

THE LIFE OF GRACE

By Rev. Albert Power, S. J.

I.—RECOLLECTION

WILLIAM GLADSTONE, the famous English Statesman, when retiring to rest at night, after delivering one of his great speeches in the House of Commons, or after a lively and acrimonious debate, made it a practice resolutely to put all thoughts of his performance out of his mind and by some religious reflections to calm his soul and prepare for his night's rest.

St. Ignatius Loyola lays it down as one of the important points of preparation for one's morning prayer that, shortly before bedtime one read over or listen to a passage from the Gospel, or other subject for meditation, and then try to shut out worldly or distracting thoughts during the night and when rising in the morning, so that when the hour for meditation or contemplation comes, the mind is under control. But this is not to be conceived as a violent process, a straining after concentration. Such efforts would be fatal to success. It is simply the application of the obvious and familiar fact, that the mind tends to ponder on what it has read or heard. Hence the idea of bedtime stories for children.

Now to supply thoughts and truths that would act as a corrective or antidote to the worrying anxieties that fill the lives of most people was one of the principal tasks that Jesus Christ set Himself when He came on earth. He invites us thus to make use of these remedies: "Come to Me all you that labour and are burdened and I will refresh you." (Matt. 11, 28). The Greek word translated "labour" means here to be "*tired out*" as a result of toil. It is used in John Chap. 4 to tell us that Jesus reached Jacob's Well "worn out" after the long tramp from Jerusalem. Hence His *invitation* means "Come to me all you who are wearied out with the troubles of life, and pressed down under the burdens of existence and I will relieve you." The whole Gospel story tells how Jesus fulfilled that promise. He lifted from our shoulders the crushing burden of sin and brought to mankind a new and wonderful spiritual life, by living which the poorest and most down-trodden of mankind found a peace and interior joy such as the wisest philosophers of Greece or Rome had never dreamt of. The inexhaustible spiritual riches of Jesus Christ are placed at the disposal of all.

But the conditions are that men come to Jesus by faith and submit to His yoke, instead of the heavy and galling yoke of sin and selfishness and worldliness under which most men are groaning. His words are (Matt. 11, 29) "Take up my yoke upon you and learn of Me: for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden light."

Jesus invites us to submit to His yoke—the yoke of obedience to His teaching. But He promises that we shall find Him a mild and gentle Teacher, and that His yoke so far from being galling and burdensome will give rest and happiness to the soul. And the reason is (as He explains elsewhere) that He Himself will help us to carry this yoke. This sharing of our burden by Jesus (who walks side by side with us along the road of life) this special divine assistance given to us to lead lives of peace and happiness in accordance with His law is what we call *divine Grace*. And the life that is led when thus assisted is called by us a supernatural life, and will be the subject of explanations in the pages that follow. Meantime, let us freshen our resolution to keep in touch with Our Lord and His holy Mother by frequent short aspirations, not only when going to bed and rising—but all through the day. Such acts are very effective in keeping our souls free from worldliness and united to Jesus.

2.—ACT OF CONTRITION

Catholics are taught to make frequently acts of perfect contrition or sorrow for sin, and especially before retiring to rest at night, to ensure that if death comes suddenly (as it does to so many) they may be ready for the summons. For through an act of perfect contrition, all grave or mortal sin is remitted. This Catholic doctrine that an act of perfect contrition is incompatible with a state of deadly sin, is one of supreme importance. Let us examine it a little. To some perhaps the word "perfect" may cause a difficulty. They feel inclined to say: "How can I work myself up to produce a *perfect* act of this kind. But remember the word "perfect" refers to the motive (*viz.*, love of God) not to the intensity or intrinsic nature of the act in itself. The motive must be "love of God," not merely fear of hell, or a sense of shame or disgust for sin, or a mere desire to feel at ease, or any other motive that is concerned chiefly with oneself. The motive is that I see that God—on account of His supreme excellence—is infinitely worthy of being loved by me; that He has a

supreme right to my homage and service, and obedience; and that by mortal sin I deliberately refuse that service and prefer some selfish earthly gratification to the fulfilment of my duty towards Him. Hence I deeply regret having sinned and make a firm resolve never again deliberately to violate God's law in a serious matter. When St. Augustine of Hippo woke up to the full realization of the life of sin and rebellion against God he had been leading, and was overwhelmed with shame and sorrow at the sight of his own disloyalty to the King of infinite beauty, his was a very intense act of perfect sorrow for sin.

