtues with detachment.

Thus it is necessary
to embrace with equanimity
everything that happens to us
through the will of God.
We must beg of God
to enable us to find peace
in everything he appoints for us.

It is certain that no one
lives more happy in the world
than he who spurns
the things of the world,
and lives in continual uniformity
with the will of God.

Therefore, it is useful during the day,
at least at prayer and communion,
frequently to renew at the foot of the cross,
the total renunciation of ourselves,
and of all that we possess.

*PRAYER O my Jesus,
I desire to think no more
of myself;
I give myself wholly to you,
do with me what you please.*

*I see that everything
the world offers me is vanity.
From this day, I resolve
to seek nothing but you,
and your good pleasure.
Help me to be faithful.*

*Most holy Mary,
pray to Jesus for me.*

On Solitude Of Heart

We have seen
how much solitude assists
recollection of mind;
but Saint Gregory warns us
that it profits us little, or nothing
to be with the body in a solitary place,
if we still keep the heart
full of worldly desires.

To be wholly given to God,
two things are necessary:
first, to disentangle ourselves
from earthly attachments
which hinder us from loving God;
second, to consecrate to God
all our love.

Many complain that in all their devotions
they do not find God,
and know not what to do
in order to find him.
Saint Teresa gives them the right means
when she says:

Detach your heart
from all created things,
and then search for God,
and you will find him.

To detach ourselves from earthly desires,
it is not possible for us
to go and live in a desert;
but we must understand
that deserts and caves are not necessary
to enjoy solitude of heart.
If we are obliged to live in the world,
it is possible —
provided our hearts are free
from worldly attachments —
to possess solitude of heart
and union with God,
even in the streets and market place.

God has given each of us a task to perform
and we must do it as well as we can;
and yet even in the midst of our affairs,
let us live as though our relationship
with God is all that matters.

We must detach ourselves from everything,
and especially from our self-love.

For example, a certain thing pleases us:

let us forgo it

for the very reason it pleases us!

Someone has injured us:

let us do good in return

just because they have injured us!

How easily does God let himself be found

by all who detach themselves

from earthly things

in order to find him.

Since God has given us everything that we have
it is reasonable that we should give him
all our love.

Should some attachment try to enter
and take for itself a portion of our love,
we must turn to God
and say with all our heart:

Whom have I in heaven but thee?

And there is nothing on earth

that I desire but thee.

My flesh and my heart may fail,

but God is the strength of my heart

and my portion for ever. Psalm 73:25

O my God, who but yourself
can satisfy my soul?

No, in heaven and on earth,

I desire nothing if it is not you.

You alone can satisfy me,

O God of my heart

and my portion for ever.

*PRAYER O Jesus, be the Lord of my heart
by possessing it entirely.
Let others seek the delights of the world;
you alone both now and forever
will be my only portion,
my only good, my only love.*

*Since you love me, and have given
so many proofs of your love,
help me to detach myself
from everything that could draw me away
from your love.*

Take possession of all my heart.

*O Mary, mother of God,
in you I trust.*

*Intercede for me
that I may belong without reserve
to Jesus.*

To Behold God Is The Happiness Of Heaven

Let us see what it is
that makes the heavenly citizens
completely happy.
The blessed,
beholding God face to face,
and realizing his infinite loveliness,
cannot but love Him
with all their strength,
and love Him immeasurably
more than themselves.
To see their beloved happy
is their total joy.
This is the happiness
for which David sighed:

As for me, I shall behold thy face. . .
when I awake, I shall be satisfied
with beholding thy form. Psalm 17:15

Therefore, I think that in prayer,
among all acts of love towards God,
none is more perfect than taking delight
in the infinite happiness
which God enjoys.
Those who rejoice in the happiness of God
begin in this life to do
that which they hope to do in heaven,
through all eternity.

The ultimate contentment,
which constitutes paradise,
will be further increased by the splendour
of that delightful city of God,
by the beauty of its inhabitants,
by the companionship
of the saints and angels,
by the presence of Mary,
the fairest of all,
and by the beauty of Jesus Christ
which immeasurably surpasses
that of Mary.

In this life,
however great and continual
be our joys,
in time they weary us;
but as for the delights of paradise,
the more they are enjoyed,
the more they are desired.

When sickness, pain or difficulties
afflict us,
let us lift up our eyes to heaven,
and say:

One day all these pains
will have an end, and after that,
I hope to enjoy God for ever.

