

THE SCHOOL
OF CHRISTIAN
PERFECTION

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THE SCHOOL
OF CHRISTIAN
PERFECTION

St. Alphonsus Liguori

Translated by
Cornelius J. Warren

TAN Books
Gastonia, North Carolina

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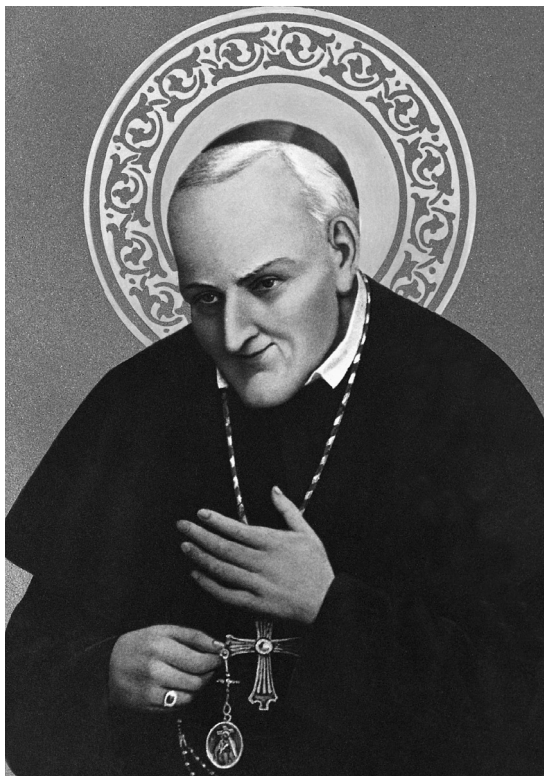
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St. Alphonsus Liguori
1696–1787
Bishop, Founder of the Redemptorists,
and Doctor of the Church

ST. ALPHONSUS LIGUORI

Saint Alphonsus Mary de Liguori was born in 1696 near Naples, Italy, to a noble Neopolitan family. He was the son of a captain of the royal galleys. St. Alphonsus received a doctorate in both canon and civil law at the age of sixteen, and practiced law very successfully for eight years. But he abandoned the practice of law to become a priest, being ordained in 1726.

In 1732 St. Alphonsus founded the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, the Redemptorists. This order was established in the face of huge difficulties; it was even divided by a schism at the time of St. Alphonsus' death. The Redemptorists have become famous for giving "missions" to enkindle and rejuvenate souls with true religious fervor.

In 1762 St. Alphonsus was obliged to become Bishop of St. Agatha. As bishop he reformed his small but slack diocese, but chronic ill health forced him to retire and he devoted himself anew to ascetical and moral theology. His experience in a lay profession, combined with natural common sense and sweetness of disposition, helped much to make him the best known of all moral theologians.

St. Alphonsus wrote numerous books, including his *Moral Theology*; of his many excellent devotional works, the masterpiece entitled *The Glories of Mary* is the most famous. He also spent much time combating anticlericalism and the heresy of Jansenism, and he was involved in several controversies regarding probabilism.

During the last years of his life St. Alphonsus suffered from ill health, especially from rheumatism which left him partially paralyzed. He experienced the dark night of the soul for several years toward the end of his life, but this period of suffering was followed by a period of peace and light during which he experienced visions and ecstasies, performed miracles, and made prophecies that later came true.

St. Alphonsus died in 1787, within two months of his 91st birthday. He was canonized in 1839, and in 1871 Pope Pius IX declared him a Doctor of the

Church. His body rests in the church of his fathers at Pagani di Nocera.

PREFACE

In the ascetical writings of the holy Bishop and Doctor of the Church, St. Alphonsus de Ligouri, there is a characteristic charm and an irresistible attraction. Whoever reads them with the proper dispositions will discover in them an indefinable something that appeals to the heart and stirs it to its very depths. We imagine we see the loving personality of the holy Bishop before us, and hear the words of eternal life from his very lips. According to a beautiful legend, the visitor at the shrine of St. John at Ephesus can hear the pulsations of the Saint's heart enclosed in the tomb. The heart of Alphonsus still throbs in his ascetical writings, where the whole being of the Saint seems enshrined. Little wonder therefore that the reverence and love entertained towards him in life should have passed to

his edifying works, the reflex of his very self. There are few ascetical writers more widely known and more sincerely loved than St. Alphonsus.

