

The STORY
of a SOUL

*The Autobiography
of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*

with THOUGHTS OF
SAINT THÉRÈSE

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CHAPTER ONE



Early Childhood

MY DEAREST Mother, it is to you, to you who are in fact a mother twice over to me, that I now confide the Story of my Soul. The day you asked me to do it, I thought it might be a distraction to me, but afterwards, Jesus made me realize that simple obedience would please Him best. So I am going to begin singing what I shall sing forever, “*the mercies of the Lord.*” (*Ps.* 88:1).

Before taking up my pen, I knelt before the statue of Mary, the one which has given us so many proofs that the Queen of Heaven watches over us as a mother. I begged her to guide my hand so that I should write only what would please her; then, opening the Gospels, my eyes fell on these words: “*Jesus, going up into a mountain, called unto Him whom He would Himself.*” (*Mark* 3:13).

The mystery of my vocation, of my entire life, and above all, of the special graces Jesus has given me, stood revealed. He does not call those who are worthy, but those He chooses to call. As St. Paul says: “*God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy; so then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.*” (*Cf. Rom.* 9:15-16).

For a long time I had wondered why God had preferences, why He did not give the same degree of grace to everyone. I was rather surprised

that He should pour out such extraordinary graces on great sinners like St. Paul, St. Augustine and so many others, forcing His grace on them, so to speak. I was rather surprised, too, when reading the lives of the Saints, to find Our Lord treating certain privileged souls with the greatest tenderness from the cradle to the grave, removing all obstacles from their upward path to Him, and preserving the radiance of their baptismal robe from the stains of sin. Also, I wondered why so many poor savages die without even hearing Our Lord's name. Jesus chose to enlighten me on this mystery. He opened the book of nature before me, and I saw that every flower He has created has a beauty of its own, that the splendor of the rose and the lily's whiteness do not deprive the violet of its scent nor make less ravishing the daisy's charm. I saw that if every little flower wished to be a rose, Nature would lose her spring adornments, and the fields would be no longer enameled with their varied flowers.

So it is in the world of souls, the living garden of the Lord. It pleases Him to create great Saints, who may be compared with the lilies or the rose; but He has also created little ones, who must be content to be daisies or violets, nestling at His feet to delight His eyes when He should choose to look at them. The happier they are to be as He wills, the more perfect they are.

I saw something further: that Our Lord's love shines out just as much through a little soul who yields completely to His Grace as it does through the greatest. True love is shown in self-abasement, and if everyone were like the saintly doctors who adorn the Church, it would seem that God had not far enough to stoop when He came to them. But He has, in fact, created the child, who knows nothing and can only make feeble cries, and the poor savage, with only the Natural Law to guide him; and it is to hearts such as these that He stoops. What delights Him is the simplicity of these flowers of the field, and by stooping so low to them, He shows how infinitely great He is. Just as the sun shines equally on the cedar and the little flower, so the Divine Sun shines equally on everyone, great and small. Everything is ordered

for their good, just as in nature the seasons are so ordered that the smallest daisy comes to bloom at its appointed time.

I expect you will be wondering, Mother, where all this is supposed to be leading, for so far I have not given you anything that looks much like my life story—but you did tell me to write quite freely whatever came into my head! So you will not find my actual life in these pages so much as my thoughts on the graces Our Lord has given me.

I have reached the stage now where I can afford to look back; in the crucible of trials from within and without, my soul has been refined, and I can raise my head like a flower after a storm and see how the words of the Psalm have been fulfilled in my case: “*The Lord is my Shepherd and I shall want nothing. He hath made me to lie in pastures green and pleasant; He hath led me gently beside the waters; He hath led my soul without fatigue . . . Yea, though I should go down into the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou, O Lord, art with me.*” (Cf. *Ps.* 22:1, 4).

Yes, “*the Lord hath always been compassionate and gentle with me, slow to punish and full of mercy.*” (Cf. *Ps.* 102:8). I feel really happy just to be able to tell you, Mother, of all the wonderful things He has done for me. Remember, I am writing for you alone the story of the *little flower* gathered by Jesus, and so I can speak unreservedly, not bothering about the style, nor about the digressions I shall make; a mother’s heart always understands, even when her child can do no more than lisp, so I am quite sure that you, who prepared my heart and offered it to Jesus, will certainly do so.

If a little flower could talk, it seems to me it would say what God has done for it quite simply and without concealment. It would not try to be humble by saying it was unattractive and without scent, that the sun had destroyed its freshness or the wind its stem, when all the time it knew it was quite the opposite.

This flower, in telling her story, is happy to make known all the gifts that Jesus has given her. She knows quite well that He could not have been attracted by anything she had of her own. Purely out of mercy He

gave these gifts. It was He who caused her to be born on soil which had been abundantly blessed, where eight radiant lilies already bloomed, and where the fragrance of purity was ever about her. In His love, He wished to preserve her from the world's foul breath, and her petals were scarcely open when He transplanted her to the mountain of Carmel, to Mary's garden of delight.

Having told you so briefly what God has done for me, I will tell you in detail of my childhood. It may seem rather a dull story here and there, I know; but as you shared it all as I grew up at your side, as we shared the same saintly parents and together enjoyed their tenderness and care, I am sure it will not be without charm to your maternal heart.

I only hope they will bless their youngest child now and help her to sing the divine mercies.

The story of my soul before I entered Carmel can be divided into three definite periods. The first, though a short one, is rich in memories and extends from the dawn of reason to Mother's death—or in other words, until I was four years and eight months old. God graced me with intelligence at a very early age, and He so engraved the events of my childhood on my memory that it seems they happened only yesterday. Jesus wished, no doubt, that I should know and appreciate what a wonderful mother He had given to me, but sad to say, it was not long before His divine hand took her from me to be with Him in Heaven. He has surrounded me with love all my life; the first things I can remember are tender smiles and caresses, and while surrounding me with all this love, He gave me a warm and sensitive heart to respond to it. No one can imagine how I loved Father and Mother; I showed my affection for them in thousands of ways, for I was very demonstrative, and I can't help smiling, even now, when I think of some of the means which I used.

You let me keep the letters which Mother sent you when you were a boarder at the Visitation Convent of Le Mans. I remember quite clearly the incidents they referred to, but it is much easier just to quote certain passages of these charming letters. Dictated by a mother's love, they are

often far too flattering to me. As an example of the way I used to show my affection for my parents, take this letter of Mother's:

"Baby is such a little imp. In the midst of caressing me, she wishes I were dead! 'Poor darling Mamma, I do wish you were dead!' She is quite astonished when I scold her, and excuses herself by saying, 'It's only because then you will go to Heaven; you told me that you have to die to go there!' In the same way, she wishes her Father were dead, when her love gets the better of her.

"The little darling never wants to leave me. She always keeps close by me and loves to follow me about, especially when I go out into the garden. She refuses to stay when I am not there and cries so much that she has to be brought in. Similarly, she will not go upstairs by herself without calling to me at each step, 'Mother! Mother!' As many 'Mothers' as there are steps! And if by chance I forget to answer even once, 'Yes, darling,' she stops just where she is and won't go up or down."

I was almost three when she wrote:

"Little Thérèse asked me the other day if she is going to Heaven. 'Yes, if you're good, Darling,' I replied. 'If I am not,' she said, 'I suppose I shall go to Hell. If so, I know what I will do. I will fly away to you, because you will be in Heaven—then you will hold me tight in your arms. God could not take me away then!' I could see by her face that she was quite sure God could not do anything to her if she were hidden in her mother's arms.

"Marie loves her little sister dearly. She is such a joy to all of us and so utterly sincere. It is charming to see her running after me to confess: 'Mother, I pushed Céline once, and smacked her once, but I won't do it again.'

"As soon as she has done the least thing wrong, everyone has to know about it. Yesterday, by accident, she tore a little corner off the wallpaper and got into a pitiful state. She wanted to tell her father about it as soon as possible. By the time he came home four hours later, everyone else had forgotten all about it, but she ran to Marie saying, 'Quick! Tell Father that I tore the paper.' She stood like a criminal awaiting

sentence, but she had gotten the idea into her little head that he would forgive her more easily if she accused herself.”

Father’s name naturally brings back certain very happy memories. When he came home, I always used to run up to him and seat myself on one of his boots; he would then walk about with me like this wherever I wished, about the house and out in the garden. Mother used to laugh and say he would do whatever I wanted. “That is as it should be,” he replied. “She is the queen.” Then he used to take me in his arms, lift me up high to sit on his shoulder and make a tremendous fuss over me.

But I can’t say he spoiled me. I remember one day very well. I was playing on the swing when he happened to be going by, and he called out to me: “Come and give me a kiss, my little queen.” I did not want to move and—what was quite unlike me—answered mischievously, “You will have to come over here for it, Father!” He was wise enough to take no notice. Marie was there. “You naughty little thing,” she said, “how can you be so rude to your father! Get off at once.” I did get off my swing at once; I had really learned my lesson, and the whole house echoed with my cries of contrition. I ran upstairs and this time I did not call Mother at every step. I thought only of finding Father and making everything up, and that did not take very long.

I couldn’t bear to think I had hurt my darling parents and used to admit my faults at once. The following account of Mother’s will show how true this was: “One morning I wanted to kiss little Thérèse before going downstairs, but she seemed to be sound asleep, and I did not want to wake her up, until Marie said: ‘Mother, I’m sure she is only pretending to be asleep.’ I stooped down close to kiss her, but she hid herself under the sheet and said with the air of a spoiled child: ‘I don’t want anyone to see me.’ I was far from being pleased, and let her know it. Not two minutes had gone by before I heard crying, and soon, to my surprise, there she was by me. She had gotten out of her bed by herself and stumbled all the way downstairs in her bare feet, wearing a nightgown far too long for her. Her little face was covered with tears, and burying her head in my lap, she cried: ‘O Mother, I’ve been very

bad; please forgive me.’ She was forgiven at once. I took my little angel into my arms, held her to my heart and showered kisses on her.”

I remember how very fond I was of my Godmother, who had just finished at the Visitation. Without showing it, I took in everything that was going on around me and all that was said; and I think I passed the same sort of judgment on things as I do now. I listened very carefully to everything she taught Céline and used to do whatever she told me, if only she would let me stay in the room while lessons were going on. In her turn, she was always giving me presents, and though they were not of much value, they gave me immense pleasure.