PRAYER O my Jesus,
how can I aspire
to so great a good,
I, who have so often
renounced paradise.
Yet I hope for it,
because you died upon the cross
to give paradise to those
who have not deserved it!
O my Redeemer and my God,
I resolve no more to lose you.
Help me to be faithful.
O those who love God,
while we live in this vale of tears,
let us ever sigh for paradise,
and say:
O fair country, where love's reward
love itself bestows
where my sweet and loving Lord
himself unveiled will show.
Hour by hour I long my God to see
when, o when shall it be?

In God Alone True Peace Is Found

Those who seek peace
in the things of this world
will never find it;
for our heart's contentment
will not be found in anything created.
In infinite goodness,
God has created us for himself,
and therefore
he alone can satisfy us.

How many people
loaded with riches and pleasures
yearn for more possessions
and more amusements,
and no matter how many they obtain,
are still restless
and never enjoy a day
of true peace.

Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you
the desires of your heart. Psalm 37:4

If we delight only in God,
if we seek nothing but God,
God will satisfy all the desires
of our heart.

Foolish are they who say:
Happy is he who can do as he likes,
who can command others,
and who can take
what pleasures he wants.
No! He alone is happy who loves God,
and for whom God alone is sufficient.

The peace of God
passes all understanding. Philippians 4:7
O, how much does the peace
which the Lord gives
exceed all the delights
of this world.

O taste and see
that the Lord is good. Psalm 34:8

Try it for once,
leave the world, leave it
and give yourself to God.*
Thus you will see how well he knows
how to console you,
more than all the delights
of this world.

True, the saints have suffered
great trials in this life,
but by resigning themselves
to the will of God,
they never lost true peace.
Hence to live always united to God,
we must remove from the heart
all that is not of God.
Happy they for whom God alone
is sufficient.

PRAYER O my God,
help me to disengage myself
from all the snares which draw me
from you.
Grant me the grace to seek nothing
but you; and to desire nothing
but to love you,
and give you pleasure.
For love of you, I now renounce
all earthly pleasures,
I renounce also
all spiritual consolations.
I desire nothing but to do your will,
and to give you pleasure.
O mother of God,
recommend me to your Son,
who denies you nothing.

* This phrase, *Lasciate Il Mondo E Datevi A Dio*
echoes the words first heard by Alphonsus on the day of his
spiritual conversion. '*Lascia Il Mondo E Datti A Me*' —
Leave the world and give yourself to me. It is, therefore, fundamental
to an understanding of his approach to holiness.

Let Us Keep God Always In View

In all we do
we should have no other end in view
but to please God.
Many things are done either to please
or not to displease others;
but Saint Paul says;

If I were still pleasing men,
I should not be
the servant of God. Galatians 1:10

In everything we do
let us say with Jesus:

I always do what is pleasing
to him. John 8:29

God has given us everything we have;
we have of our own
only nothingness and sin.
God alone is he who has truly loved us.
He has loved us from eternity.

Happy is he, O my God,
who seeks you alone, and renounces
everything for your love!
He will find that pearl of pure love
a jewel more precious
than all the treasures
and kingdoms of the earth.

My God and my all,
I prefer you to all the riches,
and to all the gifts
you could bestow on me.
You are all my good.
You alone I desire and nothing more;
For you alone are infinitely beautiful,
infinitely kind, infinitely amiable.
Wherefore, every gift which is not yourself
is not enough for me.
I repeat, and I will ever repeat:
You alone I desire;
and whatever is less than you,
I tell you, is not sufficient for me.

O when shall it be given me
to occupy myself solely in pleasing you,
loving you, and praising you.
O my Lord, and my love,
help me when you see me growing cold
in your love.

Stretch forth thy hand from on high,
rescue me and deliver me
from many waters. Psalm 144:7

In this life, God does not grant us
to enjoy him fully;
He gives only certain foretastes
of heaven.
The Lord gives consolations
only to make us yearn
for the happiness of paradise.

*PRAYER O God all powerful
O God worthy of all love,
grant that I may seek nothing
but your good pleasure.
How painful the thought
that in times past
I have so little loved you.
I desire and resolve
to love you with all my strength
for the time to come.
I hope to die loving you alone,
my greatest good.
O mother of God, sweet Mary,
pray for me.
Your prayers are never refused.
Pray to Jesus that he may give me
the grace to live for him alone.*



*If your eye is sound
your whole body
will be full of light.*

On Purity Of Intention

Purity of intention
is to perform everything we do
solely to please God.

If your eye is sound
your whole body
will be full of light,
but if your eye is not sound
your body will be full
of darkness. Matthew 6:22

The sound eye signifies
the pure intention of pleasing God.
The dark eye signifies the lack
of an honest and holy intention,
as when our actions
are done to please ourselves.