The present volume is made up of choice selections from the various ascetical writings of the Saint. The order of virtues considered is that followed by the spiritual sons of St. Alphonsus in the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. For each month of the year is assigned a particular virtue to which they are to devote their especial attention. This is a practice highly recommended by the masters of the spiritual life, and is fraught with the happiest results. It is hoped that the faithful will derive spiritual profit and pleasure from this course in "The School of Christian Perfection."

C. J. W.

CHAPTER I

FAITH

“I am the light of the world; he that followeth me, walketh not in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”—John 8:12

Faith is a divinely infused virtue by which man believes, on God’s authority, what God has revealed and teaches through His Holy Church. St. Paul calls faith “the substance of things to be hoped for, and the evidence of things that appear not.” (Heb. 11:1). Faith is indeed “the substance of things to be hoped for,” that is to say, the foundation of our hope, for without faith, hope could not exist. Faith is likewise an evidence of the unseen, “the evidence of things that appear not.”

It is quite true that there is a bright and a dark side to the practice of holy faith. Its bright side is the marks of credibility that assure us beyond shadow of

doubt that our faith is the true and only faith. Its dark side is the truths themselves which are veiled from our eyes. The proofs for the truth of our holy faith are so clear that, as Pico of Mirandola says, a man must be wholly bereft of reason to refuse them credence. "Thy testimonies, O Lord, are exceedingly credible," says the Psalmist. (Ps. 92:5). Consequently, unbelievers have no excuse for refusing to submit their reason to the teachings of our holy faith. "He who believes not, is already condemned," says our Divine Saviour. On the other hand, God has willed that the objects of our belief should remain obscure in order that, by faith, we may merit a reward. From what has been said, it follows that faith gives us knowledge which surpasses in dignity all scientific truths. "Behold," exclaims Job, "how great is our God; he exceedeth all our knowledge." (Job 36:26).

Our holy faith is a treasure of unspeakable value, for in it we possess first of all a divine light which serves to guide us safely on the way to Heaven. That which we perceive with our senses or comprehend with our reason may and often does lead us astray. The truths of faith, on the contrary, are revealed by God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived. In the second place, faith furnishes us with an excellent means of showing our reverence and respect for God.

It is no more than right that we subject to God our will by the observance of His holy law, and our reason by believing His infallible word. Were man to believe only that which he sees and understands, would he be giving honor to God thereby? Assuredly not. But we undoubtedly give honor to God when we accept as certain what God has revealed, though we may neither see nor comprehend it, and believe not because we understand but simply because God has revealed it. In the third place, faith supplies us with an abundant source of merit. If the truths proposed for our acceptance were so clear and comprehensible that we could not reasonably refuse our assent, their acceptance would in no way be meritorious, for the merit of faith consists in this, that we accept and believe the truths proposed, freely and without constraint. St. Gregory expresses this truth in the following words: "Faith loses its merit when human reason furnishes a proof." (Hom. 26). Our Blessed Saviour commends those who accept the truths of faith without being able to perceive or comprehend them: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed." (John 20:29).

OUR SHIELD AND PROTECTION

Faith is, moreover, a shield of protection against the enemies of our salvation. St. John says: "This is the victory which overcometh the world, our faith." (1 John 5:4). God has created us simply to labor at our souls' salvation and to become holy. "This is the will of God, your sanctification," says the Apostle. (1 Thess. 4:3). To this end all our efforts must be directed, and faith puts us in a position to overcome all the obstacles which the world opposes to the realization of our object, obstacles such as human respect, the inordinate desires of the flesh, in a word, all the temptations of Hell. The devil is very powerful, no doubt, and his temptations are calculated to inspire us with fear and dread. But the man of faith triumphs over all his attacks. "The devil," says St. Peter (1 Peter 5:8–9), "as a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour. Whom resist ye, strong in faith." St. Paul writes in a similar strain: "In all things taking the shield of faith, wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one." (Eph. 6:16). As a shield protects the body from the arrows of an enemy, so faith defends the soul against the assaults of Hell.