But we must bear in mind that even a less intense act of contrition—provided it proceeds from the motive of love of God, is also powerful enough to wash all mortal sin from the soul. Hence we must not be discouraged from making such acts by the fact that we do not *feel* the intensity or fervour of the saints, but on the contrary are interiorly hard and dry and desolate. It is the *will* that counts with God, not emotional feelings. The same St. Augustine has uttered this consoling sentence: "If you *want* to love God, you already love Him." The mere desire and effort to elicit an act of love of God—even in a hard, dry, manner, is already such an act; namely, the deliberate choice of the will (aided by grace) to prefer God and His Excellence before everything else whatsoever. Hence the advice of St. Teresa of Avila that we should form the habit of saying frequently during the day, "My God I love Thee." Very often, she says, it will be an act of perfect love.

Remember that sorrow for sin even from a less perfect motive than love of God is sufficient preparation for the Sacrament of Confession. Such sorrow from supernatural but less perfect motives (such as fear of hell or purgatory, desire for our own happiness in heaven, etc.) is often called attrition. When preparing to go to confession it is good to spend a little time pondering on such motives. For many people they are more tangible and make a more immediate appeal, "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 1, 7). After that we should try to excite sorrow from the perfect motive of love of God. The better our dispositions are in receiving the sacrament, the greater the effect it produces, just as the amount of water one carries away from the well depends on the size of the jug or bucket one brings to fetch it in. Sorrow for sin—or "compunction" as the Imitation of Christ calls it—should be an abiding element in our spiritual life.

3.—*SUPERNATURAL ACTS*

Through divine revelation we know that man's ultimate destiny is something so entirely beyond his nature and his natural faculties, that he could never even have dreamt of its possibility without such revelation. That destiny is to gaze upon God face to face after death. This means that in some inconceivably wonderful way God will elevate and strengthen men's souls to enable them intuitively to apprehend and contemplate the infinitely perfect essence of God—i.e., the ultimate secret of existence! In this world we can know God as Author and Creator of the universe, just as we know Shakespeare and Michelangelo from their works. But we have no direct and immediate perception of God, nor any proper concept of Him; any more than a man born blind has of the radiant glory of a summer's day. If such a man were suddenly cured and woke up to the ecstasy of sight, we might have a dim suggestion of what this Beatific Vision of God will mean to us.

Our final destiny is to see God, and our life on earth is intended to be a time of active and incessant preparation for this tremendous experience. And the degree of intensity of enjoyment of this Vision and contemplation of infinite Beauty will depend on the use we make of our period of preparation here on earth. In other words, it is God's plan that already here below we lead a life directly related to and leading up to the Vision of God in heaven, and that we spend our time in performing what are called supernatural acts. The word "supernatural" (in a religious and theological sense) is almost exclusively Catholic—just as nowadays Catholics almost alone, recognize the reality behind the word. "Supernatural" means of course "above nature."

A supernatural act means one which we perform through a very special and immediate assistance of God, who works with us as a master artist with his pupil, inspiring, directing, even physically guiding him. The music or the picture produced is the pupil's work, but is rendered possible for him because he is raised up to a new power of artistic vision and production by the master's controlling influence. So my acts of Faith, Hope, and Charity, are really the acts of my own mind and will, but are at the same time the result of the divine co-operation which imparts to them a divine beauty and excellence and worth altogether above our natural powers of production.

