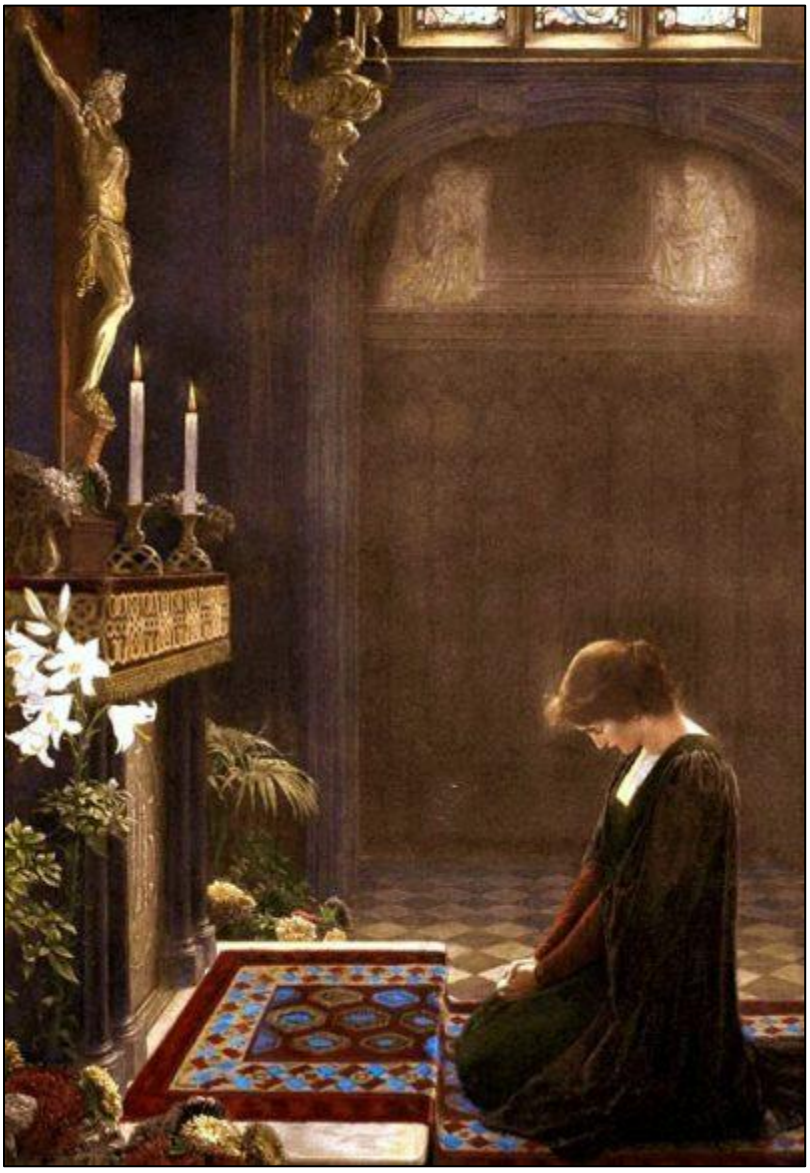

PRACTICE OF CHRISTIAN & RELIGIOUS PERFECTION

FR. ALPHONSUS RODRIGUEZ, S.J.

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LIFE OF ALPHONSUS RODRIGUEZ

The celebrated father, Alphonsus Rodriguez, to whom all devout Christians, as well as the members of the different religious orders of the church, are so deeply indebted for the rich treasures which he has bequeathed to them in his ascetic writings, was born at Valladolid, in Spain. He commenced his studies at Salamanca; and there, after having attained his degree in the School of Philosophy, he was moved by the apostolic preaching of Fr. John Ramirez, of the Society of Jesus, and, at the age of nineteen, embraced the religious state in that society. During his noviceship, and in the course of his theological studies, he acquired so high a reputation for virtue, that scarcely was he ordained priest when he was entrusted with the care of the young religious, to train them up in the spirit of their vocation; an employment which is considered of the utmost importance in the society. Amongst those who had the happiness of being under him as Master of Novices, was the celebrated doctor, Father Francis Suarez, who used frequently to congratulate himself on having been the disciple of one so renowned in spiritual life. He was next appointed Rector of Monterei, where he afterwards remained; and, during the space of twelve years, delivered lectures in Moral Theology with such celebrity that many were anxious to obtain copies of his writings.

To the important duties of the theological chair, his zeal associated still greater labours in his endeavours to promote the spiritual welfare of the city in which he dwelt, and of the neighbouring country, by preaching, catechising, and absolving sinners. From Monterei he was removed to Valladolid, to fill the office of domestic casuist in the house of the professed Fathers: thence he was summoned to Montilla to instruct the novices, and continued to perform this duty for more than thirty years. He was afterwards deputed to Rome to attend the fifth general congregation, where he gave illustrious proofs of his sanctity, prudence, and knowledge of the rules and constitutions of the society. From Rome he returned to Spain, and became Spiritual Father in the college of Cordova. It was during his sojourn here, that, having principally in view to promote the advancement in solid virtue of the entire body of the society, he wrote those admirable treatises on Christian Perfection, to which the Holy Ghost has imparted such unction, that, read again and again, they never tire. Having gone to Seville, in the year 1606, to assist at a provincial congregation, he was ordered by his superiors to remain there, and was placed once more over the novices. He continued at Seville till his death, devoting his leisure moments to the revision of his writings previous to their publication. Unceasing labour had by this time greatly impaired his strength; and, during the last two years of his life, he became so decrepit, that he was no longer able to support himself on his limbs to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass; but the saintly old man received daily from the hands of another the adorable sacrament of the Eucharist. At last, loaded with years and merits, he slept in the Lord, at the advanced age of ninety, in the seventieth year of his religious life, and forty-six years after his solemn profession. He expired on the 21st of February, 1616.

He was a man who never failed to illustrate in his own person, and by his own example, those lessons of virtue and sublime perfection which he inculcated in his works. His union with God was most intimate: he found a heaven in his cell, and seldom left it unless at the call of charity or obedience. During the last years of his life, being released from those obstacles which are inseparable from offices of authority over others, he used to devote four hours each day to prayer. He took no pleasure in walking about the garden attached to the college: his delight was to remain alone with God. He was the first at every public duty, most punctual in the least little observances of religious life, and a strenuous assertor of evangelical poverty. Even in the last stage of his long life, he would admit of no singularity in his diet; and when he happened to be helped to something likely to gratify his palate, he

would contrive to spoil its flavour with water. To the very last, he never omitted to crawl to the church to hear the confessions of the people, and, in his turn, threw himself daily at the feet of his own confessor to obtain absolution himself. It was a most edifying sight, to behold this venerable man, at the age of ninety, with the most profound sentiments of humility, stooping to kiss the feet of his religious brethren, as though he was the last and lowest amongst them, and only fit to be trampled under foot by all around him.

THE FIFTH TREATISE

OF PRAYER

CHAPTER I.

OF THE MERIT AND EXCELLENCY OF PRAYER.

St. John, in the fifth and eighth chapters of the Apocalypse expresses admirably well the excellency and merit of prayer. He says in the eighth, that there came an angel, and stood before the altar, having in his hand a thurible of gold, to whom was given a great quantity of incense, to the end he should offer up the prayers of all the saints upon the altar of God, which was before the throne of God; and the smoke of the incense of the prayers, raised itself from the hand of the angel, to the presence of God. (Apoc. viii. 3, 4.)

St. Chrysostom speaking of this passage, tells us, that one proof of the merit of prayer, is, that in the holy scripture, it alone is compared to thymiama, which was a composition of incense of many admirable perfumes. For as the smell of well composed thymiama is very delicious; so prayer also, when well made, is very acceptable to God, and gives great joy to the angels and inhabitants of the heavenly Jerusalem. Wherefore St. John speaking of the twenty-four elders, relates, that they had golden cups, full of perfumes, which are prayers of saints. (Apoc. v. 8.) So that, says St. Augustine, what can be more excellent than prayer? what is there more profitable in this life? what more sweet to the mind? and what in our whole religion more sublime? (Tract. de mis. Tom. x.) St. Gregory of Nice is of the same opinion and says, that of all things which we esteem in this life, none ought to be preferred before prayer. (De or. Dom.)

St. Bernard, the better to make us understand the merit of it, says, that though it is certain, the angels are often effectually (but invisibly) present with God's servants, to defend them from the deceits and ambushes of the devil, and more and more to raise their thoughts and desires to God; yet nevertheless they more particularly favour us with this presence, when we are employed in prayer. He proves this proposition by divers passages of scripture; as by this, I will sing hymns to thee in the presence of the angels; (Ps. cxxxvii. 2.) and the princes joining themselves to the musicians went before, in the middle of young damsels, who played upon timbrels. (Ps. lxvii. 26.)

Understanding by the princes, the angels, who join themselves to those that are in prayer, as appears by these words of the angel to Tobias; When you were in prayer, and poured forth tears, I offered your prayers to our Lord. (Tob. xii. 12.)

We see by this last passage, that prayers scarce go out of the mouth of him that prays, but presently the angels who are by us, receive and present them to God. St. Hilary also assures us, that the angels preside at the prayers of the faithful, and continually offer them to God. (Hil. can. 18. In Mat.) So that when we are in prayer, we are surrounded by angels, and in effect we perform their office; exercising at present, what we must practise with them for an eternity. Wherefore they already look upon us, as their companions, and beforehand beholding us as in heaven, filling up the places of their fallen companions, favour us more particularly during our prayer, than at other times.

St. Chrysostom speaking of the excellency of prayer, and desirous to let us see its advantages, says; Consider, to what a degree of happiness you are raised by prayer, and how great prerogatives are attributed

to it. You thereby speak to God himself; you entertain yourself and converse with Jesus Christ; you therein desire what pleases you, and you ask whatsoever you desire. (Lib. 2. de Oran. Deum.) There is no tongue that is sufficiently able to express, of how great a value this communication is, which man has with God, and what profit it brings along with it. We see in the world, that those who ordinarily keep company with wise and prudent persons, reform and improve their minds and judgments by their conversation. If therefore they become virtuous by frequenting the company of virtuous persons; what advantage may we not believe we gain, by a frequent communication with God? Approach him, says the Royal Prophet, and you shall be enlightened. (Ps. xxxiii. 7.)

In effect, with what lights, with what knowledge must we not needs be filled? What good, what happiness must we not assuredly gain, by this kind of commerce? wherefore St. Chrysostom assures us, that, nothing can so much contribute to our progress in virtue, as frequent prayer, and conversation with God; so that by this means the heart of man comes to be filled with, and to relish the most noble thoughts; and is enabled to raise itself above all earthly things; and in fine, becomes spiritual and holy, and in a manner transforms itself into God.

CHAPTER II.

OF THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER.

We have but too much experience of the need we have of prayer; and would to God that this experience were less frequent than it is. But man being subject to so many frailties, finding himself encompassed by so many enemies, and standing in need of so many things, both for soul and body, ought to have a continual recourse to God, to implore his assistance, and to tell him, as king Josaphat did, when the Ammonites and Moabites were come against him; Lord, in this extremity to which I am reduced, not knowing what to do, the only remedy I have left, is to cast up my eyes unto thee. (2 Paral. xx. 11.)

I know not, says Pope Celestine, speaking of the importance of prayer, how to say anything better to you upon this subject, than what Zosimus my predecessor said of it — When is it that we stand not in need of the Divine assistance? Wherefore in all sorts of occasions and affairs; let us always have recourse to his protection; for it would be an insupportable pride, should man dare to presume to do, or think he can do anything of himself. (Celest. i. c. 9. cont. Pelag.) St. Thomas intending to prove the necessity of prayer, gives an excellent and most essential reason for it, which is taken from the doctrine of the holy fathers, and has this truth for its foundation — That what God has from all eternity determined to give unto souls, he gives it in time, by the means and help of prayer. For as it is the order and disposition of the divine providence, that mankind should increase and multiply by means of marriage; that the earth should become fruitful by the care that is taken to cultivate it; and lastly, that it is with materials, and by the help of workmen, that buildings are raised; so it is, says he, the order and disposition of the divine providence, that by the means and help of prayer, souls should obtain many graces and lights.

For this reason Jesus Christ said in the gospel; Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: because whosoever asks, receives; who searches, finds; and the door is opened, to him that knocks. (Mat. vii. 7, 8.) It is therefore very easy to perceive the need we have of having frequent recourse to prayer; because it is the channel through which Jesus Christ communicates his favours, assists us in our necessities, and enriches us with his treasures. Some saints say, that it is like a chain of gold, fastened to heaven, and hanging down to the very earth, whereby the graces of God descend

to us, and we are elevated and raised up unto him. We may also say, that it is Jacob's ladder, that reaches from earth to heaven, by which the angels continually ascend and descend, to carry our petitions to God, and bring back his blessings unto us.

St. Augustine calls it the key of heaven: (Aug. serm. 226.) and in effect, it is the key that opens all the gates, and by which all the coffers of the celestial treasures are opened. He says also, that as natural food nourishes the body, so the word of God and prayer maintain and nourish the soul. But one of the chief things that still shows what esteem we ought to have for prayer, is, that it becomes a very efficacious means to regulate our life, and helps us to surmount all those obstacles we are to meet with in the way of virtue. Wherefore the saints say, that the whole conduct of our life depends upon it; and that our life is well or ill regulated, according to our discharging well or ill the duty of prayer. He who knows how to pray as he should, knows also how to live as he should, (Hom. iv. cx. 50.) says St. Augustine.

And St. Climacus relates, that a servant of God told him the following words, which are very remarkable — That in the morning he knew very well, how the rest of the day would pass; that is to say, that when he had made his prayer well, all the rest corresponded to this good beginning; and when he had not well acquitted himself of this duty, he was disturbed and deranged all the day after. It is the same in order to our whole life in general; for we often experience, that when we have made our prayer well, we find ourselves in greater peace and tranquility than ordinary; and we feel the joy of our souls, as well as our holy resolutions, increased in us. But as soon as we come to relent, or neglect our prayer, we presently perceive the truth of what St. Bonaventure says, that without that, religion is dry, imperfect, and near its ruin. (Bon. De prog. Rel. s. 7.)

Tepidity presently comes upon us, the soul grows weak by little and little and insensibly loses the fervour and courage it before had for spiritual and heavenly things — its good desires and holy resolutions are dissipated and vanish away; and bad inclinations come in their place, and are again enkindled. In fine, we come at last to please ourselves in nothing but vain and unprofitable things, and to be transported with joy for such as are even ridiculous; and also fall into a shameful negligence. And what is still worse, the desire of vainglory, anger, envy, ambition, and those other dangerous inclinations which we thought we had overcome and extinguished, begin to revive anew in our hearts, and bring disorder and corruption along with them.

The abbot Nilus says, that prayer ought to be the looking-glass of a religious; it is in this we daily must at leisure take a view of ourselves, both to know our faults, and the means to mend them. It is in this mirror, that we consider the resplendent virtues of Jesus Christ, wherewith to adorn and embellish our souls. A religious, says St. Francis, ought to desire nothing so much, as to obtain the grace and gift of prayer, for without this, we cannot hope to be able to make any progress in God's service; and with it, there is nothing we may not promise ourselves. (Hist. min. c. 7.) It is for this reason, that St. Thomas of Aquin said, that a religious without prayer, was like a soldier without arms in time of battle.

And St. Thomas of Villanova, was wont to say, that prayer was to the soul, as natural heat is to the stomach. And as without heat, it is impossible that food should do a man any good, or even that he should be able to live; whereas by means of this heat, he converts it into good juice and nourishment, which disperses itself through-out the whole body, to furnish each part thereof with sufficient strength to perform its functions — in like manner our spiritual life cannot subsist without prayer; for it is prayer that gives us strength to fulfil all the obligations of our profession, and to profit as we should do, of even the most troublesome accidents — it is this that makes us easily digest all injuries and hardships, and makes them become easy and supportable; so that there is nothing can happen to a soul, of which it will not make its profit and advantage.

In fine, if we make good use of prayer, we shall therein find a remedy for all our faults, and an assured help and means to maintain ourselves in the vigour and purity of religion. For if perhaps you have not been faithful in the observance of your rules; if you have given yourself too much liberty in anything; or in fine, if you feel some passions, which were before in a manner asleep, that begin to awake anew in you; have recourse presently to prayer, and by the grace of God you will therein find a speedy and efficacious remedy for all things. But if you should fall into remissness and tepidity during your prayer, it is still to prayer that you must have recourse; for it is this that will restore you that first state of fervour in which you were before. For prayer has proper remedies for all evils, and even for those faults that are committed in it. Wherefore they make a very just comparison, who say, that prayer, is to a spiritual life, what the hand is to the body. The hand serves for an instrument and help to the whole body in general, and to itself in particular; it labours for nourishment, for clothing and all the other necessities of the body; and also labours for itself. For if the hand be indisposed, it is the hand that dresses it; if the hand be dirty, it is the hand that washes it; and if the hand be cold, it is the hand that warms itself again. In fine, as the hand does all things, so prayer does the same.

CHAPTER III.

OF THE OBLIGATION WE HAVE UNTO GOD, FOR BESTOWING UPON US SO EASY, SO EXCELLENT, AND SO NECESSARY A THING, AS PRAYER IS.

Prayer being a thing of so great value in itself, and of which we have so much need; it is just we should consider how much we are obliged to God for having rendered it so easy, that we may attend to it at any time, or in any place whatsoever. It is in my power, says David, to pray continually to our Lord, who has given me a being: (Ps. xli. 9.) The gates of God's mercy are never shut; they are always open to the whole world. We find him always at leisure, always well disposed to do good: and sometimes he even importunes us to ask graces and favours of him. Some make a most pious reflection hereupon, and say, that if God should give audience only once a month, to all those that desired to speak with him, and give them a kind and favourable hearing; and moreover should bestow several graces on them; this without doubt would be, what we could not sufficiently esteem; because we should repute it a greater happiness than if an earthly king should honour us after this manner.

Now if this be so, what esteem ought we not to have of the offer which God makes us, by inviting us to address ourselves to him, not only once a month, but every day, and even every hour of the day? At night, in the morning, and at noon, I will recount my afflictions to our Lord, says the Royal Prophet, I will make my wants known unto him, and he will hear me. (Ps. liv. 18.) God is not like men, who reject the petitions offered to them; because by giving, he does not impoverish himself, as they do. A man has so much the less, by how much he bestows upon another; for he deprives himself of that which he gives, and grows the poorer by his liberality. It is for this reason then, that men so easily refuse what is asked; and if they give once or twice with a good will, they grow angry the third time, and give nothing at all, or if they do, it is in so disobliging a manner, that thereby they take away all assurance or confidence of asking them anything another time.

But God, says the apostle, is always rich for such as implore his assistance: (Rom. x. 12.) Because he makes himself not the poorer by giving, nor is weary of being importuned, nor of seeing a great many continually employed in begging of him. He is rich enough to satisfy the whole world, and is able to enrich every one, without being in the least poorer than he was before. But as the fund of his riches is infinite, the

source of his mercy is also inexhaustible. So that, as on the one hand he abounds in all things to succour our necessities, so on the other, he has a constant will to assist us, and would have us recur unto him. It is therefore very reasonable that we should have a most grateful sense of so great a favour; and that making our profit of so ample a permission, we should endeavour continually to apply ourselves to prayer. For, as St. Augustine says, upon these words of the Psalmist, Blessed be our Lord, who has not deprived me of the spirit of prayer, nor of his mercy, (Ps. xv. 19.) we must believe for certain, that if God withdraws not from us the spirit of prayer, he will neither withdraw that of his mercy; wherefore that his mercy may never forsake us, let us never leave off the exercise of prayer.

CHAPTER IV.

OF TWO SORTS OF MENTAL PRAYER.

To say nothing at present of vocal prayer, though the practice thereof is very holy, and much in use in the church, we will now speak of mental prayer only, as the apostle St. Paul designed to do, when writing to the Corinthians, he said, I will pray in spirit; I will pray within my heart; I will sing the praises of God in my mind, I will sing within my heart. (I Cor. xiv. 15.) There are two sorts of mental prayer; the one is common and easy, the other is extraordinary and sublime; which, to speak with those who are most versed in it, we do not so much form in ourselves, as the Holy Ghost forms it in us. It is of this, the great Areopagite speaks, when he says, that his master Hierotheus, suffered divine things; (Dion, c. ii. de div. nom.) that is, he was so absorbed in God, that what he did of himself was less his own production, than an impression which he received from God himself. There is a very great difference between these two sorts of prayer, for the first may in some sort be taught by words, but it is not the same of the second, because there are no words able to express it.

And no one can know what it is but who receives it and experiences it in himself, nor even then can he be able to express, or even know what it is, nor how it is made; and it is this which Cassian very well takes notice of, when he relates that most heavenly and divine sentence of St. Anthony, very fit to our purpose: that prayer is not wholly perfect, when he that prays has not entirely lost the knowledge of himself, or comprehends what he says. (Cass. Coll. ix. Ab. Issac. c. 31.) This kind of prayer is so high and sublime, that it does not permit us to think of ourselves, or to make any reflection upon what we then suffer. It sometimes happens, that a man has his mind so taken up and absorbed in some business, that he forgets himself. He knows not where he is, nor of what he thinks. It is the same in this kind of perfect prayer; wherein man is so ravished and lost in God, that he thinks no more of himself — he knows neither the things that pass within his heart, nor after what manner they pass; and without observing any method, without thinking of passing from one point to another, he loses himself in profound meditation. This is what happened to St. Anthony, of which Cassian makes mention, that oftentimes having gone to prayer overnight, he remained in it till the next day; when the light falling upon his eyes, he complained that the sun rose too soon, to deprive him of those lights, which God interiorly communicated unto him.

St. Bernard speaking of this kind of prayer, says, that we very seldom find it, and when we do, its stay is very short. (Bern. ser. in Dom. Int. oct. Epiph.) So that how long time soever it lasts, it seems to us only to have lasted a moment. And St. Augustine experiencing in himself the effects it produces; Lord, says he, you cause certain feelings of tenderness to arise in my mind, that are very extraordinary; and I know no sweetness so great as this: but should it still increase, I know not what would happen. (Conf. lib. x. i. 40.)

But this last kind of prayer, has also its subdivisions and degrees. St. Bernard makes mention of three, with reference to those words of the beloved in the Canticles: Eat my friends, drink, and be inebriated, my dearest ones. (Cant. v. 1.) He says in the first place, eat, then drink; and last of all inebriate yourselves: and by these different gradations, he leads us to that kind, which is most sublime of all; though nevertheless all are most perfect, and are in us rather a suffering, or an effect of divine impression, than an action, or an effect that came from our own motion.

Sometimes the gardener, to water his garden, is obliged to draw water out of a well, by the strength of his arms; and sometimes with folded arms he sees the showers of heaven fall sweetly upon it, and water the earth, without his doing anything but letting it rain; or at most giving a little fall to the water, that it may go in greater abundance to the root of the trees, that thereby they may bear the more fruit. The same may be said of the two first kinds of mental prayer we before spoke of, the one is got by the care and diligence, with which by the mercy of God, we apply ourselves to it; the other is purely given us, without our contributing anything to it. The first requires great labour and application; and yet all that does not entirely satisfy you. But the second leads you to a table that God himself has prepared for you, without your having taken any pains at all; a table very delicious, and a table abounding with all sorts of heavenly dainties. It is this which is signified by those words of the spouse: The king has led me into his cellar, and replenished me with his love. (Cant. ii. 4.) And that which our Lord promises in Isaiah, when he says, I will rejoice them in the house of prayer. (Is. lvi. 7.)

This last sort of prayer is a particular gift of God, a gift which he bestows upon whom he pleases, sometimes as a recompense for services done him, and for mortifications suffered for love of him; at other times gratis, and as free gift, without any regard to what is past. For it is a favour which proceeds from his pure liberality, and consequently he communicates it to whom he pleases according to his own words in the gospel: Is it not lawful for me to do what I please? (Mat. xx. 15.)

And in fine, it is a thing so far above the reach and conception of the human mind, that we can never teach, nor comprehend it. Wherefore, it is not without reason, that they have blamed, and forbidden certain authors, who imagining, that there were rules to be found, whereby a man might infallibly be rendered a contemplative, would take upon them to teach, what no one can ever apprehend; and reduce to art, what is entirely both above art and nature. Gerson, in a book he composed against Rusbrochius, severely reprehends him for this; and reproaches him for having separated the flower from the stalk. For as a flower that we have pulled and carried in our hands, fades presently, and loses its beauty; so the most sublime things, that God communicates interiorly to a soul, which he elevates to that high degree of contemplation, lose their beauty and lustre, when taking them out of their true place, we will undertake to explain and communicate them to others.

After all, these mysterious analogies, these transformations of the soul, the silence of all the faculties, this annihilation, this immediate union, this depth of Thaulerus, and all the other terms of this nature, what would they express? Can any one comprehend anything by them? For my own part I must frankly confess I do not. There is therefore this difference between divine science, and other sciences, as some say very well; that in other sciences before you can learn them, you must learn their terms; when in this science you cannot understand the terms, till you perfectly possess and are master of it in others; the theory precedes the practice; in this the practice goes before the theory.

