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THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTION OF SAINT CLAUDE DE LA COLOMBIÈRE[1]

ON PRAYER

As I feel a great attraction toward prayer I asked God, by Our Lady's intercession, to give me the grace to go on increasing in love of this holy exercise until my death. It is the only means of purifying us, of uniting us to God, and of allowing God to unite himself to us and be glorified in us. We must pray to obtain the apostolic virtues; pray that we may use them to help others, and pray also that we may not lose them while serving others. The counsel: pray without ceasing, seems sweet to me and in no way impossible. It includes the practice of the presence of God, and with his help I resolve to follow it. We always have need of God, therefore we must always pray. The more we pray, the more we please him and the more we obtain. I do not ask for consolation in prayer; that God gives where he chooses; I am not worthy of consolation and am too weak to bear it. Extraordinary graces are not good for me; to give them to me would be like building upon sand, or pouring a precious liquid into a broken vase. I ask God to give me a solid, simple gift of prayer which will glorify him and not make me vain. It seems to me that dryness and desolation accompanied by grace are very useful to me, for then I delight in making acts of real virtue: I strive against my bad inclinations and try to be faithful to God.

When we are distracted during prayer and find the time long because of our impatience to pass on to something else, it is good to say to yourself: My soul, art thou tired of thy God? Art thou not satisfied with him? Thou possessest him and dost thou seek for something else? Where canst thou be better than in his company? Where canst thou profit more? I have experienced that this calms the mind and unites it with God.

How can we help our neighbor? By prayer and good works. Preaching is useless without grace, and grace is only obtained by

[1] Selections from *The Spiritual Direction of Saint Claude de la Colombière*, translated and arranged by Mother M. Philip, I.B.V.M., Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1998.

prayer. If conversions are few, it is because few pray. Prayer for souls is so pleasing to God, it is as though we asked a mother to forgive her son.

In prayer always follow the attraction of your heart, whether God draws you to consider Our Lord's Passion or the joys of heaven; you cannot do wrong in that.

The best book of meditation on the Passion is the Passion itself in the Gospel: read this and meditate upon it, reflecting upon the love and patience of Jesus Christ.

Continue to pray as you feel drawn, but do not worry about it, for worry comes from self-love. You must abandon yourself to the leading of God with no other intention than that of pleasing him, and when you know that you have this intention deep in your heart, you must not waste time in reflecting about yourself and about the degree of virtue you have attained; occupy yourself with him whom you love and bother very little about yourself.

In general, the mere sense of the presence of God is an excellent prayer, and if you can occupy yourself with it without strain, you need think of nothing else: not that you must avoid making acts when drawn to do so, but do not worry about them unless for some reason you feel constrained to make them. Go to God simply, with great confidence that his goodness will guide you; let yourself go confidently as your heart draws you, and fear nothing but pride and self-love….

When you can do nothing at prayer, make acts of humility, comparing your nothingness with God's greatness, your ingratitude with his benefits, your lack of virtue with the purity and perfection of the saints.

It is a great illusion, but a very common one, to imagine that one has little or great virtue according to the many or few distractions one has in prayer! I have known souls raised to a high degree of contemplation who were distracted from the beginning to the end of their prayer. Most of the people who are so much troubled at this wandering of the mind are souls filled with self-love who cannot bear the confusion into which it throws them before God and man and who cannot put up with the weariness and fatigue their prayer causes them. They desire to be rewarded by sensible consolation for the mortification they practice.

Do not be either astonished or discouraged at the difficulties you find in prayer. Only be constant and submissive and God will

be pleased with you. Perhaps the lights you have concerning your unworthiness are graces by which God prepares you for the dryness that follows, which is a punishment for past infidelities.

Neither prayer nor recollection call for strain: faults must be avoided, and we must be united to God in heart if we cannot be in mind. Love and do what you will. Nothing is difficult to him who loves, and he only has to make efforts to feel his love. I say feel because it is not even necessary always to express it in prayer. He whom you love sees your heart and that is sufficient. He does not want you to worry about your lack of power to act and to produce affections as easily as you would like. You must submit humbly to his will in this, judging yourself unworthy to raise your thoughts to him. Oh, how happy you would be if you would learn this lesson well and so place your soul in holy liberty and in perfect resignation to God's guidance of you.

The coldness you feel in prayer comes from your too great desire for sensible fervor. You must love God alone with all your heart and be ready to be satisfied with his Cross as the only sign of his love. Take the posture which inconveniences you the least and take care to pray quietly and not to strain yourself.

When you have no consolation in prayer you must endure your impatience to finish it with great humility and stay rather longer than usual so as to mortify yourself.