To live a life in which every action is intensely supernatural is the aim of the saints, and should be the aim of every Catholic. It is such acts that make life worth living. It was in order to secure lives filled with such acts that God created the human race, that God became man, that the Church was founded.

You may ask; Is this kind of elevated religious life open to all without exception? Can every man, woman and child in the world aim at leading a supernatural life, in which every thought and action is inspired and produced by the Holy Ghost, so that we are forever walking, as it were, hand in hand with God Who directs all our wishes and aspirations to the one important end of fulfilling His Will and increasing our own capacity for enjoying His Friendship?

The answer is, all without exception are not only eligible for this life, providing they fulfil certain conditions, but are actually destined for, and called upon to live a supernatural life on earth as the necessary preparation for obtaining their ultimate happiness of seeing God in heaven. That is the great secret revealed to us by Jesus Christ when He came into the world, and is a truth repeatedly and lovingly dwelt upon by St. Paul and other inspired writers.

What the conditions are we shall consider next.

4.—*MERITORIOUS ACTS*

In order to live a supernatural life one in which all our activities are performed under God's special supervision and assistance, the first condition is to accept Jesus Christ and His Teaching by Faith. Through an act of Faith we come in contact with and are linked on to that great network of grace that is operating energetically in intelligent beings all through the visible and invisible universe.

But just now I want to deal with and explain those special supernatural acts which Catholics call "meritorious": that is, acts by which we are not only being prepared for the Beatific Vision of God, but by which we acquire a positive right to share in that eternal reward. This "right" is called "merit." Sometimes outsiders think that we Catholics lay too much stress on this idea of the *reward* in heaven for our good deeds—as if our services were given in a mercenary spirit, and we were always thinking of the payment when the work is over.

In the first place we might remind such objectors that this way of speaking comes to us from Jesus Christ Himself, who in His parables compares men serving God to workmen to whom the Master will pay their hire: as e.g., in the parable of the vineyard, of the talents, of Lazarus and Dives. And secondly the reward of which there is question, and which we merit by our fidelity in God's service is not a temporary payment like money wages, but the reward which alone love looks for, viz., closer friendship, deeper intimacy, with the Beloved. Who has ever dreamt of calling a child selfish or mercenary because in her efforts to do her duty she looks for the approval of the father or mother she loves as her chief reward? Who has ever criticized as self-seeking Shakespeare's Portia when she dwells so tenderly on the supreme reward she will have in Bassanio's love and devotion. In her speech to Bassanio after he has chosen the casket that will make her his wife she wishes that "Only to *stand high in your account*, I might in virtues, beauties, living, friends, exceed account."

So in this great love-story that we call Christianity, the bride-soul works strenuously and perseveringly for one reward alone: viz., to stand high in God's account, to be closely and intimately associated with Him when He brings her home to heaven. Such ambition to please the Beloved, to win His full affection and friendship is the theme of every love story in the world, from Ruth the Moabitess to Francis Thompson's "Hound of Heaven," in which he so daringly and so magnificently describes God's courtship of the human soul. We venture to use such language, because the Bible uses it. In both Old and New Testament the love between the soul and God is set forth repeatedly under the imagery of the human bride and bridegroom.

Now let us ask, presupposing the act of Faith by which we accept Jesus Christ and His teaching, what other conditions are required on our part to ensure that our acts are meritorious of eternal life,—are such as will earn for us a higher place in God's Friendship, a more perfect union with Him in Heaven?

The following three conditions are enumerated: 1st, our actions (i.e., thoughts, desires, words and outward acts) must be morally good—not sinful; 2nd, we must be living in the state of grace; 3rd, we should act from a supernatural motive—that is, one that we know through revelation, not merely for some purely natural reason—such as the wish to acquire knowledge; to improve our health; to please a friend, etc.