Could any action be more noble
than to give one's life for the faith?
Yet, Saint Paul says,
that those who die from any motive
other than pleasing God,
gain nothing from their martyrdom!
If this is so, then of what value
will be preaching, apostolic works,
penance, if they are done
to gain the praise of those around us,
or to gratify our own inclinations?

One of the best ways to know
if our intention is pure,
is to remain undisturbed
when our efforts do not have
the desired effect;
or to remain tranquil and contented
when our good works are not appreciated.

Let us be persuaded
that the more we divest ourselves
of our own interests,
so much the more will our God
increase our joy eternal.

Saint John Chrysostom says:

If you have the honour of doing
anything that pleases God,
how can you ask
for any other reward.

So whether you eat or drink,
or whatever you do,
do all to the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10:31

Purity of intention
makes the most commonplace actions
such as eating, working,
enjoying leisure become precious
when all is done to please God.
We must, then, from early morning,
direct to God,
all the action of the day.
We must be like that holy hermit,
who before beginning anything he had to do,
lifted his eyes to heaven
and remained still:
and when asked what he was doing,
he replied:
I am making sure of my aim!

PRAYER And I, O my Jesus,
when shall I begin
to love you truly.
If I seek among my works
for any that are good —
for one work done for you,
my Saviour —
I shall not find it.
Have pity on me.
Grant that whatever remains to me
of life,
I may spend it only
in serving and loving you.
O my great advocate, Mary,
obtain for me this grace
by your prayers.

Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit

In order to enrich us
with true riches,
Jesus Christ chose to be poor:

Yet for your sake he became poor,
so that by his poverty,
you might become rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9

He chose to be poor
to teach us by example
not to cling to earthly goods;
and thus to make us rich
with heavenly goods,
which are immensely more precious,
and are eternal.

Whoever does not renounce
everything on earth
which he possesses with attachment,
cannot be his true follower.

Many lament
that in meditations and communions,
and in other devotions,
they do not find God.
To such, Saint Teresa says:

Detach yourself from creatures,
and thou shalt find God.

Let us give to God our whole will,
saying:

Lord, dispose of me and of all I have
as you please.

I desire nothing but what you desire,
and I know what you will
is best for me.

Grant me then,
that I may ever love you,
and I desire nothing more.

The means to detach ourselves
is to acquire a great love for God.

The means for acquiring
this all powerful love
is holy prayer.

Let us constantly pray to God
to give us his love,
thus we shall find ourselves
detached from everything
that is not God.

*PRAYER My Jesus,
how is it possible that
having known the love
which you have for me,
I can love anything besides you.*

*Draw me always
more within your heart.
May I not seek nor sigh
after anything but your love.
My Jesus, in you I trust.*

*O Mary, mother of God,
you are my hope;
detach me from the love of anything
that is not God
May he be the object
of all my love,
and of my eternal joy.*

On A Life Of Solitude

Many people, with good reason,
fly solitude;
because in solitude,
the remorse of conscience
makes itself more felt in their hearts.
To the lovers of God
this does not happen,
because in retirement, they find
a sweet companion,
who consoles them and makes them glad.

For companionship with her
has no bitterness,
and life with her has no pain,
but gladness and joy. Wisdom 8:16

Our blessed Saviour
desired that his disciples
should, from time to time,
cease their labours, and retire into solitude,
to treat with God alone.

I am never less alone than when alone,
never less alone than when far from the crowd;
for then I find God will speak to me,
and on the other hand, I find myself
more attentive to his voice,
and more disposed to unite myself to him.

Saint Bernard

We know that Jesus was accustomed
to send them into different parts of Judea,
that they might convert sinners,
but after their labours, he did not fail
to invite them to retire
to some solitary place saying to them:

Come away by yourselves to a lonely place
and rest a while. Mark 6:31

Certainly by this expression,
Jesus did not mean that the apostles
were to go to sleep,
but that they were to repose
in communion with God,
in praying to him
for the graces necessary to live well,
and thus to gain strength
to work for the salvation of others.
Without this repose with God in prayer
we lack the energy
to attend to our own progress,
and to the profit of others.

Saint Lawrence, speaking of retirement says:
that it is always to be loved
but not always possessed,
for often the call of God will cause us
to leave our retirement and solitude.
Yet we should never cease
to love and sigh for solitude,
in which God allows himself
to be more easily found.

PRAYER O my Jesus,
I have loved retirement little
because I have loved you little.
Alas, for so many years
I have kept my heart dissipated,
thinking only of the goods of earth
and forgetting you.
O take this heart of mine
and inflame it with love.
Make it all your own.

O Mary, queen of heaven,
you can obtain for me this grace;
from you, I hope for it.