Despise troublesome thoughts and bear their importunity with resignation. A soul that fears God is not troubled by her fear of committing faults; she goes to her good Master with great liberty of spirit and childlike confidence. When we only desire to please him, we must not fear that he is offended by things that we believe to be well done. Keep yourself as much as possible in the presence of God, humbly tasting the sweetness you will find there: do not fear illusion.

Take great care not to omit your prayer unless you are ill; if you cannot kneel, sit down: it is all the same.

ON RECOLLECTION AND THE PRESENCE OF GOD

You think you would be less distracted if you were away from the circumstances in which God has placed you; I think, on the contrary, that you would have fewer distractions if you accepted things with

more conformity to God's will and if, in your work, you thought of yourself as a servant of Jesus Christ whom he employs as it seems best to him and who is equally content in whatever service is exacted from her. Try to live in your present state as though you were never to leave it; think more of making good use of your crosses than of getting rid of them under pretext of having more liberty with which to serve God.

Exterior employment is no obstacle to solitude of heart when the mind is calm and leaves everything in God's hands; when all that one does for others is done with humility and resignation; when we believe that nothing happens without God's permission; when we obey others as God himself; and when we persuade ourselves that their words, actions, temper, conduct, faults, everything in general and in particular, is ordained by the will of God, who knows all that is to happen and who allows and wills it for our good and his glory….

I have promised with God's grace not to begin any action without remembering that he is witness of it—that he performs it together with me and gives me the means to do it; never to conclude any without the same thought, offering it to him as belonging to him, and in the course of the action whenever the same thought shall occur, to stop for a moment and renew the desire of pleasing him.

God is in the midst of us, or rather we are in the midst of him; wherever we are he sees us and touches us: at prayer, at work, at table, at recreation. We do not think of this; if we did, with what fervor and devotion we should live. Let us often make acts of faith, saying to ourselves: God is looking at me, he is here present.

Keep yourself as much as possible in the presence of God, humbly tasting the sweetness you will find there. Do not fear illusion. Despise troublesome thoughts and bear their importunity with resignation. A soul that fears God is not troubled by her fear of committing faults; she goes to her good Master with great liberty of spirit and with childlike confidence. When we only desire to please him, we must not fear that he is offended by things that we believe to be well done….

ON CONFIDENCE IN GOD

In thinking of what could trouble me at death, that is to say past sin and future punishment, this thought came to me and I have made

it my own; it is a great consolation to me: at death, when my sins known and unknown trouble me, I will take them all and cast them at Our Lord's feet to be consumed in the fire of his mercy. The greater they are, the worse they seem to me, the more willingly will I give them to him because the offering will be all the more worthy of his mercy. It seems to me that I could do nothing more reasonable nor more glorious to God, and because of the idea I have of his goodness, this will not be difficult. I feel greatly drawn to act in this way. As for purgatory, I do not fear it. I am sorry to have deserved it because it has only been by offending God; but since I do deserve it, I am glad to go there to satisfy his justice as rigorously as possible even to the day of judgment. I know the torments are great, but I know that they honor God and that in purgatory I shall be sure of never opposing God's will and of never complaining of the severity of his justice but of loving it and waiting patiently until it is entirely satisfied.

God sought me out when I fled from him; he will not abandon me now that I seek him, or at least do not flee from him any more.

Cultivate thoughts of confidence as long as it pleases God to give them to you; they honor God far more than contrary thoughts. The more wretched we are, the more is God honored by the confidence we have in him. It seems to me that if your confidence were as great as it ought to be, you would not worry about what may happen to you; you would place it all in God's hands, hoping that when he wants something of you he will let you know what it is.

I do not know what you mean by despair: one would think you had never heard of God or of his infinite mercy. Hold such sentiments in horror, and remember that all you have done is nothing in comparison with your want of confidence. Hope on to the end.

Pray that my faults, however grave and frequent, may never make me despair of his goodness. That, in my opinion, would be the greatest evil that could befall anyone. When we can protect ourselves against that evil, there is no other which may not turn to our good and from which we cannot easily draw great advantage….

My God, I am so intimately convinced that thou dost watch over all those who hope in thee, and that we can want for nothing while we expect all from thee, that I am resolved to live without anxiety in the future, casting all my care on thee. "In peace I will sleep and I will rest for thou hast wonderfully established me in hope" (Ps 4:8).

Men may turn against me; sickness may take away my strength and the means of serving thee; I may even lose thy grace by sin, but I will never lose my hope. I will keep it even to the last moment of my life, and all the demons in hell shall try in vain to tear it from me. In peace I will sleep and I will rest.