5.—CONDITIONS FOR MERITING

First: Our actions must be morally good. We can merit only by acts that are morally upright—that is, not venially sinful (such as telling lies, speaking somewhat uncharitably, etc.). For it is obvious that we cannot grow in God's favour by offending Him and violating His law (even though in a small matter). But any act (thought or word) that is morally good,—such as the ordinary occupations of daily life,—our business or professional work, conversation, meals, recreation and so forth may be supernatural and meritorious, as well, of course, as acts that are directly religious— such as prayer, receiving the sacraments, spiritual reading.

Secondly, we must be in the state of grace. The full significance of this expression will be explained later. Here it is sufficient to say that it means being free from the guilt of mortal or grievous sin. Here, too, it seems obvious that this condition is required for gaining merit: since a man in mortal sin and so at enmity with God and destined, if he dies in that state, to be exiled from Him forever, cannot at the same time be worthy of seeing God in heaven, any more than a man can be genuinely your friend who nourishes in his heart hostility and bitterness against you.

The *third* condition is that we act from a supernatural, not merely a purely natural motive, such as desire of knowledge, to improve our health, or to please a friend.

But the question arises: are we obliged to think of some supernatural motive (e.g., desire to glorify God or to save souls) for each action, or is a general intention directing our whole life towards God and our salvation sufficient?

Take this example: A good Catholic living in a state of grace, goes for a walk in the country. He feels in need of exercise to keep fit for work. He does not pray about it or think of God, or any supernatural motive—but just enjoys his walk, the scenery, fresh air, etc., to the full. Are these actions supernatural and meritorious?

St. Thomas Aquinas says they are. His reason is that by living in the state of grace or charity a man has directed his whole life to God, and consequently in everything he does (unless it is spoiled by a sinful motive) he is implicitly tending to God as his last end. Others think that if acts not directly religious are to be super-naturalized, they should proceed from some explicit supernatural motive.

In practice it is advisable to follow this latter view, both to make doubly sure that our acts are meritorious and also because the frequent renewal of our intention to seek God in all that we do, helps to increase and intensify sanctifying grace in the soul.

Perhaps the simplest and most widespread Catholic practice by which one deliberately chooses supernatural motives as the directive influence of all our actions; is what is called the “Morning Offering” of the Apostleship of Prayer.

6.—MORNING OFFERING

In their daily lives men and women are influenced by motives that give a direction to everything they do. One wants to make a lot of money—and all his business activities tend to that end. A lawyer or doctor may be spurred on by the desire of fame (of which the great poet spoke so tenderly as: “That last infirmity of noble mind”). A university student is full of anxiety to pass his examination. All the activities of these people—even when not consciously thinking of it will be influenced by the motive in their heart. So if I rouse in myself each morning the desire to please Our Lord and help Him to save souls, my actions during the day will be coloured and directed Godwards by that motive, even when I do not directly think about it.

The “Morning Offering” helps to secure that every action proceeds from a supernatural motive. But it also gives them a missionary or apostolic value, making them powerful to draw down graces for the conversion of sinners. Every missionary preacher from St. Paul to our own days, has insisted that to bring about conversions, prayer and suffering are essential. Jesus Christ atoned for the sins of mankind by His sufferings and death upon the Cross, and allows us to share in this divine apostolate of suffering. He also taught us to *pray* incessantly for the conversion of men's hearts to God's perfect service. Hence the first petitions He places on our lips in the “Our Father” are: “May Thy Name be blessed, Thy Kingdom be more widely established; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” And again He said: “The harvest (the harvest of souls to be reaped for God) is great but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he sent labourers into His harvest.”

Hence in the morning we offer all the prayers and sufferings of the day to help to save souls and spread Christ's

kingdom.

But what about the ordinary non-religious activities that fill our lives—work, recreation, meals, hours of rest? Can these also be turned to account? The answer is Yes. We have seen that every morally good action can be made meritorious of eternal life; but it may also have (these are big words but I will explain) an impetratory and also a satisfactory value which we can direct to helping those in spiritual need. “Impetration” means obtaining something by asking for it—that is by prayer or petition. But there is such a thing as “*silent asking*” without formal words. A child that has been naughty and grieved its parents, may silently ask pardon by making extra efforts to please them—by its greater obedience or attention. So in the spiritual order. An old saying is “*Laborare est orare.*” All work done for God is prayer, since by our diligence in His service we show our desire to please Him and obtain His graces and favours.