I say still farther, that not only we cannot express what this prayer is, nor teach it to others, but even no one must seek to raise himself unto it, if God himself does not elevate him thereunto. For otherwise it would be a thought of pride, and presumption, whereby we should deserve to be deprived of the grace of ordinary prayer, and remain interiorly dry. He has led me, says

the spouse, into his cellar; (Cant. i. 4.) and this mode of acting which God adopts, this entrance which he gives to a soul, to inebriate it with the wine of his love, is a particular grace, and a special privilege, which he accords only to whom he pleases. Even the spouse herself enters not, till her beloved takes her by the hand, and leads her in: she dares not of herself take the liberty of kissing his lips: she is too bashful, and reserved to undertake so bold an enterprise as this: she begs this favour — O that he would bestow upon me a kiss of his mouth. (Cant. i. 1.)

As if she would say, says St. Bernard, as for me I cannot by my own strength elevate myself to so high a perfection of love, to so glorious an union, to so sublime a contemplation, if he himself bestows not this favour upon me. It is therefore from him, and from his pure liberality, that we must expect such a grace and favour as this is — it is his goodness and bounty alone, that must elevate us to the honour of kissing his mouth, to such a manner of prayer, to so sublime a contemplation, so far above our reach; it is not what we are able to acquire of ourselves, and by ourselves, we can neither learn it, nor must or can teach it to others.

CHAPTER V.

AN EXPLANATION OF TWO SORTS OF PRAYER, TAKEN FROM HOLY SCRIPTURE.

The two sorts of prayer, we are at present to take notice of, are clearly marked out by the holy scripture, when it says, that the wise, that is, the just man, will from break of day deliver up his heart to watch to our Lord who has made him, and will pray in the presence of the most High. (Ecclus. xxxix. 6.) The scripture first speaks of the ordinary sort of prayer, and mentions the morning, as a time most proper for prayer; which it takes notice of in divers other places. I will present myself before you in the morning; (Ps. v. 5.) I made haste and I cried. (Ps. cxviii. 147.) My eyes have prevented the sun, that I might meditate upon your words. (Ps. cxviii. 148.) I sought you from the dawn of the day. (Ps. lxii. 1.)

The scripture says, that the just man gave up his heart to watch, to show that we must not be drowsy in prayer, or be present in body only, whilst our heart is wholly employed, or intent upon other things. It is this that the saints call sleepiness, or drowsiness of heart; which is a very great obstacle to prayer; for when the heart is thus heavy, it cannot remain in that respect it should have, while conversing with God. But what is it, that imprints this respect in the mind of the just? It is the reflection it makes, that they are in the presence of our Lord who has made them, and that they pray before the most High! And this reflection causes them to recollect themselves, and to have a most particular attention to all that he says. See from what has been said, with what preparation and attention we must apply ourselves to prayer.

Let us now see also, what that prayer is, which the just man makes, when, as the scripture says, he will open his mouth in prayer, he will pray to obtain pardon of his sins. (Ecclus. xxxix. 7.) That is to say, he will be confounded for his sins; he will repent of them; and will make a firm purpose to fall no more into them. This is properly the prayer we must make, to deplore our sins and imperfections, and implore God's mercy. It is not sufficient to say I have made a general confession in the beginning of my conversion, and then employed many days in lamenting, and weeping bitterly for my sins, and repenting of them. For it is not just, that because we have confessed them, we should forget them; on the contrary we must endeavour to set them always before our eyes, as the Royal Prophet did according to his own words: My sin is always against me; (Ps. l. 5.) that is to say, always before me, and continually present in my mind.

St. Bernard in his comments upon those words of the Canticles, our bed is all covered with flowers; (Bern. ser. lvi. sup. Cant. i. 15) your bed, says he, which is your heart, is still very foul; it is still infected with the stench of vice, and the bad habits you brought with you from the world; and notwithstanding this, you venture to invite your spouse to lodge in it, you pretend to raise yourself to contemplation, and to the most sublime exercises of union with God; as if you had already acquired the highest degree of Christian perfection. Let your first study be to cleanse and wash your bed with your tears, as the Psalmist tells us he did, I will every night wash my bed with my tears. (Ps. vi. 7.) Think also how to adorn it with the flowers of all sorts of virtues; and then you may, like the spouse, invite your beloved, to come and repose himself therein.

Employ yourself, in the mean time, in kissing his feet; in humbling yourself, by true repentance for your sins; in kissing his hands, and offering to him all the good you can do; and in endeavouring to receive from him the grace of solid and true virtue. But as for approaching his mouth, to wit, this sublime and perfect union, attend and wait till God himself vouchsafes to elevate you thereunto. An ancient religious of the Society of Jesus, very much esteemed for his piety, and very well versed in spirituality, remained as it is said, for twenty years in the purgative way; and shall we who have scarce begun, presently grow weary of it, and desire to pass to the exercises of the love of God? The foundations ought to be very deep and strong before we venture to raise so high a building. But that which is very particular in the exercise of the knowledge and sorrow for our faults is that, besides divers other advantages we draw from thence, of which we shall speak hereafter, there is not a more special remedy, nor a better preservative to keep us from falling into sin than this.

For he who continually employs himself in detesting his sins; who is always covered with a holy confusion for those he has committed; and who continually exercises himself in a profound sorrow for having offended God, will be far from committing any new offence. On the contrary, the saints take notice that the fall of some who seemed much devoted to contemplation and a spiritual life has happened from a bare neglect of reflecting upon their past sins and imperfections, that they might give themselves to more sublime and pleasing exercises, and from the confidence they had in their own strength; so that in not accustoming themselves to stand upon their guard, as they should have done, it caused them in the end miserably to run into disorders; for by forgetting too soon their own baseness, they were on a sudden precipitated from the height of perfection, to which they thought themselves arrived. Wherefore we must for a long time reduce our prayer, to a sorrow for our sins; and this must be our only exercise, till our Lord pleases to take us by the hand, and say unto us: friend, ascend higher. (Luke xiv. 10.)

But let us at present take notice, what that so sublime and particular prayer is, of which God bestows the grace when he pleases. The holy scripture informs us what it is in these terms: If our Lord pleases, he will fill him with the spirit of understanding. (Ecclus. xxxix. 8.) It says, if our Lord pleases; because it is not anything that is due unto us; or that he has any obligation to give us, but is a pure grace, and a pure effect of his liberality. If he pleases then, when you are in prayer, that a sudden light from heaven should come upon you, and as it were a flash of lightning should strike upon the eyes of your understanding — you will then in a moment conceive that which you could not before comprehend. Behold here what properly that gift of prayer is, of which we speak. For how many times might the same thing have represented itself unto you, without your being touched, or at all struck with it? The reason, therefore, why the holy scripture calls this the spirit of understanding, is, because it gives us a knowledge of things, by a simple apprehension, without any assistance of the imagination, or any pains at all of the understanding.

It is in this manner that a man who loves painting, meeting with an excellent piece, stops on a sudden,

and fixes his eyes upon it, without speaking a word; and takes so much pleasure in viewing it, that he can scarce take off his eyes. But to say better, this state in which a soul finds itself, resembles that of the blessed in heaven. Beatitude consists in beholding and contemplating God; and when we shall be placed in glory, we shall be entirely absorbed in this sole view of him for an eternity; and thereby enjoy an everlasting felicity; without the least assistance from our reason; or without ever having any regard to ourselves. On the contrary, we shall continually be transported with a new joy — we shall find every moment a new relish in this heavenly manna; and it will seem to us, that we continually enjoy a new subject of admiration. The same thing happens in this kind of sublime and perfect prayer, which they call contemplation.

When God pleases to elevate a soul thereunto, it never ceases to contemplate; and without helping itself by discourse, or ever suffering any irksomeness, it perpetually has its sight fixed upon God. But the scripture takes notice, that God will not only bestow this grace upon the just, but that he will also fill them with it; because this grace is so abounding, that not being able to contain itself within so narrow a vessel, as the heart of man is, it necessarily overflows; and therefore the scripture presently adds, that the discourses of him who is replenished with wisdom, will fall like showers from his mouth, and in prayer he will confess and praise our Lord. (Ecclus. xxxix. 9.) It is then that colloquies are made with God — when the soul is thus illuminated by this heavenly light, and elevated above its own force, then is the proper time to converse and entertain itself with God. Wherefore St. Ignatius admonishes us to enter into these colloquies, when we find ourselves moved thereunto by an interior impulse of grace. (Lib. exer. spir, in repet. 1. & 2.) These words deserve to be very well taken notice of, and do in substance inform us, that when we have applied all the powers of our soul to meditation, when our heart begins to be inflamed, and we feel ourselves secretly incited to treat familiarly with God; it is then, that we must have a very great trust and confidence in him; since this is the proper time to ask and obtain all things. For the prayer that proceeds from the heart touched and inflamed by God, in this manner, is that which he hearkens unto; because, as St. Augustine says, when he himself moves us to ask anything of him, it is a sign that he intends to grant it.

Behold then that kind of prayer that is so sublime, which God gives to whom he pleases, according to these words: If our Lord pleases, he will fill him with the spirit of knowledge and understanding. But if our Lord is not pleased to favour us with such a singular grace as this is, we must not therefore, as St. Bernard says, afflict ourselves, and lose courage; but rest contented with the practice of virtue, and believe ourselves happy, as long as God is pleased to keep us in his grace, and preserve us from falling into sin. God grant, says this great saint, that I may enjoy peace of soul, the sweetness and repose of a good conscience, the spirit of mercy, simplicity and charity towards my neighbour, the gift of rejoicing with those that rejoice, and of weeping with those that weep, and I desire nothing else. All the rest I leave to the apostles and to men truly apostolical. (Bern. serm. xlviii. sup. Cant.) The tops of the mountains serve for a retreat to stags, but the holes of the rocks for the urchins. (Ps. ciii. 18.)

Let therefore these mountains of contemplation, that are so high and elevated, serve for a fit refuge to such, as with an extraordinary facility run towards perfection; as for me, who am a sinner, and covered with the thorns of my sins, I will retire into the corner-stone of the rock, which is Jesus Christ; I will hide myself in his wounds; I will wash away my faults with his precious blood; and this shall be my prayer. If then so great a saint as St. Bernard contented himself with the practice of virtues, and a lively sorrow for his sins; and leaves this other kind of more sublime prayer for apostolical men, to whom it shall please God to communicate so signal a favour: it is very just that we also should content ourselves with the same — that we should apply ourselves to prayer, only to bewail our sins; to mortify our passions; to root out all our evil habits; and overcome and surmount all those obstacles and impediments that check us in the way of

virtue. And as to this other kind of prayer, which is so much above our reach, we must leave it entirely to God, to call and elevate us to it, whenever he himself pleases. Moreover, it will be very advantageous diligently to stand upon our guard, when he seems to call us to it; because there are often great abuses herein. We sometimes imagine that we are called to contemplation, because we find a certain sweetness and facility therein; yet nevertheless we deceive ourselves, for this is not a call from God, but an enterprise of man; it is an illusion of the devil, who carries you to a contemplative life, thereby to withdraw you from the obligations of the active, and to occasion hereby, that you fail in the performance both of the one and the other.

A great master of a spiritual life says very well: as it would be a great boldness and an extreme imprudence, that a man whom a king had commanded to serve at his table, should presume to sit down, without his invitation or permission; so it is also a very great indiscretion to abandon ourselves entirely to the sweet repose of contemplation, if we be not called thereunto by God himself. St. Bonaventure hereupon gives most excellent counsel, and says, that we must exercise ourselves in that, which is for our assured profit; such as to get rid of our vicious habits and bad inclinations, and to gain solid virtues. And in this, no abuse can be feared; because it is infallibly true, that the more we endeavour to mortify and humble ourselves, or to be resigned to the will of God, the more pleasing we shall be to him, and we shall increase our merit in this world, and glory in the next. But the other sublime exercises, and matters so elevated, says the saint, may be deceits and illusions of the devil; because we often think that to come from God, which does not; and we count that a very great matter, which in effect is less than nothing. Wherefore in a spiritual life, we ought rather to choose and apply ourselves to those exercises that are most profitable, and not be carried away by the sweetness we find in them; but esteem them for the profit and advancement we receive thereby; and this opinion is entirely conformable to the general doctrine of saints, as we shall see in the following chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH THIS DOCTRINE IS MORE PARTICULARLY EXPLAINED AND CONFIRMED.

For a more full and clear confirmation of this doctrine, the saints and the masters of a spiritual life affirm, that to arrive at this kind of prayer and high contemplation we speak of, we must in the first place apply ourselves to the mortification of our passions — to the laying a solid foundation of all Christian and moral virtues; and to the exercising ourselves a long time in their practice. Without this, say they, it is to no purpose to pretend to apply ourselves to contemplation, and to make a kind of particular profession thereof. For we must wrestle like Jacob, before we can see God like Israel; and be able to say, I have seen God face to face. You must strive against your passions — you must overcome them together with all your bad habits, before you can attain this intimate union with God.

Blosius says, that he who would raise himself to a most eminent degree of the love of God, and notwithstanding, does not carefully endeavour to correct and amend himself, by suppressing his vices, and freeing himself from the inordinate love of creatures, is like a man who being laden with iron and lead, and bound hand and foot, would attempt to climb up a high tree. Wherefore we ordinarily take notice, that such as are appointed for the spiritual direction of others, before they speak to them of contemplation, first teach them how to mortify thoroughly their passions, and to accustom themselves to patience, humility and obedience; so that exercising them continually in all sorts of virtues of the active life of a Christian, they make them get a good and perfect

habit therein. Many by not having observed this method, and by being elevated upon a sudden to a contemplative life, without having passed through the active, which ought to precede, find themselves after many years of prayer, as defective in virtue, as impatient, as choleric, as proud as before; so that if they be in the least hurt, or admonished for any of their defects, they presently show their resentment, in impatient and angry words; whereby they discover their imperfection, and the little command they have over themselves.

Father Everard Mercurianus, general of the Society of Jesus, explains this very well, in a letter he wrote upon this subject. Many, says he, hearing of another more sublime exercise of prayer, and of the love of God, than that which is ordinarily practised, as of certain anagogical acts, and of I know not what silence of all the faculties of the soul, would, more through want of insight and experience, than from any true desire of their spiritual advancement, raise themselves before their time to the exercise of the unitive life, as to the most heroic and most perfect exercise of all others; by means whereof they doubt not but to overcome their vices with less labour and pains, and to acquire virtues with greater facility. But because they are raised to it before their time, they lose a great deal of time therein to no purpose, and are so little advanced, that at the end of many years, they find themselves as unmortified in their passions — as much tied to their own will and opinions — as wedded to their own ease, as if they had never had any conversation or communication with God.

In fine, when the superior would employ them, in anything that does not please them, or is not according to their mind, they are as little docile and tractable, as they were the first day they entered religion; and have as great a repugnance as ever, to submit their judgment to the will of their superiors. This happens, because they would needs fly before they had wings; and because, instead of going in the highway they ought to have kept, they would shorten it, by unadvisedly taking a cross path. For they build not upon the solid foundation of mortifying their passions, and practising of virtues; so that they could do nothing that was substantial; and having built upon the sand; the building they raised with a great deal of pains, falls down at the first blast of wind.

But that which still more evidently proves the truth of this doctrine, and how generally it is received, is, that it is commonly followed by all saints, when they establish the three sorts of prayer, according to the three sorts of ways that lead thereunto; which they call purgative, illuminative, and unitive. St. Gregory Nazianzen, and all those who have written of spirituality, have taken this doctrine from St. Denis the Areopagite, and they all agree herein; that before we apply ourselves to this kind of high prayer, which corresponds to the unitive, we ought to apply ourselves to what concerns the purgative and illuminative ways. We must first exercise ourselves a long time in gaining a lively sorrow for our sins; in labouring to root out our vices and bad inclinations; and we must endeavour by imitating Jesus Christ, to acquire those true virtues that were most conspicuous in his life But if acting otherwise, and without having travelled this road, we pretend to advance still farther, we shall but labour in vain, and be always deceived. We know that to raise ourselves to the knowledge of higher studies, we must exercise ourselves a long time in the lower; and to come to the top of the ladder, we must ascend by the first steps.

CHAPTER VII.

OF THE ORDINARY SORT OF MENTAL PRAYER.

But we shall say no more of this more sublime prayer; since we cannot teach it, nor even explain what it is — nor is it in our power to attain it — neither does God command it; nor will he call us to account about it. We will, at present, therefore, speak of ordinary mental prayer, which after some manner may be taught, and which every one may attain; if they add as they ought, their own care and endeavours to the counsel of their spiritual director, and to the assistance of God's grace. Amongst divers other very considerable favours God has bestowed upon the Society of Jesus, this is one, that he has given us a form and manner of prayer, confirmed by the holy see, as may be seen by the bull, in the beginning of the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius. In this bull of Paul the III. it is expressly mentioned, that the pope, after having with great attention, very strictly examined these exercises, does not only approve and confirm them, but exhorts all the faithful to make use of them as very profitable.

This form of prayer was communicated to St. Ignatius by our Saviour; and he afterwards communicated the same to us, as he had received it; wherefore this being so, we have reason to hope through his mercy, that Christ will bestow many favours upon us, by means of this prayer; because it is he himself who has prescribed to us the manner thereof. It was by this that he drew to himself our blessed founder and his companions; it was in the practice of this holy method, that he made him conceive the design, and form the model of the society; and this is the medium or means, whereby he has gained so many other souls to Christ. Let us not, therefore, endeavour to go any other way than this; let us not be attached to any extraordinary manner of prayer, but embracing this we have, let us endeavour to conform ourselves entirely thereunto, and like good children let us imitate the example of our father.

In the exercise of the three powers of the soul, which is the first of the exercises in the book we speak of, St. Ignatius teaches us the method we ought to observe in the rest. First, that having made choice of some spiritual point, we must exercise therein the three powers of our soul, which are the memory, understanding, and will. The memory, in setting before the eyes of our mind, the point or mystery which ought to be the subject of our prayer — the understanding, in finding out and considering the things most likely to inflame the will — and finally the will, in producing those acts which depend upon her. This last point is the chief of all, and what we ought to aim at; as it is the end of meditation and the fruit of all the reflections and discourses of the understanding. For these serve only to move the will to seek what is good, and to avoid what is evil. Moreover, this name of the exercise of the three powers of the soul, is given to the said exercise, because it is the first, wherein this method of praying is taught; for the three powers of the soul ought no less to be employed in the following exercises than in this.

This form of prayer, which our holy founder has taught us, and which is practised in the society, is not singular, nor is it like others filled with such inventions and novelties as savour of illusion. On the contrary it is a very common method, practised by the ancient fathers, and very conformable to human nature; which being reasonable, governs itself by reason, and permits itself to be persuaded and convinced; so that it is not to be doubted but that this manner must consequently be more easy, more secure, and more profitable than any other. For in prayer we must not be like statues, or like persons in an ecstasy; but by means of thus exercising the powers of our soul, we must draw the spirit of God upon us; and because he requires a co-operation of his creatures, we must take care to co-operate with him. This is what St. Ignatius teaches in his book of Exercises. All other kinds of prayer, where the discourse of the understanding has no place, where all the operations of the soul remain suspended and in silence; these

kinds of prayer, I say, which are taken out of mystical divinity, ought, commonly speaking, neither to be taught, nor sought after.

And those who embrace them being in a manner still novices, and little versed in spirituality, not having yet obtained a perfect knowledge of themselves, nor a victory over their passions, nor made any great progress in the practice of virtue, are subject to many deceits and illusions. For even when they think themselves much advanced, and to have gained the victory, they will find that their passions, which were only lulled by the charms and sweetness of prayer, will, to their very great danger, awake lively, strong and violent, as ever. Nay more persons devoted to this wrapped up and very particular kind of prayer contract a certain obstinacy of opinion, and yet feel inclined to receive as essential truths, the merest illusions and fabrications. It is for this reason St. Ignatius so much suspected this kind of prayer, and said, that those who applied themselves to it, were commonly subject to inconveniencies of this description.

I say then, that the first thing we must do in prayer, is to represent to ourselves, by the help of our memory, the point or mystery, which we make the subject of our prayer — then the understanding must examine this point, review it, and consider all the particulars of it — finally the will must produce acts, according as the understanding has digested the matter, which had been proposed to it by the memory. But this discourse of the understanding, being the source whence all our acts in prayer flow, and since we can make no act which does not necessarily spring from this our meditation, it follows, that we must be particularly careful to make this well. The truth of this proposition is self-evident; for there is no one that has the least tincture of philosophy, but knows that the will is a blind power, unable to attach itself to anything, unless the understanding guides it. Hence it is a maxim received by all philosophers, that nothing can be willed, unless it is first known.

The will having of itself no light, must borrow it from the understanding, which goes before to give it knowledge, and to discover what it ought to love or hate. It is this made St. Augustine say, that we may love the things we never saw, but never those we have not known. (Aug. lib. x. de Trin.) No one, says St. Gregory also, can love what he is entirely ignorant of. (Greg hom. xxxvi. Sup. Evan.) And the reason of this is, that the object of the will being a known good, we cannot love anything, but because we perceive it is good, and deserving of love: just as, on the contrary, we do not hate a thing, or fly from it, but because we conceive it is bad and deserving of hatred.

Hence it is, that when we wish to make a man change his opinion, the mode we adopt, to induce him to give up his own, and to embrace ours, is, to persuade and convince him by reason, that what he proposes to himself is not good, and what we propose to him is better and far more salutary. It is clear, therefore, that the operation of the understanding is the foundation of all our acts in prayer; and consequently it is very truly said, that meditation is extremely necessary; as we shall show more particularly in the following chapters.

CHAPTER VIII.

OF THE NECESSITY OF MEDITATION.

Hugo of St. Victor says, prayer cannot be perfect, unless meditation goes before, or accompanies it; and his doctrine is taken from St. Augustine, who says, prayer is tepid without meditation. The proof of this proposition is easy; for if we do not exert ourselves to know and examine our weakness and misery, we shall be deceived, and misinformed of our wants; and hence it will come to pass, that, in prayer, we will not know what we ought to ask; nor will we ask it with the requisite earnestness and fervour. There are many

who, from not reflecting upon themselves, and from being ignorant of their own defects, presume too much upon themselves; which they would not do, if they had a right knowledge of themselves. And hence it happens, that in prayer, they dwell on every thing else, except what is most necessary for them. If you wish, then, to learn to pray, and to beg of God what you stand most in need of, employ yourself in considering exactly your defects and weaknesses. Having obtained perfect knowledge of these, you will then know what you ought to ask of God; and, as a man who feels himself pressed with necessity or misery, you will beg with all earnestness and fervour what is most proper for you.

St. Bernard, speaking of the means of attaining perfection, says — No one becomes perfect on a sudden, it is by mounting, and not by flying, that we come to the top of the Ladder. Let us therefore ascend, and let meditation and prayer be the two feet we make use of to do so. For meditation lets us see our wants; and prayer obtains for us relief from God. The one shows us the way, and the other leads to him; and, in fine, meditation makes us clearly discern the dangers that surround us, and prayer makes us happily avoid and escape them. (Ber. Serm. i. de S. Andrea.)

But St. Augustine goes yet farther, and says, that, meditation is the beginning and ground of all good. In effect we cannot consider how good God is in himself; how good and merciful he is towards us; how much he loves us; and how much he has done and suffered for us; without feeling ourselves inflamed with the love of so good a master. We cannot perceive our faults and infirmities, without humbling and conceiving a contempt of ourselves; we cannot reflect upon our great negligence in the service of God, and the offences we have committed against him, without acknowledging, at the same time, that we deserve all kinds of chastisements. So that it is by the means and help of meditation, that the soul comes to enrich herself with all the virtues that can render her agreeable in God's sight.

It is for this reason that the holy scriptures so particularly recommend meditation unto us: Happy is the man, says the Royal Prophet, who meditates day and night upon the law of our Lord. He shall be like a tree that is planted by the riverside, which brings forth its fruit in due season. (Ps. i. 3.) And in another place he says, those who reflect upon his promises, show that they seek him with all their heart. (Ps. cxviii. 2.) Or rather, it is that which makes them seek him after this manner. The same prophet, also speaking to God, says, give me understanding, I will make profound reflections upon your law; and I will observe it with all my heart. (Ps. cxviii. 34.) But if, says he, in another place, your law had not been the subject of my meditation, perhaps I had not remained in my humility, and I should have thereby perished; (Ps. cxviii. 92.) that is to say, as St. Jerome interprets it, I should have remained in those pains and miseries that surrounded me. But that which still ought to give us a high esteem of meditation, is what the saints say of it; to wit, that it is a help to all virtues and good works. It is, says Gerson, the sister of spiritual reading; the nurse of prayer; the director of good actions; and in fine, the perfection and consummation of all heroic actions.

But to contrast it with the opposite vice, and thereby come to a better knowledge of it, we must know that the neglect of meditation is one of the chief causes of all the evils in the world, according to the words of the prophet Jeremy: The whole earth is desolate, because there is no one that makes reflection upon his heart. (Jer. xii. 11.) Would you know why the earth is desolate as to spiritual matters? It is because there is scarce any one that enters into himself, and ruminates upon the ineffable mysteries of religion, and the infinite bounties of God. For who is there that durst be so bold as to commit a sin, if he considered that God died for sin; and that sin is so great an evil that it required God should become man, in order that by his death he might entirely make satisfaction for sin, even to the rigorous justice of his eternal Father? And who would sin, if he considered that one mortal sin is punished with the eternal pains of hell? Or if he but

seriously reflected upon these words — Go ye cursed into everlasting fire? (Mat. xxv. 41.)