Others may look for happiness from their riches or their talents; they may rely upon the innocence of their lives, the rigor of their penance, the number of their good works, or the fervor of their prayers; but for me, O Lord, my confidence shall be my confidence itself. For thou hast wonderfully established me in hope.

This confidence has never deceived anyone. No one hath hoped in the Lord and been put to shame. I am sure that I shall be eternally happy, because I hope firmly to be so, and it is from thee, O Lord, that I hope it. In thee, O Lord, have I hoped; I shall not be confounded for ever.

I know that I am frail and changeable; I know the power of temptation against the most firmly based virtues: I have seen the stars of heaven and the pillars of the firmament fall; but not even this can make me fear. As long as I hope, I am safe from every evil, and I am sure of always hoping because I hope for this unchanging hope. For thou, O Lord, hast wonderfully established me in hope.

ON ABANDONMENT TO GOD'S WILL

I am resigned to sanctify myself in the way and by the means God wants me to sanctify myself: without any sensible sweetness if he so wills; by interior trial and by continual struggle against my passions: all this seems the hardest thing in life for me, yet I submit with all my heart and all the more willingly because I know it is the surest way, the way least subject to illusion and the shortest for acquiring perfect purity of heart, great love of God, and great merit.

Submission to God's will frees us from all other yokes. Because as God wills everything that happens to us, and as we will all that God wills, nothing can happen except what we will. Nobody can oblige me to do what I do not want to do because I desire to do all that God wishes....

ON TEMPTATIONS

Be on your guard against the first movements of passion, especially of the love of pleasure and honor. Love of pleasure includes friendships. Unless I am mistaken, you are very impressionable on this point, and it is hardly in your power to control these passions once you have let them enter your heart. First of all they occupy your attention; then they take up your time and application and make you neglect everything else, so that in the end, when they begin to die down, you feel lost, so to speak, so far away from God. You have strayed off the right path and not knowing how to find your way you are in danger of wandering in any direction to which nature calls you. This is why you must fight against the first movements of passion and prevent them if possible by great recollection.

If you fall under the stress of temptation, rise promptly, ask God's pardon, hope in him in spite of your fall, and with all your heart welcome the humiliation and detest the sin. Your uncertainty as to whether you sin or not is another cross that you must also bear with perfect resignation.

Do not torment yourself about getting rid of thoughts that assail you; all the resistance you should make, you do make in humbling yourself under the mighty hand of God's justice which strikes you and in willingly accepting all that it pleases him to send you. You do not consent to these imaginations, but even if you fell under the strength of the temptation, you must rise courageously and hate the sin with all your heart. I do not advise you to confess these things. If you like you can say in general that you have had all sorts of thoughts, some of them very bad in themselves, but that you do not think they were voluntary. Courage, my child, bear what Our Lord sends you with submission and love. Place yourself on his side and be glad to see him chastising you in proportion to your sins. Try to please him by perfect acceptance of the severest measures of his justice, and this by willingly accepting all that happens, all that is humiliating to body and soul, and especially your confusion and repentance at having used a life so badly that you might have employed so usefully. Let your compunction be mingled with a certain pleasure at the sight of yourself: poor, miserable, humbled, deprived of all merit and virtue.

Despise temptations against faith and remember that you believe what so many saints and doctors of the Church have believed. Be

ashamed of your fear of the future. Do you not know that your heavenly Father knows your needs and is all-powerful to provide for them? What do you fear in God's judgments? They are always favorable to souls of good will.

ON PEACE DURING INTERIOR TRIALS

There is no peace except in perfect forgetfulness of self; we must resolve to forget even our spiritual interests, so that we may seek nothing but God's glory.

In meditating on Jesus being taken prisoner in the Garden, two things touched me very much and occupied my thoughts: first the way Christ went forward to meet those who had come to apprehend him: his firmness, courage, and peace just as if his soul had been steeped in calm. His Heart is full of anguish, his human nature is disconcerted, yet amidst it all it turns straight to God the Father; it does not hesitate about taking the way suggested by the highest virtue and self-sacrifice.

One of the greatest gifts the Holy Spirit can bestow on us is to give us peace in time of struggle, calm in the midst of trouble, so that in time of desolation we are armed with so virile a courage that nature, the devil, and even God himself, who seems to be against us, cannot withstand.

The second thing that struck me was Our Lord's dispositions with regard to Judas who betrayed him, to the apostles who abandoned him, and to the priests and others who were the cause of the persecution he suffered. Amidst it all Jesus remained perfectly calm, his love for his disciples and enemies was not altered at all; he grieved over the harm they did themselves, but his own sufferings, far from troubling him, comforted him because he knew they would act as a remedy for the sins of his enemies. His Heart was without bitterness and full of tenderness toward his enemies in spite of their perfidy and of all they made him suffer.