I was very proud of my two big sisters, but you seemed far away, so I used to dream of you from morning till night. When I was just beginning to talk, Mother used to ask me: “What are you thinking about?” and my answer was always the same, “Pauline.” Sometimes I heard it said that you were going to be a nun, and without quite knowing what that meant, I said to myself. “I shall be a nun too.” That is one of the first things I can remember, and I have never changed my mind since. So it was your example which drew me to the Spouse of Virgins when I was only two! I could tell you so much of what you have meant to me, Mother, only I am afraid I should never stop.

Darling Léonie had a big place in my heart too, and she loved me. When she came home from school in the evening, she used to take care of me while everyone else went for a walk. Even now I can almost hear the little songs she used to sing so sweetly to lull me to sleep. I can remember her First Communion very clearly, and I can remember her companion too; she was poor, and following the custom of the well-to-do families of Alençon, Mother had dressed her. This child did not leave Léonie’s side for a moment that wonderful day, and at the grand dinner in the evening she was given the place of honor. I was too young to stay up, unfortunately, but I was not left out of the feast altogether, for Father, out of the goodness of his heart, came up to me during the dessert to bring his *little queen* a piece of the First Communion cake.

Last of all, I must tell you about Céline, who shared my childhood.

I have so many memories of her that I do not know which to choose first. We both understood each other perfectly, but I was more lively and much less naïve than she was. Here is a letter which will remind you how good Céline was. It was when I was about three and Céline six and a half.

“Céline seems to be quite naturally good, but as for the other little monkey, I don’t know what is to become of her, she is such a little madcap. She is intelligent enough, but not nearly so docile as her sister. When she says ‘no,’ nothing can make her change, and she can be terribly obstinate. You could keep her down in the cellar all day without getting a ‘yes’ out of her; she would rather sleep there.”

I had one fault Mother does not mention in her letters. I was very proud, and here are only two examples of it:

One day, wishing to see just how far my pride would take me, she said to me laughingly: “If you will kiss the ground, Thérèse, I will give you a halfpenny.” A halfpenny was a fortune to me in those days, and I did not have to stoop far to get it; I was so small that the ground was quite near. All the same, my pride was up in arms, and drawing myself up to my full height, I replied: “No, Mother! I’d rather go without the halfpenny.” The other time was when we were going to visit some friends in the country. Mother told Marie to put on my nicest dress, but not to let me have my arms bare. I did not say a word and tried to seem as indifferent about it as I should have been at that age, but inwardly I was saying to myself: “Why? I should look so much prettier if I had my arms bare.”

With tendencies like these, had I not been brought up by such wonderful parents, I am quite sure I should have gone from bad to worse and probably ended up by losing my soul. But Jesus was watching over His little bride and drew good even out of her faults, for as they were corrected very early, they helped her to grow more and more perfect.

I had a love for virtue, but I was proud too, so I only had to be told once: “You mustn’t do that,” and I never wanted to do it again. I am glad to see from Mother’s letters that I became more of a consolation

to her as I grew older. With only good example about me, it was only natural that I should tend to follow it. This is how she wrote in 1876: “Even Thérèse wants to start making sacrifices now. Marie has given each of the little ones a chaplet on which they can keep count of their good deeds. They have real spiritual conferences together. It is most amusing. Céline asked the other day: ‘How can God get into such a little Host?’ Thérèse answered her: ‘It’s not surprising, since Our Lord is almighty.’ ‘What does almighty mean?’ ‘It means He can do whatever He wants.’ But the most charming thing of all is to see Thérèse slip her hand into her pocket time and time again and move a bead along as she makes some sacrifice.

“These two children are inseparable and quite happy to be alone together. Not so long ago, their nurse gave Thérèse a small bantam cock and hen. She gave the cock to her sister at once. After dinner every evening Céline goes and catches the two birds, and then they sit together in the corner of the fireplace and play for hours. One morning, Thérèse decided to climb out of her own little bed and go and sleep in Céline’s. When the maid, who was looking for her to dress her, found her there, she put her arms around her sister, and hugging her tight, said, ‘Let me stay here, Louise—can’t you see we are just like the little white chickens; we must always be together.’”

It was quite true; I could not bear to be parted from Céline and would rather leave the table before I had finished my dessert than let her go without me. I would fidget about in my high chair, wanting to get down at once, so that we could go and play together.

Because I was still too little to go to Sunday Mass, Mother used to stay and look after me. I was very good and quiet as a mouse, until I heard the door open; then, simply bursting with joy, I rushed over to my darling sister, saying, “Quickly, Céline! Give me the blessed bread!” One day she had not brought any—what could be done? I could not go without it, for this little feast was my “Mass.” I had a wonderful idea: “You haven’t any blessed bread? Very well, then, make some!” She took the bread out of the cupboard and cut off a little piece;

then having solemnly recited a Hail Mary over it, she presented it to me triumphantly. Making the Sign of the Cross, I ate it with great devotion and was quite sure it tasted like the real blessed bread. Another day, Léonie, who thought she had outgrown playing with dolls, came to look for us both, carrying a basketful of their dresses, little bits of material and other curiosities, with her doll laid on top. "Here, my dears," she said to us, "choose what you want." Céline examined them all and took a ball of silk braid. After a moment's thought, I put out my hand saying: "I choose everything," and carried off the basket, doll and all, without more ado.

I think this trait of my childhood characterizes the whole of my life; and when I began to think seriously of perfection, I knew that to become a Saint, one had to suffer much, always aim at perfection and forget oneself. I saw that one could be a Saint in varying degrees, for we are free to respond to Our Lord's invitation by doing much or little in our love for Him; to choose, that is, among the sacrifices He asks. Then, just as before, I cried: I choose everything; my God, I do not want to be a Saint by halves. I am not afraid to suffer for Your sake; I only fear doing my own will, so I give it to You and choose everything You will."

But I am forgetting, Mother! I am supposed to be only three or four, and here I am talking about my adolescence!

I remember a dream I had at that age, which left a very deep impression: I was walking alone in the garden when suddenly I saw two horrible little devils near the arbor, dancing on a barrel of lime with amazing agility, in spite of having heavy irons on their feet. They looked at me with flaming eyes, then, as if overcome by fear, threw themselves in the twinkling of an eye to the bottom of the barrel. They escaped in some mysterious way and ran off to hide in the linen room, which opens onto the garden. When I saw how cowardly they were, I put my fears aside and went over to the window to see what they were up to. There the little wretches were, running round and round the table, and not knowing how to escape my gaze. From time to time they came

nearer, still very agitated, to peep through the window; then, when they saw I was still there, they began racing about again in abject misery.

I do not suppose this dream was very extraordinary, but I do think God made use of it to show me that a soul in the state of grace need never be afraid of the devil, who is such a coward that even the gaze of a child will frighten him away.

I was so happy at this age, Mother, not only because I was beginning to enjoy life, but also because virtue had begun to appeal to me. I think my dispositions were the same then as they are now. I had acquired considerable self-control already, for I never complained when any of my things were taken away from me, and if ever I were unjustly accused, I would keep silent rather than excuse myself. There was no real virtue in this on my part, for it came naturally.

How swiftly these sunny years of childhood passed, yet what delightful memories they left behind! I love to think of the days Father used to take us to the pavilion, and most of all those Sunday walks, when Mother came with us. I can still feel the deep and poetic impression which the wheat fields made on me when I saw them all studded with poppies and cornflowers and daisies. Even then I loved far distances, wide spaces and the trees. The whole of nature, in fact, enchanted me and raised my soul toward Heaven. During these long walks we often met poor people, and much to her delight, it was always little Thérèse who was sent to give them alms. On the other hand, much to her disgust, she was often taken home when Father thought the walk too long for his "little queen." However, Céline used to fill her little basket with daisies and bring them home to console her.

The whole world smiled on me; wherever I went my path was strewn with flowers, and my own happy nature helped to make life all the more delightful, but a new period was soon to begin. Since I was to become the Spouse of Jesus so young, I had to suffer from childhood. Spring flowers begin to grow beneath the snow before they open to the sun, and the little flower I am writing about had to pass through the winter of trial, and have her fragile calix watered with the dew of tears.

ABANDONMENT
to DIVINE
PROVIDENCE

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CHAPTER ONE



Sanctity Consists in Fidelity to the Order Established by God, and in Submission to All His Operations

SECTION I—HIDDEN OPERATIONS OF GOD

Fidelity to the order established by God comprehended the whole sanctity of the . . . righteous under the old law; even that of St. Joseph, and of Mary herself.

GOD continues to speak today as He spoke in former times to our fathers when there were no directors as at present, nor any regular method of direction. Then all spirituality was comprised in fidelity to the designs of God, for there was no regular system of guidance in the spiritual life to explain it in detail, nor so many instructions, precepts and examples as there are now. Doubtless our present difficulties render this necessary, but it was not so in the first ages when souls were more simple and straightforward. Then, for those who led a spiritual life, each moment brought some duty to be faithfully accomplished. Their whole attention was thus concentrated consecutively like a hand that marks the hours which, at each moment, traverses the space allotted to it. Their minds, incessantly animated by the impulsion of divine grace, turned imperceptibly to each new duty that presented itself by the permission of God at different hours of the day. Such were the hidden springs by which the conduct of Mary was actuated. Mary was

the most simple of all creatures, and the most closely united to God. Her answer to the angel when she said, “Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum,” contained all the mystic theology of her ancestors to whom everything was reduced, as it is now, to the purest, simplest submission of the soul to the will of God, under whatever form it presents itself. This beautiful and exalted state, which was the basis of the spiritual life of Mary, shines conspicuously in these simple words, “Fiat mihi” (*Luke* 1:38). Take notice that they are in complete harmony with those which Our Lord desires that we should have always on our lips and in our hearts: “Fiat voluntas tua.” It is true that what was required of Mary at this great moment was for her very great glory, but the magnificence of this glory would have made no impression on her if she had not seen in it the fulfillment of the will of God. In all things was she ruled by the divine will. Were her occupations ordinary, or of an elevated nature, they were to her but the manifestation, sometimes obscure, sometimes clear, of the operations of the most High, in which she found alike subject matter for the glory of God. Her spirit, transported with joy, looked upon all that she had to do or to suffer at each moment as the gift of Him who fills with good things the hearts of those who hunger and thirst for Him alone, and have no desire for created things.

SECTION II—THE DUTIES OF EACH MOMENT

The duties of each moment are the shadows beneath which hides the divine operation.