If we considered seriously the everlasting duration of an unhappy eternity; and that as long as God is God, so long we are to burn in hell, would there be any one so mad or foolish, think you, as for a moment of pleasure, to expose himself to such eternal torments? St. Thomas of Aquin said, that he could not comprehend how a person in mortal sin could have any joy or repose. And without doubt the saint had a great deal of reason; because man is not certain of the enjoyment of any one moment of his life, and yet knows infallibly, that should he die in this state, he would be for ever damned. We read that the most costly viands, and the most enchanting music could not impart pleasure to Damocles, when he perceived a naked sword which was hanging over his head, and which was fastened by a single hair only; for he trembled every moment lest the hair should break, and the sword fall, and cause his death. What fear, therefore, ought that man to have who, in the midst or the criminal delights and filthy pleasures of this world, knows that at every instant he is threatened not only with a temporal, but with an eternal death? That all depends upon the slender thread of life: that every moment he may die suddenly; and that lying down in perfect health, he may the next morning find himself buried in hell?

A great servant of God said very well upon this subject, that he thought, in a Christian commonwealth, there ought to be only two sorts of prisons; the one for heretics, and the other for fools. For either we do, or do not believe that there is a hell destined for the eternal punishment of sinners. If we do not believe it, we deserve to be cast into the inquisition as heretics; and if we believe it, and still remain in sin, we deserve to be ranked amongst fools and madmen; as having our understanding vitiated, and infected with the greatest folly that can be imagined. It is certain, if we practised it as we might, that meditation would serve as a guard to restrain us from falling into sin. It is for this reason that the devil, who knows the advantage we would derive from it, endeavours continually by all sorts of means to withdraw us from meditation.

The first thing that the Philistines did to Samson, after they had made him their prisoner, was to put out his eyes. It is the first thing the devil, in like manner, does to sinners. If he cannot entirely deprive them of the eyes of faith, he endeavours at least to deprive them of their use; and to make them believe in such a manner, as if they believed not at all — That seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not hear, nor understand. (Mat. xiii. 13.) He hinders them from reflecting upon what they believe; and makes them think no more on it than if they believed it not at all, which is all one for the compassing his ends; because, since he cannot put out their eyes, he at least shuts them. It is the same thing, whether we open our eyes in the dark, or shut them in the light; because, in either case, we see nothing. But meditation is of so great and particular importance, that it not only opens the eyes of our understanding, but also imparts light to discern the most obscure mysteries of faith.

CHAPTER IX.

OF THE GREAT ADVANTAGE WE MAY DERIVE FROM MEDITATION; AND HOW WE ARE TO PERFORM IT.

It being very good, during prayer, to exercise ourselves, in producing acts of the will, we will speak of those at present. They must be founded on reason. For man, being a rational being, ought to be guided by reason; and consequently it is necessary that his understanding should be convinced, before his will can be inflamed. Wherefore, one of the chief things we should have in view in meditation, is to disabuse ourselves of the errors of the world; to confirm ourselves in the belief of solid truths; and firmly to

resolve upon what we design to do, and what we intend to avoid. When a worldly man begins to conform himself to a more Christian and regular life than ordinary, we are used to say that he is disabused; and to be thus disabused is one of the chief advantages we ought to derive from prayer. As this point is of very great importance, so it is also very proper we should particularly reflect upon it, and above all it is necessary in the beginning, that we apply ourselves to it with great diligence, in order that, by means of an exact discussion of things, we may be the more confirmed in the belief of essential truths.

Wherefore that we may be able to gather much fruit from meditation, we must not make it superficially, in haste, or after a tepid and languishing manner, but with very great fervour and with all possible attention and peace of mind. Consider maturely the shortness of life, the frailty and vanity of all things in the world, the little which will remain with you after death; and thereby you will soon contemn and undervalue all things here below, and will fix your heart upon those things that will last for ever. Consider seriously, and frequently ponder, how little solidity there is in the esteem and opinion of men, and how ridiculous a thing it is, to torment yourself upon this account; because their esteem can neither give or take anything from you, nor render you either better or worse than you are; and by this means, you shall soon come to set no value at all on them.

In fine, ruminate in like manner upon all other truths; and by this means you will, by little and little, disabuse yourself of the chimeras and errors of the age— you will confirm yourself in true sentiments and principles of piety — you will resolve upon what will conduce most to your salvation; and you will begin to become quite another man, and to lead a life altogether spiritual. The solitary person will sit himself down, says Jeremias, and keep silence, because he is lifted above himself. (Lamen. iii. 28.) He will find that his heart is become greater and larger than ordinary; he will mount in his thoughts even to heaven itself, contemning all earthly objects, and will say with St. Paul — that for love of Jesus Christ, he looks upon them all as hurtful and pernicious, and, in comparison of gaining Jesus Christ, all other things are but as dirt and ordure. (Phil. iii. 8.)

There is a very great difference between meditating and meditating; between knowing and knowing: for the wise man knows things after one manner, and the ignorant man knows them after another. Wise men know what they are in effect, and ignorant persons know only what they are in appearance. If a simple clown finds a precious stone of great value, he will esteem it for its lustre and exterior beauty; but for nothing else, because he knows not the value of it. But if the same stone falls into the hands of a skillful lapidary, he esteems it not only for its exterior lustre, but because he knows its value.

The same difference is found between him who knows how to meditate upon spiritual things, and another that knows it not: he who looks upon things superficially, and regards only the outside, though their exterior beauty pleases him, yet he feels not an ardent desire of them. But he who knows how to examine them as he ought — he who weighs and considers them attentively, will easily undeceive himself and reject such as are of no value, and will resolve to compass what he perceives to be excellent; and knowing perfectly well of how great a value the precious stone is, he has found, he makes no account of anything else; but goes and sells all he is worth to purchase it. (Mat. xiii. 16.)

This difference is pointed out to us by Jesus Christ, in his curing the woman of a bloody flux. Our Saviour went to raise to life the daughter of a prince of the synagogue, and was followed by a great crowd of people, who encompassed and pressed upon him on all sides. This poor woman who, for twelve years together, had suffered this bloody flux, having spent all she was worth upon doctors to obtain a cure, and finding herself still in a worse condition than ever; seeing the Son of God pass by, the great desire she had to be cured made her break through the crowd with a wonderful faith and confidence: for she said within

herself, if I can but come so near him as to touch his garment, I shall be cured. (Mat. ix. 21.) In fine, she approaches him, touches him, and the flux of blood which she had suffered for many years, wonderfully stopped upon a sudden. Whereupon our Saviour turned about and asked, Who had touched him? And St. Peter said, Master, the throng of people press upon you on all sides, and do you ask who touches you? It is not that, replies our Saviour, that I would know, but some one has touched me in a far different manner from the rest, for I find that virtue is gone out of me. (Luke viii. 45.)

The chief point, then, is to touch Jesus in such manner as to make him ask, who touched him? For it is nothing to touch him in the throng, as the common people did, and as all the rest of the world do. What is of importance, therefore, in meditation, is, to touch Jesus Christ and his mysteries after such a manner, that we may feel the fruit and virtue of them in ourselves; and for this purpose we must examine things with attention, in detail, and at our leisure. We find neither sweetness or bitterness in things we give not ourselves time to taste. So the sinner feels not the bitterness of sin, death, judgment, nor of hell itself; because, imitating sick persons, he swallows down the pills whole and entire, lest he should feel their bad taste; he looks upon things only in the gross, and never ruminates upon them. The reason, then, why we relish not the incarnation, passion, resurrection, and all other mysteries is, because we consider them very superficially, and descend not to particulars, and dive not into them as we should do, by long continued and serious meditation. We taste not a grain of pepper or mustard-seed, if we swallow it whole; but if we break it in pieces with our teeth, it is pungent, it smarts, and even draws tears from our eyes.

CHAPTER X.

OF OTHER ADVANTAGES FOUND IN PRAYER.

There is another advantage in meditation, says St. Thomas, i. e. it causes true devotion to spring up in our hearts, which is of very great importance in a spiritual life; and is very much sought after by those who are on the road of perfection. But this devotion is nothing else than a prompt and ardent disposition in the will to do good. Now this has two causes, the one and the chief is from without, and is God; the other is within us, and is meditation. For meditation is that which, next to the grace of God, most of all warms the heart and the will; and is what produces this so prompt disposition to do virtuous actions. So that true devotion and fervour of spirit consist not in a certain sensible sweetness which some feel and experience in prayer, but in having our will always disposed, and ready to execute what may any ways conduce to God's glory and service.

This is the devotion which is lasting; but as for the other, it quickly vanishes, it being nothing else but an affectionate and sensible motion that springs up upon a sudden, from a desire we have of what is amiable — it is only the effect of our natural complexion — it is found in those who, on every appeal made to their feelings, express their sensibility by tears; and scarce do their tears cease to flow, but their devotion dries up with their tears, so that they seldom remember the good resolutions they made. In fine, this devotion is only a love of tenderness, which is founded upon sweetnesses and sensible consolations. While these last, their love and devotion last also, and so long as they remain careful, punctual, and lovers of silence and retirement. But when these sweetnesses fail, all the rest also fail at the same time. It is not so with them whose devotion is grounded upon more solid foundations, and who, by the help of exact meditation, are disabused and convinced as they should be.

Such as these always constantly persevere in virtue, and though they feel no longer the usual sweetnesses or consolations, yet they remain always the same; because reason, which excited these sentiments in

them, always subsists. A love of this nature, is truly a vigorous and manly love — it is the mark of the true servants of God; and it is from this mark, not from sweetness or sensible consolations, that we must judge, whether we have effectually advanced in virtue. The passions of such as seek sensible comforts, are, as some say, like little dogs, that never cease to bark, till you throw them a piece of bread to appease them; they are quiet as long as the consolation lasts, and for a time desire nothing; but as soon as the bread of consolation is gone, they begin to bark again; and it is then that we come to know what each one effectually is. They compare also these sweetnesses and consolations to moveable goods, which are soon worn out and dissipated; and solid virtues they compare to immoveable goods, which last always, and of which consequently we ought to have a greater esteem.

We shall likewise notice here, what is well known by experience, that, on the one hand, there are some, who receive great consolations in prayer, and yet are afterwards very weak on occasions, and let themselves be easily overcome by temptations. And on the other hand, we see others, who, on the contrary, find nothing but aridities in prayer, and know not what consolation or sweetness is, and yet notwithstanding courageously resist temptations, and behave themselves gloriously in the combat. The true cause of this, is, as we have already stated, that the fervour of the one proceeds only from a certain sensible sweetness, which soon passes away, and leaves them dry; and the others have a devotion established upon solid foundations; that is, they have employed, and made use of the light of true reason to undeceive and convince themselves; and thus they remain constant and unshaken in the truths they have embraced, and the resolutions they have taken. One of the best means also with which we may help ourselves, to remain constant in the practice of those good purposes we have made in prayer, and to put them the better into execution, is, that we endeavour to recollect the reason, which had influenced us to form them; because that which occasioned the first thought, will afterwards help us to conserve, and put it in practice. From our being fully disabused and convinced by reason, in prayer, there arises this advantage also, that though we afterwards cannot call to mind the particular motives, which influenced us to make this resolution, nevertheless we are thereby sufficiently moved to remain more constant therein; because we know in general, that it was not made without reason; and this certainly gives us strength to resist temptations, and to persevere in the way of virtue.

It was upon this account, that Gerson set so high a value on meditation, that being asked, what employment was most profitable for religious persons retired in their cells; and what one of these four — spiritual reading, vocal prayer, manual work, or meditation, was most proper? He answered, that obedience apart, they could do nothing better, than apply themselves to meditation. The reason he gave was this; that though in time of vocal prayer, or spiritual reading, we feel perhaps more fervour, and, as it seems to us, greater profit than in meditation; yet, as soon as we cease to read or speak, our devotion, in like manner, ordinarily ceases. But meditation goes farther, and therefore is more profitable, since it disposes the mind for the future; and therefore he said we must accustom ourselves to it, in order that when our voice or books happen to be wanting, meditation may serve us instead of voice or books; by which means true devotion will never be wanting or extinguished in us.

CHAPTER XI.

OF THE METHOD TO BE OBSERVED IN PRAYER, AND THE ADVANCEMENT TO BE DERIVED FROM IT.

My heart is inflamed within me, says the Royal Prophet, and in my meditation this fire shall be kindled. (Ps. xxxviii. 4.) The method we must follow in prayer, is prescribed us in these words, according to the interpretation of the holy fathers, who explain the fire here mentioned to be the fire of charity, and the love of God and of our neighbour, which was kindled in the bowels of the holy prophet, by meditating on heavenly things. My heart, says he, is inflamed within me; behold the effect of prayer. But by what is it inflamed? By meditation: And in meditation the fire shall be kindled; behold the means, and the instruments that served to light this fire. This manner of meditating, says St. Cyril of Alexandria, is like the striking a piece of steel upon a flint, to extract fire from it. It is therefore by meditation and reflections of the understanding, that we must continually strike the flint of our hard heart, till we extract fire from it, and till we inflame ourselves with the love of God, and of our neighbour, and with an ardent desire of humility, mortification, and all other Christian virtues.

Nevertheless, though meditation be so profitable and necessary, yet we must not pass our prayer in reasoning and reflections only; nor must we dwell and repose upon these; because otherwise it would rather be a study than prayer. But all the meditations we make, must serve as so many helps to excite the desire of virtue in our hearts. For the perfection of a Christian and religious life, consists not either in good thoughts, or in the understanding of holy things, but in solid and true virtues; and particularly in those acts of virtue we produce, which are, as St. Thomas says, the accomplishment of all perfection. It is this, therefore, we must insist upon, and it is to this, we ought most apply ourselves in prayer.

On this occasion, it must be a first principle with us, to apply ourselves to the study of virtue, and this also not only simply to know what virtue is, but to become virtuous. (Gerson sup. Magnif. Alph. 86. Littera D.) If we sew, we must have a needle; but it is not the needle, but the thread that sews; and it would be a ridiculous thing, and lost labour, for a man to busy himself all day long, in sewing a cloth with a needle alone, without any thread in it. They act, however, nearly in the same manner, who meditate, and make many reflections in prayer, without applying themselves to produce acts of the will; as acts of charity, humility, etc. For meditation must be like the needle, it must pass first, but it must carry after it the thread of love, and such affectionate acts, as unite the will unto God.

St. Ignatius particularly advertises us of this, and repeats the same very often, in his book of spiritual exercises, wherein after having established the point, upon which we are to meditate, and having made some observations of less importance, he presently adds, that we must apply all to ourselves, in order to derive advantage from it. In effect, all the advantage of prayer consists in knowing how to apply to ourselves, and to our own profit, what we meditate on, according to the necessity we have thereof. As the sun, says St. Bernard, heats not all, that it enlightens; so meditation, though it teaches us what we must do, does not always excite every one to practise what it teaches; nor does it excite affections in all persons. And as there is a great difference between knowing where great treasures are, and the possessing them; and as it is the possession only, and not the simple knowledge that makes a man rich; so there is a great difference between knowing God, and between fearing and loving him. It is not the knowledge of what belongs to God, but it is his love and his fear that render us truly wise and rich. They make also another very just comparison upon the same subject — As it signifies nothing, say they, to a man almost dead with hunger, to be present at a table covered with all sorts of meats,

if he be not permitted to eat thereof; so he that performs prayer, profits little by the holy thoughts he receives in it, if he nourishes not himself therewith, nor applies them to himself, making firm and constant resolutions to put them in practice.

But still to examine things more particularly, I say, that the whole fruit we must derive from meditation, consists in forming pious desires in the bottom of our hearts, that we may afterwards in due time put them in practice. And therefore St. Ambrose says, that action is the end of the meditation of God's commandments. (Amb. sup. Ps. cxviii.)

Amongst many other particulars, the scripture informs us of, concerning these holy creatures that Ezechiel saw in his vision, it says, that they had hands of men under their wings; (Ezech. i. 8.) to let us know, that in meditation we must raise ourselves by the help of our understanding; that afterwards we may come to execute and practise, by means of our will. In prayer, then, what we ought to have principally in view, is, to excite in ourselves either acts of humility, by contemning ourselves, and desiring to be contemned by others — or an ardent will to suffer for the love of God, proposing to ourselves to suffer with joy, the present pains and afflictions we lie under — or sentiments of affection to poverty of spirit, desiring to be rejected and contemned by all; and even sometimes to want such things as are very necessary. In fine we must endeavour to bring with us to prayer, a lively sorrow for our sins; a firm resolution rather to die than offend God; deep gratitude for his benefits; an entire resignation of ourselves into his hands; and an ardent desire to imitate our divine Master, in the practice of those virtues, of which he has given us an example. Behold here what ought to be the object and the end of our meditation, and the advantage we ought to derive from it.

From what has been already said, it follows, that because we make use of meditation and reflection, as means to excite our will to acts of affection, and to holy resolutions, and that this is our only aim and end; we consequently must not entertain ourselves in meditation any longer than is necessary to move our will. For the means must be proportionate to their end: so that when we find our will touched with any motion of piety, as for example, with a regret for our sins, contempt of the world, love of God, desire to suffer for him, and such like other motions; we must imitate skillful architects, who, as soon as the arch of a vault is finished, take away the frame of wood, upon which it was formed; that is, we must presently interrupt our meditation, and dwell upon these affectionate acts, till our soul is quite penetrated therewith.

This advice is very important, and is given us by St. Ignatius, in his book of spiritual exercises, where he says, the very moment we begin in our meditation to feel in ourselves these motions of fervour and devotion, we must stop, and fix there, without being anxious to pass to other things, till we are thereby very well penetrated and replenished. As a gardener who waters a bed in his garden, and perceiving the water not presently to enter into it, stops a little, to let it be imbibed by the earth, and goes no farther till it has sunk to the very bottom, and that the earth is well watered; in like manner, when the water of these holy affections and desires, begins to enter into our soul, which is, to speak with the Psalmist, like earth without water; (Ps. cxlii. 6.) we must suspend the operation of our understanding, and think only of receiving these salutary waters, and enjoying this effusion of the will, till our heart being filled, we feel its wants no more.

The great St. Chrysostom explains the same thing, by another comparison. Have you not taken notice, says he, of a lamb, which would suck its mother? He first goes from side to side; he takes, he leaves, and returns again divers times, sometimes to one, sometimes to the other teat; but when he finds that the milk begins to come, he presently stops, and does nothing else but receive it, and take it in large draughts. It is the same in prayer, as long as the dew of heaven does not fall, we turn from one side to another, by means of reasoning and reflections; but as soon as we begin to feel it, we must stop, and think of nothing else, than of

receiving it into the bottom of our heart, and quietly enjoying those sweet and delicious draughts, whereby we may replenish and nourish our souls.

CHAPTER XII.

OF HOW GREAT IMPORTANCE IT IS, TO DWELL UPON THESE ACTS AND AFFECTIONATE MOTIONS OF THE WILL.

It is of so great importance to dwell a long time upon these affectionate motions of the will, that the masters of a spiritual life say, that prayer is then in its sovereign degree of perfection, when no longer recurring to meditation, in order to excite in us the love of God, our heart being penetrated with this love, it sighs after, enjoys it, and reposes itself therein, as in the only end of its researches and desires. It is this the spouse teaches us, by her own example, in the Canticles, when she says — I have found him whom my soul loves; I will hold him fast, and will not let him go: (Cant. iii. 4.) and what she intimates to us by these other words, I sleep, but my heart is awake. (Cant. v. 2.)

For in perfect prayer, the understanding is as it were asleep, because all its functions are in a manner suspended, but the will and heart are awake, and melt with tenderness for the heavenly spouse. This sleep also of the spouse is so agreeable to her beloved, that he conjures the daughters of Jerusalem, not to disturb the repose of his spouse, and not to awake her till she wakes of herself (Cant. iii. 5.) So that meditation, and all those other functions of the mind in prayer, are all made use of, and directed to contemplation; and are as so many steps, to help us to ascend to it. It is after this manner that St. Augustine speaks of it, in his book he calls the Ladder of Paradise, where he says, that we search by reading, we find by meditating, we ask by prayer, and we obtain by contemplation. (Lib. de Scala. Parad.)

And afterwards making mention of that passage proposed in the gospel: Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; (Mat. vii. 7.) he applies it to the same thought: Seek, says he, in reading, and you will find in meditating; knock by the help of prayer, and the gate shall be opened unto you by means of contemplation. There is also, says Albertus Magnus, and many saints, this difference between the contemplation of the faithful, and that of the heathen philosophers; that of the philosophers, only perfected the understanding, by the knowledge of truth; and stopped at that alone, as having no other end, but to know daily more and more; but the contemplation of the faithful goes farther, and tends to move the will, and to warm and inflame it with the love of God; according to these words of the spouse: My heart melted with tenderness, at the moment my beloved spoke. (Cant. v. 2.) St. Thomas understood very well this difference, when speaking of contemplation, he says, that though it essentially consists in the operations of the understanding; yet it oftentimes receives not its last perfection, but from affectionate motions, and acts of the love of God, produced by the will: so that these acts and motions must be the principal and chief end of contemplation.

This form of prayer, as St. Augustine remarks, is taught us in the gospel by Jesus Christ himself, when he warns us not to speak much in prayer. (Mat. vi. 7.) Whereupon the same saint adds, that to employ ourselves in long discourses, is quite a different thing, from entertaining ourselves for a long time in affectionate thoughts; and that in prayer, we ought as much as we can, to retrench the one, and let our prayer be always accompanied with the other. Because, says he, it is a business that is better done by sighs than by words; (Lib. de oran. deum, c. x.) The delicacy of thought, the force of argument, and the abundance of discourse, are all to little purpose, when we treat with God. There are only the desires of the

heart, sighs, moans, and tears, that we must employ ourselves in, when we treat with him, according to the prophet Jeremias: Let not the apple of your eye be silent. (Lamen. ii. 18.)

St. Jerome hereupon proposes a question to himself, and after having asked how it was possible the apples of our eyes should speak; because speaking is the proper office of the tongue only? When we pour out our tears, says he, before God, then it is that the apples of our eyes speak to him, make themselves be understood by him; in like manner, though our mouth utter not a word, yet our heart ceases not to make its cries be heard. This is what St. Paul explains to us, when writing to the Galatians, he says, that God has sent the spirit of his Son, which cries out in our hearts, Father, Father. (Gal. iv. 6.) And it is this that God himself gave us to understand, when he asked Moses, Wherefore do you cry to me? (Exod. xiv. 15.) Though Moses had not so much as opened his mouth, but instead thereof, had made his heart speak to him, praying with so much fervour and efficacy, that God asked him why he cried out in such a manner. It is thus we must raise our voices to God in our prayer — it is thus we must speak to him with our eyes; it is thus the apple of our eye must not be silent — and it is thus we must cry out to him, with the sighs, tears, sobs, and groans of our hearts.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ANSWER TO THE COMPLAINTS OF SUCH AS SAY THEY ARE NOT CAPABLE OF MEDITATING.

What we have already said, may serve as a sufficient answer to those who complain they know not how to meditate; because nothing ever presenting itself to their minds, to help them to extend the points they have taken, they presently want matter. There is nothing in this that should afflict them; for as we have already said, meditation is an exercise that consists more in the acts of the will, than in the discourses of the understanding. And even the masters of a spiritual life admonish us to take care, that the meditation be not too long; because by this means, and particularly when we entertain ourselves with curious and subtle reflections, we only check the motions and affections of the will, which ought to be the chief end of prayer. The reason of this, is most clear and natural. For it is certain, if a supply gives but one inch of water, and if it be distributed among different pipes, the more there runs through one, the less there will run through the other.

Now the virtue of our soul is finite, and limited; so that the more it effuses itself by the channel of the understanding, the less it will be able to transmit by that of the will; and thus we see by experience, that when our heart is filled with devotion, if the understanding lets itself be carried away with speculations and curious reflections, the devotion is presently spent, and our heart becomes dry. The reason of this is, because the spring flows entirely through the channel of the understanding, and therefore that of the will must necessarily be dried up. Hence it is, says Gerson, that those who are not learned, are sometimes more devout, and make their prayer far better than others; because the understanding does not present to them so many objects to distract their attention; and without running after far-fetched speculations, they presently endeavour to move their wills, by simple and familiar reflections, which make a deeper impression upon them, than the most sublime and exquisite meditations can make upon others. We have an example of this in the cook I have already mentioned, who from the material fire, he had continually before his eyes, took occasion to call to mind the eternal fire of hell; and to be so deeply impressed with sentiments of devotion, that amidst his occupations, he had continually the gift of tears.