I feel more wretched than I can say: my imagination is foolish and extravagant. All my passions rise in me, hardly a day passes without my being tempted to give way to them. Sometimes real and sometimes imaginary things excite them. By God's grace I suffer all this without consenting to them, yet I am continually troubled by these foolish passions. Self-love hides everywhere; I am very sorry

for myself, but I am not vexed or impatient, what would be the good? I pray that I may know what I ought to do to please and serve God and purify myself; but I am resolved to wait peacefully until he works this miracle in me, for I am convinced he alone can do it.

God is touched by our sorrows and does not allow them to last for ever. He takes pleasure in trying our love for a time because he sees that trials purify us and render us worthy to receive his greater graces; but he considers our weakness, and one would even think that he suffered with us, so anxious is he to relieve us. May he be eternally blessed and praised by all his creatures….

No plans we make for God are ever accomplished without trouble. The more the devil tries to upset them, the more glory for God can we hope for.

The time of desolation and dryness is the best for gaining merit. A soul that seeks God easily bears this state and rises above all that passes before the imagination and in the inferior part of the soul where consolation is mostly to be found. It does not cease to love God, to humble itself, and to accept this state even for ever. There is nothing so dangerous and so much to be suspected as sweetness. Sometimes we attach ourselves to it, and when it is passed we find we have less instead of more fervor in doing good. It is a real consolation for me to think that in the midst of aridity and temptation my heart is free and that it is only by my heart (that is, my will) that I can merit or demerit; that I neither please nor displease God by things which are beyond my control, such as sensible sweetness and importunate thoughts which come into my mind in spite of myself.

ON FERVOR

It is strange how many enemies we have to fight as soon as we make the resolution to become a saint. It would seem that everything is let loose against us: the devil with his snares; the world and its attractions; nature with its resistance to all good desires; the praise of the good; the mockery of the wicked; the suggestions of the tepid. If God visits us, vanity is to be feared. If God withdraws himself, we fall into dejection. Despair may succeed the greatest fervor.

Our friends tempt us because we are accustomed to try and please them; the indifferent because we fear to displease them.

Indiscretion is to be feared in fervor, sensuality in moderation, and self-love everywhere. What is to be done? We have no refuge but in thee, O God. "As we know not what to do, we can only turn our eyes to thee" (2 Chron 20:12).

Above all, as sanctity does not consist in being faithful for a day or a year but in persevering until death, we must use God as a shield which covers us completely because we are attacked from all sides.

God must do everything. All the better; there will be no fear of failure. As for ourselves, we have only to acknowledge our powerlessness and to be fervent and constant in asking for help through the intercession of Mary, to whom God refuses nothing; but even this we cannot do without a great grace, or rather without many graces.

The spirit of God inclines us to fervor, but this fervor is calm and causes no trouble either to ourselves or to others; when it meets with obstacles it knows how to stop and submit to God's will. Its only arms are patience and gentleness. You want to be a martyr; you have a daily martyrdom which you endure unwillingly and without resignation! I see nothing reasonable in such a desire and nothing which looks like an inspiration.

ON FAITH

It is an error to think that faith is so entirely a gift of God that it is not in our power to increase and strengthen it. Some admit that they have very little faith and excuse themselves on this account for their bad lives. Therefore when they are reproached for having so little faith, it makes no more impression upon them than if you told them they had not the gift of miracles. They admire faith in the saints as a purely gratuitous grace; they persuade themselves that they can do nothing to increase their own faith and that the only thing to do is to remain passive until God grants them that favor; they will make no effort to grow in faith, saying that to do so is quite useless. "I know my faith is weak," they say, "but it is no good me trying to rekindle it; I cannot do it. I wish I were like those saints who without any trouble were detached from everything but God. What is the good of me wishing for these things if God does not intend to give them to me?"

We must get rid of these ideas, see why it is our faith is so weak, and acknowledge that it is our own fault and that, whatever we may

say, the truth is that we do not believe because we do not wish to believe.

Of all states to be in, the most wretched is that of a Christian who has but little faith. It would be better to have none because such a one suffers more even in his pleasures than a man of real faith does in the greatest trials: the little he possesses is enough to damn him but not enough to save him. To him faith is like a light which disturbs the rest one finds in darkness and not like the light which brings the joy of day.

ON SPIRITUAL JOY

By God's infinite mercy I feel a liberty of spirit which fills me with great joy. It seems as though nothing could now make me unhappy. The thought that I am serving God fills me with this joy, and I feel that it is of far greater value than all the favor of kings would be. The occupations of the worldly seem very despicable in comparison with work done for God.