“My just man liveth by faith,” says Holy Scripture (Heb. 10:38); that is to say, by means of faith, he sustains himself in the life of grace. When faith grows weak, virtue is in danger; when faith is lost, virtue departs with it. Accordingly, when we are assailed by a temptation to pride or sensuality or any other vice, for self-defense we must instantly arm ourselves with the principles of holy faith. We must direct the eye of our soul to the presence of God or reflect on the sad consequences that follow in the wake of sin, or again on the account we shall have to render on judgment day, and the punishment that awaits the sinner in eternity. Above all we must recall to mind that teaching of holy faith which says that whoever has recourse to God in temptation will be victorious. “I will call upon the Lord,” says David, “and I shall be saved from my enemies.” (Ps. 17:4).

In fine, faith preserves our peace of heart amid the trials and tribulations that beset us, for in all the crosses of life, faith gives us the assurance that patience and resignation will merit eternal joy. St. Peter the Apostle has said: “If you believe, you shall rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorified, receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” (1 Peter 1:8–9).

Let us therefore thank God from the bottom of our hearts for having bestowed upon us the inestimable gift of faith. St. Francis de Sales once said: "O God, exceeding great and numerous are the benefits which Thou hast given me! But how shall I ever be able to thank Thee for having bestowed on me the light of holy faith?" And again: "The dignity of our holy faith is so great that I would gladly lay down my life for it." St. Teresa found such consolation in the thought that she belonged to the Holy Catholic Church that at the hour of her death she continued to exclaim: "I am a child of Holy Church, a child of Holy Church." Let us thank God unceasingly for this wonderful grace and be ever mindful of the words of the Psalmist: "He hath not done in like manner to every nation." (Ps. 147:20).

AN OFFERING OF THE INTELLECT

God desires us to use our intellect to know with certainty that it is He who has spoken, not to comprehend all that He asks us to believe.

Reason takes us, as it were, by the hand and leads us into the sanctuary of faith, but itself remains standing at the threshold. Once we are convinced that the truths we are asked to believe really come from God, we are

obliged to submit our reason and, on the strength of God's word, to accept as certain the truths proposed, though we may not or cannot understand them. This is that humble simplicity so characteristic of the child, and of which St. Peter speaks when he says: "As newborn babes, desire the rational milk without guile, that thereby you may grow unto salvation." (1 Peter 2:2).

FAITH NOT OPPOSED TO REASON

The mysteries of holy faith are not in opposition to reason, but they transcend its power of comprehension; therefore the futility of trying to fathom them. "Faith," says St. Augustine, "is characteristic not of the proud but of the humble." He who is truly humble never finds it hard to believe. St. Teresa said: "The devil has never succeeded in tempting me against faith. It even seems to me that the less I can comprehend the truths of faith, the more readily I give them my assent."

If you are tempted by the evil spirit against some truth of our holy faith do not stop to consider the difficulties suggested by the devil, but make an act of faith without delay and protest before God your willingness to lay down your very life for the truths of your holy faith. St. Louis, King of France, relates that a learned

theologian was once assailed with violent temptations regarding the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. He had recourse to the Bishop of Paris, and made known to him his dreadful anxiety; at the same time he begged him with tears to assist him. The Bishop simply asked him if there was anything on earth that could induce him to deny his faith. The theologian protested that nothing could ever cause him to commit so great a crime; whereupon the Bishop quieted him with the assurance that great good would result from the patient endurance of his temptations.

On one occasion when St. Francis de Sales was very ill, he was grievously tormented with doubts in regard to the Blessed Eucharist. Never for a moment did he stop to argue with the devil, but he fought and overcame him with the holy Name of Jesus. When similarly tempted, in all humility, surrender your reason a willing captive; subject yourself to the teachings of Holy Church and strike the tempter with his own weapons, by protesting with zeal and fervor that you are ready to die a thousand times for your holy faith. By acting in this way, you render what Satan intended for your harm an abundant source of merit. Often turn to our Divine Redeemer and address Him in the words of the Apostles: "Lord, increase our faith." (Luke 17:5).

