

THE FLOWER OF THE FIELD

*I am the flower of the field,
and the lily of the valleys...*

Canticle of Canticles ii, 1.

THESE words from the Canticle of Canticles are generally applied by theologians to Our Lady, whom the Litany of Loretto also calls the *Mystical Rose*. In choosing these words, our first wish is to place under Mary's patronage such considerations as we hope to submit to you on the subject of spiritual simplicity and abandonment of the soul to divine Providence. These are the very virtues that we find exemplified in that chapter of St Matthew, where Our Lord uses the words: *Consider the lilies of the field;* and who, indeed, more than Our Lady has given us such a perfect example of them? Before anything else, therefore, I would ask her to obtain for you all the graces of which she has so worthily merited to be the dispensatrix, through her virginal purity and her perfect abandonment to the divine Will.

Simplicity is the sister of purity and not less of poverty; since it is the treasure from which we draw the very means for these virtues. A simple soul does not waste time on half-measures; it goes straight to the end in everything, and with one movement—one bound, as it were—arrives at the very heart of God.

But this does not mean that we are to despise the gifts of grace, nor for that matter any of the aids we need so badly during our earthly pilgrimage. For these signs come from God himself, and are the means by which we shall find him and serve him in this life. More than that, he has given us his Son, whom he called the Way and the Mediator, for it is through him, indeed, that salvation comes to us, and by him alone that we shall reach our goal.

The fulness of Christ, in whom as St Paul says are united all things, draws souls to him by countless different ways. The ineffable richness of divine Being cannot but manifest itself under divers aspects. Apart from the natural plane, we can extend our legitimate devotions to the various aspects of Our Lord's Person: to Our Lady's part in mirroring the light of Christ and drawing us to him; and equally to the sacramental and liturgical aids that the Church spreads before us so lavishly. These ways or manifestations of divine Providence are numberless and varied, by reason of the very simplicity of divine grace, and of our imperfect capacity for receiving it.

These powerful and effective signs, however, exist for our sakes, as means. They invite us to seek farther with eager zeal the very centre towards which they beckon us. Thus devotion to the Incarnate Word leads us to worship him in spirit; his sacred humanity to his divinity. It is precisely for the contemplation of this latter that the whole work of redemption and grace is directed.

The Prayer of Love and Silence from A Carthusian

Our senses content themselves with appearances, for they are external faculties made for the mere surface of things. But our intellect (as the word indicates) seeks to penetrate whatever object is put before it, that it may reach the reality behind these appearances. The German mystics, however, seem to find beyond the intellect a faculty reserved for God alone, and dominantly impatient of all intermediary means. Reason—so they tell us—makes use of concepts and words, but what makes a man spiritual is the craving for *contact*. Hungry for solitude, hungry for God alone, this faculty forces its very way beyond all bounds and measures, beyond names and images, that it may find the Essence Itself, and rest quietly therein alone.

It would be foolish and unwise to pretend to the higher forms of the spiritual life and neglect the ordinary ascetical means necessary for each step of the way, or not make wise and prudent use of the resources placed at our disposal by the Church for the help and sanctification of the faithful. But no school of spiritual thought can be reproached for aiming too high, since our inward vision is made for pure light, and the soul only truly breathes on the heights. In everything it is true wisdom to seek the source. So true is this as a general principle that it can be applied to everything. Drink at the source of the fountain if you would taste in all their purity the gifts of both earth and heaven. If this be true of the water we drink with our lips; if it be true in the realms of art and science, it is even more so in the domain of grace. Seek the source of life within you; waste no time in getting there, and then take full measure of joy in its limpid purity.

You remember Our Lord's promise: *He that believeth in me, as the Scripture saith: out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*² It is only by slaking our thirst at the heart of Jesus that we can give to others what their souls need, and thus practise true charity towards them. Daily charity, especially among religious, consists for the most part in the giving of invisible things—the fruits of our prayers; silent and unexpressed sympathy, an understanding of and respect for those with whom we live. In order to understand the life of a religious it is of the utmost importance that we ourselves should not be victims of any sort of narrowness, but have on the contrary a lofty and simple spirituality. So long as we keep close to Our Lord, if we love him in spirit and in truth, we shall recognize and welcome all forms that that love may take. The intellect, guided by charity, seeks ever the centre and the height: our inward vision loves the summits, with their large and comprehensive view. It is there that one understands; there that one loves.

Go then, straight to the heart of Jesus: to that innermost mystery that that heart reveals; learning from God himself all powerful how to love our brethren with a pure respect for the being that God has given them, and for the many graces with which he has adorned them through his own sovereign liberty.

Now supernatural generosity is a form of justice. The soul is compatible to a balance, exact and at the same time free, since it rests on a single point, and is poised in the hand of God. All freedom comes from peace in the depths of the soul. All goodness to be effective is the present

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and spontaneous outcome of a contemplative grace. No true consolation can be given by one soul to another unless it proceeds from a soul serene, and at rest in the peace of God.

That peace, however, is not to be found without much labour and suffering. No soul is set free until it has had the courage to break with its attachments. God takes possession of a soul in the measure in which it is freed—by patient and honest efforts—from created things. But in this daily task of ascetical detachment, we are not alone; at our hand are divine aids—the very course of events as ordered by creative Wisdom. Everything that claims our attachment is, when all is said and done, passing and doomed to die. The chains with which we bind ourselves are very fragile, and once our will is set in order by our clinging to the divine Will, everything conspires to set us free.

No doubt it will be necessary at times to take the initiative of personal effort, but the first task, especially in the religious life, is to make use of those very things that constrain us—that hem us in: the very trials and constraints which God permits to encumber our path. Keep silent: smile quietly when a treasured trifle is taken from you and causes you pain. When things go of themselves, let them go—they leave you God. They live only to die; they are given only to be taken away again, that we may be left free. A religious who welcomes ungrudgingly the mortifications that each day brings is already travelling fast on the way of interior peace, and thus of union with God. It is in this sense that the abandonment recommended by the Gospel is so true. The flower of the field labours not, neither does it spin:³ yet the whole of nature conspires together to fulfil the designs of God in its regard. Still more does that same nature seek to bring to perfection God's designs on us. Man, alas! has the power to thwart that growth—not so, the rose. What makes the soul elect of God is its unconditional surrender to the work of divine grace: what sanctifies it is its immediate *Amen*, and the purity and reality of its consent.

Rest assured there never will be a day which will not bring its contradictions, its suffering, its salutary check. Try to find in these things the will of the Father, recognizing gratefully in them their liberating action. With a heart set free every day, united to God in a manner closer and more intimate and interior, learn to love your neighbour by the same act by which you love God.

You have the example of Mary...it is her abundant blessing that I wish you in conclusion.

1 Matthew vi, 28.

2 John vii, 38.

3 cf. Matthew vi, 28.