I know no greater joy than to discover some weakness in myself that I did not realize before. I often taste this joy and shall always have it when God gives me his light when I am examining my conscience. I firmly believe, and in this I find joy, that God guides those who give themselves up to his leading and that he takes care of the least things that concern them.

We must serve God with our whole heart and do all in our power to prevent ourselves from sinning, but all this is to be done with joy, liberty of heart, and entire confidence, in spite of all the weakness that we feel and the faults we commit.

ON HUMILITY AND SIMPLICITY

Anyone who thinks of what he is, what he has been, and what he can do of himself will find it difficult to be proud. To shatter pride it is enough to remember that the first sign of real virtue is to consider self as nothing at all. We have only to look at Jesus Christ who emptying himself gave all glory to his Father.

If people praise me, it is a mistake, an injustice done to God. People do not think so highly of us as we imagine: they know our faults, even those we do not see ourselves.

If God uses me for great things, he should be praised and thanked for making use of such a poor instrument, but I myself am not on that account any better; it might even happen that I shall be damned after having helped to save others.

We should imitate Our Lady: she acknowledged that God had done great things for her and that all generations would call her blessed, but instead of attributing anything to herself she says: "*Magnificat anima mea Dominum*" (Lk 1:46)….

We have no reason to despise anyone. A humble man sees only his own faults. It is a sign of little virtue to notice the imperfections of others. A person may be imperfect today who in a little while, recognizing this, may rise to great sanctity.

It is very necessary to walk with great circumspection, humility, and distrust of self in directing others and in one's own spiritual life. We must be detached from our natural desire to make great progress; that leads to illusions and may make us indiscreet. Love of humility and abjection and a hidden and obscure life are the great remedies….

Once God is master of a heart, he does not remain idle. If you saw that you always remained the same, it would not be a good sign even though things seemed to be going on fairly well. When the world is entirely satisfied and even in admiration, a soul that is really enlightened from above finds a hundred things still with which to reproach itself and can only wonder at those who admire its virtue. I do not think there are any souls in the world with whom God is less pleased than with those who imagine they have reason to be pleased with themselves. As soon as we begin to see how lovable Our Lord is, we should have very hard hearts if we did not love him greatly; and when we love greatly, we think we have never done enough for him.

You must overcome everything by humility and simplicity. These virtues are not, as some think, the virtues of stupid people: on the contrary, stupid people are not capable of practicing them. We require a great deal of light to know ourselves and much strength to despise all that is not God so as to abandon ourselves to him and to those who govern us in his name. People who are less docile and who count on themselves because they think they know better are really greatly to be pitied. It would be a strange blindness to think there is any knowledge or prudence above the knowledge and pru-

dence of God, so that we could be dispensed from following the teaching of the Gospel.

ON DETACHMENT

The thought of the greatness of God and of the nothingness of all created things has made me understand the foolishness of those who make themselves dependent upon other people and the happiness of those who depend only upon God.

There is only one way of raising ourselves above our own nothingness, and that is to cling to God: "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor 6:17). By doing this we rise above the things of earth and become in some measure like unto God.

There is no peace except in perfect forgetfulness of self. We must make up our mind to forget even our spiritual interests and think only of God's glory.

Thinking of the eternity of God, I imagined it as an immovable rock on the bank of a river past which God sees every creature go by without ever moving himself. Those who are attached to created things appeared to me like people caught in the current, some clinging to a plank, others to the trunk of a tree, others to a mere heap of foam which they mistake for something solid. Everything is washed away by the torrent: friends die, health is shattered, life passes, and we arrive at eternity borne along by these passing props and plunge into it as we do into a sea which we cannot prevent ourselves from entering and where we perish.

Then we see how imprudent we have been not to attach ourselves to the immovable and eternal Rock; we would like to go back, but the waves have carried us on too far; we cannot return but must necessarily perish with all perishable things.

On the other hand, a man who clings to God sees the peril and loss of others without fear for himself; whatever happens he stands upon the rock. God cannot forsake him; he has clung to him alone and feels himself always upheld by the Eternal. Adversity comes and shows him what a good choice he has made. Such a man always possesses God; the death of his relations and friends, separation from all who esteem and favor him, distance, change of employment or of dwelling, age, sickness, or death, none of these things separate him from God. He is always happy and says in peace and joy of

heart: "It is good for me to hold fast unto my God: to put my hope in the Lord God" (Ps 73:28).