From what we have already seen it is evident that with regard to those truths that surpass our power of comprehension we must subject our reason, and in the words of St. Paul, “bring into captivity our understanding unto the obedience of Christ.” (2 Cor. 10:5).

This does not, of course, prevent us from considering the motives that make for the credibility of our holy religion. On the contrary, God wishes us to use our natural powers of intellect to be convinced of the reasonableness of our faith. With this conviction and the assistance of God’s grace we shall be more firm in our adherence to all that Holy Church proposes to our belief. As we have said above, the credibility of our holy religion is so clearly established by solid and trustworthy evidences that any man in his sound senses must needs acknowledge them worthy of credence. We shall briefly consider some of these proofs.

PROOFS OF FAITH

In the first place, the truth of our holy faith is loudly proclaimed by the prophecies of Holy Scripture. These prophecies were uttered hundreds of years ago, and in later years fulfilled to the letter. Thus, for example, the death of our Saviour was foretold by several

prophets and the time and circumstances accompanying it minutely described. It was prophesied that the Jews, in punishment for the deicide, would be driven from the temple and the holy land, and hardened and obstinate in sin would be dispersed throughout the world; this prophecy, we know, was literally fulfilled. It was prophesied that after the death of Christ the veneration of heathen deities would give way to the worship of the true God. The event has verified the prediction, for the Apostles of Our Lord, in spite of the innumerable obstacles thrown in their way and armed with no weapons save the cross of Christ, have conquered the world and brought it a captive to faith in the living God.

In the second place, the truth of our holy faith is evident from the miracles which were wrought by our Lord, by His Apostles and the Saints of the Catholic Church as a sanction of her holy teaching. Miracles are beyond the powers of nature. They can happen only by the power of God, to whom all creation is subject. Accordingly, if a religion has real miracles to show in confirmation of her doctrine, that religion must be divine, for it is impossible for God to sanction and promote a false religion by the performance of genuine miracles.

Can the Jews, the heathens, the Mohammedans or the heretics point to a single miracle wrought in favor of their religious tenets? They have no doubt made efforts in the past to deceive the people by trickery and the seemingly miraculous; the deception was soon discovered. But the miracles which God has worked through His servants in every age of the Catholic Church are simply innumerable. In the Catholic Church alone have the words of our Blessed Lord been fulfilled: "Amen, amen I say to you, he that believeth in me, the works that I do he also shall do; and greater than these shall he do." (John 14:12).

Without doubt, in the early days of the Church miracles were more numerous than they are today, since they were necessary for the spread of the Faith. But still they have never been wanting in any age, and they have constantly aided in the conversion of heathen and infidel nations. Numberless miracles were performed, for example, by a St. Francis Xavier, a St. Louis Bertrand, and other holy missionaries in India. Were one to call into question the extraordinary facts recorded in the annals of Church history and in the lives of the Saints, I would simply ask him: By what right do you refuse to believe such men as St. Basil, St. Jerome, St. Gregory

and others when you willingly accept what a Tacitus, a Suetonius, or a Pliny has said?

Moreover, God has been pleased to allow certain miracles to go on uninterruptedly in the Church as a continual reproach to the unbelief of the wicked. Recall to mind the famous miracle of the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius at Naples. This blood, which usually is found in a hardened, coagulated condition, liquifies several times a year when brought near the head of the Saint. This has been attested by thousands of eyewitnesses. Infidels have tried in vain to find natural explanations for the phenomenon; but the miracle continues to baffle their efforts and to humble their pride.

A third proof for the truth of our holy faith is furnished by the courage and constancy of the martyrs, and this proof is more convincing even than that of miracles. Fifteen Roman emperors in succession used every means in their power to destroy the Christian faith from the face of the earth. Under the reign of Diocletian, who inaugurated the ninth persecution, 17,000 Christians were executed within a single month, not to speak of the thousands who were banished from the country.