THE power of the most High shall over-shadow thee” (*Luke* 1:35), said the angel to Mary. This shadow, beneath which is hidden the power of God for the purpose of bringing forth Jesus Christ in the soul, is the duty, the attraction, or the cross that is presented to us at each moment. These are, in fact, but shadows like those in the order of nature which, like a veil, cover sensible objects and hide them from us. Therefore in the moral and supernatural order the duties of each moment conceal, under the semblance of dark shadows, the truth of

their divine character which alone should rivet the attention. It was in this light that Mary beheld them. Also these shadows diffused over her faculties, far from creating illusion, did but increase her faith in Him who is unchanging and unchangeable. The archangel may depart. He has delivered his message, and his moment has passed. Mary advances without ceasing, and is already far beyond him. The Holy Spirit, who comes to take possession of her under the shadow of the angel's words, will never abandon her.

There are remarkably few extraordinary characteristics in the outward events of the life of the most holy Virgin, at least there are none recorded in Holy Scripture. Her exterior life is represented as very ordinary and simple. She did and suffered the same things that anyone in a similar state of life might do or suffer. She goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth as her other relatives did. She took shelter in a stable in consequence of her poverty. She returned to Nazareth from whence she had been driven by the persecution of Herod, and lived there with Jesus and Joseph, supporting themselves by the work of their hands. It was in this way that the holy family gained their daily bread. But what a divine nourishment Mary and Joseph received from this daily bread for the strengthening of their faith! It is like a sacrament to sanctify all their moments. What treasures of grace lie concealed in these moments filled, apparently, by the most ordinary events. That which is visible might happen to anyone, but the invisible, discerned by faith, is no less than God operating very great things. O Bread of Angels! heavenly manna! pearl of the Gospel! Sacrament of the present moment! thou givest God under as lowly a form as the manger, the hay, or the straw. And to whom dost thou give Him? "Esurientes implevit bonis" (*Luke* 1:53). God reveals Himself to the humble under the most lowly forms, but the proud, attaching themselves entirely to that which is extrinsic, do not discover Him hidden beneath, and are sent empty away.

SECTION III—THE WORK OF OUR SANCTIFICATION

How much more easily sanctity appears when regarded from this point of view.

IF THE work of our sanctification presents, apparently, the most insurmountable difficulties, it is because we do not know how to form a just idea of it. In reality sanctity can be reduced to one single practice, fidelity to the duties appointed by God. Now this fidelity is equally within each one's power whether in its active practice, or passive exercise.

The active practice of fidelity consists in accomplishing the duties which devolve upon us whether imposed by the general laws of God and of the Church, or by the particular state that we may have embraced. Its passive exercise consists in the loving acceptance of all that God sends us at each moment.

Are either of these practices of sanctity above our strength? Certainly not the active fidelity, since the duties it imposes cease to be duties when we have no longer the power to fulfill them. If the state of your health does not permit you to go to Mass you are not obliged to go. The same rule holds good for all the precepts laid down; that is to say for all those which prescribe certain duties. Only those which forbid things evil in themselves are absolute, because it is never allowable to commit sin. Can there, then, be anything more reasonable? What excuse can be made? Yet this is all that God requires of the soul for the work of its sanctification. He exacts it from both high and low, from the strong and the weak, in a word from all, always and everywhere. It is true then that He requires on our part only simple and easy things since it is only necessary to employ this simple method to attain to an eminent degree of sanctity. If, over and above the Commandments, He shows us the counsels as a more perfect aim, He always takes care to suit the practice of them to our position and character. He bestows on us, as the principal sign of our vocation to follow them, the attractions of grace which make them easy. He never impels anyone beyond his

strength, nor in any way beyond his aptitude. Again, what could be more just? All you who strive after perfection and who are tempted to discouragement at the remembrance of what you have read in the lives of the saints, and of what certain pious books prescribe; O you who are appalled by the terrible ideas of perfection that you have formed for yourselves; it is for your consolation that God has willed me to write this. Learn that of which you seem to be ignorant. This God of all goodness has made those things easy which are common and necessary in the order of nature, such as breathing, eating, and sleeping. No less necessary in the supernatural order are love and fidelity, therefore it must needs be that the difficulty of acquiring them is by no means so great as is generally represented. Review your life. Is it not composed of innumerable actions of very little importance? Well, God is quite satisfied with these. They are the share that the soul must take in the work of its perfection. This is so clearly explained in Holy Scripture that there can be no doubt about it: “Fear God and keep the commandments, this is the whole duty of man” (*Ecclesiastes* 12:13), that is to say—this is all that is required on the part of man, and it is in this that active fidelity consists. If man fulfills his part God will do the rest. Grace being bestowed only on this condition the marvels it effects are beyond the comprehension of man. For neither ear has heard nor eye seen, nor has it entered the mind what things God has planned in His omniscience, determined in His will, and carried out by His power in the souls given up entirely to Him. The passive part of sanctity is still more easy since it only consists in accepting that which we very often have no power to prevent, and in suffering lovingly, that is to say with sweetness and consolation, those things that too often cause weariness and disgust. Once more I repeat, in this consists sanctity. This is the grain of mustard seed which is the smallest of all the seeds, the fruits of which can neither be recognized nor gathered. It is the drachma of the Gospel, the treasure that none discover because they suppose it to be too far away to be sought. Do not ask me how this treasure can be found. It is no secret. The treasure is everywhere, it is offered to us at all

times and wherever we may be. All creatures, both friends and enemies, pour it out with prodigality, and it flows like a fountain through every faculty of body and soul even to the very center of our hearts. If we open our mouths they will be filled. The divine activity permeates the whole universe, it pervades every creature; wherever they are it is there; it goes before them, with them, and it follows them; all they have to do is to let the waves bear them on.

Would to God that kings, and their ministers, princes of the Church and of the world, priests and soldiers, the peasantry and laborers, in a word, all men could know how very easy it would be for them to arrive at a high degree of sanctity. They would only have to fulfill the simple duties of Christianity and of their state of life; to embrace with submission the crosses belonging to that state, and to submit with faith and love to the designs of Providence in all those things that have to be done or suffered without going out of their way to seek occasions for themselves. This is the spirit by which the patriarchs and prophets were animated and sanctified before there were so many systems of so many masters of the spiritual life.* This is the spirituality of all ages and of every state. No state of life can, assuredly, be sanctified in a more exalted manner, nor in a more wonderful and easy way than by the simple use of the means that God, the sovereign director of souls, gives them to do or to suffer at each moment.

* It would be a mistaken idea of the meaning of the author to imagine that he would urge anyone to undertake to lead a spiritual life without the guidance of a director. He explains expressly elsewhere that in order to be able to do without a director one must have been habitually and for a long time under direction. Less still does he endeavor to bring into disrepute the means made use of by the Church for the extirpation of vice and the acquisition of virtue. His meaning, of which Christians cannot be too often reminded, is that of all direction the best is that of divine Providence and that the most necessary and the most sanctifying of all practices is that of fulfilling faithfully and accepting lovingly whatever this paternal Providence ordains that we should do or suffer.

SECTION IV—IN WHAT PERFECTION CONSISTS

*Perfection consists in doing the will of God,
not in understanding His designs.*

THE designs of God, the good pleasure of God, the will of God, the operation of God and the gift of His grace are all one and the same thing in the spiritual life. It is God working in the soul to make it like unto Himself. Perfection is neither more nor less than the faithful co-operation of the soul with this work of God, and is begun, grows, and is consummated in the soul unperceived and in secret. The science of theology is full of theories and explanations of the wonders of this state in each soul according to its capacity. One may be conversant with all these speculations, speak and write about them admirably, instruct others and guide souls; yet, if these theories are only in the mind, one is, compared with those who, without any knowledge of these theories, receive the meaning of the designs of God and do His holy will, like a sick physician compared to simple people in perfect health. The designs of God and his divine will accepted by a faithful soul with simplicity produces this divine state in it without its knowledge, just as a medicine taken obediently will produce health, although the sick person neither knows nor wishes to know anything about medicine. As fire gives out heat, and not philosophical discussions about it, nor knowledge of its effects, so the designs of God and His holy will work in the soul for its sanctification, and not speculations of curiosity as to this principle and this state. When one is thirsty one quenches one's thirst by drinking, not by reading books which treat of this condition. The desire to know does but increase this thirst. Therefore when one thirsts after sanctity, the desire to know about it only drives it further away. Speculation must be laid aside, and everything arranged by God as regards actions and sufferings must be accepted with simplicity, for those things that happen at each moment by the divine command or permission are always the most holy, the best and the most divine for us.

SECTION V—THE DIVINE INFLUENCE ALONE
CAN SANCTIFY US

No reading, nor any other exercise can sanctify us except in so far as they are the channels of the divine influence.

OUR whole science consists in recognizing the designs of God for the present moment. All reading not intended for us by God is dangerous. It is by doing the will of God and obeying His holy inspirations that we obtain grace, and this grace works in our hearts through our reading or any other employment. Apart from God reading is empty and vain and, being deprived for us of the life-giving power of the action of God, only succeeds in emptying the heart by the very fullness it gives to the mind.

This divine will, working in the soul of a simple ignorant girl by means of sufferings and actions of a very ordinary nature, produces a state of supernatural life without the mind being filled with self-exalting ideas; whereas the proud man who studies spiritual books merely out of curiosity receives no more than the dead letter into his mind, and the will of God having no connection with his reading his heart becomes ever harder and more withered.

The order established by God and His divine will are the life of the soul no matter in what way they work, or are obeyed. Whatever connection the divine will has with the mind, it nourishes the soul, and continually enlarges it by giving it what is best for it at every moment. It is neither one thing nor another which produces these happy effects, but what God has willed for each moment. What was best for the moment that has passed is so no longer because it is no longer the will of God which, becoming apparent through other circumstances, brings to light the duty of the present moment. It is this duty under whatever guise it presents itself which is precisely that which is the most sanctifying for the soul. If, by the divine will, it is a present duty to read, then reading will produce the destined effect in the soul. If it is the divine will that reading be relinquished for contemplation, then this

will perform the work of God in the soul and reading would become useless and prejudicial. Should the divine will withdraw the soul from contemplation for the hearing of confessions, etc., and that even for some considerable time, this duty becomes the means of uniting the soul with Jesus Christ and all the sweetness of contemplation would only serve to destroy this union. Our moments are made fruitful by our fulfillment of the will of God. This is presented to us in countless different ways by the present duty which forms, increases, and consummates in us the new man until we attain the plenitude destined for us by the divine wisdom. This mysterious attainment of the age of Jesus Christ in our souls is the end ordained by God and the fruit of His grace and of His divine goodness.