ON VANITY AND VAINGLORY

I have resolved never to hesitate when an opportunity presents itself of humbling myself and of letting people see me as I am and know me as I have been. This will not be difficult if God gives me the grace to remember that the less we are esteemed by men, the more we are esteemed by God, and it is he alone I desire to please.

I have noticed that when we are very careful to mortify and humble ourselves in everything, we sometimes become depressed and less ready to serve God. This is a temptation which we can conquer by thinking that God only asks these things of us through love. We should aim at humbling ourselves to please God as a good friend tries to please his friend, or a son his father. There must be no constraint but a holy liberty of spirit, for this liberty is one of the best signs of true love. It is easy to do things which we know will please one whom we love.

Do you want to know what you gain from those you try to please? Consider what they gain from you. You are not the only one thirsting for vainglory: nearly everyone runs after the same phantom. Confess that if you had only obtained as much esteem from those around you as you have given them, it would not be worthwhile taking all the trouble you do take. You can be very sure that you certainly do not receive more; it is much if you hold in the esteem of others the same place that they hold in yours.

Beware of vanity. Remembrance of the past is a good antidote. Nothing is more to be feared in the spiritual life than what is extraordinary. Everything that inclines you to humility and hatred of self is good.

ON MORTIFICATION

I can still sin! Wretched condition of this life! Danger which makes life bitter to all those who love God and who know the value of grace! Yet penance and mortification which can prevent this misery make life sweet! Mortification tames the flesh, weakens inclinations

to evil, cuts down occasions of sin, removes enticements, and so on: O holy penance!

Try to make yourself worthy of God's favors by always seeking to refuse nature what it demands both interiorly and exteriorly. Do not be self-willed, but try on the contrary always to do what others wish rather than what you yourself wish, even in indifferent things. Thus you will find that Our Lord is close to you and that your hardness of heart will melt away.

Be on your guard against illusions concerning mortification. Be more obedient on this point than on others. Sacrifice to God your desire for austerities, and only do penances which cannot hurt your health: such as interior mortifications.

ON THE DUTIES OF OUR STATE OF LIFE

The good order of things in the world depends upon the fidelity with which each one performs the duties of his state of life. All disorder originates in negligence upon this point. What a grand thing it would be if everyone acquitted himself of his duties! It is, perhaps, the thing that is most neglected even among pious people, indeed probably more often among those than among others. Yet people do not accuse themselves of it. Charles V said to his confessor: "I accuse myself of the sins of Charles, not of those of the Emperor."

More souls are lost for this reason than for any other. Half are damned for not having performed the duties of their state, the other half because others have neglected their duties with regard to them. The duties of one's state take precedence of private duties: for instance, a magistrate must not consider relationship or friendship. Public good must prevail over private good. Jesus Christ, who came into this world to teach us and save us, did not think of his Mother when it was a question of his office as Redeemer: he looked upon others only in so far as they concerned this work of Redemption. Those who cooperated with him are his brothers; those to whom his Precious Blood gives new life are his children; his Mother is she who is perfectly submissive to the will of his Father.

A man who neglects the duties of his state is a discordant voice in the harmony of the world, no matter what else he does. Those who are faithful to all other duties often neglect these; those who do not omit them perform them negligently or through human motives and self-interest. This is not fulfilling their duty.

In choosing a state of life, the human advantages are considered but not the duties. It is impossible to neglect these duties without injuring others, and as God has their interests at heart even more than his own, such neglect is very dangerous.

People would consider it strange for a man to become a religious without knowing to what he was going to bind himself. But what of a secular who has been married for twenty years, or who has held some responsible post in his profession, without knowing the duties these states of life entail.

Sins of omission on this point are easily committed. They are hardly noticed, and consequently reparation is rarely made for them. These are sins that are committed by doing nothing; sins that do not consist in bad actions but which are often the consequence of some good work.

By neglecting your duties, you condemn both yourself and others to punishment: others because you do not teach them their duty and make them fulfill it; and yourself because you do not fulfill your own. The less wicked will be damned for what they have done; the most wicked for what they have omitted to do.

ON THE WORLD

What would you say if I asked you if you can live in the world without offending God? When the dangers are put before you of certain kinds of talk, of certain ways of acting, and of backbiting your neighbor, you answer that you cannot help it, that otherwise you would have to be dumb in society, that people talk of nothing else, that you would have to have a heart of bronze to resist all temptations in the midst of a world which breeds them, and that in fact you would have to live like a hermit if you want to escape them.

All this is frequently said in excuse by those who think it justifies them.

It is impossible to frequent the world without offending God, or at any rate without exposing oneself to the danger of offending him: therefore you must renounce the world.

Every Christian has renounced the world and its pomps at baptism. This vow does not oblige you to live like a hermit, but it certainly obliges you to something. It is not an empty promise.