Sighs For Our Heavenly Home

How happy it will be to be saved!
To leave this place of exile
and enter the heavenly Jerusalem,
to enjoy that perfect day
which shall always be day,
and always joyful,
free from all cares,
and from all fear of ever losing
so infinite a happiness.

We ought always to sigh
for paradise, saying:
When, O Lord,
shall I be delivered
from so many anxieties,
and think of nothing
but loving and praising you . . .
When will you become
all to me in all things,
as the apostle writes:

That God may be everything
to everyone. 1 Corinthians 15:28

When shall I enjoy that unchanging peace,
free from all affliction,
and from all danger of being lost?
When, O my God,
shall I find myself swallowed up in you,
and behold your infinite beauty,
face to face, and without a veil?
When, O my Creator, shall I possess you
in such a way that I may say:
My God, I cannot lose you anymore!

Meanwhile, O my Saviour,
while you see me an exile
and afflicted in this land
where I have to be fighting
in ceaseless internal struggles,
help me by your grace,
and console me
in this so difficult a pilgrimage.

Whatever the world may offer me,
I already know that nothing in it
can give me peace;
but yet I fear
if I have not help from you,
the pleasures of the world,
and my evil inclinations,
may draw me down some precipice.

Seeing myself an exile
in this vale of tears,
I wish to think continually of you
and rejoice in your happiness;
but the evil desires of the senses
often cry out within me and disturb me.

I wish to keep my affections
ever occupied in loving you
and thanking you;
but the flesh entices me
to enjoy sensual delights.
Hence I am constrained to exclaim:

Wretched man that I am!
Who will deliver me
from this body of death? Romans 7:24

I am in continual combat,
not only with external enemies,
but with myself,
so that I am weighed down
and a trouble to myself.
Who then will deliver me
from the body of this death?

O God, be not far from me;
O my God, make haste to help me. Psalm 71:12

My God, go not far from me;
because if you go from me,
I fear I shall displease you.
Remain very near me, my beloved Saviour,
and give me the patience I need
to overcome the continual attacks
by which I am tormented.
How often, when I apply myself to prayer,
random thoughts draw me away,
and distract me with a thousand follies!
Take from me, too, the great repugnance I feel
to anything that hurts my self-love.

I have gone astray like a lost sheep;
seek thy servant. Psalm 119:176

O beloved shepherd of my soul,
seek me;
abandon me not, as I deserve.
Seek me and save me;
take me and hold me tightly
upon your shoulders,
that I may not leave you again.

Even while I am longing for paradise,
I am terrified by the remembrance of my sins;
but the sight of you, my crucified Jesus,
consoles me and encourages me to hope
that, one day, I shall come and love you,
beholding you unveiled in the kingdom.

Mary, queen of heaven,
continue to be my advocate.
Through the blood of Jesus Christ,
and through your prayers,
I have a firm hope of being saved.