This fruit, as we have already said, is produced, nourished and increased by the performance of those duties which become successively present, and which are made fruitful by the same divine will.

In fulfilling these duties we are always sure of possessing the “better part” because this holy will is itself the better part, it only requires to be allowed to act and that we should abandon ourselves blindly to it with perfect confidence. It is infinitely wise, powerful and amiable to those who trust themselves unreservedly to it, who love and seek it alone, and who believe with an unshaken faith and confidence that what it arranges for each moment is best, without seeking elsewhere for more or less, and without pausing to consider the connection of these exterior works with the plans of God: this would be the refinement of self-love.

Nothing is essential, real, or of any value unless ordained by God who arranges all things and makes them useful to the soul. Apart from this divine will all is hollow, empty, null, there is nothing but falsehood, vanity, nothingness, death. The will of God is the salvation, health and life of body and soul, no matter to what subject it is applied. One must not, therefore, scrutinize too closely the suitability of things to mind or body in order to form a judgment of their value, because this is of little importance. It is the will of God which bestows through these things, no matter what they may be, an efficacious grace by which the image

of Jesus Christ is renewed in our souls. One must not lay down the law nor impose limits on this divine will since it is all-powerful.

Whatever ideas may fill the mind, whatever feelings afflict the body; even if the mind should be tormented with distractions and troubles, and the body with sickness and pain, nevertheless the divine will is ever for the present moment the life of the soul and of the body; in fact, neither the one nor the other, no matter in what condition it may be, can be sustained by any other power.

The divine influence alone can sanctify us. Without it bread may be poison, and poison a salutary remedy. Without it reading only darkens the mind; with it darkness is made light. It is everything that is good and true in all things, and in all things it unites us to God, who, being infinite in all perfections, leaves nothing to be desired by the soul that possesses Him.

SECTION VI—ON THE USE OF MENTAL FACULTIES

*The exercise of mental and other faculties is only useful
when instrumental of the divine action.*

THE mind with all the consequences of its activity might take the foremost rank among the tools employed by God, but has to be deputed to the lowest as a dangerous slave. It might be of great service if made use of in a right manner, but is a danger if not kept in subjection. When the soul longs for outward help it is made to understand that the divine action is sufficient for it. When without reason it would disclaim this outward help, the divine action shows it that such help should be received and adapted with simplicity in obedience to the order established by God, and that we should use it as a tool, not for its own sake but as though we used it not, and when deprived of all help as though we wanted nothing.

The divine action although of infinite power can only take full possession of the soul in so far as it is void of all confidence in its own action; for this confidence, being founded on a false idea of its own

capacity, excludes the divine action. This is the obstacle most likely to arrest it, being in the soul itself; for, as regards obstacles that are exterior, God can change them if He so pleases into means for making progress. All is alike to Him, equally useful, or equally useless. Without the divine action all things are as nothing, and with it the veriest nothing can be turned to account.

Whether it be meditation, contemplation, vocal prayer, interior silence, or the active use of any of the faculties, either sensible and distinct, or almost imperceptible; quiet retreat, or active employment, whatever it may be in itself, even if very desirable, that which God wills for the present moment is best and all else must be regarded by the soul as being nothing at all. Thus, beholding God in all things it must take or leave them all as He pleases, and neither desire to live, nor to improve, nor to hope, except as He ordains, and never by the help of things which have neither power nor virtue except from Him. It ought, at every moment and on all occasions, to say with St. Paul, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (*Acts 9:6*) without choosing this thing or that, but "whatsoever You will. The mind prefers one thing, the body another, but, Lord, I desire nothing but to accomplish Your holy will. Work, contemplation or prayer whether vocal or mental, active or passive; the prayer of faith or of understanding; that which is distinguished in kind, or gifted with universal grace: it is all nothing Lord unless made real and useful by Your will. It is to Your holy will that I devote myself and not to any of these things, however high and sublime they may be, because it is the perfection of the heart for which grace is given, and not for that of the mind."

The presence of God which sanctifies our souls is the dwelling of the Holy Trinity in the depths of our hearts when they submit to His holy will. The act of the presence of God made in contemplation effects this intimate union only like other acts that are according to the order of God.

There is, therefore, nothing unlawful in the love and esteem we have for contemplation and other pious exercises, if this love and

esteem are directed entirely to the God of all goodness who willingly makes use of these means to unite our souls to Himself.

In entertaining the suite of a prince, one entertains the prince himself, and he would consider any discourtesy shown to his officers under pretense of wishing for him alone as an insult to himself.

SECTION VII—ON THE ATTAINMENT OF PEACE

There is no solid peace except in submission to the divine action.

THE soul that does not attach itself solely to the will of God will find neither satisfaction nor sanctification in any other means however excellent by which it may attempt to gain them. If that which God Himself chooses for you does not content you, from whom do you expect to obtain what you desire? If you are disgusted with the meat prepared for you by the divine will itself, what food would not be insipid to so depraved a taste? No soul can be really nourished, fortified, purified, enriched, and sanctified except in fulfilling the duties of the present moment. What more would you have? As in this you can find all good, why seek it elsewhere? Do you know better than God? As he ordains it thus why do you desire it differently? Can His wisdom and goodness be deceived? When you find something to be in accordance with this divine wisdom and goodness ought you not to conclude that it must needs be excellent? Do you imagine you will find peace in resisting the Almighty? Is it not, on the contrary, this resistance which we too often continue without owning it even to ourselves which is the cause of all our troubles? It is only just, therefore, that the soul that is dissatisfied with the divine action for each present moment should be punished by being unable to find happiness in anything else. If books, the example of the saints, and spiritual conversations deprive the soul of peace; if they fill the mind without satisfying it; it is a sign that one has strayed from the path of pure abandonment to the divine action, and that one is only seeking to please oneself. To be employed

in this way is to prevent God from finding an entrance. All this must be got rid of because of being an obstacle to grace. But if the divine will ordains the use of these things the soul may receive them like the rest—that is to say—as the means ordained by God which it accepts simply to use, and leaves afterwards when their moment has passed for the duties of the moment that follows. There is, in fact, nothing really good that does not emanate from the ordinance of God, and nothing, however good in itself, can be better adapted for the sanctification of the soul and the attainment of peace.

SECTION VIII—TO ESTIMATE DEGREES OF EXCELLENCE

*The perfection of souls, and the degree of excellence
to which they have attained can be gauged by their
fidelity to the order established by God.*

THE will of God gives to all things a supernatural and divine value for the soul submitting to it. The duties it imposes, and those it contains, with all the matters over which it is diffused, become holy and perfect, because, being unlimited in power, everything it touches shares its divine character. But in order not to stray either to the right or to the left the soul should only attend to those inspirations which it believes it has received from God, by the fact that these inspirations do not withdraw it from the duties of its state. Those duties are the most clear manifestation of the will of God, and nothing should take their place; in them there is nothing to fear, nothing to exclude, nor anything to be chosen. The time occupied in the fulfillment of these duties is very precious and very salutary for the soul by the indubitable fact that it is spent in accomplishing this holy will. The entire virtue of all that is called holy is in its approximation to this order established by God; therefore nothing should be rejected, nothing sought after, but everything accepted that is ordained and nothing attempted contrary to the will of God.

Books and wise counsels, vocal prayer and interior affections if

they are in accordance with the will of God are instructive, and all help to guide and to unify. In contemning all sensible means to this end quietism is greatly to blame, for there are souls that are intended by God to keep always to this way. Their state of life and their attraction show this clearly enough. It is vain to picture any kind of abandonment from which all personal activity is excluded. When God requires action, sanctity is to be found in activity. Besides the duties imposed on everyone by their state of life God may require certain actions which are not included in these duties, although they may not be in any way opposed to them. An attraction and inspiration are then the signs of the divine approval. Souls conducted by God in this way will find a greater perfection in adding the things inspired to those that are commanded, taking the necessary precautions required in such cases, that the duties of their state may not clash with those things arranged by Providence.

God makes saints as He pleases, but they are made always according to His plan, and in submission to His will. This submission is true and most perfect abandonment.

Duties imposed by the state of life and by divine Providence are common to all the saints and are what God arranges for all in general. They live hidden from the world which is so evil that they are obliged to avoid its dangers: but it is not on this account that they are saints, but only on account of their submission to the will of God. The more absolute this submission becomes the higher becomes their sanctity. We must not imagine that those whose virtue is shown in wonderful and singular ways, and by unquestionable attractions and inspirations, advance less on that account in the way of abandonment. From the moment that these acts become duties by the will of God, then to be content only to fulfill the duties of a state of life, or the ordinary inspirations of Providence would be to resist God, whose holy will would no longer retain the mastery of the passing moments, and to cease practicing the virtue of abandonment. Our duties must be so arranged as to be commensurate with the designs of God, and to follow the path

designated by our attraction. To carry out our inspirations will then become a duty to which we must be faithful. As there are souls whose whole duty is defined by exterior laws, and who should not go beyond them because restricted by the will of God; so also there are others who, besides exterior duties, are obliged to carry out faithfully that interior rule imprinted on their hearts. It would be a foolish and frivolous curiosity to try to discover which is the most holy. Each has to follow the appointed path. Perfection consists in submitting unreservedly to the designs of God, and in fulfilling the duties of one's state in the most perfect manner possible. To compare the different states as they are in themselves can do nothing to improve us, since it is neither in the amount of work, nor in the sort of duties given to us that perfection is to be found. If self-love is the motive power of our acts, or if it be not immediately crushed when discovered, our supposed abundance will be in truth absolute poverty because it is not supplied by obedience to the will of God. However, to decide the question in some way, I think that holiness can be measured by the love one has for God, and the desire to please Him, and that the more His will is the guiding principle, and His plans conformed to and loved, the greater will be the holiness, no matter what may be the means made use of. It is this that we notice in Jesus, Mary and Joseph. In their separate lives there is more of love than of greatness, and more of the spirit than of the matter. It is not written that they sought holiness in things themselves, but only in the motive with which they used them. It must therefore be concluded that one way is not more perfect than another, but that the most perfect is that which is most closely in conformity with the order established by God, whether by the accomplishment of exterior duties, or by interior dispositions.

SECTION IX—SANCTITY MADE EASY

Conclusion of the first chapter. How easy sanctity becomes when this doctrine is properly understood.