According to the account of Genebrard, 11,000,000 martyrs were put to death during the ten great persecutions. If these were gathered within the space of one year, there would be 30,000 martyrs for each day. Now in spite of the fact that these confessors of Christ were subjected to every imaginable torture, such as the tearing of the flesh with iron hooks, roasting their bodies on a gridiron, and burning them with lighted torches, the number of those who were willing and anxious to die for their holy faith was never diminished but seemed always on the increase.

Tiberius, the governor of Palestine, wrote to the Emperor Trajan that there were so many Christians who desired to die as martyrs that it was impossible to execute them all. Hereupon Trajan published an edict in which he commanded the Christians to be left in peace for the future. Now I ask: If the Faith of these valiant martyrs, which is the same that our Holy Church professes today, were not the True Faith of Christ, and had not God assisted them to witness to that Faith with their very blood, would they ever have been able to endure those frightful torments and to deliver themselves up freely and joyfully to a cruel death? Have there been any martyrs in the sects that fell away from the Catholic Church? Have they perhaps a St. Lawrence

who offered his roasted limbs to the cruel tyrant for a banquet? Have they perhaps a St. Marcellus or Marcellinus whose feet were pierced with nails; when urged to free themselves from torture by renouncing their holy faith, they replied: "You speak of torments, but we have never experienced a greater joy than at present when we suffer for the love of Jesus Christ." Have they perhaps a St. Processus or a St. Martinian whose bodies were burned with red-hot plates and torn with iron hooks? In the midst of their sufferings they sang hymns of praise to God and yearned to die for Christ.

Add to these martyrs of the first ages the numberless men and women of later days who suffered the most excruciating torments that human cruelty could devise and gave their life for their holy faith. How many died during the 16th century in Japan alone? We select the following facts from the list of cruelties perpetrated during the savage persecution that raged in Japan. A woman named Monica ardently desired to die as a martyr for Christ. To render herself proof against weakness when suffering from the executioners, she practiced beforehand what she thought she might have to endure. One day she grasped a red-hot iron in her hand. Her sister cried out: "O Monica, what are you doing?" "I am preparing myself," she replied, "for

a martyr's death. I have already resisted the cravings of hunger and I have overcome that danger. Now I am trying fire so as to be able to endure it when subjected to its torture."

Another woman said to her companions: "I am firmly resolved to give my life for my holy faith. But if at the approach of death you see me tremble, I beg you to drag me by main force to the executioners in order that I may share your crown." A boy named Anthony replied to his parents, who begged him with tears to renounce his faith: "Cease torturing me with your words and complaints; I am resolved once and for all to die for the love of Jesus Christ." And when, like his Divine Master, he hung on the cross, he intoned the words of the 112th Psalm: "Praise the Lord, ye children." He sang it as far as the "Glory be to the Father," when he expired and went to complete the hymn of praise in Heaven. Another boy said to his father: "I will rather suffer death at the hands of the executioners or at your own hands than refuse obedience to God; I will not cast myself into Hell for the sake of pleasing any man." A servant spoke thus to his master: "I know what Heaven is worth; and since a martyr's death is the shortest road that leads me thither I choose it with joy,

and I esteem my earthly life as little as the dust beneath my feet.”

A woman by the name of Ursula had seen her husband and her two children put to death for their faith; with tears in her eyes she exclaimed: “I thank Thee, my God, that Thou hast deemed me worthy to make this offering; grant me also the crown which now adorns my loved ones. All I have left is the little child I carry in my arms. I gladly offer it with myself; graciously accept this last offering which I make to Thee.” She then pressed the child to her heart, and one stroke of the sword beheaded the mother and the daughter.

Another mother called out continually to her son who, like herself, was fastened to a cross: “Courage, my son, courage! We are on the way to Heaven. Continue to call on Jesus and Mary.” A nobleman named Simon said: “What a happiness for me to be permitted to die for my Redeemer! How have I ever deserved so great a favor?” A little blind girl of eight years clung closely to her mother so as to be able to die with her on the funeral pyre. A boy of five years of age was roused out of sleep to be led off to a cruel death. Without betraying the least alarm he put on his best clothes and was then carried off to the place of execution. On their arrival the little lad himself offered his neck to the executioner.