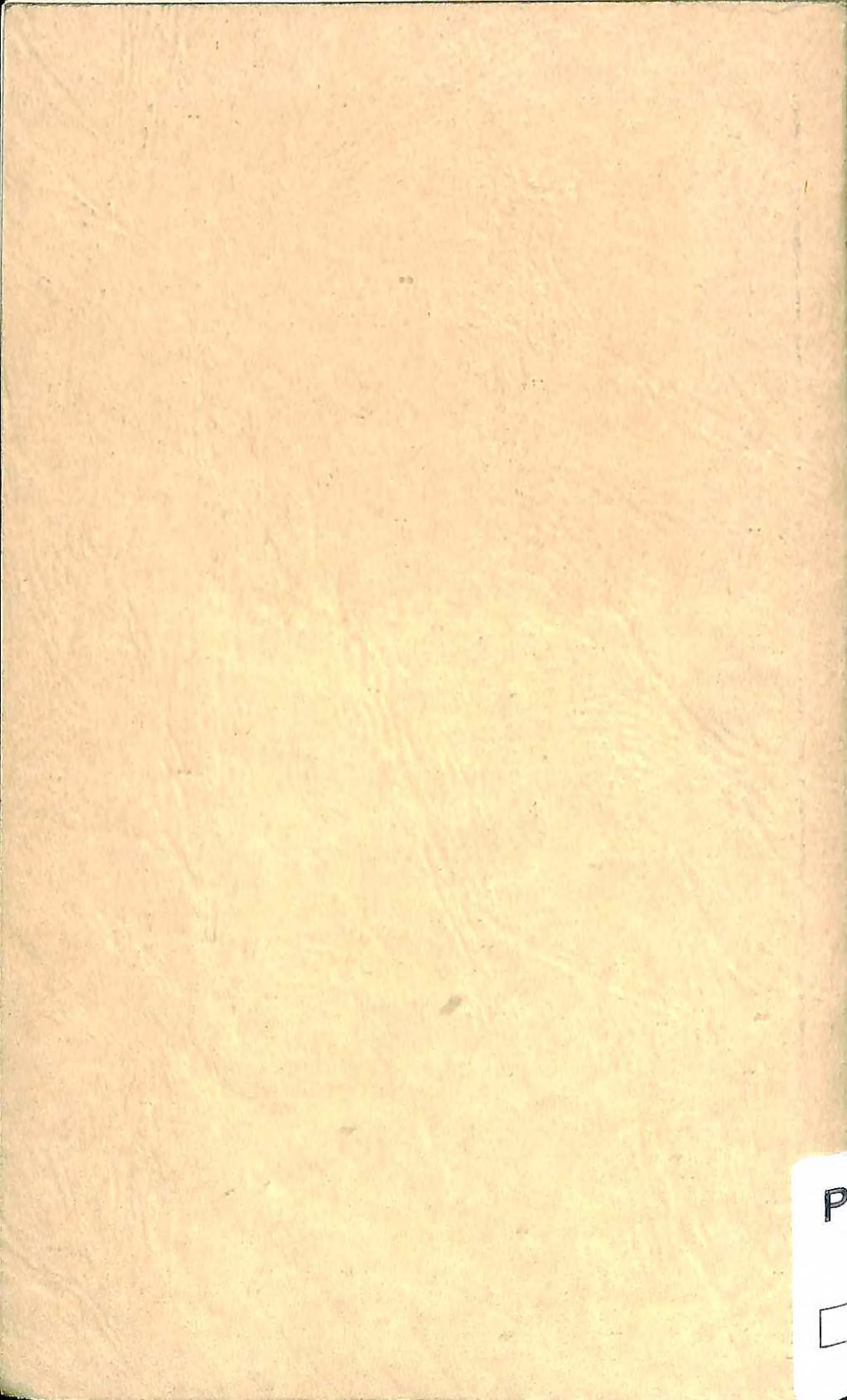
*PRAYER O beauteous home,
Where love's reward
Love will itself bestow;
Where my sweet and loving Lord
Himself unveiled will show.
When shall I see that blest abode,
And there behold and love my God?
When will that wished-for day arise?
While now I cry, twixt smiles and tears,
Ah, when? ah, when shall end my fears?
O Paradise! O Paradise!*

For those wishing to consult the original work of Saint Alphonsus, it can be found in the centenary edition of the complete works of Saint Alphonsus, Volume 2: *The Way of Salvation and of Perfection*. edited by Rev. Eugene Grimm, C.Ss.R., 1954.

Father Edmund Vaughan, C.Ss.R., the Superior of the first foundation of Redemptorists in Australia, also translated this work into English — Burns & Oates Ltd., London, 1901.

Both texts have been used in this present adaptation. Printed in brackets you will find the source of the original reflection.

| | |
|---|-------|
| On The Thought Of Eternity | [1] |
| We Are Pilgrims On Earth | [2] |
| Love The Lord With All Your Heart | [3] |
| The One Who Prays Is Certain Of Salvation | [7] |
| The Way To Holiness | [4] |
| On The Necessity Of Mental Prayer | [14] |
| Some Helps To Meditation | [15] |
| On Prayer Before The Blessed Sacrament | [34] |
| On Lukewarmness | [43] |
| On Dryness of Spirit | [39] |
| Helps To Holiness — Desire And Resolution | [5] |
| I Must One Day Die | [8] |
| Thy Kingdom Come | [10] |
| Behold The Wood Of The Cross | [11] |
| In The Cross Is Our Salvation | [12] |
| Love Is The Answer | [13] |
| His Mercy Is Everlasting | [16] |
| On Confidence In God | [17] |
| On Resignation To The Will Of God | [19] |
| On Joy Eternal | [20] |
| The Thoughts Of One About To Die | [22] |
| Longing For The Beloved | [25] |
| Jesus The Good Shepherd | [26] |
| On The Happiness Of Heaven | [28] |
| On The Love Of Solitude | [31] |
| On Detachment | [41] |
| On Solitude Of Heart | [32] |
| To Behold God Is The Happiness Of Heaven | [33] |
| In God Alone True Peace Is Found | [35] |
| Let Us Keep God Always In View | [36] |
| On Purity Of Intention | [44] |
| Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit | [38] |
| On A Life Of Solitude | [40] |
| Sighs For Our Heavenly Home | [45] |



P