What is to be farther observed, is, provided the motions of the will, and sentiments of the heart are very sublime, it is no matter whether the thought or the reflection that causes them be ever so mean and common. We have sufficient proofs and examples of this truth in scripture; where the Holy Ghost by simple and easy comparisons, is oftentimes pleased to explain the highest and most sublime mysteries. St. Ambrose speaking of this verse of the Psalmist: Who will give me the wings of a dove, that I may fly and be at rest? (Ps. liv. 7.) asks the question, why the prophet, desirous to fly, and raise himself on high, should desire rather the wings of a dove, than of any other fowl, since there are many more swift than a dove? It is, says he, because the prophet knew very well, that to fly to the highest pitch or summit of perfection, and to raise ourselves to what is most sublime in prayer, the wings of a dove are the best; that is to say, that simplicity of heart is more proper and fit for it, than the sublimity and refinement of the understanding, according to the words of the Wise Man: The conversation of our Lord is with the simple. (Prov. iii. 32.)

We have no reason, then, to be uneasy, when, during prayer, we feel it difficult, to make great or long discourses; when we find not reflections for enlarging on the points of our meditation. On the contrary, it is maintained with a great deal of reason, that in a spiritual life, these are in the best state, in whom God dries up the source of vague and diffuse speculation and opens at the same time, in them the source of the affections and feelings of the heart — in order that the understanding remaining in a most profound tranquility, the will may repose in God alone, and entirely employ itself in the love and enjoyment of the sovereign good. If our Lord bestows upon you this favour, that by the help of some simple reflection, or by the sole consideration of his being made man, of his being born for your sake in a stable, and dying for you upon a cross, you find and feel yourself inflamed with his love, and with a desire to humble and mortify yourself for his sake; and that you entertain yourself for a long time herein; this kind of prayer, is without doubt far better, and far more profitable, than if you had busied yourself with long reflections, and sublime discourses. Because you dwelled upon that which is most exquisite and essential in prayer, and upon that which ought to be the end and fruit of it. This shows us, how much these deceive themselves, who imagine that not to make reflections, is to pray ill, and to make them is to pray well.

We read in the Chronicles of St. Francis, that a holy religious, named brother Giles, said one day to St. Bonaventure, who was general of their order: God has given great talents to you and other learned men, that you may serve and praise him, but we simple and ignorant people, who have no light at all, what can we do to please God? If nothing more, replied St. Bonaventure, were given to a man, than grace to love God, this would suffice to render him more pleasing to God, and to make him merit more, than he would, by using all other means together. How! replied the good religious, is it possible then, that an ignorant and simple person should be able to love Jesus Christ as much as a wise and learned man? It is possible, replied St. Bonaventure, that a poor simple ignorant woman, may have as great love and charity, as a very learned divine. Hereupon the good religious, transported with fervour, ran about that side of the garden next to the town, and cried out with a loud voice: Poor simple woman, love but our Lord Jesus Christ, and you may have greater merit than brother Bonaventure; and he had scarce ended these words, but, as he frequently did, he fell into an ecstasy, and remained in it, for three whole hours together.

CHAPTER XIV.

TWO ADVERTISEMENTS, WHICH MAY CONSIDERABLY HELP US TO MAKE OUR PRAYER WELL, AND TO DERIVE GREAT ADVANTAGE FROM IT.

To make our prayer well, and to derive from it the benefit we ought, it will be extremely profitable to us first to be assured that prayer is not the chief end we propose to ourselves in a spiritual life; but only a means and help we make use of, to advance ourselves in perfection. We must not confine ourselves to prayer, as to the end in which we are to repose. For our perfection consists not in consolations, and sweetnesses of contemplation, but in acquiring a perfect mortification of sense — in obtaining a victory over ourselves — in surmounting our passions and appetites; and re-establishing ourselves, as much as it is possible, in the happy state of original justice wherein we were all created, in the person of our first father Adam.

For then the flesh and concupiscence were subject to reason; and reason was entirely subject and conformable to God. And it is to attain this so elevated an end, that we must help ourselves by prayer, as a means most proper and profitable. Though iron is hard, yet fire softens it and renders it fit for any use we please. Prayer works the same effect upon our heart, which being naturally hard, has a repugnance to mortification and contempt, and feels it very difficult to submit to the will of another. We must, then, have recourse to prayer, to overcome this hardness; and by the fire and heat of devotion, and the example of Jesus Christ, our heart will become so soft and pliable, that we may afterwards very easily manage it, and form it to whatsoever shall be necessary for God's greater glory and service. See what prayer ought to work in us — behold the advantage we must derive from it. And as to those sweetnesses and interior consolations we sometimes receive from God therein, he does not intend them, that we may repose in them; but he gives them, that thereby we may become more ready and ardent to run on in the way of virtue and perfection.

It is this the Holy Ghost would give us to understand by what happened to Moses descending from the mountain, where he conversed with God. The holy text says, that coming down, his face was resplendent with rays of light; and this light was formed into the shape of horns. For, as in scripture, horns are a symbol of strength, so the Holy Ghost would thereby intimate to us, that we must rise from prayer with additional strength and activity. The Son of God also, has taught us this by his own example, on the night of his passion. He put himself three times in prayer, to prepare himself for the sufferings which awaited him; and, as soon as he had ended it, he said to his disciples: Arise, let us go, he who betrays me is at hand. (Mat. xxvi. 46.) He himself offers and delivers up himself into the hands of his enemies. He was offered, because it was his pleasure. (Is. liii. 7.)

Yet it was not, as St. Ambrose well observes, because he wanted either preparation or succour that he prayed, but because he would teach us by his example, to recur to prayer as a most proper means to surmount all difficulties that can occur in the way of virtue. St. Chrysostom compares our heart to an instrument of music, and says, that prayer tunes all the notes to elicit thence a harmony very agreeable to God. In effect, what we must propose to ourselves in prayer is, so to regulate all the motions of our heart, and all our actions and passions, that they may accord very well with reason, and with God. Wherefore we are every day admonished, in these exhortations that are made to us, that our prayer should be practical; that is to say, that it tend to the regulating of our life, the lessening difficulties, and removing the obstacles we shall meet with in a spiritual life. The Holy Ghost also gives the name of wisdom to the science of saints; (Prov. ix. 10.) which is nothing else than prayer; because prudence teaches us to regulate our actions;

whereas human science terminates in the simple knowledge of objects.

Theodoret, in his religious history, relates of a holy anchoret, who was wont to say, that physicians ordinarily treat each corporal disease with a particular and proper remedy; and frequently apply many remedies to the cure of one disease; because all medicines are weak, and have only a limited virtue in them: but that prayer is an universal remedy, and is very efficacious in all our necessities — that it is fit to repel and resist the attacks of the devil, and to gain all the virtues; so that to all the evils of the soul, it applies an infinite good, which is God himself; from whom it borrows all its force and power. They also call it omnipotent; and it is a good title; because it is in effect a sovereign remedy, which the Saviour of the world has given us against all sorts of temptations. Watch and pray, says he, that ye enter not into temptation. (Mat. xxvi. 41.)

The second advertisement which will help us to reduce the former to practice is, that as before we put ourselves in prayer, we should know the points upon which we are to meditate; so we must also know the fruit we are to reap from it. But some may say, how shall we know beforehand what benefit to derive from the prayer we are about to make?

This proposition requires to be explained; which I shall endeavour to do, and render it as intelligible as I can. Have I not just now said that when we have recourse to prayer, it is to find out a remedy for our spiritual infirmities, and to gain the victory over ourselves, and over our passions and bad habits; and that prayer is a means we adopt, in order to amend, and reform our lives? This being so, we must consider for some time before we begin our prayer; and ask ourselves what is the greatest spiritual infirmity I have? What is the obstacle, that most opposes itself to my progress in virtue? And what enemies make the most open war against my soul? Let every one set this before his eyes; let him before-hand call it to mind, that afterwards he may, in his prayer, with greater fervour and earnestness, request some necessary remedy for this evil, wherewith he is molested; and let all the preparation he makes for the disposing the points of his meditation, be directed to this end only. You are, for example, tempted by an irregular desire of the esteem and praises of men; and this renders you so very sensible to the least appearance of contempt, that sometimes you cannot forbear to let your resentment appear exteriorly.

You perceive it is this which more violently wages war against you, and is the greatest obstacle and hinderance to your spiritual advancement — that it is this which most of all hinders the peace and quiet of your mind, and in fine this is what occasions your falling into your most considerable faults and imperfections. Since you know that this is your greatest fault, it is to overcome and root out this, that you must chiefly apply yourself; and consequently this is the fruit you must propose to yourself to reap from your prayer; this is what you must always have before your eyes, and what you must insist on most constantly and earnestly. Those, then, deceive themselves exceedingly, who think not upon what most imports them; but, like a hunter that shoots always at random, go to prayer without any fixed design to profit of what the Holy Ghost shall put into their minds. We go not to prayer to take all that comes to hand, but we go to find what is most necessary for us; and to imitate the sick man who goes not to the apothecary's to take what drugs come next; but to seek those he stands most in need of. One is puffed up with pride and vanity; another boils with anger and impatience; a third abounds in his own sense, being tied to his own will and opinion; every day we find ourselves guilty of faults, and yet in prayer we entertain ourselves with far-fetched speculations, and subtle reflections, taking hold of the first pleasing thing that presents itself; and, without directly stopping or fixing upon anything, let our minds wander to and fro on things which are not to the purpose.

This is not the way to profit. We must continually think upon that which principally requires

reformation in us, and endeavour to remedy it by prayer; since prayer was established for this end.

St. Ephrem applies very well to this subject the example of the blind man in the gospel, who had recourse to Jesus Christ, crying out, and begging that he would take pity on him. Consider, says he, that our Saviour having asked him what he would have, the man presently mentions to him his greatest misery, which was his blindness, and said — Lord, grant me my sight. (Luke xviii. 41.) He asked him for nothing else that he wanted; he mentioned not his poverty, his want of clothes, or anything else; but, not alluding to any of these, he thought only upon what was most pressing. It is after this manner, continues this great saint, that we must behave ourselves in prayer; we must regard that which we stand most in need of, and insist and persevere in our importunity till we have obtained it.

But to anticipate a difficulty which may be made, it is proper to observe, that though it be true, that to excite ourselves to a love of those particular virtues we stand most in need of, we must try whether the matter, and points we have chosen to meditate upon, be such as they ought to be, to move our will to produce fervent acts; nevertheless we may also affirm with truth, that any mystery or point we take for our meditation, may equally be applied to all sorts of necessities. For prayer is like the heavenly manna, that has that taste which each one desires. If you would find sentiments of humility, you will meet with them in the considerations you shall make upon sin, death, hell, the passion of the Son of God, and upon the benefits you have thereby received. If you would excite in yourself a lively sorrow and extreme confusion for your faults, each one of these points will also conduce to this effect. If you would gain the spirit of sweetness and patience, they will, in the same manner, serve for the obtaining them. In fine, whatsoever you would seek in prayer, you will always infallibly find it therein.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND, THAT IN PRAYER WE MUST TAKE TO HEART THOSE THINGS WE STAND MOST IN NEED OF, AND INSIST ON THEM TILL WE HAVE OBTAINED THEM.

I do not mean that in prayer we must always apply ourselves to one thing only; because, though humility, for example, or any other virtue, be the most necessary for us, yet we may always in prayer exercise ourselves in any other virtues, and in forming or making acts of them. You are moved to make an act of conformity to the will of God, in whatsoever he shall please to ordain in your regard. Stop there as long as you can; and all the time you shall spend in it will be well spent; and your prayer made in this manner will be so good, and be so far from diverting you from sentiments of humility, that it will even more and more excite you to them. You are moved to a grateful acknowledgment of all the benefits God has bestowed upon you, as well in general as in particular. Stop there as long as you are able; since it is just to thank God daily for all the favours you have received from him, and principally for that, which he bestowed upon you when he called you to religion. You are moved to a horror of your sins, and compunction for them, and to make a firm resolution rather to die a thousand times than offend God; dwell a good while on this; you cannot produce an act more profitable, and more conducive to your salvation.

You are moved to a greater love of God, to a fervent zeal for the salvation of souls, and an ardent desire for this purpose to expose yourself to all sorts of labours and sufferings. Repose and rest herein; and, if you will, you may apply yourself, moreover, to beg grace

of God, as well for yourself as for your neighbour, and for the whole church in general; for this is one of the principal points of prayer; and, by dwelling either on these, or those before mentioned, or any others of the same nature, you may make a very good and profitable prayer. Let us also take notice of the Psalms, which are a most perfect prayer, how they are replenished with an infinity of different affectionate acts; and it is this that made Cassian say, that prayer is like a field enamelled with a thousand different odoriferous flowers; a simile Isaac made use of when he said — the smell of my son is like the smell of a fertile field, that our Lord has blessed. (Gen. xxvii. 27.)

But there is also an advantage in this variety; which is, that it ordinarily helps to make prayer more easy and pleasant unto us; and consequently makes us persevere a longer time in it. For as a frequent repetition of the same thing is wont to create tediousness; so variety, on the other hand, renders what we are about more pleasant, and delightful. What I wish to say, then, is, that it is of great importance for our spiritual advancement, to take to heart, for some time, some one thing in particular; and it must be precisely what we find ourselves standing most in need of. And in prayer we must chiefly insist upon this, and beg it of God with fervour several times, several days, nay even several months; making this our chief business, having it continually before our eyes, and lodging it in the very bottom of our hearts, till we come at last to obtain it. Even worldly affairs are performed after this manner; and therefore we ordinarily say, God preserve us from the man that has but one affair. St. Thomas, speaking of prayer, says, that the more the desire unites itself to one thing in particular, the more perfect and efficacious it is; and upon this subject, he recites the words of the Psalmist: I desired one thing of our Lord, and I will not cease earnestly to beg it of him till I obtain it. (Ps. xxvi. 4.)

Whoever wishes to distinguish himself in any art or science, begins not a thing one day, and another thing another; but he continues for some considerable time to make it his chief study; till he thoroughly understands what he undertook to learn. Whoever therefore wishes to acquire any virtue he stands in need of, must make it, in like manner, his chief business, and direct his prayer and all his spiritual exercises to this end; and this the more perseveringly, as all moral virtues, according to the doctrine of the same saint, are so inseparably united one with another, that whoever perfectly possesses one of them, possesses all the rest. Root out of your heart pride, and plant humility in its place. As soon as you shall be truly humble, you will be obedient, you will be patient, you will complain of nothing, you will think nothing hard; and though anything should happen to you, very difficult to be borne with, yet it will always seem to you very little, in comparison of what you deserve. As soon also as you shall be humble, you will be charitable towards your brothers, because you will believe them all to be good, and that there is none bad but yourself; you will have a great simplicity of heart, and you will judge ill of nobody, because you will have so great sorrow and confusion for your own defects, that you will not at all reflect upon those of your neighbour. And what we say at present of these particular virtues, may be in like manner extended to all others.

It is also very profitable to take for the subject of our particular examen, the same matter that we also take for the subject of our prayer; and to join prayer and examen together, because by this means all our exercises tending to the same end, we shall make a greater progress in virtue. But Cassian goes farther yet, and would have us not only insist in our prayer and examen, upon what we find most necessary for us; but would have us also elevate our minds to God several times in the day, by short and lively aspirations, with sighs, and groans of our heart; and that to these we also add penances, mortifications, and other particular devotions for the obtaining what we desire. For since the greatest business we have, is to increase in virtue, and to root out that vice which most of all predominates within us; and that bad inclination and propensity also, which carry us on, and cause us to fall into most grievous faults — and since by the

overcoming and rooting out this vice, and the gaining this virtue, we overcome and root out all vices, and acquire all virtues: whatsoever attention we devote to it, and what pains soever we take upon this account, our care and efforts can never be better applied.

St. Chrysostom says, that prayer is like a fountain in the middle of a garden, without which all things would become dry and barren; and by means of which, all things flourish and become fresh and pleasant. So that it is by prayer we must always keep the plants of obedience, humility, patience, mortification, silence, recollection, and all other virtues, in continual beauty and perfection. But as in a garden there is ordinarily one plant or flower, that is cultivated with more care than all the rest, and for which we always find time and water sufficient, though we should want for the others; so in the spiritual garden of our soul, where all things must be refreshed with the wholesome water of prayer, there must always be something upon which we more particularly cast our eye, and for the cultivation of which, we should always find leisure. I mean, we must take notice which is the virtue we want most, and apply ourselves more to attain that, than all the rest. Moreover, since it commonly happens, that before we go out of a garden we pluck one of those flowers. That most of all pleases us; so in prayer, we must apply ourselves not only to what pleases us most, but what is most necessary for us, and endeavour to take it along with us when we go from our prayer.

What we have here said may be a sufficient answer to those who ask, whether the fruit we reap from prayer must be conformable to the matter upon which we meditate? We have already taken notice, that though we ought always chiefly to apply ourselves to that which we find most necessary for us, yet we must exercise ourselves also in producing acts of other virtues; according to the point we have made choice of for our meditation. But in this there is one thing very essential to be observed; which is, that those affections which shall arise in us, from the matter we meditate upon, must not be formed in haste and superficially; but though we should employ even the whole time of our prayer in them, yet we must make them at leisure, entertaining them in peace and tranquillity, till we feel our hearts very well filled and penetrated with them. For it is better without doubt to make and continue one sole act in this manner, than to produce many acts of different virtues in haste, and only, as I may say, take a imperfect sketch of them.

One of the things that most of all hinders some from deriving the advantage they ought, is, that they slightly pass over all the acts they make. For they only touch the matter, and fly from one thing to another. A thought occurs to them to make an act of humility, they make it, and as soon as they have done, they go to another. If it be to their purpose afterwards to make an act of obedience, they do the same, without dwelling any longer upon it, than upon the first — afterwards they make an act of patience, in which they spend no more time than in the former, and pass so quickly and lightly over all, that if they were running over burning coal they could not at all annoy themselves. Father Avila reprehends very severely, those that thus go from one thing to another, and says; that in effect, it proceeds from a deceit of the devil, who thus lays different matters before them, in order that, like birds flying from one branch to another, they may not reap any considerable fruit from their prayer.

It is therefore of great importance to dwell upon one thing, till the soul is filled and well penetrated with it. If you would, for example, make an act of contrition, and have a lively sorrow for your offences; you must persist so long in it, till, finding your soul seized with a horror of sin, you shall be able to say with the prophet, I have hated iniquity, and had it in abomination. (Ps. cxviii. 163.) For this will cause you to make a firm resolution, rather to die a thousand deaths, than mortally offend God. Wherefore St. Augustine very judiciously takes notice, that the horror which men have conceived of some certain sins, as parricide and such like, is the occasion that they very seldom fall into them. And on the contrary,

there are other sins, that the frequent habit of committing them, has so taken away all fear or horror, and rendered them so small in appearance, that we permit ourselves to fall into them very easily. If you desire to exercise yourself in humility also, and to make acts of this virtue, you must entertain thoughts of self-contempt, till they have penetrated so to the bottom of your soul, that they chase from you all the smoke of vanity and pride; and that you feel yourself ready to suffer contempt and reproaches with joy. And what we say here of contrition and humility, may in like manner be said of all the virtues, and of all pious motions of the soul.

By this we may see, how much the taking some one thing to heart, and the persevering therein according to the manner aforesaid, conduce to spiritual advancement; because, if we entertain ourselves an hour in the morning, and another in the evening, with a desire of being contemned, or in any other pious sentiment of this nature, and should continue many days together to do the same, it is certain, that this would work a quite different effect in our hearts, and this virtue would be imprinted in it after a quite different manner, than by thinking upon it only now and then, as if it were by chance, or only by a slight and passing thought. St. Chrysostom says, that though the soil be ever so good, yet to make it become fertile, it must be well watered with rain, and this not only once, but very often; so our souls in like manner must be watered by prayer, if we desire they should bring forth the fruit of justice and sanctity. And he cites upon this subject those words of David: — I have sung your praises seven times a day. (Ps. cxviii. 164.)

The Royal Prophet watered his soul seven times a day by means of prayer; and the better to entertain himself in the same sentiments of devotion, he renewed it frequently in a short pace of time. We see this in the hundred and thirty-fifth psalm, where he repeats twenty-seven times these words: Because his mercy is for ever. (Ps. cxxxv. 1.) And in another psalm, which contains only five verses, he invites us to praise God, no less than eleven times. This manner of praying, in which the same words are repeated over and over again; and the persevering a good while therein, was taught us by our Saviour also, in the garden of Olives, where he returned to prayer three several times; saying always the same words. (Mat. xxvi. 44.) By this, he teaches us, to insist often in prayer upon the same thing, and always with a new fervour; for if we persevere a long while in this manner, we shall at last obtain the virtue and perfection we desire.

CHAPTER XVI.

OF THE MEANS OF EXERCISING OURSELVES A LONG WHILE IN PRAYER, UPON THE SAME SUBJECT; AND OF A VERY PROFITABLE MANNER OR FORM OF PRAYER, WHICH IS MADE BY OUR DESCENDING TO PARTICULARS.

Having shown that it is very profitable in prayer, to dwell a long while upon interior acts of the same virtue, it remains that we point out the means requisite for effecting this. The most common, and what is ordinarily assigned, is to reproduce the same act in our heart, whether it be by helping ourselves with the first consideration that moved us to form it, (as a man by repeated strokes upon a wheel that hangs in the air upon its axletree, continues and augments its circular motion,) and exciting ourselves by those words of the prophet, My soul return to thy repose, by remembering the benefits thou hast received of our Lord: (Ps. cxiv. 7.) or by adding some other consideration to the first, when it is not sufficient to move us any longer: which is like casting fresh fuel upon the fire, when we would preserve it from going out. But if after all this, we feel not ourselves sufficiently excited, we must pass to another point; for we must always have several points in readiness; in order, when we have so much exhausted one, that we

find nothing more in it to inflame our will, we may pass to another, that is better able to awake and stir up the motions of our understanding, and carry our thoughts to what we chiefly desire and aim at.

Moreover, when we would avoid the disgust we find in feeding constantly upon the same meat, we are accustomed to dress and season it after a different manner, which renders it as it were new, and that to excite in ourselves a new appetite; so also to be able to dwell a long time upon the same subject in prayer, which is the true food and nourishment of our soul, there is no better way than to season it after a different manner, by thinking of another consideration, or else upon some other point, as we have said before. So that as often, as by any reflection different from the first, we produce the same act; it is as it were a different kind of seasoning, that renders the thing in a manner new. We may also, without making use of any new reflection, vary the interior act of virtue, different ways; as for example, if we would exercise ourselves upon humility, we may sometimes dwell upon the consideration and knowledge of our misery and weakness, and there find an ample subject of confusion and humiliation. Sometimes we may employ ourselves in desiring the contempt of men, considering that the esteem of the world, is only mere vanity and smoke, and consequently we must make no account of it; sometimes we may conceive a wholesome shame and confusion, for faults we find ourselves daily guilty of, and ask God's pardon, and beg a remedy for them.

Sometimes we may enter into an admiration of the divine goodness, which tolerates us, notwithstanding all our imperfections, when frequently we are scarce able to tolerate, or bear with ourselves; and lastly, we may sometimes employ ourselves in giving him thanks, that he has not permitted us to fall into greater faults. By this variety, we avoid the disgust, which the continuation of the same act ordinarily occasions; and the perseverance in the desire and exercise of the same virtue, becoming thus easy and pleasant, our hearts by this means will be more deeply penetrated therewith, and this virtue will take deeper root. For as every time the file goes over the iron, it takes something with it, so also every time we make an act of humility, or of any other virtue, we always diminish something of the contrary vice.

There is besides this, another means to persevere many days in prayer, upon the same subject; which means is both very easy and profitable, and consists in descending to several particulars of the things we meditate on. It is not sufficient, as all masters of a spiritual life tell us, to form in prayer a weak and wandering desire, or a general resolution to serve God — to make progress in virtue, and to render ourselves perfect; but we must moreover descend to the particulars of those things we know are most pleasing to God. Nor is it sufficient to conceive a desire in general, of any virtue in particular; as of obedience, humility, patience, or mortification, as this sort of general desire, or rather vanity, is formed in the hearts even of the most vicious persons. For virtue being a thing pleasant, honourable, and also most profitable, as well for this life as for the next; it is an easy thing to love it, or thus to desire it in general; but this is not enough: together with this, we must enter into a detail of the particular circumstances which bear any relation to the very virtue we wish to acquire.

If, for example, we propose to ourselves the gaining a perfect conformity to the will of God; we must set before us the different situations in which we may happen to find ourselves. We must look upon sickness as well as health; the time of temptation as well as of comfort; and life as well as death; with an entire resignation to the divine will. If we wish to acquire humility, we must in like manner descend to particulars; representing to ourselves those things in which we may have any occasion of exercising humility; and it is the same with respect to all the other virtues. Because it is particular facts, which most of all touch and move us; it is in these, what is most difficult in virtue consists — it is by these virtue is not only proved but acquired. The method we are to observe herein, is in the beginning to propose to

ourselves such examples and practices as are easy; and afterwards to image to ourselves such as are more hard and difficult; and then to image to ourselves such as are the most difficult of all and when we think we have mastered all these, we must endeavour after this manner still to raise ourselves by little and little; never ceasing to make one act after another, just as if the occasions had actually presented themselves; till there is nothing that opposes itself to our design; and till we have resisted and overcome all our difficulties with so much vigour, that at last we become masters of the field. But if afterwards any new occasions offer themselves, we must also exercise ourselves in these, and excite ourselves to support them with patience, and make our profit of them. A certain servant of God moreover adds, that we must in prayer purpose to practise something of this kind each day; so true it is, that, in what concerns our perfection, we cannot descend too much to particulars.