I BELIEVE that if those souls that tend towards sanctity were instructed as to the conduct they ought to follow, they would be spared a good deal of trouble. I speak as much of people in the world as of others. If they could realize the merit concealed in the actions of each moment of the day: I mean in each of the daily duties of their state of life, and if they could be persuaded that sanctity is founded on that to which they give no heed as being altogether irrelevant, they would indeed be happy. If, besides, they understood that to attain the utmost height of perfection, the safest and surest way is to accept the crosses sent them by Providence at every moment, that the true philosopher's stone is submission to the will of God which changes into divine gold all their occupations, troubles, and sufferings, what consolation would be theirs! What courage would they not derive from the thought that to acquire the friendship of God, and to arrive at eternal glory, they had but to do what they were doing, but to suffer what they were suffering, and that what they wasted and counted as nothing would suffice to enable them to arrive at eminent sanctity: far more so than extraordinary states and wonderful works. O my God! how much I long to be the missionary of Your holy will, and to teach all men that there is nothing more easy, more attainable, more within reach, and in the power of everyone, than sanctity. How I wish that I could make them understand that just as the good and the bad thief had the same things to do and to suffer; so also two persons, one of whom is worldly and the other leading an interior and wholly spiritual life have, neither of them, anything different to do or to suffer; but that one is sanctified and attains eternal happiness by submission to Your holy will in those very things by which the other is damned because he does them to please himself, or endures them with reluctance and rebellion. This proves that it is only the heart that is different. Oh! all you that read

this, it will cost you no more than to do what you are doing, to suffer what you are suffering, only act and suffer in a holy manner. It is the heart that must be changed. When I say heart, I mean will. Sanctity, then, consists in willing all that God wills for us. Yes! sanctity of heart is a simple “fiat,” a conformity of will with the will of God.

What could be more easy, and who could refuse to love a will so kind and so good? Let us love it then, and this love alone will make everything in us divine.

An INTRODUCTION
to the DEVOUT LIFE
or PHILOTHEA

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CHAPTER ONE



True Devotion Described

YOU aim at true devotion, my dear Philothea, because, as a Christian, you know how acceptable it is to the Divine Majesty. But inasmuch as trifling errors at the outset of any undertaking are wont to increase rapidly as we advance, frequently becoming almost irreparable, it is needful that, first of all, you should ascertain wherein lies the virtue of devotion; for there are many counterfeits, but only one true devotion; and, therefore, if you do not find that which is real, you will but deceive yourself, and vainly pursue an idle, superstitious form.

Aurelius gave to all his works of art the countenance of the women he loved; and so every one colors his devotion according to his tastes and inclinations. One is given to fasting, and whilst he fasts he holds himself to be devout, although his heart is full of bitterness; and whilst he will not touch his lips with wine, nor even with water for abstinence' sake, he scruples not to sully them with his neighbor's blood in slander and calumny. Another would fain be devout because he daily repeats many prayers, although, at the same time, he gives way to angry, proud, and injurious language amongst his servants or associates. Another willingly opens his purse to give alms to the poor, but he cannot open his heart to forgive his enemies. Another forgives his enemies, but only

force obliges him to do justice to his creditors. Such men may pass for devout, but they are not really so.

When the messengers of Saul sought David, they found only an image in his bed, which, being dressed by Michol in David's garments, deceived them so that they imagined it to be David himself. Thus many persons clothe themselves with a garb of external devotion, and the world believes them to be really devout and spiritual, whilst in truth they are mere statues or phantasms of devotion.

True, living devotion, my Philothea, implies the love of God. Indeed it is itself a true love of Him in the highest form, for whereas divine love enlightening our soul is called Grace, and makes us pleasing in His sight; so giving us power to do good, it is called Charity; and when it reaches that point of perfection wherein it not only causes us to do good, but to do it earnestly, frequently, and readily, then it is called Devotion. The ostrich never flies, the common fowl flies but seldom, and then heavily and near the ground; but the swallow, the dove, and the eagle are ever on the wing, they fly far and easily. Even so sinners rise not to God, but always grovel on the earth in pursuing earthly things; well-meaning people who are as yet not truly devout, mount up to God in good works, but rarely, slowly, and heavily; whilst the devout fly to Him perpetually, soaring lightly. In short, devotion is spiritual agility and vivacity, by means of which charity works in us, or we in her, with love and readiness; and as charity leads us to obey and fulfill all God's commandments, so devotion leads us to obey them with promptitude and diligence. Therefore no one who fails to observe all these commandments can be truly virtuous or devout, since to that end he must have charity, and further, thorough readiness and eagerness to fulfill the laws of charity.

And as devotion consists in perfect charity, so it not only makes us active, ready, and diligent in keeping God's commandments, but furthermore it stimulates us to the eager and loving performance of all the good works we can attain unto, even such as are not enjoined us, but only suggested or counseled. Even as a man just recovered from an

illness walks on his journey only as far as is absolutely necessary, with pain and difficulty, so the repentant sinner treads in God's ways heavily and slowly until, having attained the grace of devotion, he resembles the healthy and light-hearted traveler, who not only proceeds on his way, but runs, and leaps with joy in the way of God's commandments, hastening into the paths of His heavenly counsels and inspirations. In truth, charity and devotion differ no further than flame and fire, for charity is a spiritual fire which when it flames brightly, becomes devotion; and devotion adds to the fire of charity a flame which renders it ready, active, and diligent, not only in keeping His commandments, but in carrying out His heavenly inspirations and counsels of perfection.

The INTERIOR
CASTLE
or The MANSIONS

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P R E F A C E



*This Treatise, Styled The Interior Castle,
Was Written by Teresa of Jesus, Nun of Our Lady of Carmel,
for Her Sisters and Daughters, the Discalced Carmelite Nuns*

RARELY has obedience laid upon me so difficult a task as this of writing about prayer; for one reason, because I do not feel that God has given me either the power or the desire for it, besides which, during the last three months I have suffered from noises and a great weakness in my head that have made it painful for me to write even on necessary business.¹

However, as I know the power obedience has of making things easy which seem impossible, my will submits with a good grace, although nature seems greatly distressed, for God has not given me such strength as to bear, without repugnance, the constant struggle against illness while performing many different duties. May He, Who has helped me in other more difficult matters, aid me with His grace in this, for I trust in His mercy. I think I have but little to say that has not already been put forth in my other works written under obedience; in fact, I fear this will be but repetition of them. I am like a parrot which has learnt to talk; only knowing what it has been taught or has heard, it repeats the same thing over and over again. If God wishes me to write any thing new, He will teach it me, or bring back to my memory what I have said elsewhere. I should be content even with this, for as I am very forgetful, I should be glad to be able to recall some of the

1. "I am always suffering from my head." Letter of June 28, 1577. *Letters*. vol. ii.

matters about which people say I have spoken well, lest they should be altogether lost. If Our Lord will not even grant me this, still, if I weary my brains and increase my headache by striving to obey, I shall gain in merit, though my words should be useless to anyone. So I begin this work on the Feast of the Blessed Trinity in the year 1577, in the Convent of St. Joseph of Carmel at Toledo, where I am living, and I submit all my writings to the judgment of those learned men by whose commands I undertake them. That it will be the fault of ignorance, not malice, if I say anything contrary to the doctrine of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, may be held as certain. By God's goodness I am, and always shall be, faithful to the Church, as I have been in the past. May He be forever blessed and glorified. *Amen.*

He who bids me write this, tells me that the nuns of these convents of Our Lady of Carmel need someone to solve their difficulties about prayer: he thinks that women understand one another's language best and that my sisters' affection for me would make them pay special attention to my words, therefore it is important for me to explain the subject clearly to them. Thus I am writing only to my sisters; the idea that anyone else could benefit by what I say would be absurd. Our Lord will be doing me a great favor if He enables me to help but one of the nuns to praise Him a little better; His Majesty knows well that I have no other aim. If anything is to the point, they will understand that it does not originate from me and there is no reason to attribute it to me, as with my scant understanding and skill I could write nothing of the sort, unless God, in His mercy, enabled me to do so.

CHAPTER ONE



*This Chapter Treats of the Beauty and Dignity of
Our Souls and Makes a Comparison to Explain This.
The Advantage of Knowing and Understanding This
and the Favors God Grants to Us Is Shown, and
How Prayer Is the Gate of the Spiritual Castle*

1. *Plan of this book.* 2. *The Interior Castle.* 3. *Our culpable self-ignorance.*
4. *God dwells in the center of the soul.* 5. *Why all souls do not receive certain
favors.* 6. *Reasons for speaking of these favors.* 7. *The entrance of the Castle.*
8. *Entering into oneself.* 9. *Prayer.* 10. *Those who dwell in the first mansion.*
11. *Entering.* 12. *Difficulties of the subject.*

1. WHILE I was begging our Lord today to speak for me, since I knew not what to say nor how to commence this work which obedience has laid upon me, an idea occurred to me which I will explain, and which will serve as a foundation for that I am about to write.

2. I thought of the soul as resembling a castle,¹ formed of a single diamond or a very transparent crystal,² and containing many rooms, just as in Heaven there are many mansions.³ If we reflect, sisters, we shall see that the soul of the just man is but a paradise, in which, God tells us, He takes His delight.⁴

1. *Way of Perfection*, ch. xxviii, 9.

2. In her *Life* St. Teresa likened God to a diamond (ch. xl, 14); and elsewhere (ch. xi, 10) the soul to a garden wherein Our Lord takes His delight.

3. *John* 14:2: “*In domo Patris mei mansiones multae sunt.*” St. John of the Cross uses the same comparison: “If the soul shall overcome the devil in the first combat, it shall then pass on to the second; and if it shall be victorious there also, it shall then pass on to the third; and then through the seven mansions, the seven degrees of love, until the Bridegroom shall bring it to the ‘cellar of wine’ of perfect charity.” (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, bk. ii. ch. xi. 7.)