“*Satisfaction*” means making atonement, through suffering or in some other way, for offences committed by ourselves or others.

You may have come across a case like this. In a family one child causes much trouble and pain to its parents by waywardness, disrespect, and disobedience. One of the other children grieved by this conduct tries to make up to its parents for the misbehaviour of the sister or brother by showing greater affection, respect, and obedience. So in God’s service not only our sufferings but our ordinary actions performed in a spirit of love have the power of making satisfaction for the sins of others who are negligent in God’s service. Hence we say “Sacred Heart of Jesus I offer Thee all the prayers, works (i.e., activities of every kind) and sufferings of this day for the salvation of souls—the promotion of Thy interests.” I pray that each action may win graces and spiritual helps to promote the salvation and sanctification of the souls that You love. This offering should be made slowly and fervently and may usefully be renewed sometimes during the day. Thus every moment of the day and night will be consecrated to His Service.

7.—SANCTIFYING GRACE

We have spoken of the special divine assistance by which each of our good acts becomes meritorious, and prepares us for the sharing of the Beatific Vision in heaven. The question may be asked: Does God’s grace consist merely in this divine co-operation with our acts of intellect and will; or does it affect the soul itself in any *permanent* way rendering it habitually disposed to living a supernatural life?

The Catholic Church teaches that God confers on those who turn to Him sincerely, a permanent abiding gift of grace, which affects the very substance of the soul itself, and lifts it up to share in some wonderful way the divine life of God Himself.

This doctrine is clearly taught in the New Testament. In John Chap. 3, Our Lord speaks of this life of grace as a new *birth*. He said to Nicodemus: “No man can enter into the kingdom of God unless he is born anew.” And, in the prologue to his Gospel St. John tells us that to those that received Jesus He gave the power of becoming Sons of God—born again not in the natural way, but of God Himself. Monsignor Knox renders the passage thus: “All those that did welcome Him, Jesus empowered to become the children of God. This birth came not from human stock, not from nature’s will or man’s, but from God.” As birth from our parents in the natural order gives us our human nature, so this new birth or “*regeneration*” implies the communicating of a new and higher nature. Hence St. Peter says that through it “we become sharers in the divine Nature.” And St. Paul writes: “when a man is in Jesus Christ there has been a *new creation.*”

Again (Ephes. 2, 16), “God has created us in Christ Jesus, pledged to such good actions as He has prepared beforehand to be the employment of our lives.” (Knox).

Such expressions cannot be understood merely of transient helps given to our acts, but imply a permanent supernatural principle communicated to the regenerated soul.

Let us consider some of the effects of this mysterious gift of Sanctifying Grace.

In the first place it renders the soul beautiful beyond all imagining in the eyes of God, and gives it a right to abide in His Presence forever.

What that supernatural beauty of a soul in the state of grace is, we can only dimly guess from expressions or comparisons used in Scripture. One such comparison (very dear to St. John the Evangelist) is that of *Light*.

All the exquisite beauty of nature that so entralls the artist or the poet, is the effect of light. When night envelops

the world all beauty vanishes. A precious stone, a diamond or ruby, if held in the hand in a dark room, has no sparkle or brilliancy. But hold it up in the streaming sunshine, and mark the change! How it dances and glitters as the sunlight penetrates it and shows its dazzling loveliness

Sanctifying Grace is the sunshine that floods the soul and fills it with such surpassing beauty that God Himself is enamoured of it.

Another Scriptural expression and comparison used frequently by Our Lord Himself, is that of *Life*—the mysterious force that is so constantly and irresistibly working all around us, lifting up the dull dead chemicals of earth and transforming them into the radiant petals of a rose, the exquisite colouring of a butterfly's wing, or the graceful curves and velvet coat of a champion racehorse. Can one imagine a greater transformation?