Without doubt, this is one of the most profitable things in which we can exercise ourselves in time of prayer. For prayer, as we have said, ought to be practical; that is to say, it ought always tend to the practice of the virtue we aspire to; and it ought to smooth the difficulties we meet with in the practice of it. And for this purpose, it is requisite, that we try and exercise ourselves beforehand, like soldiers who are trained in time of peace, that they may be able to surmount the difficulties they meet in time of war. Cassian also particularly recommends this method. And even Seneca and Plutarch declare, that the weak are the only persons who feel not how much the ills and afflictions of life are sweetened by often thinking upon them beforehand. It is very profitable, say they, often to fix our thoughts upon things that are hard and difficult; for as a man who employs his thoughts only upon those things that are pleasant, contracts a certain effeminacy, that makes him afraid of any pain or labour; and therefore loses courage on the least occasion that presents itself: so he who is accustomed to propose to himself, the pains of sickness, exile, prisons, and all other adversities that can happen in this life, will be the better prepared to bear them, whenever they shall happen; and will experience that all these things cause a great deal more fear and apprehension in the beginning, than they can do hurt in the end.

The darts we perceive afar off says St. Gregory, hurt us far less than others; (Greg. Hom. xxxv, sup. Evang.) the evil is in a manner half overcome, when we have foreseen it; the enemies that surprise us fright us far more than those we courageously wait for. We read in the life of St. Ignatius, a thing very pertinent to this subject. He happened to be sick, and the physician, having forbidden him to do anything that might give him any trouble of mind; or to dwell on any uneasy or disquieting thoughts, this circumstance led him to think with himself, what accident could happen that was capable of afflicting him, or of disturbing the peace of his mind. After having cast his thoughts upon several, he found that the object most dear to his heart, was the conservation of the society which he had but newly established; and that the dissolution thereof was the only thing that could give him any pain or trouble. He afterwards went on to examine himself how long this affliction would last, in case such a thing should happen; and it seemed to him, provided it happened not through his fault, he would require but a quarter of an hour's recollection and prayer, to free himself from all the trouble that this would give him, and to restore to his mind the peace and tranquility it had before enjoyed. He added moreover, that he should preserve the same joy and quiet, even though the society should come to be dissolved as complete as salt is in water. Behold here a most happy and most profitable manner of praying.

Is there any one of you afflicted? says the apostle St. James, let him have recourse to prayer; (James v. 13.) it is there we find a comfort and a remedy for all evils; and this was what the Royal Prophet practised when he felt himself oppressed with any interior affliction or desolation: My soul, says he, refused to be comforted, I thought upon God, and I was delighted in him. (Ps. lxxvi. 4.) This is God's will, it is he that will have it thus, and this is enough for me; because I ought to

have no other will, nor desire any other pleasure than his. Now if in time of afflictions, prayer efficaciously assists us to bear them, and to derive advantage from them; it is also an admirable preparative to render us more ready and better disposed to receive them. St. Chrysostom says, that one of the chief causes why Job remained so constant and patient in all his adversities and sufferings, was, that he had, in the manner described, prepared himself for them — representing them often to his mind, and making acts of resignation, as if these afflictions were very likely to happen to him. Job himself informs us of this in the following words: The fear I had, is truly fallen upon me, and that which I feared has happened unto me. (Job iii. 25.)

But if you have not taken this salutary precaution, and if the bare representation of bad and troublesome accidents shock you at present, what will real afflictions do when they happen? If whilst you are in prayer, and remote from any occasion, you feel not courage and vigour enough, to accept of a humble and painful employment, or to suffer any contempt, what will you be able to do out of prayer, when deprived of that help which those reflections upon the example of Jesus Christ impart, and when you find yourself amidst the obstacles and difficulties, which attend on the occasion? And if after having very great fervour in your prayer, you should afterwards when the occasion happens, fail to execute your good purposes, what would you have done had you not been at all prepared for them, and if in prayer you had not had this fervour? If he who makes good resolutions, says Thomas à Kempis, happens, notwithstanding, to fall, what will he do who makes none at all, or makes them very tepidly?

I have here furnished you with most ample and sufficient matter, to dwell a long time, upon the same subject in prayer, and upon the same act of virtue. For the particular cases that may happen are numberless, and we must labour very hard, before we shall be able to resist all. But when you shall proceed so far as to find in yourself, as you imagine, sufficient strength to support with joy all that can happen to you, think not that you have gained the point, and that all is done. You are far from it; for there is a great difference between saying and doing; and there are far more pains required to execute, than to resolve. In the action, the object is present, and acts by itself; whereas the purpose has no force but what it borrows from the imagination. Hence it happens, that we very often feel ourselves so zealous and fervent in prayer, that we think nothing can be able to shake or move us; and yet when the first occasion presents itself, and when we come to execute our good purposes, we experience, to our shame and confusion, that we are far from being, what we presumed and thought we had been. It is not sufficient, then, that you feel in yourself these good desires, but you must endeavour that these desires become efficacious, and that they be put in execution. For action is the true proof or trial of virtue; and if you perceive your actions correspond not, with the resolutions you have made, but that on the contrary, you find yourself in the occasion, far from what you thought yourself in prayer; be truly confounded, that you have nothing else but weak and simple desires of what is good, or to say better, that they are no true desires at all, but only vain and flying imaginations; because when the least occasion gives you any trouble, you lose courage, and shamefully give way and fall back.

Imitate the smith, who, when the piece of iron he forges, fails, the first time, puts it into the fire a second time, in order to forge it again and give it a better form. Put therefore these imperfect desires again into the fire of prayer, and there endeavour to render them efficacious, and do not give over till your actions are conformable to your purposes: and till there remains nothing which can render you wavering or inconstant in their execution. But even after you have gained thus much over yourself, and you think you behave as you ought upon all occasions, be not persuaded that there remains nothing else for you to do. For in the action itself there is a great many degrees of perfection that you must endeavour to compass. First, you must

support all things, with patience: Suffer with patience at least, says a holy man, if you cannot suffer with joy.

Behold the first degree of virtue; it will cost you some time and labour, before you come to this, and when you are arrived thus far, you have still a considerable progress to make, before you attain perfection. For as the philosophers say very well, the true sign that we have gained any virtue in its perfection, is, readily, easily, and with pleasure to produce its acts. See therefore whether you practise humility, poverty of spirit, patience, and other virtues, with this readiness, facility, and pleasure; and thus you will know, if you truly possess the virtue. See, according to the rule, which the gospel, as well as St. Ignatius prescribes, to examine yourself by; whether contempt and reproaches impart as much joy and satisfaction to you, as praises and honours give unto worldly persons? Whether in want of all conveniences of this life, you are as well pleased and content, as the covetous man is amidst his riches, and plenty of all things? Whether the mortification you suffer, be as pleasing to you, as ease and pleasure are to worldlings? Now if in the practice of each virtue, we must endeavour to raise ourselves to this height of perfection, we shall have matter enough to employ ourselves in, during our whole lives; since in one virtue alone, we find sufficient employment not only for many days, but even for many years.

CHAPTER XVII.

THAT WE MUST MEDITATE DELIBERATELY ON THE MYSTERIES OF THE GOSPEL. WHAT WILL ASSIST US TO DO SO.

It is also of very great importance to fathom things well and not to pass over them lightly, in the meditations we make upon the mysteries of the gospel. For it will be of far greater profit to us, to examine only one deliberately than to touch on many superficially. It is for this reason that St. Ignatius in his book of the Spiritual Exercises, makes such an account of those repetitions that, at the end of each exercise, he wishes to repeat this exercise, twice or thrice over; because, he who seeks, finds; and the gate shall be opened to him that knocks. (Mat. vii. 8.) Perseverance overcomes all difficulties, and attains its end. It was necessary that Moses should strike twice upon the rock, to make water issue forth. (Num. xx. 11.)

And even Jesus Christ himself, did not immediately cure the blind man mentioned in the gospel: he first anointed his eyes with spittle, and asked him whether he saw anything? And the man who as yet could not see any objects distinctly, answered him: I see men walk, that seem to me like trees. (Mat. viii. 24.) Then our Saviour touched his eyes the second time with his hand, and perfected their cure. Behold here what ordinarily happens in prayer; for by means of going over the same matter several times, and persevering therein, we discover those things which at first we did not perceive. Much after the same manner, as when we enter into a dark room; at first we see nothing; but if we remain for some time in it, we begin gradually to distinguish the objects. We must therefore dwell a good while in the consideration of the same matter, and not leave off, till we find ourselves disabused of the errors of the age; till we clearly behold these most important truths; and find ourselves confirmed in our good resolutions.

For this, as I have said before, is one of the greatest advantages, we can derive from prayer, and to which we must chiefly apply ourselves. Now to come to the means, which may help us to make long and salutary reflections upon these mysteries, I say, when God is pleased to impart his lights to a soul, and to open its eyes, it will find so many things to consider and such a variety of things to dwell on, that it may say with the Psalmist: Uncover my eyes and I will consider the wonderful things of thy law. (Ps. cxviii. 18.) I will

rejoice in the consideration of thy promises, as he, who having gained a victory, finds a great quantity of rich spoils. (Ps. cxviii. 18.) St. Augustine and St. Francis passed whole days and nights in repeating these words: Who are you, O Lord, and who am I! O that I could know you, that I could know myself! You are my God, and all things to me. (Aug. Isai. vi. 3.) This manner of prayer is very conformable to that, which the prophet Isaias says, the blessed make in heaven; when ravished with the contemplation of the divine majesty, they incessantly sing: Holy, holy, holy. The Apocalypse says the same, of those holy and mysterious creatures, which were before God's throne: They never ceased, says St. John, to repeat day and night, holy, holy, holy, Lord God, omnipotent, who was, and who is, and who is to come. (Apoc. iv. 8.)

But to attain this, it is necessary, that we, on our part, perform our duty, by accustoming ourselves to reflect seriously upon those mysteries, and that we exercise ourselves in penetrating into their particular circumstances. Gerson says, the best means to succeed in this prayer, is to practise it; and it is not a thing which is gained by the force or acuteness of arguing — nor is it learned by hearing it spoken of, nor by reading many treatises on prayer; but to acquire a knowledge of it, we must set our hand to work, and practise it a long time. When a mother wishes to teach an infant boy to walk, she holds not long discourses with him, to show him what he must do, but by practising him, she makes him form his steps, and thus, in a very short time, she teaches him to walk alone. It is this means therefore we must make use of, to gain the science of prayer. For though it be true, that it is a supernatural gift, and consequently not to be obtained by us, if it comes not from the liberal hand of God; because it is our Lord who gives wisdom, and prudence; and knowledge proceeds from his mouth: (Prov. ii. 6.) yet it is very certain, that God wishes, that we practise it as diligently, as if it were to be obtained by our own industry.

He is the eternal wisdom, who powerfully reaches from end to end, and disposes all things, sweetly. (Wisd. viii. 1.) Wherefore he acts in the order of grace, as he does in that of nature; and as he would have all human arts and sciences acquired by practice; so he would have us acquire the divine science of prayer, in the same manner. It is only because they do not practise contemplation, says Gerson, that there are now-a-days so few contemplatives. Formerly, monasteries were filled with them, and now it is very hard to find in any convent, a person that gives himself to prayer; now-a-days we are so far from the practice of contemplation, that even if we speak of it, we are looked upon to speak of some speculation, or of such metaphysical abstraction, as is not to be understood. This difference, says he, proceeds from our not following the method of the ancient fathers, who made prayer their constant practice, and took care that it should be practised likewise, by such as they received into their monasteries, as we see in the rule of St. Pacomius, and of other primitive founders of orders. Wherefore Gerson gives this counsel, that in all religious houses, there should be men of learning and piety, long experienced in the exercise of prayer; and that they should take care, to form betimes the novices, by an assiduous practice thereof. And St. Ignatius has so punctually followed this counsel, that in his Constitutions, he not only ordains that in every house where novices are brought up, there should be one put over them, to instruct them in the exercise of prayer; but he would moreover have a spiritual prefect, appointed in all colleges, who should have an eye upon what regards the practice of prayer, and examine how every one acquits himself of that duty.

There is still another thing which may help us to persevere a long time in the exercise of prayer: and this is, to have an ardent love of God, and a very great affection for spiritual things. Because I love your law, O Lord, says the prophet, it is the subject of my meditation all the day long. (Ps. cxviii. 97.) And I meditate, says he, in another place, upon your commandments which I love. (Ps. cxviii. 47.) In effect if we loved God tenderly we should willingly pass whole days and nights in thinking of him, and should never want matter to work upon. A mother that

tenderly loves her son, wants no one to put her in mind of him, nor to urge her to think upon him. She herself thinks often upon him; and if any one speaks ever so little of him, her heart is touched with a tender affection, and their words draw tears from her eyes. A widow also that tenderly loved her husband, cannot hear him spoken of, without shedding tears on his being recalled to her memory. If natural love therefore has so much power, what shall I say of supernatural? Nay, if the libertine's irregular love, has so much influence over him, that it sets him, as it were, beside himself, and hinders him from thinking of anything but the object of his criminal passion, what wonders would not the supernatural love of the goodness and infinite beauty of God effect, since grace is incomparably more powerful, than either nature or vice can be? If God were your only good, and chief treasure, your heart would be continually wafted towards him; because, where your treasure is, there is your heart also. (Mat. vi. 21.)

Every one thinks very willingly of what he loves, and of what is most to his taste: and therefore the holy scripture gives us this invitation: Taste and see how sweet our Lord. (Ps. xxxv. 9.) We must taste God, before we see him; that is to say, we must love him, to be able to think upon him, and the more we think upon him, the more we shall love him; for love, according to the opinion of St. Thomas, augments itself by contemplation; and as it is the beginning, so it is also the end. Hence it is that when we love God, we are easily induced to think upon him, and contemplate him; and the more we contemplate and think upon him, the more we love him. Because that which is good, excites us to love it, and the more we behold it, the more we love it; as also the more we love it, the more joy and pleasure we feel in beholding and thinking of it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THAT IT IS ALWAYS IN OUR POWER TO MAKE OUR PRAYER WELL, AND TO DERIVE ADVANTAGE FROM IT.

The sublime and extraordinary prayer, which I here before spoken of, is in truth a very particular gift of God, which he bestows upon a few persons only; but as to ordinary mental prayer, of which I speak at present, he refuses it to nobody. So that those who are not able to attain the other kind of prayer, and high contemplation, and who imagine that they cannot pray at all and that they are unfit for this exercise deceive themselves extremely. For the ordinary prayer I speak of, is very holy and profitable; because it is sufficient to render us perfect. And although God does not favour us at present with the other, yet this prayer is an excellent disposition to move him afterwards to bestow it. Wherefore I shall now make it clearly appear, that with the assistance of God's grace, it is always in our power to perform well this last kind of prayer, and thereby to promote our salvation — which, without doubt, cannot but be a great comfort unto us.

This proposition is a consequence deduced from what I have already said in the preceding chapters, and may be proved two ways. We can prove it, first, from the form of prayer, taught by St. Ignatius, which does not consist in our having certain sweetnesses and sensible comforts, but only in exercising the three powers of our soul. In this prayer, we first call to mind, by help of our memory, the point or mystery we would meditate on; afterwards we reflect and meditate, by the means of our understanding, upon such things as may help us to excite our affections; and lastly, we produce acts of our will. Now, this exercise is always in our power, whatsoever state of dryness and aridity we may feel ourselves in. For let the aridity be ever so great, yet it is always in our power to produce an act

of detestation and sorrow for our sins; an act of the love of God, an act of patience, and an act of humility, that may even reach so far as to desire to be despised by the world, that we may the better imitate Jesus Christ, who was so kind, as for love of us, to become the reproach and scorn of men.

We must moreover call to mind, and believe it for a certain truth, that neither the merit nor fruit of prayer, nor the merit or fruit of these sorts of acts, consists in our having sweetness and comfort when making them; nor in being very much touched by them; it is in this, many err and afflict themselves without cause, imagining they do nothing in prayer, because they feel not in themselves, either so much sorrow for their sins as they would have, or so much love for virtue as they desire to possess. Sensible feelings of this kind are produced by the sensible appetite. But the will being a spiritual power, depends not at all upon sense, and therefore it is not in the least necessary, that we should have these sensible feelings; it is enough that we produce the acts with a firm and resolute will. Wherefore divines and holy persons, speaking of contrition and sorrow for sins, comfort their penitents, who, when they reflect upon the enormity of one mortal sin, are dejected because they cannot shed tears, and because their hearts do not, as they could wish, even burst with sorrow.

True contrition, say they, and true sorrow for sin, is not in the sensible appetite, but is in the will alone; wherefore be sorry that you have sinned, because thereby you have offended God, who deserves to be loved above all things, and thus it will become true contrition. As for those other motions that proceed from the interior or sensitive part, when God pleases to send them, receive them with due thanks, but afflict not yourself at all, when you have them not; for God does not require them, nor does he desire anything of you, that is not in your power to perform. These sensible affections you desire to have, are nothing else but a certain kind of sweetness and sensible consolation, that depends not upon you at all, nor is it in your power, and therefore God does not require it of you. But what he exacts, is in your power to perform, without any dependence at all upon your sensitive appetite; and this is a grief that proceeds from a determined will, never more to offend him. It is the same with respect to acts of the love of God. Love God above all things, with a firm and constant will, and this is that solid and true love of esteem, which he requires. The other kind of love, is such a tenderness of affection, as is not in our power, and the same may be said with respect to all other acts of virtue, and all other resolutions we make.

The truth of what I have here said, may easily be inferred from such sinful acts, as are contrary to the former. For if, for example, we consent to a mortal sin, it is certain that though at the same time we feel no sensible motion in ourselves, nor any pleasure at all therein, yet we cease not to offend mortally, and to deserve eternal damnation. By consequence, therefore, if we will and desire effectually what is good; though we feel not any sweetness in conceiving this will, yet nevertheless we fail not to please God, and merit heaven; chiefly because God is always more ready to reward than he is to punish. I say yet more, that acts of this sort, which are made with an extreme dryness, and without any pleasure or sensible comfort, are more meritorious and pleasing to God than the others are; because they are more pure, more strong, more lasting, more our own; and because we take more pains in producing them, than when we are urged to them by fervour and devotion. And they are moreover a sign of a more solid virtue, and of a will more firm and constant in God's service; because if we produce them without the help of spiritual consolations, what should we not do, had we them to help us? Such as produce no acts without the help of these sensible sweetnesses and comforts are, as Father Avila says, like infants that must be carried in persons arms; but the others are like those who are able to walk alone.

And Blosius says, that persons of this last description resemble those who serve their prince at their own expense. But it is of very great importance to accustom ourselves to these sorts of aridities in prayer; because

these aridities are very frequent, and sensible comforts occur but seldom. And as galleys, when the wind fails, ply the oar, so when the favourable wind of Divine consolation is wanting to us in prayer, we must help ourselves by the powers of our soul, assisted by the succour of the Holy Ghost; and always continue our course, though the succours be less abundant, or less sensible than they were wont to be.

Secondly, What we advanced in the beginning of this chapter, may also be proved in the following manner — prayer, as we have said elsewhere, is not the end we propose to ourselves in a spiritual life; it is only a means, by which we help ourselves to make progress in virtue, and to obtain a victory over our passions and evil inclinations; in order that, having surmounted all the obstacles that hinder us from approaching God; and having made straight the path that leads to him, we may unite ourselves inseparably with him. When St. Paul had the eyes of his soul entirely opened by God, by that light which flashed on him from heaven, and by that divine voice that said to him: I am Jesus whom you persecute; (Acts ix. 5.) what a change was then made upon a sudden in him? With what promptitude, with what submission, did he then abandon himself to the will of God, as his own words testify: Lord what would you have me do? (Acts ix. 6.) Behold here the fruit of good prayer — behold the effect it ought to produce in us. I have also said that we must not content ourselves with forming general resolutions, but we must descend to such particular ones, as are more necessary for us; and carefully prepare ourselves for such trials as may occur during the day, and in all things act with edification.

Now, to apply this to our subject, I say, it is always in our power to apply ourselves to that which is more necessary for us. Let us apply ourselves, one, for example, to humility, another to patience, another to obedience, another to the spirit of mortification and resignation; and let us endeavour to rise from prayer more humble, more patient, more obedient, and with a greater desire of mortification, and of conformity to the will of God, than we brought to it. Above all, let us endeavour to prevail with ourselves, to live during the day in very great innocence, and with edification to our neighbour, each one according to his employment; and by this means we shall have made a better prayer than if we had shed many tears, and received very great lights and consolations.

This being so, we must not feel uneasy at our not being favoured with many reflections, or effusions of tenderness, or elevations, or raptures of devotion; for prayer consists not in these, but only in the fruit we reap from it. Nor must we be in pain about our distractions, or the thoughts that are wont to disquiet us in prayer, of which the world do commonly complain. All required of you, is, when you perceive them, and when you are come to yourself, to endeavour to employ your thoughts about what is most necessary; that is to say, endeavour, then, to reap from your prayer the fruit you proposed to yourself, and thereby you will repair the time you have lost, and revenge yourself upon the devil, who tried to distract you by extravagant thoughts, which were either out of season, or which rendered your meditation unprofitable. And as a traveler who falls asleep upon the way, and is left behind by his companions; as soon as he awakes, presses forward to overtake them, and rides more in a quarter of an hour than, were it not that he slept, he would have done in an hour. So when you come to yourself after your distractions, you must so employ the remaining quarter of an hour that therein you may perform what you might and should have done in the whole hour, had you been attentive.

Wherefore will yourself to account; ask yourself what the fruit was, you designed to reap from your prayer, see whether it be either profound humility, an extreme indifference to all things of this world, or an entire resignation to the will of God; and use your utmost endeavour to derive this advantage from your prayer, notwithstanding all the distractions the devil had been able to cause in you. But if indeed you should find that your whole time of prayer was spent without having reaped the fruit you desire; you must then, in the

examen of your prayer, of which I shall afterwards treat, do that which I just now said; and thus you will make amends for your negligence in prayer, and will always reap fruit from it.

CHAPTER XIX.

OTHER MEANS OF MAKING OUR MENTAL PRAYER WELL.

There are other things which enable us to pray well; and which, being easily practised, evince that it is always in our power to make mental prayer; that every man has talents sufficient for it; and that there is no one but may make it so as to derive advantage from it. In the first place several masters of a spiritual life, give excellent advice on this head. They say we must not amuse ourselves with too many speculations in prayer; but we must imitate good merchants, who think only of their affairs, and of the means of improving them. It is thus a true servant of God ought to examine how he carries on the business of his spiritual advancement and of his eternal salvation. For, properly speaking, this is our only business, and we came into the world for no other purpose than to carry it on well.

Let a religious, then, call himself to account, and say thus to himself: — How does the affair of my advancement and salvation succeed? What virtue have I gained during the space of ten, twenty, thirty, or forty years, I have been in religion? What progress have I made in humility, in obedience, and the mortification of my senses? I would wish to see, what account I shall be able to render to God for so many helps he has given me in religion, to increase the stock or talent he has trusted me with. But if hitherto, I have spent my time badly and unprofitably, I will repair my past faults and negligences by a greater exactness for the time to come; and I will live in a manner entirely different from that wherein I have hitherto lived. Every person can, in the same manner, institute an inquiry, in order to discover whether or not he has fulfilled the obligations of his calling. He can ask himself, had he done what is requisite for leading a Christian life, for bringing up his family in the love and fear of God, and for enabling himself to support, like a Christian, all those troubles that his condition and employment are subject unto? If we ever so little apply ourselves to reflect upon these things, we shall find sufficient matter to meditate upon, and faults enough both to be sorry for, and to reform; and this will be a very profitable, and a very excellent prayer.

Gerson makes mention of a servant of God, who was accustomed to say, that for forty years he had very diligently applied himself to prayer, but had not found a shorter or more easy method to make a good one, than to present himself before God as an infant, or as a man overwhelmed with miseries, blind, naked, destitute of all things, and abandoned by all the world. The Royal Prophet frequently makes use of this kind of prayer, which the Psalms are full of in many places, wherein he styles himself, sometimes a sick person, sometimes an orphan, sometimes a blind man, and a poor beggar; and many adopting this method have attained great perfection in prayer. Do you, therefore, adopt it, and God will give you the grace thereby to obtain what you desire. Gerson says, that the method adopted by any poor beggar man is an excellent method of praying. See with what humility, with what patience, he asks and expects an alms at the rich mans gate: and what care he takes to go to those places where he knows alms are more frequently bestowed. We ought to act, in the very same manner, in regard to God; and, as the poor man, when he casts himself at the rich man's feet, makes known his miseries with submission, expects assistance with patience, and a respectful countenance; even so when we present ourselves before God in prayer, we must discover and lay open our wants, necessities, and miseries; and await, with respect and patience, the assistance of his liberality and goodness. As the eyes of the servant are continually upon the hands of her mistress, when she

expects a recompense from her, so our eyes must be continually fixed upon our Lord, our God, and our master, till he has compassion upon us. (Ps. cxxii. 2.)