The latter was so moved at the sight of this tender child that he was unable to perform his duty. Another had to take his place, and it was only after several strokes of the sword that an end was put to the child's life. All these facts were attested by declared enemies of our Holy Church.

Once more the proof of our holy faith becomes evident when we consider that from the time of the Apostles down to our own days our Faith has continued unaltered. The Apostles and their successors were careful to preserve the doctrine of our Divine Redeemer in its primitive purity and integrity. Christ Himself imposed upon them this sacred duty when He said: "Going therefore, teach ye all nations; teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:19–20). Therefore St. John exhorts the faithful: "Let that which you have heard from the beginning abide in you." (1 John 2:24).

The Apostle Jude writes: "I beseech you, dearly beloved, to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints." (Jude 3).

Similar are the exhortations of the Apostle St. Paul when writing to the Ephesians: "I beseech you, brethren, that you be careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3), and to the Corinthians:

“Let there be no schisms among you; but be perfect in the same mind and in the same judgment.” (1 Cor. 1:10).

These admonitions of the Apostle have always been strictly adhered to by the pastors of the Church, for, in the words of St. Augustine, “What they found in the Church they have preserved, and what their fathers handed down to them they in turn left as a precious legacy to their sons.” Accordingly, the Catholic Church has remained the same in all ages and in all climes. The doctrines she teaches today are the same that were taught and believed in the first ages of the Church. The sects, on the contrary, that have separated from the Catholic Church, have not remained unchanged in the doctrines which they propound. If you desire an illustration of this, read the *History of the Variations* by the famous Bishop Bossuet. There you will find an authentic record of the everchanging tenets of the Protestant denominations. The pride that caused the founders of these sects to refuse obedience to the true Church of Christ has led their followers in turn to refuse obedience to them, and thus countless new doctrines and new religions have sprung into existence. It is of immense advantage for us who are faithful adherents of the true Church of God to read and ponder the

accounts that are found in the history of heresies. Such a reflection is calculated to bring into a most favorable light our own True Faith that, like our Saviour Himself, is “yesterday, and today, and the same forever.” (Heb. 13:8). It will foster in us a spirit of loyal submission to our Holy Church, and a deep sense of gratitude to God for the inestimable gift of the True Faith.

A LIVING FAITH

To be pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God, it is not enough merely to believe all that our holy faith teaches us; we must, moreover, regulate our life in accordance with our belief. Pico of Mirandola says: “It is certainly great folly not to wish to believe the Gospel of Christ; but it would be greater folly still to believe it and to live as if you did not believe it.” The unbelieving act very irrationally when they close their eyes so as not to see the abyss towards which they are hastening. But what of the folly of those among the faithful who see the abyss, and with open eyes actually hurl themselves into it? “O my brethren,” exclaims St. James, “what shall it profit if a man say he hath faith, but hath not works? Shall faith be able to save him?” (James 2:14).

Many Christians believe without doubt that there is a just God who will judge them; that endless happiness or eternal misery awaits them; and yet they live as though there were no God, no judgment, no Heaven and no Hell. There are many who believe that our Divine Redeemer was born in the stable at Bethlehem, lived for 30 years in the humble abode at Nazareth, supported Himself by the labor of His hands, and at last, consumed with suffering and sorrow, ended His life on an infamous gibbet; and yet they do not love Him; indeed, they offend Him by innumerable sins. It is to these that St. Bernard addresses his words of warning: "Show by your deeds that you believe; by a virtuous life a Christian must prove that he has faith."

The sinful man who knows the truths of faith, and does not live in accordance with them, has a very weak faith, to say the least. For it stands to reason that if a man firmly believed that the grace of God is the highest and best good he could possess, and that sin robs us of grace and is the greatest evil in this world, he must of necessity change his life. When, therefore, the sinner prefers the miserable goods of this world to his Lord and God, he gives evident proof that he has a very weak faith, if any at all. St. Bernard says: "He who acknowledges God with his tongue but denies Him

in deed, dedicates his tongue to the Lord and his soul to the devil.” According to the Apostle St. James, that faith which does not manifest itself by works, is dead. (James 2:17).