What physical life is to the body, that Sanctifying Grace is to the soul itself. "I am come (says Our Lord) that they may have life, and have it more abundantly." "The water that I will give shall become in him a fountain springing up into *life everlasting*." "He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood hath everlasting life and I will raise him up in the last day."

To safeguard this divine treasure should be our chief concern during our time on earth.

8.—JUSTIFICATION

St. Teresa and others favoured with heavenly visions have spoken in vivid terms of the extraordinary beauty of a soul in the state of grace. And it is a comforting thought that it is through this amazing transformation that the guilt of mortal sin is washed away from the soul. In His parable, Our Lord tells us that when the prodigal son returned grieving for his sinful conduct, his father at once ordered the filthy ragged boy to be clothed in the best robe the home could produce—with shoes for his naked bleeding feet, and a ring for his finger. These and the other honours showered on him—the special banquet with music and dancing—all symbolize God's attitude towards the repentant sinner.

The Council of Trent has defined that this process of justification (i.e., restoring the sinner to God's friendship) does not merely cover over and hide away the stains and scars of sin, but washes them clean away from the soul. Sanctifying Grace penetrates into the very essence of the soul, and fills it with a cleanness and brightness and splendour destructive of all grave guilt. And to make it easy for everyone to live this supernatural life, and be ever clothed with the wedding garment of sanctifying grace, is the purpose for which the Church exists, and has the sacrifice of the Mass, and the sacraments, entrusted to her care. All the activities of her missionaries all over the world are directed to this one object—the securing for each of her children the possession of Sanctifying Grace. In the estimation of the Church, as in that of Jesus Christ, nothing really matters except the securing for ourselves of this pearl of great price. "What does it profit a man" (says Our Lord) "to gain the whole world if he suffer the loss of his own soul?"

But we must not think of Sanctifying Grace as something fixed and unchanging. It is a new life, a new spiritual health, which we can go on perfecting and intensifying, just as we can improve our bodily health by proper exercise, food, and so on. The degree of development or intensity of sanctifying grace in the soul is the measure of the perfection with which we shall enjoy the Vision of God in heaven, and the measure of progress in holiness.

All the supernatural activity hitherto described, as made possible by actual grace, is to have as its result the intensifying of sanctifying grace. Hence Catholics speak of growing in merit, and performing meritorious acts, since sanctifying grace gives us a positive right to the reward of the Beatific Vision in heaven. Not that this thought of reward should be our chief or habitual motive in leading a supernatural life. That motive should be, above all, the love of God for His own sake—the will to seek and serve Him because of His own infinite excellence. It was in order to bring that motive home to us with almost irresistible force that God became Man. The life, teaching, passion and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ constitute the amazing appeal which God has made to a sinful, selfish, idolatrous world to recognize His claims to our love, because of *His* love for us. "For God so loved the world as to give His only Begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish but may have life everlasting." And he founded His Church and gave her the Eucharist in order to keep ever fresh in men's minds the story of this great divine achievement of the Incarnation.

9.—INFUSED VIRTUES

Our human nature it is that makes us what we are. But human nature acts through various faculties (as we call them) bodily and spiritual, with which we are endowed: such as the faculty of sight, hearing, memory, imagination, understanding, free-will.

So when man is given a new supernatural nature by Sanctifying Grace, it is to be expected that he will also be provided with new supernatural faculties through which this new nature will carry on its operations. These faculties are called in Catholic theology, infused virtues or habits.

And it is by the exercise of these virtues or powers that we live that supernatural life—for which God has placed us in this world; just as it is by using our natural faculties: the bodily senses, the power of imagination, of thinking and of choosing, that we live our natural life. And just as we develop our natural powers by using them (as the Latin proverb has it— “fit faber fabricando”) so our supernatural faculties also, are strengthened by use.

Hence we find in the saints such intense faith, trust, love of God, prudence, etc.— which are the result of their diligent use of these infused virtues. Let us see briefly what these virtues are.