There is a very well known story related of Abbot Paphnucius, who, living in the further part of the desert, and hearing of a famous courtesan, called Thais, that had occasioned the deplorable loss of many souls, and been the unhappy cause of many quarrels and murders, conceived within himself a design of converting her to God and of bringing her back again into the way of salvation. For this end, he put on secular clothes, took a considerable sum of money with him, and went to find her out. Coming to her house, he asked her to conduct him into a more retired and secret place, than that she received him in; she told him, he was very private and secure in the place he was, where none but God could see him. He presently took this occasion to make known to her the sad and most unhappy state and condition she was in, and so touched her heart, that he entirely converted her. The story is very long; but, to come to that part which is to my present purpose, this woman being converted, he led her into the desert, shut her up in a cell, and sealed up the door, with a seal of lead; leaving only a little hole open, through which they daily gave her a little allowance of bread and water. After this he resolved to leave her, and at his departure she asked him what kind of prayer she should make to God? You deserve not, says the holy abbot, to pronounce the holy name of God, from a mouth so impure as yours is.

Wherefore you shall make your prayer in this manner: you shall put yourself upon your knees, and, looking towards the east you shall often repeat these words: — Thou who hast made me, have mercy upon me. She lived three years in this manner, without ever daring to pronounce the sacred name of God, and did nothing else but continually set before her eyes the multitude and heinousness of her sins, and beg pardon of God for them, in the words the saint had taught her. At the end of three years the Abbot Paphnucius went to see St. Anthony, to know of him whether he believed that God had pardoned the sins of this woman. And the saint commanded his religious to put themselves in prayer all the night following, thereby to beg of God that he would please to reveal to some one of them what Paphnucius had so earnest a desire to know. There was one of these holy religious, named Paul, to whom this favour was granted. He thought he saw in heaven a bed very richly adorned, and guarded by four virgins: when, being surprised at the sight of a thing so rich and wonderful, he thought with himself that this could not be prepared for anyone else but his spiritual father St. Anthony; and, whilst he entertained this thought, he heard a voice that said to him; This bed is not for your father Anthony, but is destined for the sinner Thais. And within the space of fifteen days after, it pleased Almighty God to call her to himself, to make her enjoy the glory that awaited her. and that heavenly bed he had prepared for her. Wherefore content yourself with this prayer, believe you deserve not to make any other, and believe that perhaps you will render yourself hereby more pleasing to God, than by prayer of any other kind.

In a written treatise on Spiritual Communion, composed by a Carthusian monk, the author relates a story of St. Ignatius and his companions, which he assures us he received from a person most worthy of credit. He says, that St. Ignatius and his companions going one day to Barcelona, on foot, as ordinarily they were wont to do, each one carrying his sack upon his back, they met upon the way a clown, who, being moved with compassion to see them travel in this condition, pressed them extremely to give him their bags to carry, alleging that he was stronger and better able to carry them than they were. After having a long time refused what he desired, at last they granted his request. They continued their journey in this manner; and the good man, perceiving that as soon as the fathers came into the inn, each one sought out a corner, or some secret place, where, upon his knees, he might recollect himself in prayer, he did so too, and put himself upon his knees as they did. They asked him one day what he did when he retired? I do

nothing else, says he, but this I now tell you — I say, Lord, these persons are saints, and I am their sumpter horse; what they do, I desire to do also. Behold, this is what I then offer to God. And the author remarks, that this man profited so much by means of this constant practice, that afterwards he very much excelled in the gift of prayer and spirituality. Now, who is there that cannot, if he will, make every day a prayer of this kind?

I knew an ancient religious of the society, a very great preacher, whose prayer for a long time was no other than this: Lord, I am a beast, I know not how to make my prayer, teach me yourself to make it. And by this means he made great progress, and rendered himself perfect in this holy exercise; fulfilling in himself what the Royal Prophet said, I am become as a beast before thee, and I am always with thee. (Ps. lxxii. 23.) Humble yourself in the same manner — make yourself as a beast before God; and you will always be with him, and he will always be with you. Humility is very powerful before God; it is a most proper means to obtain all things of his divine Majesty; and the saints make an excellent remark upon this subject. They say that, as humility is a means to gain the gift of prayer, so prayer is a means to obtain and conserve humility; and that we must never quit a good prayer without making an act of profound humility, and feeling very great confusion for our sins and ingratitude. Hence it follows, that when we rise from prayer with a sort of satisfaction, or of vain complacency, or of self-esteem, imagining that we have already made great progress in spirituality, and are become very intelligent therein; we must, I say, when we find ourselves thus disposed, always suspect our prayer was not as it should have been. If you complain, therefore, that you are not capable of making many and great reflections, or of elevating yourself to high contemplation; humble yourself, and reap at least this fruit from your prayer. This is entirely in your power; it admits of no excuse, and it is sufficient to render your prayer perfect.

That also is a very good means, which Father Avila wishes us to make use of, when we meet with distractions and desolations in prayer. Cast yourself, says he, at the foot of your crucifix, as at the feet of Jesus Christ, and say to him; inasmuch as these, O Lord, happen to me, and through my fault, I am truly sorry, and feel extreme regret and trouble for the cause I have given; but inasmuch as it is your divine will, and a just punishment for my past sins, and present negligences, I accept them with all my heart; and it is with joy that I receive from you this dryness, this distraction, this mortification, and spiritual dereliction. The acts of patience and humility, you shall thus form, on this occasion, are a sort of perfect prayer, which pleases God more than any you could have designed to make.

It is related of St. Francis Borgia, that when he thought he had not performed his duty well in prayer, he endeavoured that day to mortify himself more than usual, and to attend more particularly to all that he did, thereby to make satisfaction for the faults he had committed in it. He counselled, moreover, all the religious of the society to do the same. And without doubt this is a very proper means and help, not only to make amends for negligence, but also to enable us to make a most perfect prayer. The Abbot Nilus says, that as it happens, when upon any day we have committed a fault, it seems as if God presently punished us for it in prayer; because he then retires from us, and leaves us in great dryness; so when we have mortified our senses, when in anything we have overcome ourselves, he presently recompenses us for it in our prayer, communicating his favours unto us in greater abundance than he was used to do. When you shall, says he, patiently support some hard or bad usage, or any other affliction, you shall afterwards receive the fruit of it in your prayer.

The same saint teaches us, in the same place, another very proper means to dispose ourselves well for prayer, very like that which I mentioned last. If you would make your prayer well, do nothing, says he, that is contrary to prayer, and by this means, God will communicate himself unto you, and will go along with you. (Nil. de orat, c. xxvii. & lxii.)

Moreover, let it be universally understood and felt, that the chief care of a true servant of God, ought to be to mortify his senses, to purify his heart, to preserve himself from sin, to have always a firm resolution never to consent to offend God mortally in anything. This ought to be the foundation of prayer; and it is upon this we must particularly insist, confirming ourselves herein by many acts of our will. For there is nothing we have greater need of, than continually to take precautions, and strengthen ourselves against the weakness and inconstancy of our nature. But this foundation once laid, each one must afterwards endeavour to gain that virtue and perfection he afterwards desires; and if God be not pleased to raise him to a more sublime kind of prayer, instead of complaining or afflicting himself, he must daily return equal thanks to the divine goodness, because sanctity is not precisely annexed to the gift of prayer, but consists in performing God's will. Fear God, says the Wise Man, and observe his commandments, for in this the whole man does consist; (Eccl. xii. 13.) that is to say, all the duty, all the obligations, all the perfection, and all the happiness of man.

I shall now conclude this chapter, by proposing a help or means that ought to impart comfort to all mankind. When you feel not in prayer that fervour you desire, and when you labour in vain to attain an intimate union of your soul with God, exercise your will in conceiving an ardent desire thereof, and thereby you will supply and gain what you think you want. For, as St. Bartholomew of the martyrs says, God contents himself no less with this will and holy desire, than if the soul, all languishing with devotion, should entirely unite itself unto him. (la comp. spir. cap. xix.) This means, as Blosius relates, was taught to St. Gertrude by God himself, when once she complained that she could not always keep her heart so elevated towards God as she desired, and as she thought herself bound to do. She being assured from heaven, that when we feel not in ourselves any desire of heavenly things; or, at least, feel but a very weak one, it suffices that we truly desire to have a very ardent one; because in the eyes of God the desire is always as great as we would have it to be.

Blosius, moreover, adds, that in a heart which is impressed with this desire; i. e., which wishes to be so impressed, God dwells with greater pleasure than that wherewith any man dwells in the most delightful place, or palace in the world. In effect God does not want the sublimity of your prayer; he seeks only your heart, and will effect, that all the good desires and sentiments thereof, shall be accounted and rewarded as effects, or good works. Offer yourself, therefore, entirely to him in prayer; give him your whole heart, and desire to have as much fervour as even the angels of the highest choir can have; he will receive that good will, and make the same account of it as of the action itself. This being so, it will be a most pious and profitable reflection, when we find ourselves tepid in prayer, to consider how many servants of God are then at their prayers, perhaps not only shedding tears in devotion, but even their blood in martyrdom; and in spirit we may join ourselves to them, and not only join ourselves to these, but even to the angels also, with intent to praise and love God, supplying after this manner by others, what you are not able to perform by yourself; and often repeating, both with mouth and heart, those words of the canon of the mass: With whom, we beseech you to command, that our voices may be united and received; because we confess your holy name, and say with them, holy, holy, holy. We say, O Lord, what they say; and we would also willingly do what they do; and we earnestly desire we could love and glorify you in a manner equally perfect. It will also then be very good to call to mind those times, in which we were most fervent, and say: Lord, that which I then so earnestly desired I desire at present; as then I made an entire oblation of myself unto you, so I now offer myself in the same manner; I have at present the same regret for my past sins I then had; and in the manner that I then desired humility, patience, and obedience, I now desire the same, and earnestly beg them of you.

But above all, it is a most holy and profitable exercise, to unite our works with those of Jesus Christ, and thus to supply our defects and imperfections by his merits. Thus we may offer our prayer to the eternal Father, to be united to the prayer of Jesus Christ upon earth; and offer our sufferings also to be joined with his; begging of him that he would supply our impatience by his patience; our pride by his humility and our malice by his innocence. Blosius says that this exercise was revealed by God himself, to a great servant of his, that thereby we may render our actions more meritorious, and repair the miseries of our extreme poverty, by the infinite treasures of the merits of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER XX.

THAT WE MUST CONTENT OURSELVES WITH THE FORM OF PRAYER I HAVE NOW SPOKEN OF, AND NEITHER BE AFFLICTED, NOR COMPLAIN, WHEN WE ARE NOT RAISED BY GOD TO MORE SUBLIME PRAYER.

Albertus Magnus says, that he who is truly humble, dares not raise his desires so high as to wish for the more sublime prayer, and those extraordinary favours that God sometimes communicates to his elect; for the humble man has such contempt of himself, that he thinks he is unworthy of them. But if it should happen, that without his having contributed anything to it by his desires, God should impart to him some particular consolation, yet he cannot receive it but with fear and trembling; because he thinks that he neither deserves it, nor knows how to make use of it. If therefore we have true humility, we shall content ourselves with the common manner of praying, and shall even ascribe it to a special grace of God, that he is pleased to conduct us rather by this secure path of humility, than by any other way wherein perhaps we might go astray and lose ourselves. St. Bernard says, that God deals with us as fathers do with their children whilst they are young. For if a child asks of his father bread, he most willingly gives it him, but if he asks a knife to cut with, the father refuses it, because the child may therewith do himself mischief. For this reason also, he cuts the bread himself for his child, whereby he both saves him labour and preserves him from danger. God deals with you in the same manner — he gives you bread ready cut, and will not raise you to that more sublime kind of prayer, lest thereby you might do yourself hurt; that is, lest that other sort of prayer might perhaps do you a prejudice, by inducing you to entertain thoughts of vain-glory — to believe yourself advanced in spirituality, and to prefer yourself before others. So that God does you a greater favour by cutting your bread himself, than by giving you a knife to cut it. And if in your ordinary prayer he bestows upon you so firm a resolution, as rather to die than offend him; and in effect preserves you all your life-time from mortal sin, what better prayer can you desire, or what greater fruit can you wish to reap from it?

When the elder brother of the prodigal son understood the good reception his father had given him, he took it so very ill and so indignantly, that he would not so much as enter into his father's house. Behold, says he, how many years I have served you and have never disobeyed you in anything, nevertheless you have never yet so much as given me a kid to eat with my friends; but as soon as your son returned, who has spent on bad women all the estate you gave him, you cause a fat calf to be killed for him. Son, replied the good father, you are always with me: (Luke xv. 29.) as if he would have said, that which I have done to your brother, is not because I love him better than you; for you are always in my house: and this particular favour, deserves that you should well reflect upon it, and make great account of it.

Let us now apply this to our present subject. Is it a small matter, think you, that you should be always

with God? He does more for you by giving you the grace of perseverance, by hindering you from separating yourself from him, by preserving you from falling into mortal sin, than if after you had fallen, he should stretch out his hand to help you up. For it is far more, to hinder a man from being hurt, than to cure him after he is so. If therefore you derive from your ordinary prayer so considerable an advantage as this, what reason have you to complain? If by the help of this prayer, God bestows upon you an ardent zeal for whatsoever belongs to his service; a general indifference to all other things in the world, and an absolute resignation and compliance with all that obedience shall command, what can you desire more? In fine, if by the help of this prayer, he preserves you in humility, and in his fear — if he gives you a continual custody and watch over yourself, and defends you from all occasions of sin, what is there you can wish for more?

Because this is all the fruit that can possibly be reaped from the most sublime prayer; for to what other end than this do all those sweetnesses and particular consolations serve, that accompany the other prayer? And without this, what do they signify? But behold what God does to those who persevere in the common way of prayer; if he does not lead them as he does the others, by the way of sublime contemplation, he at least conducts them to the same end; and in this he bestows upon them a double favour; so that he makes them reap from ordinary prayer, all the fruit and advantage that can be reaped from the other. Joseph spoke very harshly to his brethren, when they appeared before him to buy bread; yet he omitted not to have their sacks filled with corn, and the money they paid for it put into them, and commanded his steward to treat them with all possible kindness. It is in this manner that God oftentimes deals with us.

We do not sufficiently comprehend in what prayer consists; or to say better, we do not understand wherein consists our advancement and perfection, which is the end of prayer. Hence it comes to pass, that oftentimes we think we have done wonders, even when we have prayed ill. And on the contrary, when we have diligently complied with our duties therein, we also believe that we have not made it well. Do but carry the fruit with you from prayer, I have taught you to reap from it; and chiefly gain so much over yourself, as to pass that day in extreme innocence, and with very great edification of your neighbour; and you will have made a very good prayer, whatsoever dryness or hardness of heart you felt during it. As on the other hand, if you do not profit in this manner by your prayer, assure yourself that it was not good, though you should have done nothing else but shed floods of tears the whole time of it; and though you even thought yourself, like St. Paul, rapt to the third heaven. Wherefore for the future, complain not at all of your prayer, but turn your complaints against yourself, and say; I do not fortify myself enough; I am not so humble as I should be, nor have that patience I ought — I do not so exactly observe silence as the rule requires, nor do I sufficiently recollect myself. This complaint is very just; because it is to complain that you do not the things which you ought and could perform. But to complain of your prayer, and of the aridity you feel in it — to complain of your want of facility in making it; and that you find not that quiet and repose in it, nor those consolations you desire, is in a manner to complain of God himself: and is, as Judith said to the inhabitants of Bethulia, a discourse that is more proper to excite him to anger, and enkindle his fury, than to procure his mercy. (Judith viii. 12.)

It is moreover very surprising, to see how different our conduct is, on this occasion, to what it ought to be. For we never complain, that we take no care to mortify, to humble, and to amend ourselves, which is what is in our power to do; but we complain of that, which God has not left in our power to do, and which he has entirely reserved to himself. Apply yourself then seriously to mortify and overcome your passions; use your utmost endeavours in this, and leave the care of the rest unto God. He has a greater desire of our good, than we ourselves can have; and if we do but perform what is required on our part, we may assure

ourselves he will not be wanting on his, to give us what is most expedient for us. But I shall hereafter treat this matter more at large, in the treatise of conformity to the will of God, where it shall be more fully proved, that this complaint is unfounded.

CHAPTER XXI.

OF THE CAUSE OF DISTRACTIONS IN PRAYER, AND THE REMEDIES TO BE APPLIED TO THEM.

Distractions being a subject of very general complaint, several Saints have taken occasion to treat of them; and Cassian in particular has written at large of them. Distractions, say they, may proceed from three causes; first from our own negligence; because during the whole day we employ ourselves in a great many unprofitable things; and because we are not sufficiently careful to place a guard over our heart and our senses. He who lives in this manner, needs not ask the question, how he comes to be distracted in prayer? Nor why he feels it so painful to apply himself thereunto? For it is certain that the ideas of different objects, which had made an impression upon his mind, will not fail afterwards to disquiet him by representing themselves in time of prayer. The Abbot Moses said, that though it is not in our power, to hinder ourselves from being perplexed by divers thoughts, yet it is in our power to put them away when they come, and adds, that it is even partly in our power to reform the evil, that our thoughts have in themselves, by procuring good ones; and to effect that only such as these should present themselves to our mind. For if we apply ourselves to spiritual exercises, and works of piety, we shall have holy and pious thoughts; but if during the whole day, we employ ourselves in vain and extravagant things, the thoughts we shall have, will be of the same nature.

Cassian makes the same comparison that St. Bernard and St. Anselm make upon this subject. He says, that though we cannot hinder a millstone in a mill from going always about whilst the wheel or sails move, yet it is in the miller's power to make it go upon good or bad corn, and to make it go only upon that which he puts under it; so the heart of man must always have something to think on. It is like a millstone. Whilst we live, it is always in motion, but you may employ it upon what sort of grain you please; and in fine, it will work only upon what you cast into it. According to this, then, if in prayer you wish to be recollected, you must endeavour to be so all day long, and must keep a strict guard over your senses; for God loves to converse with souls that are like a garden that is enclosed. It was, says Cassian, a maxim amongst the ancient fathers of the desert, that whoever wishes to pray well should prepare well for it, because the state and motion of the mind in prayer depends upon the state and disposition it was in before and upon what impression it had before received. (Cassian Coll. 9. Abb. Isa.) Such as the liquor is, says St. Bonaventure, that we pour into a vessel, such will be the scent that it will give; and such as the seed is that you have received into your heart, such will be the fruit that it will bring forth. (Bonav. de prof. Rel. 1. ii. c. lviii.)

There is nothing more common or natural than to reflect frequently upon what we love; if therefore you would have your mind at repose in time of prayer, and not be distracted by vain thoughts, you must before-hand detach your heart from earthly, and attach it to nothing but heavenly things; and the greater progress you make in this, the greater will your application and attention be to prayer, which thereby will also become more easy.

The second cause of distractions proceeds from the malice of the devil; who perceiving, as St. Basil says, that prayer is the means whereby God replenishes us with all sorts of blessings, endeavours by all ways imaginable to withdraw us from it, and to raise to it a

thousand obstacles and impediments; in order that, depriving us of those succours which accompany prayer, he may afterwards find a more easy passage and entrance into our souls. He does the same against us that Holofernes did against the city of Bethulia; when to facilitate the taking it, he broke the aqueducts through which the city was supplied with water. Prayer is the conduit or channel, through which our soul receives the water of grace: and therefore the devil uses his utmost endeavours to break it, and render it useless. Wherefore St. John Climacus says, that when, at the sound of the bell, the faithful and religious visibly assemble to pray and praise God; our invisible enemies invisibly assemble to tempt us and divert us from this pious occupation.

We read in the Spiritual Meadow that Marcellus, an ancient father of the desert, having got up at midnight to make his prayer and to sing psalms as his custom was, heard a noise like that of a trumpet, when it sounds a charge, and being astonished how this noise should happen in so solitary a place, no soldiers being near it, the devil hereupon appeared unto him; and told him, that this trumpet was the signal that gave notice to the devils to prepare themselves for combat against the servants of God, and that if he would put himself out of danger, he should go back again to rest; if not, that he must expect a severe attack. But the holy old man confiding in our Saviour's help, put himself in prayer and persevered in it in spite of the devil's efforts.

One of the things which clearly shows the merit and importance of this virtue (which the Abbot Nilus very well takes notice of) is the particular hatred the devil conceives against those who apply themselves to prayer, and the continual war he makes against them. He suffers very patiently many other good works, as fasting, taking the discipline, and wearing the hair-shirt; but he cannot suffer us to be a moment in prayer, without using his utmost endeavours to hinder and molest us in it. Hence it is that, when we are in prayer, we are far more tempted than at other times. It is then wicked thoughts pour in upon us, as if we put ourselves in prayer, to be only a butt to all sorts of temptations; for in it he excites in our mind such strange and filthy ideas that it seems as if he had reserved them all for that particular time. He knows very well that prayer is a sovereign remedy against all evil, an infinite source or fountain of all spiritual good, and the most efficacious means of attaining all the virtues, and therefore he makes use of all the power he has to deter us from it. Prayer also, according to the language of the saints, is the scourge and torment of the devils; which consideration ought to give us a greater esteem of it, and urge us to apply ourselves to it with so much the greater care and diligence; because we see the devil takes so much pains to withdraw us from it. St. Thomas and many grave doctors say, that it is by reason of the war that the devil is accustomed to make against those that are in prayer, that the church, directed by the Holy Ghost, ordains that we should begin all the canonical hours with this verse — O God, incline unto my help, O Lord, make haste to assist me. (Ps. lxix. 1.) Whereby we implore God's assistance in prayer against the snares and temptations of the enemy.

In the third place, distractions sometimes proceed from man's natural weakness, without his being any way in fault, for sin has rendered us so weak and miserable, and our imagination chiefly, partakes so much of the corruption of our nature, that we cannot be a moment in prayer, without having our mind distracted with a thousand thoughts. The remedy of this evil is to make them the subject of our prayer and to humble ourselves upon the consideration and knowledge of our weakness; for this knowledge and humility is a very holy and profitable prayer. I shall moreover in the following chapters speak of some other remedies which the saints and masters of a spiritual life prescribe us upon this subject.

CHAPTER XXII.

OF SOME OTHER HELPS TO PERSEVERE WITH ATTENTION AND RESPECT IN PRAYER.

St. Basil asks what we should do to have our minds so recollected in prayer, as not to be molested with distractions. And he makes this answer, that the best and most proper means is to consider that we are in God's presence, and that God beholds in what manner we pray unto him. For if before an earthly prince, we take care to keep ourselves always in a profound respect — if we are exceedingly attentive to our words and actions, and if we conceive it a gross impropriety to turn our back whilst we are speaking to him, or to amuse or busy ourselves with anything else; how is it possible we should not be so much master of ourselves as to behave with the like respect, when we reflect attentively, that we are in God's presence, who takes notice not only of our exterior behaviour, but penetrates even to the bottom of our heart? And who is there, that is fully persuaded of this truth, that dares withdraw his eyes or heart, even for one moment, from what he is about; or as I may say, turn his back upon God, amusing himself not only with vain, but even sinful thoughts? Theodoret relates, that the Abbot Jacob was wont to make use of a reflection, similar to that just mentioned, in order to show how much ashamed and confounded he was to give way to distractions; and St. Augustine also had the very same reflection. If I were in my master's service, says he, and instead of waiting upon him as I ought to do, I should busy myself in something else, he would have reason to chastise and punish me as I truly deserved. Moreover, should I come to make complaint to a judge of some injury done me, and should quit him on a sudden, turning my back upon him, to treat with some other person; would not the judge have reason to believe me very extravagant, and order me out of his presence? Yet see how far greater irreverence they daily fall into, who putting themselves in prayer to God, permit their thoughts to be carried away with all sorts of distractions imaginable.

St. Ignatius also, in one of his additions to mental prayer points out to us the same remedy. He says, that a little before we go to prayer, we must raise our minds to Heaven, by considering that God is present, and that he beholds us; and excite ourselves by this consideration, to remain with a most profound respect, and keep ourselves in a diligent attention. Moreover, he would not have us lose the reflection upon God's presence all the time of our prayer, that we may say with the Psalmist: the meditation of my heart is always in your presence. (Ps. xviii. 15.)

St. Chrysostom says, that when we go to prayer, we must imagine that we enter into the court of heaven, where the King of glory sits upon his throne, shining with bright stars, and surrounded by an infinite number of angels and saints, who all cast their eyes upon Him; (Chys. sup. Psal. iv.) according to the words of St. Paul: we are become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. (I Cor. iv. 9.) St. Bernard also gives us the same counsel in this point, which he himself followed: when you go to the church, says he, lay your hand upon your mouth, and say, stay here at the door, bad thoughts, criminal desires, irregular affections and carnal concupiscences; but you my soul, enter into the joy of your Master, and of your God, that you may know the will of your Lord, and visit his holy temple. (Bern. in scala. Spir. Grad. 4 & 18.)