In the world there is an inner world: a second world which every Christian must avoid, for it knows not God and the devil is its ruler. It was of this world that Jesus Christ said: "I pray not for the world" (Jn 17:9). In this world are found those who live solely for vanity and pleasure; it is where the one aim is to please and flatter, where there is hardly anything that is innocent and good, and where people glory in all that ought to make us ashamed.

How foolish to bother about a world full of such unreasonable people. One is proud of a name which he dishonors by a bad life; another prides herself on a dress which she owes to the skill of a dressmaker and which not merely covers a body made of dust but a corrupt soul; another gives up rest and peace to acquire a fortune he does not know how to use; others get furious over things of no importance or things which do not concern them. There is no charity in this world: men are left to die of hunger, while horses and dogs are fed with food that is refused to those who are created in God's image.

ON PRAYER

What a mistake it is to be tormented and sad because you have no light or consolation in prayer, to strain your head seeking after sensible devotion at Holy Communion, and to neglect little faults, small observances, and occasions for mortifying your own will and desires, for conquering your human respect and for procuring your own humiliation before others! If we were reasonable, we should think only of these last and not make the slightest effort to succeed according to our own ideas; because, as a matter of fact, we never succeed better than when we humbly endure dryness and the privation of this false fervor that nature so loves and that the real love of God despises and even rejects as far as it is able.

If you were ravished in ecstasy twenty-four times a day and I had twenty-four distractions in saying a Hail Mary, but if I were as humble and mortified as you, I would not change my involuntary distractions for all your ecstasies which have no merit. In a word: there is no devotion without mortification. You must always do violence to yourself, especially interiorly. Never allow nature to be mistress, nor your heart to be attached to anything, no matter what it may be; and then I would canonize you and not even ask you how you prayed.

If you only pray when you are obliged or because you are obliged, you will never succeed in prayer, nor will you ever love it, nor ever take pleasure in intimate converse with God.

A soul which exempts herself from prayer when ill or upset through fear of harming herself, does not know how to pray; for, far from harming, it strengthens both mind and heart, it keeps the soul in peace and leaves behind it a consolation which relieves all trouble.

It is neither vows nor promises which should attract you to this holy exercise but the happiness that a faithful soul finds in approaching to her God. I pray that the Holy Spirit may give you the gift of prayer: it is the hidden treasure of the Gospel; but to possess it we must detach ourselves from everything that we may enjoy God and merit his caresses.

ON PEACE OF SOUL

From the moment one has a real desire of giving oneself entirely to God, one enjoys great peace. I am sure that which you have found by Our Lord's mercy is the result of the sincere and fervent will which he has given you to serve him and belong to him without reserve. You would indeed be miserable if there were anything in the world that could trouble you, for there is nothing that can prevent you from becoming a saint, in fact everything may help you to become one. There is nothing, not even our sins, from which we may not gain advantage for our sanctification, through the knowledge they give us of ourselves and by the renewal of fervor with which they inspire us. This being so, I do not see what could happen that could prevent you gaining profit if only you have enough faith to realize that nothing happens to you except by God's permission and enough submission to conform yourself to his will. If ever you have a fit of sadness or trouble, remember that it is because you are still attached to life, or health, or some comfort, or person, or thing that you ought to forget and despise that you may desire Jesus Christ only. Every time your heart feels troubled, be sure that it is caused by some unmortified passion and that it is a fruit of self-love which is not yet dead. Thinking this, throw yourself at the feet of Jesus crucified, and say: My Savior, do I still desire something which is not thee? Art thou not sufficient for me, shall I not love thee

alone and be content to be loved only by thee? What have I come to seek, O my God, if not thee? Can I not keep thee? What does it matter what they say of me, or if I am loved or despised, well or ill, occupied with this work or with that, placed with these people or with others? Provided that I am with thee, and thou with me, I am content.

ON GENEROSITY IN GOD'S SERVICE

Many reasons convince me that I must aim at it (generosity) with all my strength. First, God has loved me too well for me to spare myself henceforth in his service: the mere thought of doing so horrifies me. What! not belong to God wholly after his mercy toward me, or reserve something for myself after all that I have received from him? Never will my heart consent to act thus.

Secondly, when I see of how little account I am, and what it is I can do for God's glory by employing myself entirely in his service, I am ashamed at the mere thought of depriving him of anything.

Thirdly, there would be no safety for me in any half-measures: I know myself, and I should soon fall into a bad extreme.

Fourthly, only those who have given themselves to God unreservedly can expect to die calmly.

Fifthly, they alone lead a peaceful and tranquil life.