4. *Prov.* 8:31: “*Deliciae meae esse cum filiis hominum.*”

What, do you imagine, must that dwelling be in which a King so mighty, so wise, and so pure, containing in Himself all good, can delight to rest? Nothing can be compared to the great beauty and capabilities of a soul; however keen our intellects may be, they are as unable to comprehend them as to comprehend God, for, as He has told us, He created us in His own image and likeness.⁵

3. As this is so, we need not tire ourselves by trying to realize all the beauty of this castle, although, being His creature, there is all the difference between the soul and God that there is between the creature and the Creator; the fact that it is made in God's image teaches us how great are its dignity and loveliness. It is no small misfortune and disgrace that, through our own fault, we neither understand our nature nor our origin. Would it not be gross ignorance, my daughters, if, when a man was questioned about his name, or country, or parents, he could not answer? Stupid as this would be, it is unspeakably more foolish to care to learn nothing of our nature except that we possess bodies, and only to realize vaguely that we have souls, because people say so and it is a doctrine of faith. Rarely do we reflect upon what gifts our souls may possess, Who dwells within them, or how extremely precious they are. Therefore we do little to preserve their beauty; all our care is concentrated on our bodies, which are but the coarse setting of the diamond, or the outer walls of the castle.⁶

4. Let us imagine, as I said, that there are many rooms in this castle, of which some are above, some below, others at the side; in the centre, in the very midst of them all, is the principal chamber in which God and the soul hold their most secret intercourse.⁷ Think over this comparison very carefully; God grant it may enlighten you about the different kinds of graces

5. *Gen.* 1:26: "*Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram.*"

6. *Way of Perf.* ch. xxviii. 5.

7. St. John of the Cross on the words of his stanza: "In the inner cellar of my Beloved have I drunk." "Here the soul speaks of that sovereign grace of God in taking it into the house of His love, which is the union or transformation of love in God . . . The cellar is the highest degree of love to which the soul can attain in this life, and is therefore said to be the inner. It follows from this that there are other cellars not so interior; that is, the degrees of love by which souls reach to this, the last.

He is pleased to bestow upon the soul. No one can know all about them, much less a person so ignorant as I am. The knowledge that such things are possible will console you greatly should Our Lord ever grant you any of these favors; people themselves deprived of them can then at least praise Him for His great goodness in bestowing them on others. The thought of Heaven and the happiness of the Saints does us no harm, but cheers and urges us to win this joy for ourselves, nor will it injure us to know that during this exile God can communicate Himself to us loathsome worms; it will rather make us love Him for such immense goodness and infinite mercy.

5. I feel sure that vexation at thinking that during our life on earth God can bestow these graces on the souls of others shows a want of humility and charity for one's neighbor, for why should we not feel glad at a brother's receiving divine favors which do not deprive us of our own share? Should we not rather rejoice at His Majesty's thus manifesting His greatness wherever He chooses?⁸ Sometimes Our Lord acts thus solely for the sake of showing His power, as He declared when the Apostles questioned whether the blind man whom He cured had been suffering for his own or his parents' sins.⁹ God does not bestow these favors on certain souls because they are more holy than others who do not receive them, but to manifest His greatness, as in the case of St. Paul and St. Mary Magdalen, and that we may glorify Him in His creatures.

6. People may say such things appear impossible and it is best not to scandalize the weak in faith by speaking about them. But it is better that the latter should disbelieve us, than that we should desist from enlightening souls which receive these graces, that they may rejoice and may endeavor to love God better for His favors, seeing He is so mighty and so great. There is no danger here of shocking those for whom I write by treat-

These cellars are seven in number, and the soul has entered them all when it has in perfection the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, so far as it is possible for it. . . . Many souls reach and enter the first cellar, each according to the perfection of its love, but the last and inmost cellar is entered by few in this world, because therein is wrought the perfect union with God, the union of the spiritual marriage." *A Spiritual Canticle*, stanza xxvi. 13. Concept. ch. vi. (*Minor Works* of St. Teresa.)

8. *Matt.* 20:15: "Aut non licet mihi quod volo, facere? an oculus tuus nequam est, quia ego bonus sum?"

9. *John* 9:2: "Quis peccavit, hic, aut parentes ejus, ut caecus nasceretur?"

ing of such matters, for they know and believe that God gives even greater proofs of His love. I am certain that if any one of you doubts the truth of this, God will never allow her to learn it by experience, for He desires that no limits should be set to His work: therefore, never discredit them because you are not thus led yourselves.

7. Now let us return to our beautiful and charming castle and discover how to enter it. This appears incongruous: if this castle is the soul, clearly no one can have to enter it, for it is the person himself: one might as well tell someone to go into a room he is already in! There are, however, very different ways of being in this castle; many souls live in the courtyard of the building where the sentinels stand, neither caring to enter farther, nor to know who dwells in that most delightful place, what is in it and what rooms it contains.

8. Certain books on prayer that you have read advise the soul to enter into itself,¹⁰ and this is what I mean. I was recently told by a great theologian that souls without prayer are like bodies, palsied and lame, having hands and feet they cannot use. Just so, there are souls so infirm and accustomed to think of nothing but earthly matters, that there seems no cure for them. It appears impossible for them to retire into their own hearts; accustomed as they are to be with the reptiles and other creatures which live outside the castle, they have come at last to imitate their habits. Though these souls are by their nature so richly endowed, capable of communion even with God Himself, yet their case seems hopeless. Unless they endeavor to understand and remedy their most miserable plight, their minds will become, as it were, bereft of movement, just as Lot's wife became a pillar of salt for looking backwards in disobedience to God's command.¹¹

9. As far as I can understand, the gate by which to enter this castle is prayer and meditation. I do not allude more to mental than to vocal

10. *Imitation*, bk. 11. ch. I: "*Regnum Dei intra vos est.*" Luke 17:21. The *Imitation* is one of the books which according to St. Teresa's *Constitutions*, (§ 7) every prioress was bound to provide for her convent.

11. *Gen.* 19:26: "*Respiciensque uxor ejus post se, versa est in statuam salis.*"

prayer, for if it is prayer at all, the mind must take part in it. If a person neither considers to Whom he is addressing himself, what he asks, nor what he is who ventures to speak to God, although his lips may utter many words, I do not call it prayer.¹² Sometimes, indeed, one may pray devoutly without making all these considerations through having practiced them at other times. The custom of speaking to God Almighty as freely as with a slave—caring nothing whether the words are suitable or not, but simply saving the first thing that comes to mind from being learnt by rote by frequent repetition—cannot be called prayer: God grant that no Christian may address Him in this manner. I trust His Majesty will prevent any of you, sisters, from doing so. Our habit in this Order of conversing about spiritual matters is a good preservative against such evil ways.

10. Let us speak no more of these crippled souls, who are in a most miserable and dangerous state, unless Our Lord bid them rise, as He did the palsied man who had waited more than thirty years at the pool of Bethesda.¹³ We will now think of the others who at last enter the precincts of the castle; they are still very worldly, yet have some desire to do right, and at times, though rarely, commend themselves to God's care. They think about their souls every now and then; although very busy, they pray a few times a month, with minds generally filled with a thousand other matters, for where their treasure is, there is their heart also.¹⁴ Still, occasionally they cast aside these cares; it is a great boon for them to realize to some extent the state of their souls, and to see that they will never reach the gate by the road they are following.

11. At length they enter the first rooms in the basement of the castle, accompanied by numerous reptiles¹⁵ which disturb their peace, and prevent their seeing the beauty of the building; still, it is a great gain that these persons should have found their way in at all.

12. *Way of Perf.* ch. xxi. 6; xxix. 4. 13. *John* 5:5: "*Erat autem quidam homo ibi triginta et octo annos habens in infirmitate sua.*"

13. *John* 5:5: "*Erat autem quidam homo ibi triginta et octo annos habens in infirmitate sua.*"

14. *Matt.* 6:21: "*Ubi enim est thesaurus tuus ibi est et cor tuum.*"

15. Many an ancient castle was provided with a beargarden where rare animals were kept for the amusement of the inhabitants. This may have supplied the material for St. Teresa's comparison.

12. You may think, my daughters, that all this does not concern you, because, by God's grace, you are farther advanced; still, you must be patient with me, for I can explain myself on some spiritual matters concerning prayer in no other way. May Our Lord enable me to speak to the point; the subject is most difficult to understand without personal experience of such graces. Any one who has received them will know how impossible it is to avoid touching on subjects which, by the mercy of God, will never apply to us.

The IMITATION
of CHRIST

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CHAPTER ONE



Of the Imitation of Christ, and the Contempt of All the Vanities of the World

HE THAT followeth me, walketh not in darkness," saith Our Lord. (*John* 8:12). These are the words of Christ, by which we are admonished, that we must imitate His life and manners, if we would be truly enlightened, and delivered from all blindness of heart.

Let it then be our chief study to meditate on the life of Jesus Christ.

2. The doctrine of Christ surpasseth all the doctrines of the saints, and whosoever hath the spirit will find therein a hidden manna. (*Apoc.* 2:17).

But it happeneth that many, by frequent hearing of the Gospel, are very little affected: because they have not the spirit of Christ.

But he who would fully and feelingly understand the words of Christ, must study to make his whole life conformable to that of Christ.

3. What doth it avail thee to discourse profoundly of the Trinity if thou be void of humility, and consequently, displeasing to the Trinity?

In truth, sublime words make not a man holy and just: but a virtuous life maketh him dear to God.

I would rather feel compunction, than know its definition.

If thou didst know the whole Bible by heart, and the sayings of all the philosophers, what would it all profit thee without the love of God and His grace?

“Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity” (*Eccles.* 1:2), besides loving God and serving Him alone.

This is the highest wisdom, by despising the world to tend to heavenly kingdoms.

4. It is vanity, therefore, to seek after riches which must perish, and to trust in them.

It is vanity also to be ambitious of honors, and to raise one’s self to a high station.

It is vanity to follow the lusts of the flesh, and to desire that for which thou must afterwards be grievously punished.

It is vanity to wish for a long life, and to take little care of leading a good life.

It is vanity also to mind this present life, and not to look forward unto those things which are to come.

It is vanity to love that which passeth with all speed, and not to hasten thither where everlasting joy remaineth.

5. Often remember that proverb: “The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with hearing.” (*Eccles.* 1:8).

Study, therefore, to withdraw thy heart from the love of visible things, and to turn thyself to things invisible. For they that follow their sensuality, defile their conscience, and lose the grace of God.

Practical Reflections

If we would really honor Jesus Christ, we must apply ourselves to know Him, to love Him, and to follow Him in the practice of every Christian virtue. This is absolutely necessary for salvation, as we cannot become true Christians, but by knowing, loving, and following Christ. To pretend to please our Blessed Saviour by a profound knowledge of His divinity, without endeavoring to follow His example, without living as He lived, would be most dangerously to delude ourselves.