St. John Climacus says, that when we are in prayer, and make a serious reflection upon the presence of God, we are then like a firm and solid pillar, that nothing can shake. And he relates, that once taking notice that a certain religious was more attentive than the rest, whilst they were singing the psalms, and chiefly when they began the divine office; seeming by his countenance and the motion of his lips as if he had spoken to some body; he requested of him afterwards to tell him whence that happened? It is, says he, because in the beginning of the divine office I am wont

to recollect and call home all my thoughts, and all the powers of my soul, and speak to them in this manner: Come, let us adore our Lord who has made us — let us prostrate ourselves and weep before him; because he is our Master and our God; because we are the people of his pasture, and sheep of his own making. (Ps. xciv. 6, 7.) All these methods and considerations are very good, and may very much help us to awake and stir up our attention to prayer, and cause us to remain in it, with that respect we ought to have.

To attain the same end, others are wont to make their prayer, when they can, before the blessed sacrament; or at least to turn themselves towards the nearest place where it is kept, and to fix and unite their heart and thoughts to it. Others help themselves by looking upon pictures or images, whereby they find themselves excited to affection and respect. Others by lifting up their eyes to heaven, find that this helps them to elevate and fix their minds. It is also a very good remedy against distractions and aridities to represent our weakness to God by short and lively aspirations, imploring his help and assistance, saying, Lord I suffer violence, answer for me. (Is. xxxviii. 14.) The blind man in the gospel, though Jesus Christ, as he thought, went on his way, and minded him not; and though all others endeavoured to make him hold his peace, yet ceased not to cry out still louder and louder, with all the strength he was able, Jesus, Son of David, take compassion on me. (Mark x. 47.) You must do the same. Though God seems not to mind you, or not to think upon you, but rather retires from you, not vouchsafing you a visit: and though the multitude of thoughts and temptations that surround you, would stop your mouth, yet you must not hold your peace; but on the contrary, must raise your voice so much the higher, and cry out without ceasing: Jesus, Son of David, have compassion on me, fortify me, O Lord, at this present time, (Judith xiii. 9.) that I may think only upon your divine self, and constantly persevere in prayer.

This was the maxim of a very great saint, that when her heart was silent, she neglected not to speak with her lips, because thereby she renewed and enlivened the fervour of her heart; and she also confessed that sometimes, for want of making vocal prayer, when she found herself sleepy, she also omitted her mental prayer. This is but too often experienced; tepidity and drowsiness to which we give way in time of prayer are the cause why our lips are silent; but if we forced ourselves to speak, we should overcome these impediments, and should animate ourselves with new fervour. Gerson says that it is also a very good remedy against distractions to prepare ourselves well for prayer and to choose several points to meditate upon. Because doing thus when we come to be distracted in any point we have chosen, we no sooner perceive this distraction, but we have recourse to another point; and if we find not a facility in applying ourselves to that, we still go on to another; and thus we persevere with a great deal more ease in prayer. If we would but examine ourselves well, we should find that oftentimes those dissipations of mind, which we have in prayer, proceed from our not having resolved upon nor prepared those points we should meditate on; and from our having determined upon nothing for certain, whereupon we may fix our thoughts.

But to prepare well for prayer, there are also two things necessary; and the first is, what St. Ignatius recommends to us in these words: It will be very profitable before we begin our prayer, to call to mind the points we are to meditate upon, and determine the number of them. (Exerc. spir. nota 3, 4. Hebd.) And lest we should imagine that this was a duty attached to novices only, we read that it was his own practice, not only in the beginning, but even when he was well advanced in years and in perfection, to prepare himself with care, and read attentively overnight the subject of his meditation for the next day, just before he betook himself to rest. Moreover, though we have heretofore meditated on any matter, and we believe it still remains very fresh in our memory; yet it will be nevertheless very much to the purpose, especially when ordinarily we take any matter from the words of holy scripture, which are dictated by the Holy Ghost, to read them with attention, which will give us

fervour, and a new disposition for our meditation and spiritual advancement.

Another means that may in like manner be a very great help to us is that, soon as we awake, we presently, without giving time to our thoughts to settle any where else, direct them to the subject we had prepared over night, and dispose ourselves for it by some strong reflection. Cassian, St. Bonaventure, and St. Climacus, look upon it to be of very great importance, and say, that our praying well, and consequently our acting well, during the whole day, depend on it. And St. John Climacus, moreover, observes that, as the devil knows very well of how great consequence the good employment of those first moments are, so he always watches with great impatience for our first waking, that he may presently seize upon our imagination, and thus reap for himself the first-fruits of the day. He says also that, amongst the wicked spirits, there is one they call the Precursor, whose charge it is all night long to watch over us, that, at the first moments of our waking, or even before we are quite awake, or come perfectly to ourselves, he may seize upon the avenues of our heart, by means of impure phantoms, and thereby take a kind of possession of us for the whole day: figuring to himself that the imagination and heart which he first seized upon, ought to belong to him as his right.

We must, then, be extremely vigilant, in order that, as soon as ever our eyes are open, our imaginations may be filled with the thought of God, and our memory and heart receive a similar impression, before any strange thought is able to make its entrance. St. Ignatius gives the same advice in his book of Spiritual Exercises, and adds, that when prayer is made at any other than the ordinary hour in the morning, the person so praying must, inasmuch as the time permits, do the same thing. He must pause and say to himself: What am I going to do? Before whom am I going to appear? And afterwards, like a man who tunes a musical instrument, he must repeat and run over very briefly the matter he resolves to meditate on. In fine, it was his opinion that upon the observance of these, and such other like advertisements, which he calls additions, the perfection and fruit of our prayer did in great part depend. Moreover, do we not daily experience that our prayer succeeds well or ill, according as we are well or ill prepared for it, or according as we practise or neglect these additions?

Before prayer prepare your soul, says the Holy Ghost, by the mouth of the Wise Man, and be not like a man who tempts God. (Ecclus. xviii. 23.) St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure, from these words, draw this consequence, that, to go to prayer without preparation is in a manner to tempt God; for to tempt God, say they, is to desire to obtain something, without adopting the means he has established for this end and effect. For example, if any one should say, I will not eat, because God who is all powerful can keep me alive without eating. This would be to tempt God; requiring he should work a miracle, without any necessity for it. Wherefore when the devil had transported our Saviour Christ to the top of the temple, and would have persuaded him to cast himself down; saying, that God would send his angels to receive him in their arms, our Saviour answered him: It is written, you shall not tempt the Lord your God. (Mat. iv. 7.) Preparation therefore for prayer is so necessary a means to make it well, that the Wise Man says, to pray without any preparation is to tempt God, and to desire he should work a miracle upon our account. Our Lord would have us make a good prayer, and that we should apply ourselves to it with great attention and respect; but he would have us to do this by help of the ordinary means, which consists in preparing ourselves before-hand, after the manner I have here set down.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OF THE GREAT COMFORT AND CONSOLATION, THAT THOSE WHO ARE SUBJECT TO DISTRACTIONS IN PRAYER OUGHT TO HAVE.

Those who are subject to distractions in prayer should derive great comfort from the words of St. Basil, who says that they are never imputed to us as faults, but when they are voluntary, and when, after we have perceived them, we continue in them, without respecting God in whose presence we are. He who in time of prayer freely and deliberately entertains thoughts of his studies or business, deserves that God should chastise him, instead of doing him any favour; and we may very justly apply to such a one, what St. Chrysostom says: You attend not to what you say yourself and yet you would have God attend to you. (Chrys. hom. xvii.) But, on the other hand, when with all sincerity we do all we can to recollect ourselves, and yet the natural weakness of our minds carries us notwithstanding to other things, and even our heart fails us, and forces us to cry out in the words of the Psalmist: My heart has forsaken me; then God is not at all displeased; but, on the contrary, has compassion for us; and, as a father pities his children, so our Lord has compassion on those that fear him, because he knows of what matter we are made. (Ps. cii. 15.)

He knows our infirmities and weaknesses; and, as a father whose son is an idiot, is touched with compassion, when, after he had begun to speak to him in a peaceful and respectful manner, he perceives him to fall upon a sudden into extravagant discourse; so our heavenly Father pities and compassionates us, when he perceives that, after we have begun to treat with him in a rational and prudent manner, the weakness of our nature makes us fall into a thousand idle, vain, and ridiculous thoughts. Wherefore though sometimes we feel no fervour at all in prayer, and pass the whole time of it in great aridities, amidst the embarrassment of innumerable fantastical ideas; yet we may not only assure ourselves that this is a very meritorious condition in God's sight; but that what we suffer herein, through love of him, renders us far more pleasing, and meritorious in his sight, than if we abounded in fervour and consolation. And as the jelly taken by a sick person fails not to nourish and strengthen him, though he takes it with disgust, nor perceives at present the good it does him; so prayer fails not to nourish the soul, and to give it new strength to serve God, though we find no sweetness at all whilst we make it, nor feel any benefit we receive by it.

To leave off praying, then, on account of the thoughts and temptations we are molested with at the time, is exceedingly improper. All we are to do, is to take care that tepidity and laziness do not introduce themselves under the cloak of natural weakness, of which I shall afterwards speak at large, whereby we come to yield too easily, let our mind take too much liberty, and permit our imagination to wander from one thing to another. For we must take care, as Abraham did, to drive away the birds of prey that descend upon the sacrifice; that is to say, we must apply ourselves to the banishing all thoughts that hinder our prayer; and if we do but our endeavour, there will be no reason at all to disquiet ourselves.

We read of St. Bridget that once having a great many temptations to suffer in time of prayer, the blessed Virgin Mary appeared to her and said: The devil, envying man's good, does all he can to trouble him in prayer, and to withdraw him from it; but, dear child, what temptation soever troubles you, and what pain soever you feel in resisting it, take care always to strengthen your good resolutions as much as you are able, and by this means your prayer will be of great merit in God's sight. I have in another place spoken of a very proper means to repair and redeem the time we may fear to have lost in distractions, wherefore I shall say no more on that subject.

CHAPTER XXIV.

OF THE TEMPTATION OF SLEEP; WHENCE IT COMES; AND THE REMEDIES WE MAY USE TO OVERCOME IT.

An inclination to sleep, which is another kind of distraction, may sometimes proceed from a natural cause; as, from our not having slept enough; from weariness and labour; from the heaviness and dullness of the air or weather; from the infirmity of old age; from excess in eating or drinking, though only of bread and water. At other times it may proceed from the malice of the devil, as is stated by some of the fathers of the desert, who, by God's permission, saw in spirit, some devils sitting upon the heads of the religious, to oblige them to sleep; and others putting their fingers in their mouths to make them yawn. And sometimes it proceeds from our own negligence, by putting ourselves, or continuing in such a posture whilst we are at prayer, as easily provokes sleep. The chief remedy for this, is what I have already spoken of; which is to remember that we are in the presence of God. For as we should not dare to sleep when we are in the presence of some great prince, so if we consider well that in prayer we are before the infinite majesty of God, who beholds us, we shall be ashamed to sleep.

We may help ourselves also with many other remedies; as by standing upright without leaning against anything; to have a wet handkerchief to wipe our eyes with, when we find ourselves most oppressed with drowsiness; to look now and then towards heaven; to hold a lighted candle in our hand; to make our prayer amongst others before the blessed sacrament; and, lastly, to take a discipline before we go to prayer; or to do some other thing that is painful, during prayer itself; as to hold our arms across when we are alone. We shall also find great helps against sleep by reciting vocal prayers, as I have said elsewhere. Yet in helping ourselves by these, or other such like remedies, we must not neglect to beg God's assistance also, and that he would cure us of this infirmity.

Cæsarius in his dialogues, says, that a Cistercian monk being very subject to sleep in his prayer, our Saviour one time appeared to him, nailed to his cross, with his back towards him, and said thus — Because you are tepid and drowsy you deserve not to see my face. He makes mention in the same place of another religious that was treated more severely; for falling asleep in the choir as he was wont to do, the crucifix upon the altar unfastened itself from the cross, and flying to him, gave him such a stroke on the ear, that the third day after he died of it: (Cæs. lib. iv. Dialog. c. 29 and 33.) all which gives us sufficiently to understand how much this laziness and tepidity displeases God. The lazy and tepid religious, says the same author, provokes God to vomit, according to the words of the Apocalypse — Because you are tepid, I begin to vomit you out. (Apoc. iii. 16.) Peter Damian speaking of that practice, which St. Romuald, founder of the Camalduli, caused his religious to observe in prayer; says, that it was a great fault in the opinion of the saint, to sleep during that time, and he permitted no one who had fallen asleep in time of it, to say mass that day, because of the little respect he had kept in his Master's presence, whom he was to receive.

CHAPTER XXV.

THAT BESIDES THE ORDINARY TIMES ALLOTTED FOR PRAYER, IT IS VERY CONVENIENT TO TAKE SOME OTHER TIME TO APPLY OURSELVES THEREUNTO.

As secular persons, besides the ordinary meals they take every day for refection of their body, sometimes solace themselves also by particular feasts, wherein they have better cheer than ordinary; so it is very just that besides the ordinary time we daily employ in prayer, which is the food and nourishment of our souls, we should sometimes make spiritual feasts and banquets, in which the soul taking more than its wonted allowance upon ordinary days, may fully satisfy itself with the abundant sweetness of God's graces and favours. Nature also teaches us this practice; for we see, that besides the dew that falls every night, it sometimes rains whole weeks together without intermission, that the earth being well watered to the very bottom, neither the greatest heats, nor the most violent winds, might be able to dry it up. We must therefore, according to this example, make choice of some particular times, in which, besides the dew which we procure for the soul by our ordinary prayer, we may also procure for it such large showers and effusions of many graces, that neither our exterior occupations, nor the winds of temptations, may ever be able to dry it up. This has been the practice of many saints, and holy prelates of the church, who laying aside their affairs and occupations for a time, gave themselves more freely to prayer and contemplation. And we read that St. Arsenius was wont every Saturday to remain in prayer from the evening till the next morning.

But this practice is not only of great importance for our spiritual advancement, but also hinders us from falling back. Because the frailty of man is so very great, and the inclinations we have to evil so powerful, that though we sometime begin our spiritual exercises with a great deal of zeal and fervour, yet we soon by little and little come to relent therein, and to lose our first fervour. For we return to our first tepidity and natural remissness as easily as warm water returns to its first state of coldness, after we have taken it off the fire. For the mind of man, as the Scripture says, is inclined to evil from its youth. (Gen. viii. 21.) And is like a perverse nation, to which malice is become natural. (Wisd. xii. 10.) Let us add to this, that being employed as we are, some in studies, others in domestic employments, and others in exercises and functions abroad; we have need to recollect ourselves sometimes by retirement, it being an axiom amongst philosophers, that every agent suffers by its action; so that though our employments are good and holy, yet as a knife grows blunt by daily use, and requires that it should be sharpened from time to time, so we grow dull by our continual action, and relent in the care of our own advancement, by labouring to procure that of our neighbour.

Therefore it is of very great importance to make now and then a retreat; whereby, disengaging ourselves from all sorts of employments, we give leisure to our soul to recover her impaired strength and regain new vigour, to be able to continue in action. For we are more obliged to ourselves than to our neighbour, and well regulated charity begins at home. But it is also for our neighbour's advantage that we do this; since their progress depends upon the progress of those who are employed in the salvation of souls; and therefore it is so far from being a loss to our neighbour to take time for ourselves, that even he receives profit thereby. It is like the letting land lie fallow for a year, that afterwards it may become more fertile; or to use father Avila's comparison, it is like the taking off the millstone to pick it anew, thereby to make it grind the better. Our occupations then are so far from being a legitimate excuse, to dispense with ourselves sometimes from these retreats; that on the contrary, the more we are employed and busied in affairs, the

more we stand in need of having recourse to the ordinary remedy and help of prayer and recollection. Those who travel by sea, must from time to time go ashore to lay in fresh provisions; and in the same manner, those who are embarked in exterior employments, for the salvation of their neighbour, and who are continually encompassed with so many dangers as the sea of this world is full of, have reason oftentimes to go ashore, and enter the harbour of solitude and recollection, to furnish them-selves with fresh spiritual supplies, and thereby make provision of what is necessary for the continuation of their voyage.

The gospel affords us an excellent example of this. Jesus Christ had sent his apostles to several places to preach; and when they returned from missions, and had given account of them to the Son of God: he says to them, come aside to a place of solitude, and there repose and rest yourselves for a while. (Mark vi. 31.) If the Saviour of the world gave this counsel to his apostles; and if such persons as these wanted repose and retirement, with how far greater reason ought we to believe that we stand in need thereof?

Those who have written of prayer, say very well, that it is to the soul, what sleep is to the body; and even in the scripture itself, it is styled a sleep. I sleep, but my heart watches. (Cant. v. 2.) Ye daughters of Jerusalem I conjure you not to awake my beloved, till she pleases to awake of herself. (Cant. viii. 4.) And the better to explain this comparison, he says, as the body reposes and gathers new strength by sleep, so the soul reposes in prayer, and gathers thereby new vigour to serve God; and as without sleep, though we should take the most exquisite food in the world, we should notwithstanding grow weaker, and be in danger of losing our senses; so without this spiritual sleep of prayer, how holy soever our exterior employments are, the soul would become weak and sickly, and would even be in danger of being lost. It is for this reason that the spouse would not have his beloved wakened out of her sleep till she pleased; for it is very troublesome to be wakened by any noise; but very pleasant to wake of ourselves, after our bodies have taken all the repose they stood in need of, and that all the vapours that mounted to the head are quite dissipated and spent. God therefore would have no exterior thing disturb or awake our soul, when she reposes in prayer, but that she should awake of herself, when she has sufficiently reposed; and she should exercise herself also in charitable employments; because she is then far fitter for them than she was before.

Though generally speaking, it is at any time whatsoever of great importance, to apply ourselves to prayer, which we cannot do too often, yet there are some occasions and conjunctures in which it is particularly necessary, that we should employ ourselves in it. When for example, we perceive that we begin to relent in our spiritual duties, and reap not such fruit from them as we ought to do; when we perceive that we are not as truly observant of our rules, as we were wont to be, and set little or no value on small things; when we find we have not sufficient interior recollection, and we are too much dissipated in the exterior, and too much taken up with affairs, into the management whereof we have intruded ourselves. It is good also to make a retreat for some days, when we perceive we cannot entirely overcome ourselves, in some things that we may endeavour to compass by prayer, what otherwise we could not effect. Because then it may happen, that in a happy moment, we shall obtain more grace of God, and more strength to mortify and overcome ourselves, than we should have been able to do in many days, by the practice of our ordinary exercises. For then we would have employed a long time only in falling and getting up again; but by the help of a few days' retreat, it will happen upon a sudden, that we shall feel ourselves disabused of our errors, confirmed in our good purposes, and absolutely resolved to change our lives. For after all, it is not to be doubted, but that to be sometimes alone, and to confer with God and ourselves, is a very good disposition, to obtain of him to speak to our hearts, and to move him to bestow plentiful grace upon us.

The solitary person shall sit and keep silence, says the prophet, because he is raised above himself. (Lamen. iii. 28.) By the help of a retreat then, we elevate ourselves above ourselves, and become quite other men than we were before. And hereby very extraordinary changes have often happened: the hand of God is not shortened (Is. lix. 1.) — his power is not at all diminished; wherefore we must never lose courage nor neglect anything we are able to do. How do you know but that God may work great things in you in time of this retreat? Perhaps it is to some one of those exercises during that time, to which he has united your progress in perfection. Moreover, it is not less necessary for the happy state of your soul, thus to retire after a long journey, or some great and distracting employments, than it is necessary for our corporal health, and for the regaining strength, to treat ourselves with more than ordinary care, after we have been exhausted by a long sickness. It is good also for the same reason, when we are about to engage ourselves in any great employments, to take our precautions in this manner, that we may afterwards perform our actions with more purity of mind, and defile ourselves less with the commerce and traffic of the world. The medicines that prevent diseases, are better than those that cure them: and it was upon this account that St. Ignatius recommended to all superiors, that before they took their charge upon them, they should make eight days' retreat; to exercise themselves for that time on spiritual things.

It is also very much to the purpose to do the same, when we are upon the point of being employed in any long mission, of which Jesus Christ himself has given us an example; who before he began to preach, retired forty days together in the desert. The time of affliction also is very proper for a retreat; as well when the affliction regards ourselves in particular, as when it regards the society, or the whole church in general. For it is an ordinary practice in the church, to have recourse to prayer, penance, and mortification, for the appeasing God's wrath, and the obtaining his mercy and particular favours. All these occurrences may give us occasion to recollect ourselves in a retreat of some days. But is it not necessary to seek occasions? No — our own necessities and our own interest also furnish us with sufficient. Wherefore we ought not to pass a year without making such a spiritual retreat; and when we undertake it, we must perform it to the purpose; that is, with a firm purpose to profit by it. For a matter of so great importance, ought never to be made superficially, through custom, or condescension.

In fine, God has given this means particularly to the society, not only as a thing very proper for our own advancement in virtue, but also for the advancement of our neighbour. It is in this manner that the bulls of our institute speak; and St. Ignatius very particularly recommends it to the priests; to the end, says he, that thereby they make themselves skillful in the management of these sorts of spiritual arms, which by the special grace of God, are so proper to gain souls to his service (4 p Const. c. viii. §5 Reg. 7. Sacerd.)

It was by this means that God drew to himself our blessed founder and his companions; and it is by this means also that he will draw many others after the same example, and we have seen most wonderful effects of his holy grace in those he has conducted by these means; and we must hope that by our making use of the same he will give us the like assistance, and pour down the same blessings upon us. I add to what I have already said, another thing still very considerable, which ought strongly to excite us to make use of these exercises. It is the favour which Paul V has granted to all religious in general, in his bull, published in the year 1606, the 23rd of May — in which he grants a plenary indulgence and remission of all sins to those of any order whatsoever, who shall retire for eight or ten days to make the spiritual exercises. This evinces the esteem this great pope had of them — an esteem which we also ought to have.

And that the whole world may be the better informed by the very words of the said bull, I shall here insert them. As to those who by the permission of their superiors, quitting their present affairs, and retiring for ten days in their cells, or in any other place, free from the commerce and conversation of men, shall

employ themselves during this time, in the reading of holy books, and in other spiritual exercises, to excite their hearts to piety and devotion; adding at the same time meditations upon the mysteries of our holy faith, upon the benefits received from God, upon the four ends of man, upon the passion of our Saviour, or any other prayers, either short or long, and applying themselves at least two hours a day in mental prayer; and after having at the same time made a general confession of their whole life, or of the year past, or only an ordinary confession, shall receive the holy sacrament of the Eucharist, or shall celebrate mass; every time that they shall make these exercises, we mercifully in our Lord grant them a plenary indulgence or a remission of all their sins.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FRUIT WE OUGHT TO REAP FROM THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISE.

In the spiritual exercise we must chiefly propose to ourselves three things. The first is, to perform well our daily actions; since all our advancement and perfection as I have already signified, depends upon this. For we must not imagine that these exercises are instituted for no other end than that we should remain eight or ten days in retirement, constantly employed in prayer. No! but they were instituted, that we may accustom ourselves to make our prayer and examens well, to hear or say mass with fervour, to recite the divine office with devotion, to profit by our spiritual reading, and so of the rest. It is to excite ourselves by many acts, and thereby to contract a habit to perform them as we should do, that we lay aside for some time all other employments; and it is for the same end that St. Ignatius would have us, during the time of these exercises (which in the beginning, he ordained to last for a month, and would have all made in the same order he there appoints) wherein all the particular examens are to be made upon the observance of those rules or additions we are to follow, and upon the faults we also commit therein: and this is frequently recommended to us, as a thing he knew to be of such great importance and profit.

But it is not in our spiritual exercises only, which are the soul of the rest, that we ought to benefit in this retreat; but the fruit thereof, must extend itself to our exterior offices and employments, that we may procure help and succour to perform them better, and to observe all our rules for the future more punctually. This is the advantage we must derive from these exercises, in our retreat, and regards not only the present time but chiefly the time to come; and it is by our conduct after we have finished them, that we are to discern and judge the profit we have made by them.

The second thing we must propose to ourselves in the spiritual exercise or retreat, is to overcome ourselves, and to practise mortification for the defects and imperfections, we are most subject to. So that every one ought to examine himself, on the branch of duty, he most frequently fails in — on that wherein he gives most frequent occasions of scandal and difficulty to his brethren; and must employ himself chiefly in correcting these. He will have performed the spiritual exercise with profit; because this is the chief end thereof. The title that St. Ignatius gives them, marks this very expressly; because he calls them, spiritual meditations, to overcome ourselves, and to direct our thoughts, and all the actions of our life to the service of God. Wherefore we must make it our business in this retirement, so to reform ourselves, that at the end of it, each one may find himself quite changed into another man, (I Kings x. 6.) as Samuel said to Saul, or as St. Paul says, into a perfect man. (Eph. iv. 13.)

Now it is amendment of our lives that will be the strongest proof of this change. Hence, if you loved hitherto to dissipate and divert yourselves, losing your time in frivolous conversations, it must appear that now you love silence and retirement; if hitherto you love your own ease, it must appear that now you seek

nothing else but your greater mortification and penance; if hitherto you spoke harshly to your brethren, you must prove that now you speak to them with all imaginable sweetness; if hitherto you relented in the observance of your rules, and neglected little things, it must appear that now you are become faithful in the very least observances, and most submissive and exact, in following punctually whatsoever is prescribed, and in applying yourselves so to your duty, that by God's assistance, you will not fall into any deliberate imperfection. See here what victory we ought to have gained over ourselves in this retreat; for if we depart from it no better than we entered into it, and bring out with us all the imperfections and defects we carried in, to what purpose have we made it?