If we see a man who betrays no sign of life, and who neither moves, nor speaks, nor breathes, we say he is no longer alive but dead. In like manner, that faith which gives no evidence of vitality by the performance of works of eternal life, we rightly regard as dead. There are Christians who willingly accept those teachings of our holy faith that are confined to the sphere of the intellect, but who give no proof whatever that they believe the truths which affect the will. And yet the latter are as certain and undoubted as the former, for they are all made known to us by one and the same Gospel of Christ. If we believe the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity and the Incarnation of the Divine Word, we must also accept the principles that Christ our Lord has laid down for the regulation of our conduct. It was with this end in view that St. Paul wrote thus to his disciples: “Try your own selves if you be in the faith; prove ye yourselves.” (2 Cor. 13:5). Our Blessed Redeemer has said: “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt 5:3).

Now if a man complains of the dispositions of Divine Providence because he happens to be poor, such a man cannot be called truly faithful, for the man who believes from his heart the words of our Blessed Lord, will seek his riches and his happiness not in the perishable goods of this earth but in the grace of God and eternal life. When gold and silver and precious stones were offered to St. Clement on condition that he would renounce Christ, the Saint heaved a deep sigh and complained bitterly that with such a miserable and contemptible exchange they should try to rob him of his God. Our Divine Redeemer has said: "Blessed are the peacemakers! Blessed are they that mourn! Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake!" (Matt. 5:9). By this He meant to say: Blessed are they that suffer sickness, and temporal loss or some other misfortune with patience and resignation. Blessed are they that suffer persecution because they flee from sin or endeavor to promote the glory of God! He who thinks that he disgraces himself when he forgives; he whose only concern is to live an easy and agreeable life and to shun the very shadow of self-denial; he who pities those who renounce the joys and pleasures of earth and crucify their flesh; he who from human respect neglects the practices of piety and the reception of the

Sacraments and is wholly absorbed with the attractions of the theater and ballroom can have no valid claim to the title of a faithful Catholic.

This seems to be the place to correct a false impression that is very prevalent. There are many who imagine that a life in harmony with the precepts of our holy faith must necessarily be a sad and joyless life. The devil pictures our holy religion to them as a tyrant who imposes only burdens and cares upon her children, forces them to constant self-renunciation and interdicts the gratification of every desire. There is no doubt that for those whose only desire is to satisfy their sensual cravings, a life in accordance with holy faith has little that is attractive. "They that are Christ's," says the Apostle, "have crucified their flesh with the vices and concupiscences." (Gal. 5:24).

The law of Jesus Christ commands us to battle against our inordinate inclinations, to love our enemies, to mortify our body, to be patient in adversities and to place all our hope in the life to come. But all this does not make the life of the truly faithful a sad and sorrowful one. The religion of Jesus Christ says to us, as it were: Come and unite yourselves to Me; I will lead you along a path which to the bodily eyes seems rough and hard to climb, but to those of good will is

easy and agreeable. You seek peace and pleasure? Well and good! Which peace is to be preferred? That which, when scarcely tasted, disappears and leaves the heart replete with bitterness, or that which will rejoice and satiate you for all eternity? You strive for honors? Very well! Which do you prefer, that empty honor that disappears like a puff of smoke, or that true and genuine honor which will one day glorify you before the whole world? Ask those who lead a life of faith if the renunciation of this world's goods makes them sad! Visit the holy Anchorite Paul in his grotto, St. Francis of Assisi on Mount Alverno, St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi in her convent and ask them if they miss the joys and pleasures of this earth! They will answer without hesitation: No, no; we desire but God alone and nothing else.

Should anyone object that a life according to faith is opposed to nature, I answer: It is, no doubt, opposed to nature—but to a depraved and fallen nature. It is burdensome, yes, but only for those who rely on their own strength and resources. But for one who trusts in God and begs for His assistance, the observance of the law of Jesus Christ is sweet and easy. “Taste and see,” says the Psalmist, “how sweet is the Lord.” (Ps. 33:9). “Come to me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you. Take up my yoke upon you and learn

of me because I am meek and humble of heart: and you shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is sweet and my burden light.” (Matt. 11:28–30).