Sixthly, in order to do much for God, one must be completely his. However little you keep back, you will be unfit to do great things for others.

Seventhly, in this state one maintains a lively faith and a firm hope, one asks God confidently and one obtains infallibly.

ON PUSILLANIMITY

I think you are somewhat slow and pusillanimous. If you are, you will recognize it by these marks: if you are tempted to postpone what you are obliged to do or what you have resolved to do; if you leave off something good that you have begun; if you often change your methods and practices of devotion; if you imagine that things are beyond you and only fit for great saints; if you omit to do something from human respect, through fear of appearing better than

you are, fear of importuning superiors, fear lest it should seem you were condemning others, fear of mortifying others; if you are not absolutely sincere with those to whom you ought to disclose your conscience; if you persuade yourself to be content with a mediocre fervor; if you allow yourself to think that anything in obedience is small, that a word does not count, that you can put off obeying instantly ... and so on.

The remedy is not to pardon oneself anything; not to listen to any repugnance; to try always to conquer self and to be quite convinced that one great reason for doing a thing is because you find difficulty in it, and for not doing it because you are inclined to do it, always supposing that you do nothing against obedience.

ON CHRIST OUR FRIEND ABOVE ALL

Jesus, thou art my only true and real friend. Thou dost share all my sorrows and takest them upon thyself, knowing how to turn them to my good. Thou dost listen to me kindly when I tell thee of my difficulties, and thou never failest to lighten them. Wherever I go I always find thee; thou dost never leave me, and if I am obliged to go away, I find thee waiting for me.

Thou art never weary of listening to me, and thou dost never cease to do me good. I am sure of being loved if I love thee. Thou hast no need of me or of my goods, and thou dost not deprive thyself by giving me of thy riches. However wretched I am, no one nobler or more clever or even more holy can rob me of thy friendship; and death which separates us from all other friends will only unite me to thee. All the accidents of age or of fortune will never detach thee from me; on the contrary, I shall never enjoy thee more fully and thou wilt never be so close to me as when everything goes against me. Thou dost bear with my defects with tender patience; even my infidelities and ingratitude do not wound thee in such a way that thou art not always ready to return to me when I call upon thee.

Jesus is in the midst of us in the Blessed Sacrament. What a consolation to live in the same house where he dwells! Yet does it not often seem as though we ignored this happiness? Do we often visit him? Do we go to him in our needs and consult him in our plans? Do we bring him our little sorrows instead of talking about them

and complaining and murmuring to others? "There hath stood one in the midst of you whom you know not" (Jn 1:26).

You love the king although you have never seen him and probably never will see him, although he has no affection for you and does not even know you, and if he did know you he would take no notice of you. Yet we find it hard to love God, whom we do not see, it is true, but whom we shall see throughout eternity and who sees us, and loves us, and does us good, and who knows our most secret thoughts! You say you love the king because he is your master. But God is much more than this: he is our Creator, our Father.

I feel myself moved to imitate the simplicity of God in my affections, loving him only, cherishing no other love but this, which is easy since I find in God all that I can love elsewhere.

But my friends: they love me and I love them. Thou seest this and I feel it, O my God, who art alone good, alone lovable. Must I sacrifice these to thee since thou desirest to have me entirely? I will make this sacrifice with my whole heart, since thou dost forbid me to share my friendship with any creature. Accept this painful sacrifice, but in exchange, my divine Savior, be thou their friend. As thou wilt take their place with me, take my place with them. I will remind thee of them daily in my prayers, and of what thou owest them in me in promising to be my substitute. Jesus, be thou their friend, their sole and real friend! Jesus, be my friend, since thou commandest me to be thine.

As Jesus Christ possesses your whole heart, he wishes also to have all your anxieties and all your thoughts. Think of him and trust in his goodness for all the rest. You will see that he will make all things right when you think only of his interests. Reflect very specially on this advice: it contains a great treasure. Experience will show you that I am not deceiving you.

Do not let your peace depend upon what is outside you; you will see that Our Lord will supply for everything when you are satisfied with him alone, and you will find more in him than in all creatures together. Beware of thinking that you have need of anyone whom God withdraws from you. He is too faithful to take away from you any help that he sees necessary for you, so that you may reach the perfection he expects from you.

My Savior, do I still desire something which is not thee? Art thou not sufficient for me, shall I not love thee alone and be content to be loved only by thee! What have I come here to seek, O my God, if it be not thee? What does it matter what they say of me, or if I am

loved or despised, well or ill, occupied with this work or with that, placed with these people or with those? Provided that I am with thee, and thou with me, I am content.

The Spiritual Direction of Saint Claude de la Colombière

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