Prayer

What will it avail me, O Jesus, to study and to know in part Thy supreme greatness, and the most sublime of Thy mysteries, if I endeavor not to derive advantage and merit from them, by cherishing Thy disposition and copying Thy virtues, since, to save my soul, I must not only know, but practice what Thou hast taught me by Thy word, and manifested in Thy life for my imitation—I must know and practice my religion? This, my Saviour, is the grace which I now ask of Thee, with a firm hope that Thou wilt grant my petition. *Amen.*

CONFESSIONS

SAINT AUGUSTINE

TRANSLATED By
ANTHONY ESOLEN

TAN Books
Gastonia, North Carolina

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BOOK ONE



1

You are great, O Lord, and to be praised indeed:⁷ great is your power, and your wisdom is beyond reckoning. And man, a mere part of your creation, desires to praise you, man, who bears his mortality about with him, and the testimony of his sin, and testimony that you resist the proud;⁸ and still this man, this part of your creation, desires to praise you. You rouse him up to take delight in praising you,⁹ for you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.

Lord, give me to know and to understand which comes first, to call upon you or to praise you, to know you or to call upon you? But who could call upon you without knowing you? For without knowing it, he might call upon another instead of you. Or rather must you be called upon, to be known? But how can they call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how can they come to believe, without a preacher?¹⁰ And more: They shall praise the Lord who seek him, for

⁷ Ps 144:1.

⁸ Jas 4:6; cf. Job 22:29, Mt 23:12, 1 Pt 5:6.

⁹ Cf. Ps 122:1. Praise is the gift whereby we who receive the gift of grace participate in the being and the goodness of God, the giver.

¹⁰ Rom 10:14. Notice that reason alone, without the revelation of Christ, cannot attain to faith.

they who seek him shall find him,¹¹ and they who find shall praise him. I shall seek after you, O Lord, as I call upon you, and I shall call upon you, believing in you; for you have been preached to us. My faith calls upon you, Lord, the faith you have given to me and breathed in me by the humanity of your Son, through the ministry of your preacher.

2

And how shall I call upon my God, my Lord and God, seeing as when I invoke him, I seem to invoke him into myself? For what place is there in me, where my God might enter?¹² What place for God to enter, God who made heaven and earth? My Lord God, is it so? Is there anything in me that can contain you? Why, even the heavens and the earth you have made, wherein you have made me—can even they contain you? Or is it this way: because without you nothing that is could ever have come to be, it follows that whatever does exist must contain you? I too exist, and so what do I beg for when I ask you to enter me, when I would not exist in the first place unless you were in me already? For I am not in the nether world, and yet you are there too. And “even if I should descend to the world below, you would be present there.”¹³

So, my God, I could not be, I could not be in the slightest, unless you were in me. Or is it rather that I would not be, unless I were in you, from whom and through whom and in whom all things are? This too, this too, O Lord. But if I am in you, why do I call upon you? From what place can you enter into me? Where can I go beyond heaven and earth, so that my God can enter into me from there, my God, who has said, “I fill heaven and earth”?¹⁴

¹¹ Cf. Jer 29:13, Mt 7:7–8. Augustine will end his work with the same echo of Scripture.

¹² Augustine had been a materialist, so that his emphasis here on place is quite significant. What, in fact, does it mean that God is “in” us if we conceive of things only as bodies taking up space?

¹³ Ps 138:8.

¹⁴ Jer 23:24.

3

Do heaven and earth then contain you, because you fill them? Or, after you have filled them, does some part of you remain that they cannot grasp hold of? When you have filled heaven and earth, where do you pour out that part of you that is left over? No, you have no need of that, no need for a place to contain you, because all that you fill, you fill by containing it. Those vessels that are filled with you do not provide for you a settled place of rest, because if they were shattered, you would not be spilled. And when you shed yourself upon us, you do not fall, but you raise us up; you do not trickle away, but you gather us together.

You fill all things, and it is with all of yourself that you fill them. Or, because all things cannot contain the whole of you, do they hold only a part of you, and do they all hold the same part? Or do various things contain various parts, the greater containing the greater, and the lesser the lesser? Or are you everywhere in your totality, even though no one thing can contain you wholly?

4

What then is my God? What, I ask, but the Lord God? “For who is Lord, but the Lord? And who is God, but our God?”¹⁵

Supreme, best, most mighty, most omnipotent, most merciful and most just, most hidden and most immediately present, loveliest, strongest, steadfast and impossible to grasp, unchanging and yet changing all things, never new, never old, making all things new; driving the proud to the decay of old age though they know it not; ever in act, ever at rest, gathering up and never in need, bearing and filling and sheltering, creating and nourishing, bringing to perfection, seeking, though of nothing are you in want.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ps 18:31.

¹⁶ Augustine’s emphasis here is on the personhood of God and his free and providential action as the Creator and the fulfillment of all things.

You love, but you do not burn with passion; you are jealous for what is yours, though you are secure in your possession; you regret, though you do not grieve; you grow angry, though you are at peace; you alter your works but not your counsel; you take up what you find though you have never lost it; you are never needy, but you are glad in your winnings; you are never covetous, but you exact interest. Men pay and overpay you, that you may be in their debt, and yet what does anyone have that is not already yours? You pay debts though you are in debt to no one; you forgive debts, and you lose nothing. Then what shall we say, my God, my life, my sacred sweetness, or what does anyone say, when he speaks of you? But woe to them who keep silent about you, when those who chatter most are like the dumb.

5

Who shall give me the gift, to take my rest in you? Who shall give me the gift, that you may enter my heart and so fill it with drink,¹⁷ that I may forget all my ills and embrace you, my only good? What are you to me? Have pity on me, that I may speak. What can I possibly be to you, that you command me to love you, and if I do not do so, you grow angry and threaten me with mighty sorrows? Is it then by itself only a little sorrow, if I should not love you? Ah me, tell me, my Lord God, in your mercy tell me what you are to me. Say to my soul: "I am your salvation."¹⁸ Say it aloud, so that I may hear. Behold, O Lord, the ears of my heart are before you; open them, and say to my soul, "I am your salvation." I shall run after that voice, I shall take hold of you. Hide not your face from me!¹⁹ Let me die to see it, lest I die.²⁰

¹⁷ Cf. Ps 23:5, 42:1. We thirst for the living God, while the drink of this world can provide a brief satisfaction at best.

¹⁸ Ps 35:3. The Latin means also, "I am your health."

¹⁹ Ps 27:9. Isaiah cried out that he was a dead man because he had seen the face of God, 6:5, but now the Son has come into the world, and we can seek the face of God with confidence.

²⁰ Death is the lot of all men, but God gives us the grace of dying with Christ, that we may live; cf. Rom 6:8.

The house of my soul is too cramped for you to enter: make it more spacious. It is falling to ruin; repair it. Much inside it offends your sight; I know it and I confess it. But who shall cleanse it? To whom else but you shall I cry: “Cleanse me, O Lord, from my hidden sins, and from the sins of others deliver your servant?”²¹ I believe, and that is why I speak. You know this, O Lord. Have I not given witness before you against my own crimes, my God, and have you not forgiven the impiety of my heart? I shall not contend in judgment with you,²² who are Truth yourself; and I do not want to deceive myself, lest my iniquity bear false witness in its own behalf. So I shall not contend in judgment with you, for “if you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, who shall stand?”²³

6

Nevertheless, permit me to plead before your mercy, though I am but earth and ashes.²⁴ Permit me to plead, for it is to your mercy that I speak, and not to some man who smiles at me in scorn. And maybe you smile at me also, but when you turn you will have pity on me. What do I want to say, O Lord, except that I do not know from what place I came into—what shall I call it—a dying life, or a living death? I do not know. And the comforts of your mercy took me up, as I have heard from the parents of my flesh, from whom and in whom you formed me in the course of time; I myself have no memory of it. And so the comfort of human milk came to me, though neither my mother nor my nurses filled their breasts. It was you who by their means gave me the nourishment my infancy required, according to the natural law you have established, and the riches you have shed even upon the least of your creatures.²⁵ And you gave me the desire to want no more

²¹ Ps 19:13.

²² Cf. Job 9:32.

²³ Ps 130:3.

²⁴ Cf. Job 42:6.

²⁵ We should try to enter into the wonder that Augustine here expresses at the beauty and the mystery of creation and the natural laws that govern it, whereby God provides for all

than what you gave, and to those who nourished me, the desire to give me what you gave to them; for they were willing to give to me by well-ordered affection what they had from you in abundance. For it was good for them that my good should come from them, though really it was only by their means, as indeed all good things come from you, O God, and from you comes all my health. It was only later in life I took note of this, as you were calling me by those faculties you had endowed me with, both within and without. For then I knew how to suck at the breast, and to rest content with what pleased me, and to cry whenever something hurt my flesh. That was all I knew.

Then I began to laugh, first while I was sleeping, and then when I was awake. At least, so was I told about myself, and I believed it, because we see other babies doing the same; but of what I myself did, I remember nothing. And sure enough, little by little I began to be aware of where I was, and I had a will to express my desires to those who would fulfill them, but I could not do so, because the desires were within me while the people were without, nor could they by any power of their senses enter my soul. So I thrashed about and I spluttered, and made signs that somehow were like what I wanted, only a few, and only such as I could make. And when the people did not obey me, either because they could not understand me, or what I wanted would hurt me, I would grow indignant with my elders, because they were not my underlings, and with free-born children, because they were not my slaves,²⁶ and I avenged myself against them by wailing. And this is the way all speechless babies are, as I have since learned by observation, and they have shown me, without their knowing it, that I was just the same—shown me it better than did my nurses who knew.

And see, my infancy of long ago is dead, and I am still alive. But you, Lord, live forever and nothing in you dies, for you are God and Lord of

living things; cf. Job 39.

²⁶ The words for “slave” and “servant” are the same in Latin, as in Hebrew and Greek. Notice that man’s fallen nature expresses itself, from our earliest years, in the desire to dominate others, to be first rather than last.

all the things you have created, before the beginning of the ages, before anything that can be said to come before.²⁷ In your presence stand the causes of all things that do not stand still; in your presence abide the changeless founts of all things that suffer change; in your presence live the eternal reasons²⁸ of all things temporal and unreasoning. Then tell me, O God to whom I bend the knee, have pity on your pitiable servant and tell me, did my infancy follow upon some other age of mine that had died? Was it the time I spent in my mother's womb? For I have been told a little about that too, and I myself have seen women with child. And before that age, was there another, my God, my sweet delight? Was I somewhere? Was I anyone at all? I have no one to tell me about it, neither my father nor my mother, nor anyone else by experience, nor my own memory. Do you laugh at me for wondering about these things, you who command me to praise you and to confess to you for what I know?