First come the three theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity: called theological, because they have God Himself as their direct object, whereas the moral virtues have, as their object the means for reaching God.

We can think of God either as the Supreme Truth, and so the object of our intellect: or as the Supreme Good, and as such the object of our will. By Faith we cling to God intellectually as the Supreme Truth revealing Himself to us. With our will we seek Him as the Supreme Good in two ways: either as our own Supreme Good who alone can make us perfectly happy—and this is the virtue of hope; or we seek Him and love Him on account of His own infinite excellence—and this is the virtue of Charity. In each case we tend to *God Himself* as the formal object of our faith, or hope, or love.

The other so-called moral virtues may be grouped under four headings—which are called the cardinal virtues—Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude and Justice. The formal object of all these virtues is moral good.

Obviously the first thing is to have a right notion or judgment about what is morally good (or upright conduct), and this we do through the virtue of *prudence*: which, like faith, is an intellectual act, and the foundation of all other virtues.

Secondly, a man must have the power of using created things so as to avoid all excess or abuse; and this is the virtue of temperance—or self-control.

Thirdly, he must be strong to overcome difficulties that tend to turn him away from the path of duty; and this is fortitude.

Lastly, he must follow right reason in his dealings with his fellowmen, respecting their rights and giving to everyone his due—which is the virtue of Justice.

Hence Temperance enables a man to resist too great attraction for created things (e.g., the attraction of food or drink).

Fortitude to overcome difficulties that might deter him from using them when he should (as fear of public opinion or of failure). And Justice makes him respect the rights of other persons in their use of created things.

Everyone in the state of grace has these supernatural habits in his soul and calls them into play whenever he elicits a virtuous act, e.g., of obedience, humility, patience, self-control. It is by the constant exercise of these habits that we grow in holiness and become more and more like to God Himself.

EPILOGUE

“They have forsaken Me, the *Fountain of Living Water*” (Jer. 2, 13). Thus God complained of His people through the prophet Jeremias, and how true that complaint still is! Men and women are forever turning away from Him who alone can give the Waters of Life, and trying to slake their thirst at the stagnant, poisonous water of earthly pleasures.

In these pages, a brief and imperfect sketch has been given of how God is ever soliciting the human soul in order to draw it to Himself to drink of the heavenly waters that spring up unto life everlasting. But a bare description of grace in dry, theological terms is to the actual reality, what a text-book of Botany is to the glorious, luxuriant plant-life of forest and field! To read about grace and study its nature is one thing, to absorb it into our being from Him who alone

can communicate it is quite another. This latter soul-satisfying process we call prayer; and all discussions about grace are barren, unless they lead to more perfect intercourse with God in prayer.

Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: "If you only knew the glorious gift which God is offering you, and who He is that says 'Give me to drink,' you *would have asked Him*, and He would have given you Living Water." That is it! God gives His graces to those *that ask*.

In St. Luke (chap. II) Jesus teaches that this asking must be importunate, persevering and full of faith and trust. Hence the Church stresses so strongly the importance of prayer as an essential part of our daily life. She knows that by prayer Saints are produced; and to supply God with Saints is her supreme aim, as it is the ultimate reason for her existence.

Arnold Lunn's fascinating books about Alpine climbing tell us that this sport requires great skill and knowledge of the right tracks to follow; strength, courage and energy to overcome difficulties; and withal a competent and reliable guide. To climb the towering peaks of sanctity, the same conditions are necessary, and to supply them Jesus was born. He spent His life mapping out for us the tracks that lead to God; warning us of dangers to be faced, but promising strength to overcome them; and offering Himself to be our heavenly Guide, ever at our service during the ascent. To follow His directions, attend to His warnings, cling to His guiding Hand is what a life of prayer means. Such a life alone can guarantee our final success in reaching those heights from which, we shall behold unclouded the Vision of Eternal Being that will wrap us in ecstatic contemplation for ever.

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