St. Ambrose mentions a circumstance, we may very well here take notice of. He says, that a young man who was very much debauched, had occasion to make a very long voyage, during which there was a complete reformation wrought in him. At his return to the city where he lived, he met in the street a person of his acquaintance of ill fame, with whom heretofore he had kept dishonest conversation; and having passed her without saluting her, she was hereat very much surprised, and thinking he did not know her, went to him and told him, she was such a one. I see very well, says he, who you are; but I am no longer the same you knew me heretofore. For he was so changed that he was become quite another man. We ought to effect in ourselves a similar reformation, that we may be able to say with the apostle: I live, but after such a manner, that it is no more I that live, but Christ that lives in me. (Gal. ii. 20.) And this, says St. Ambrose, is that happy change of which the Saviour of the world speaks, when he says, whosoever will follow me, let him deny himself. (Mat. xvi. 21.) For, to renounce one's self, says this Holy Father, is to change one's self into another man, and to endeavour to be no more the same we were wont to be. When St. Francis Borgia accompanied the corpse of the Empress Isabella to Granada, God did him the favour so to convince him of the vanities of this world, by that constant spectacle of death he had always before his eyes, that at his return he affirmed, that the Court appeared to him quite changed. The reason hereof was, that it was he himself was changed, when God had enlightened him. It is after this manner we should be changed: and this is the end of the spiritual exercises, if we make good use of those lights and graces, which, during them, God is accustomed to communicate to souls.

The third thing we must take notice of, and which is only in consequence of the second, is, the gaining of that virtue which is most necessary for us. Because we root out vices, only to plant virtues in their place: and there are two means, says Thomas à Kempis, that chiefly help to our spiritual advancement; viz., violently to withdraw ourselves from what nature does viciously incline us unto, and fervently to set upon the gaining that virtue, we stand most of all in need of; (I Book, ch. xxv.) which is the thing in question. The directory also of the exercises speaking of the conduct we ought to hold, during the time of retreat, says, that we must not spend all the time of the first week in the practice of the first means; but it is sufficient to employ only two or three days, in order that there may be sufficient space left, wherein we may proceed to some other means, that may elevate us to a higher degree of perfection.

Amongst others that are marked us, as the most proper for this effect, the chief is to select one of our rules in which we think all perfection we can desire is contained; as for example, the rule that says, as those that are of the world, love and earnestly seek after honours, esteem and reputation of men, so we must love and earnestly seek after the contrary. Take to heart, during the time of your retirement, the gaining such a degree of humility, that all contempts, affronts, injuries, and false accusations, may give you as much joy, as honour and praise give to worldlings. And thus raising yourselves above the temptations men ordinarily have, of desiring to be esteemed; one for his learning, and another for the dignity of his employment; you will surmount what is a very great obstacle to your spiritual advancement.

At another time, propose to yourself the observance of the rule, which requires of us, to be always advancing ourselves in the service of God, purely to please him, out of love of him; and rather through a grateful acknowledgment of his benefits, whereby he has prevented us, than through fear of punishment or hope of reward. Endeavour to purify your intention, that you seek your own interest in nothing, either little or great, in things temporal or eternal; but that in the one and the other, you seek nothing, but only the will and glory of God, so that you come at last even to forget yourself. At another time apply yourself to obtain a perfect conformity to the will of God in all things, that whatsoever may happen to you, or from whatsoever persons, you must still receive all, as coming from his divine hand. Lastly, whatsoever virtue or perfection you shall propose to yourself to get in your retreat (for we may equally cast our eyes upon all, and see which we stand most in need of) you must never leave off, till you have accomplished your object.

CHAPTER XXVII.

OF SOME ADVERTISEMENTS, WHICH WILL HELP US TO DERIVE STILL GREATER ADVANTAGE FROM THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISE.

That we may derive still greater profit from the spiritual exercise, and, as we have said, reap more fruit from it, we must know that, before we set ourselves to prayer, we must not only prepare, and resolve upon the points we are to meditate on, but upon the fruit also we ought to reap from thence. In the same manner before we begin the exercise, we must beforehand foresee and determine the profit we ought to derive from it. For this end it is necessary, before we enter into any retreat, that we take an exact review of ourselves; and ponder at leisure, and say each to himself; what is my greatest spiritual necessity? To what does my corrupt nature feel the strongest inclination? What is my most irregular passion, and the worst of those bad habits I have contracted? Wherein have I most of all endangered my soul? Which of my imperfections does most of all offend or scandalize my brethren? Behold here an excellent method to prepare ourselves for the spiritual exercise: and when, after an exact discussion and examination, we have found out what we sought for, we must always set it before our eyes, either to procure it in perfection, if it be a virtue; or entirely to correct it, if it be a vice. So that in these retreats, we must not propose either the raising ourselves to a sublime contemplation, or imagine that therein our chief aim must be the enjoying a strict communication with God; for it may so happen that, even during this time, we may have more distractions, more disquiet, and more frequent and violent temp-tations, than we had amidst the impediments of worldly employments.

We must, therefore, chiefly have regard to the fruit we are to reap, as I have before signified, and take all pains possible to gather it; and, if we do this, we shall have made a profitable and pious retreat, though perhaps we have not felt therein all the fervour and devotion we desired or expected. But if we do not compass this, though we should be elevated to such a pitch of devotion, as to be continually dissolved in tears, yet we shall find we shall have lost our time; because it is not this feeling of tenderness, but the care of our amendment, and progress in virtue, which should have been our chief end and aim. It will also conduce extremely to our advancement, if we help ourselves by the method which St. Ignatius would have us always make use of in prayer; which is, that having made our prayer for an hour, we afterwards spend one quarter, or thereabouts, standing or sitting, in making our reflection upon it, and taking account how we have behaved ourselves the preceding hour.

When we find we have performed it ill, we must seek out the cause, and examine, whether it proceeds from

our not having prepared the points well? Whether we have not entertained ourselves in vain and extravagant thoughts?

Whether we have not permitted ourselves to be overcome by sleep; or to fall into a kind of drowsiness or languor of heart? Whether we have not rested too long in speculations of the understanding, and neglected to excite fervorous affections of the will? Whether we performed it with all that purity of intention we ought; but rather sought the sweetness of consolations, than the accomplishment of the divine will? After we have thus made an exact discussion or examen, and discovered in what we have failed, we must presently ask pardon for our defects, and make a firm resolution to correct them for the future; and, on the contrary, if we find that our conscience does not reproach us with any neglect, we must give due thanks to God, and purpose hereafter to behave in prayer after the same manner. This instruction is of very great importance; because, by means of this examen, we shall come to know by experience in what we are defective, and we shall correct it; and in what we have been so happy as to succeed, that we may persevere therein; and thus we shall gain the spirit of discretion and discipline, which experience will teach us.

On this account St. Ignatius considers this examen to be well calculated to form and make spiritual masters, not only in the science of prayer, but also in all other sciences which regard or relate to the direction of souls. For, in the fourth part of his constitutions he says, that when a confessor has heard anyone's confession, it will be a very great help to him, especially in the beginning, to reflect presently upon it, that he may see in what he has been defective; and that, by correcting himself the next time, he may derive advantage from his own faults. The examen of prayer was appointed for the same end; and it is also the first thing we must do after we have ended it. The second thing, which is as important as this, is to take notice what the fruit is that we reap from our meditation; and thereupon produce new acts of the will, by resuming, in a few words, the substance of what we had said in many; whence we draw consequences and deductions, and make a kind of epilogue. Moreover, we cannot better know what opinion our holy founder had of prayer; and of how great importance he thought it was to make it well, and carefully to correct the faults we commit in it, than by seeing that he was not content with our having only the ordinary help of our examens at noon and at night, but would have us also, immediately after prayer, to make a particular examen thereof. And this examen is of so great importance, that if we foresee we shall not have time to make it after our prayer, we must take part of the time of our prayer to make it in.

We may add here another very profitable advice, which is, to write down very briefly the fruit we have reaped from prayer; the good thoughts we had; the pious resolutions we made; and the lights we received from God in it; as well concerning those virtues we proposed to ourselves the gaining of, as about the mysteries upon which we meditated. This was the practice of St. Ignatius, and Father Fabre; and we have even some of those things they wrote upon this subject. St. Francis Xavier also advised us to practise the same method; the directory of the spiritual exercises counsels it; and Father Aquaviva, our general, in his writings, has very particularly recommended the same. Besides, by this means, the good desires and resolutions we make are more perfected, and take deeper root, and make deeper impression on our heart; and experience also will teach us, that when, at another time we come to read them over again, they will be of great profit to us. For, being the very sentiments we had before, and which then touched and moved us, they will move us with a far greater facility afterwards than others; and we shall find ourselves excited to produce the same acts again, with greater promptitude than before. But if we go not so far as heretofore we did, we shall have at least a greater confusion to find we are not the same now we were then; and that we go back instead of advancing; and, by this means, we either do our endeavours to come to the same point, or we supply our defects by

that holy shame and confusion we suffer, for coming so much short of our former perfection. Thus, either the one way or the other, it must needs be very profitable; but above all, in time of the spiritual exercise or retreat.

In the last place, I say, if it be at all times good, as I shall have occasion to prove in another place, to render an account of conscience and prayer to some spiritual director, it is more particularly to be rendered in time of our retreat; and some persons, because they will not subject themselves hereunto, often reap not from the spiritual exercise that fruit which otherwise they would have reaped.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

OF SPIRITUAL READING — HOW IMPORTANT IT IS — HOW IT IS TO BE DONE PROPERLY.

Spiritual reading is a very great help to prayer, and it is upon this account that St. Paul, writing to Timothy, recommended to him to apply himself to reading. (1 Tim. iv. 13.) St. Athanasius esteems it so necessary for one who would walk in the path of God that, in an exhortation he made to religious, he says: You will see no one truly intent on God's service, who is not also given to reading. (Exhor. ad. Relig.) We can neither practise nor leave it off, without receiving profit or prejudice. St. Jerome also testifies the esteem he had of it, when writing to Eustochium: Let sleep, says he, surprise you with a book in your hand, and let the Holy Scripture receive your reclining head. In fine, all saints in general recommend unto us spiritual reading; and experience, moreover, lets us clearly see the profit thereof; because history records innumerable wonderful conversions that God has wrought by this means.

The founders of religious orders, relying upon the doctrine of St. Paul, and upon the authority and experience of saints, have been so convinced of the importance and profit of this exercise, that all of them have prescribed the practice of it to their religious. Humbertus says, that St. Bennet was not content with prescribing a time for the daily practice of it; but ordered, moreover, that at the time allotted for it, two of the ancient religious should make their visit round the monastery, to see if there were any that omitted this duty; or that withdrew or hindered others from it. By this we may see in what estimation it was held by this great saint; and here it may be proper to observe that the visits daily made amongst us, whilst we are employed in our spiritual exercises, had their origin in the direction and experience of the most ancient saints. He ordered, moreover, that such as should be found faulty should, for the first and second time, be gently corrected; but that afterwards, if they were found guilty, they should be severely punished, and be made examples to others. We have also in our society a rule for spiritual reading which says: That the religious should twice a day employ therein the time allotted for examen of conscience, for meditation, and spiritual reading; and with all possible care and diligence, apply themselves thereunto in our Lord; and the superior and spiritual prefect is to take care that each one daily employs therein the time allotted jar these exercises. (Reg. I. Com.) Lastly, spiritual reading is practised by all that make profession of piety; whereupon, I shall content myself to set down such things as may render the practice of it more profitable.

St. Ambrose, exhorting us to apply ourselves as much as we can to spiritual reading, says: Wherefore do you not employ all the time you are out of the church in spiritual reading? Wherefore do you not return to take a view of Jesus Christ? Why do you not speak to him? And why do you not hearken to what he says to you? For we speak to him whilst we are in prayer; and we hear him speak, whilst we read the holy scripture.

(Amb. 1. i. Offic. c. xx.) Let this, therefore, be the first means we adopt to profit by spiritual reading; let us believe that it is God speaks to us, and that it is he who dictates to us what we there read. Read the Holy Scripture in such a manner as always to bear in mind that all the words that are therein are the words of God, who would have us not only know his law, but also fulfil it. (Aug. ep. cxliii. in Virg. Demet.)

What the saint says elsewhere furnishes us with another very profitable means and many most pious reflections. The Holy Scripture, says he, is like so many letters sent us from our own country; (Id. serm. lvi. Ad frat. in Er.) let us therefore read them with the same eagerness that a man would read the letters he receives from his native country, from which he has been a very long time absent, and from which he is far away. Let us read them to see what news we receive from heaven, which is our true country; to see what they tell us of our fathers, brethren, and friends that are there, to see what they say of that place to which we so earnestly desire to go.

St. Gregory writing upon the same subject, says, that the Holy Scripture is like a looking-glass, which we ought to set before the eyes of our soul, to behold our interior; and in which it is very easy to perceive, what good or bad there is within us; and how near to, and how far off we are from perfection. For sometimes it sets before us the admirable exploits of the saints, to excite us to imitate them, that the sight of their victories and triumphs, may augment our courage in temptations and sufferings; sometimes it speaks also of their falls, that we may both know, wherein we are to imitate them, and what we ought to take care to avoid. Sometimes it sets before us the example of Job, whose virtue increased amidst temptations, as foam does amidst the waves and billows of the sea; sometimes also it represents David to us, who fell at the first attack. The constancy of the one, helps to strengthen us in the greatest trials; and the frailty of the other, teaches us always to have an humble fear, even in prosperity, and amidst the consolation that grace brings along with it; and never to presume upon ourselves, or our own strength, but to conduct ourselves always with all precaution imaginable. St. Augustine speaks in the same manner as St. Gregory does — You will make a good use, says he, of Holy Scripture, if you use it as a looking-glass, that your soul beholding itself therein, may correct what is bad, and perfect what is good in her. (Id. ep. sup.) What the one and the other say of Holy Scripture, may also be applied to all kinds of spiritual reading.

But to descend more to particulars, and to declare what method we are to observe herein, we must take notice that to profit by this sort of reading, we ought not to perform it in haste, as when we read something for the amusement of our minds; but at leisure, and with very great application. For as violent and tempestuous rains do not penetrate the earth, or render it fruitful; but only gentle and continual showers do work this effect; so to make our spiritual reading enter into our heart, and that it may be received therein, we must make it with tranquility and attention. It is also very good when we meet with any passage that strikes or moves us, to dwell a little longer upon it than upon others; and to pause a little, and think upon what we have read, hereby to move the will; in the same manner as we are wont to do in time of meditation. Yet we ought not in our reading to spend so much time on our thoughts and considerations, as we do in meditation; where things should be ruminated and digested at greater leisure; but at least, we must give them some proportionate space. And this is what the saints counsel us to perform when they say, we must in reading, do as birds who, whilst they drink, take different draughts, and every time they drink, lift up their eyes to heaven.

We see by this what connection and resemblance there is between spiritual reading and prayer. In effect, this connection is so great, that when we would train up any one to prayer, and would by little and little prepare him for it, agreeably to his genius and disposition; the first thing we counsel him is to read good and pious books, and to stop now and then whilst he is reading; and it often happens by this

means, that God raises him to the exercise of mental prayer. We also direct such as have not a facility in prayer, and despair ever to compass it by reason of their continual distractions, to join spiritual reading with prayer, reading a little at a time, and each time meditating upon what they have read. For the mind being thus collected, and fixed upon the things we read, has not so much occasion of spreading itself from side to side, as when it is altogether free, or when the senses are not arrested by any object.

The facility of reading and praying together is, no doubt, what induced the saints to set so high value on spiritual reading, that they in a manner praise it as much as they do prayer. For they say that reading is the spiritual food of the soul, which fortifies, and renders it firm against all temptations; which inspires it with the only thoughts and desires of heaven; which enlightens the understanding; heats and inflames the will; comforts it in that irksomeness occasioned by all the afflictions it meets with in this world; and produces that true and spiritual joy that is found only in God.

St. Bernard gives us another instruction, how we may profit by spiritual reading — He who sets himself to read, says he, does not so much seek to learn, as to taste the things of God (Bern. in spec. monach.) For the bare or simple knowledge of the understanding is dry and barren, if it warms not the will, and excites not that fervour, which renders the reading profitable and fruitful, and which is truly the end thereof. This advertisement is moreover of very great importance; for there is a very great difference between reading to learn, and reading to advance in virtue; between reading for others, and reading for ourselves; the one is a pure study, and the other is spiritual food. So that in reading, if you apply yourself only to the knowledge of things, or to gain something whereby to be better able to instruct others; this is not such a spiritual reading as is to be made for your own advancement; but it is a study you undertake to advance another. There are other times for this; all things have their times. (Ecclus. iii. 1.) That of spiritual reading must not be employed in study, but in that which I have here set down.

It is for this reason that the saints recommend to us that we read not much at the time, lest a long lecture should weary and tire out our mind, instead of fortifying it: and this counsel, which is very good for all persons, is most particularly necessary for those who imagine that all consists in reading, or rather devouring, as I may say, a great many books. For as the nourishment of the body depends not upon the quantity of food, but upon the good digestion thereof; even so the nourishment of the soul, consists not in reading much, but in ruminating and well digesting what we have read. And as hard matters rather tire us, than edify us; and rather dry up devotion, than increase it; therefore they counsel us to make our spiritual reading upon simple and easy matters, in which more and greater sentiments of piety rather than profoundness of learning are contained. Hugh of St. Victor says upon this subject, that a servant of God was counselled by a revelation to discontinue the reading of all sorts of intricate or hard matters, and to apply himself to read the lives of saints, and other books of the like nature; and that by this means he made very great progress in piety.

St. Bernard more particularly teaches us what we ought to observe herein: We must, says he, take care to keep in our minds all day long, some passage we have that day read; that we may afterwards digest it the better; by calling to mind and often ruminating upon it. And this must be something also that agrees with the good purposes and resolutions you have made before, and that may propel you to strengthen them, and hinder your mind from distracting or dissipating itself upon other thoughts. (Ber. ep. ad frat. de mon. dei.) For as we do not eat, only to spend the time that is taken up therein, but that the food we take may sustain and nourish us all the day after; so we must not apply ourselves to spiritual reading, which is the spiritual food of our souls, only to employ the time allotted for it; but we must perform it so as to make our profit by it the whole day after. For this end it will

be very advantageous to us, if we elevate our minds to God before we begin to read, and beg his grace, that our reading may become fruitful, that it may penetrate our heart, and take such root in it, and so fortify it, that it may render us more ardent and fervent in virtue, let us see the deceits of the world, and make us also more firm and constant, in what regards our spiritual advancement and perfection. St. Gregory was wont to make his spiritual reading after this manner, to which he never applied himself, without being first prepared for it by prayer, and without having recited this verse of the Psalmist, retire from me, ye wicked spirits, and I will dive into, and penetrate the commandments of my God. (Ps. cxviii. 114.)

But that we may still conceive a greater esteem of spiritual reading, and have a greater desire to apply ourselves thereunto, the saints compare it to the preaching of the word of God; and affirm, that it has all the force and energy that the voice of a preacher can have; and has moreover a great many other advantages, that preaching has not. First, it is not so easy to have a preacher at hand at all times, as to have a spiritual book. Secondly, the best instructions of a preacher are soon over; and therefore cannot work all those good effects which this may; for in this we may often turn to any place we have read that moved us; we may examine and ponder it again and again, and insist and dwell so long upon it as we shall find necessary to have it make a deep impression on our souls. Thirdly, in a spiritual book we have a good counsellor; for as a great philosopher said very well, a book says boldly, and without any fear, that which no person dares tell us; it tells the whole world their faults; exhorts and reprehends all with the same liberty. Moreover, by means of reading, we converse with the greatest saints, and the most famous doctors of the church; and may entertain ourselves sometimes with one, sometimes with another; and hear them speak as if they were present with us, and as if we heard them pronounce the same words we read. Therefore, they had great reason, who said, that spiritual and holy books were a public and inexhaustible treasure.

For in effect there is no one who every moment may not draw immense benefits and infinite riches from them. In fine, the advantages we may derive from spiritual reading are so great, that St. Jerome, speaking of the interior fervour of the soul, says, that it is not to be doubted but that it proceeds from holy and spiritual books; by the reading of which, the soul, inflamed with divine fire, remains entirely purified from all its defects. To prove this, he alleges those words of the disciples going to Emmaus: was not our heart inflamed within us, whilst he spoke unto us as we walked with him, and when he explained the Scripture unto us? (Luke xxiv. 32.) And that passage of the Psalmist: The words of the Lord are chaste, they are like silver that have been tried in the fire. (Ps. xl. 7.) St. Ambrose also says, that the reading the Holy Scripture is the life of the soul; and this was what our Lord himself testified in St. John, when he said: The words which I have said are spirit and life. (Amb. serm. xxxv. — John vi. 63.) If then we would live a spiritual life, if we would walk in the spirit of God, and be inflamed with his love, let us apply ourselves to spiritual reading and endeavour to make that good use of it which I have here noted.

What I have said shows us clearly that those are very much deceived, who when they have read a book, never read it the second time, how good soever they find it to be. A good book ought not to be read over only once; wherefore take it again into your hands, the second reading will touch and move you more than the first, and the third more than the second, and you will always feel new pleasure and satisfaction in it; as they experience, who read with a real intention of reaping fruit from it. And on the contrary, it is a very laudable and profitable custom those have, who, when they meet in a pious book with anything affecting or impressive, take very great care to note it down, that they may have always something by them wherewith to nourish their souls when they stand in need thereof; and wherewith to excite themselves to fervour; and that which may be a comfort to them in the time of aridity and affliction.

What I have said of the many advantages derived from spiritual reading, I might confirm by a great many examples; but I shall content myself with selecting one, which is of very great edification and which I relate on the authority of St. Augustine. He says, that he was visited by an African gentleman, called Potitianus, who beginning to speak of the wonders of St. Anthony, which all the world talked of, said that one day the Emperor being at Triers, busy in beholding the sports of the circus, he himself (Potitianus) and three of his friends took a short walk out of the city — that two of them, entering an hermitage, took up a book, in which the life of St. Anthony was written; and that one of these had scarce begun to read, but he felt his heart inflamed with divine love, when piously incensed against himself, he cried out to his companion: What do we aspire to, for all the services we have so many years rendered the Emperor? The most we can hope for, is to obtain his favour, and than this what can be more frail or dangerous? For how much must we still encounter, before we can arrive to any great fortune; which of itself is also very dangerous, and therefore is so much the more to be feared? But should I endeavour to gain the love of God, I can do it with ease — I may obtain it in a moment— it suffices that I only earnestly desire it.

In saying this, the approaching pangs of his birth to a new life caused such interior commotions in his soul, that he took up the book again, and the more he read, the more he was disgusted with the things of the world; and the work of God was the more perfected in his heart, as the effect immediately after testified. For as soon as he had done reading, and that the storm which was raised in his heart became a little calmed and appeased: Now, says he to his friend with a sigh, I am at ease; my mind enjoys repose; I renounce all hopes upon earth, to fix my thoughts only upon those of heaven; in short, I am resolved to serve God, and I declare that from this very moment I will never quit this habitation. For your part, if you desire not to make a similar resolution, at least, lose not your time by going about to persuade me to no purpose, to change the determination I have now made. The other answered, that he was resolved never to leave or forsake him, especially in an enterprise where there were so great recompenses to be hoped for: and thus they both of them began together to raise a spiritual edifice of perfection, by abandoning all things to follow Jesus Christ. What is still no less wonderful and surprising is that two young ladies to whom they were contracted, understanding the choice their lovers had made, consecrated their virginity to God.

Behold here the example St. Augustine relates, which as he says, had so great influence upon himself, that, turning to one of his friends, he cried out with a disgusted and agitated mind: What will become of us? The ignorant rise, and take the kingdom of heaven by violence; and we with all our learning, let ourselves be plunged into an abyss of misery. (Lib. Viii. Conf. ch. 16.) Being thus disquieted in mind, he retired into an adjacent garden, where, sitting down under a fig-tree, and melting into tears, in a transport of mind he cried out — How long! O Lord, how long will your anger against me continue? Will your wrath, O Lord, never have an end? Remember not, Lord, my past iniquities. And as he repeated these words, How long, O Lord, how long? Tomorrow, tomorrow; and why not as well today? Why may not my miseries find this day a happy end? He heard a voice that said, Take up and read, take up and read. Whereupon he rose and took up the Epistles of St. Paul, to read the first passage he should light upon: for he had heard that the first thing that moved St. Anthony to leave all he had to follow Christ was this passage of the gospel which he once heard by chance: Go and sell all you have, and give it to the poor and you shall have a treasure in heaven; and come and follow me. (Mat. xix. 21.) Excited therefore by this example, and far more by the voice he heard, he opened the book, and by the first words he read, he found himself struck with such light from above, and so changed, that from thenceforward he absolutely renounced all things of this world, and gave himself entirely to God.