I confess to you, Lord of heaven and earth, and praise you for the first stirrings of my infancy, which I do not remember; and you have made men to guess from other people at many things about themselves, and to believe many such things upon the credit of weak little women. For I existed then, even then was I alive, and as my infancy drew to its end, I sought out the signs to make my meanings known to other people. Whence could such a living soul come, O Lord, but from you? Can any man be his own craftsman, to shape himself? Whence could any stream of being and life flow into us apart from you who made us, Lord, you for whom to be and to live are not separate things, for the summit of being and the summit of life are one and the same?

²⁷ God does not dwell in time as created beings do; he is the creator of time. Augustine will address the question of what God did before He created the world, affirming that the question has no meaning, since "before" and "after" come into existence only with time, which God has created.

²⁸ We may think here of the immaterial laws which govern the created world. When the modern physicist says that the "nothing" that existed before the physical universe burst into being was not "nothing" but rather full, we may say, of potentiality and the laws that would govern the matter about to exist, they are not doing philosophy very well, and they have, besides, unwittingly said nothing that Augustine has not said here more precisely.

For you are the highest, and you do not change. Nor is this present day past in you, and yet in you it does pass, for in you are all such things, and they would never have their ways to come and pass except that you hold them in your grasp. And because your years never fail, your years are this present day, and no matter how many are our days and the days of our fathers, through this present day they all pass, and thence do they receive their manner of being, and that they have being at all; and then other days come and likewise pass away. But you, Lord, are the selfsame, and all the tomorrows and beyond, and all the yesterdays and before, you are creating today, you have created today.²⁹

What is it to me, if someone should not understand this? Let him be glad anyway, and say, “What is this?”³⁰ Let him be glad, and let him love to find you in not finding it, rather than in finding it to fail to find you.

7

Give ear to me, O God! Woe to the sins of men!³¹ But it is a man who says this, and you have mercy upon him, because you made him, but the sin within him you did not make.³² Who shall recall to my mind the sins of my infancy? For no man is clean of sin in your sight, not even the infant whose life is but one day upon the earth. Who shall recall it to my mind? Why not any little child at all, in whom I now see what I cannot remember about myself?

²⁹ Again, Augustine insists that God does not suffer time, as the false gods of the pagans do, because they are conceived as existing on the same plane with everything else. If we ask when God created the world, we must be careful lest we identify a specific time after which God, like any lesser craftsman, might cease to work. The creation was at the beginning, and it is now, and it shall be till the world comes to its consummation.

³⁰ Ex 16:15. The Israelites found flakes like hoarfrost on the ground, and they said, “What is this?” – in Hebrew, *mah na*, “manna.” Even if we do not understand these tremendous mysteries about God’s being and his creation, we should be glad, and partake of the bread of heaven.

³¹ Mt 18:17.

³² Cf. Ws 11:25. God loves all the things he has made, but he hates sin; he is its punisher, not its author. Augustine will return to the question of what evil can even be, seeing that it is not something God made, who made all things.

How did I sin then? That I wailed open-mouthed for the breast? For if I wailed like that now, not for mother's milk, but for some food fit for my years, I would be laughed at, even reprehended, and rightly too. So I did reprehensible things, but since I could not understand anyone who might blame me, neither custom nor reason permitted me to be blamed. For as we grow, we root out such things and throw them away, nor have I ever seen anyone who knew what he was doing clean out the bad and throw away the good. Or are we to think that for the time being it was good to cry for something that would hurt me if it was given, to be bitterly angry with freemen and elders and even those who gave me birth if they did not truckle to me, to lash out as much as I could and try to hurt those who were wiser than I, for not obeying the nod of my godlike will, because they did not heed my commands, which would have done me harm had they heeded them? Then it is not the will of the infant that is harmless, but the weakness of his little limbs. I myself have seen and observed a little baby rife with jealousy. He could not yet speak, but he went pale and cast a bitter glare at the child nursing at the breast beside him.³³

Who is unaware of this? Mothers and nurses say they have some remedies or other to allay such things. But is it really innocence, to be full fed from a fountain flowing and dripping with milk, and not to suffer a poor fellow nursling to share in the one nourishment he needs to stay alive? We bear with these things, we smile, not because they are nothing, or little and insignificant, but because they are going to pass away as the child grows older. To prove it, one can consider that the same things, if an older person should do them, would be condemned and not to be borne with a patient mind.

You, O Lord, who have given life to the speechless baby, and a body, as we have seen, furnished with senses, fitted with members, and shaped in beauty, and for his integrity and safety have instilled in him

³³ For Augustine, man's fallen nature is evident from his earliest days on earth. He is not saying that such a child is evil, but that our inclinations have been distorted by the effects of the sin of Adam.

all the powers of a living being, you command me to praise you for them, and to sing psalms to your name, O Most High. For you are a God almighty and good, even if you had made these things and no more, which none other than you could have made, you single and one, from whom comes all measure, you most beautiful, who lend form to all things and set them in order by your law.³⁴ So then, O Lord, I consider this age of my life which I cannot recall, which I have learned of by crediting the accounts of others, and guess at by observing other infants, and indeed the guesses are much to be trusted, and only grudgingly do I count it a part of the life that I live in this time now. In the darkness of my forgetting, it is like the age I passed in my mother's womb. Now if I have been conceived in iniquity, and if in sin my mother fed me in her womb, then where, I beg you, my God, where and when, O Lord, was I your servant ever innocent? But now, see, I shall let that time pass. What does it matter to me now, when I cannot recall a trace of it?

8

What happened then? From infancy did I pass into boyhood? Or did that come to me, following upon my infancy? Nor did my infancy depart—for where would it have gone? And yet it no longer was. For I was no longer an infant that could not speak, but a gabbling little boy indeed. I do remember this, but it was only later that I became aware of how I learned to talk. For the grownups did not teach me how to talk by giving me words in a certain plan of instruction, as they did when they taught me my letters a little later on, but I myself, with the mind you gave me, my God, by moaning and making various sounds and moving my limbs, tried to bring forth the senses of my heart, so that my will would be obeyed, though I could not express everything I wanted to, no matter for all the signs I made. Then I remembered the word they used when they called something by a name and moved their

³⁴ Cf. Ws 8:1.

bodies toward it, and I saw it and I grasped that the thing was called by the sounds they made when they wanted to show it to me. That they wanted to do this was clear to me by the movement of the body—by natural words, so to speak, common to all peoples, made by the face or a wink of the eye or the motion of other members or the sound of the voice, to show the affections of the soul, to ask for things, or grab hold of them, or shove them aside, or flee them. So, little by little, by words set in their right places in various sentences and heard time and again, I gathered what they were the signs of, and my mouth was tamed to these signs, and through them I expressed my will.³⁵

So did I learn to exchange, with the people among whom I lived, the words people use to tell what they want. And I set forth more deeply into the whelming ocean of human society, dependent upon the authority of my parents, and at the beck and call of those who were greater than I.

9

O God, my God, what miseries and mockeries did I suffer in that age! For then it was put to me, when I was just a boy, that to live a good life meant to obey those who urged me to flourish in this world, and to excel in the arts of the tongue, arts that go slaving after false riches and honor among men. And so I was sent to school to learn my letters, and, poor lad that I was, I did not know what use there was to it. Yet if I was sluggish in learning, I got beaten. The adults praised this form of discipline, and so did many people who led this life before us, and it was they who paved the way for these troublesome roads we had to travel, multiplying labor and sorrow for the sons of Adam.

³⁵ Augustine will devote much of his treatise *On Christian Doctrine* to the nature of signs, their fitness to the things they signify, and the degree to which they participate in those things, rather than being merely arbitrary. Language, after all, must be near to the heart of a Christian who meditates on what it means for God to speak, whether in words to the prophets or in signs and wonders.

Yet, Lord, we observed people calling upon you in prayer, and from them we learned to think of you, so far as we were able, as someone great, who even though you did not appear to our senses could hear our cry and come to our aid. For while I was but a boy I began to call to you, my help and my refuge, and in prayer to you I loosened the knots of my tongue, and small though I was I begged you, with no small feeling, that I would not be beaten in school. And when you did not hear me out, and it was by no means foolishness in me, my elders took these plagues of mine in sport, even my own parents, who never wished me any harm. But for me then it was a great and burdensome evil.

Is there any man, O Lord, so great of soul, cleaving to you with so strong a love, is there, I ask, anyone—though sheer dullness can sometimes make a man so—is there, then, anyone who by piously cleaving to you is so profoundly moved that he can reckon as trifles the racking-horse, the hooks, and other tortures of that kind, which make people all over the world beg you with great fear to help them to escape, going so far as to make fun of people he loves who are terrified of them, as our parents laughed at the torments which we boys suffered from our masters? For we were no less afraid of them, and no less did we pray to you to escape them. And still we sinned by not writing or reading or pondering our lessons as much as we were told to.

It was not, Lord, that we were lacking in memory or in native intelligence. You had willed to bestow on us as much as we needed for our age. But we loved to play games, and people who did the very same thing took it out on us. For the frivolities of grown men are called business, yet they punish children for the like, and no one has pity on the children or on them or on both. But maybe some good judge of things would say I was rightly beaten, because I was a schoolboy playing ball, and so it took me more time to learn the lessons I needed for more disgraceful foolery once I was grown up. Or did my master who beat me do anything other than what I did?³⁶ If some other schoolmaster

³⁶ Augustine has said that if a grown man should wail like a baby because he was hungry,

defeated him in some petty question, he was racked worse with gall and envy than I was when I lost a game of ball to my playfellow.

10

Despite it all I did sin, O Lord my God, ruler and creator of all natural things, but of sin the ruler only; O Lord my God, I did sin by acting against the commands of my parents and those masters. For I could have gone on to put those lessons to good use, no matter what my people had in mind. I did not heed them, not because I had better things to choose, but because I loved to play, relishing in my sports the pride of victory, and loving to have my ears scratched with stories full of lies, which inflamed them to itch all the more.³⁷ And then the same sort of curiosity flashed from my eyes, to gape at the spectacles and the plays my elders put on. And the producers of these plays rise to such honors that almost everyone would wish the honors for their own children, whom they are glad to see bruised if the plays keep them from their studies. And why do the parents want them to study, but to grow up and put on the very same? Look upon these things with pity, O Lord, and deliver us who call upon you now, and deliver also those who do not yet call upon you, that they may call upon you to deliver them.

11

When I was still only a boy I had heard of the life eternal you promise to us, by the humility of our Lord God who descended to our pride, and I was signed with the sign of his cross, and was seasoned with his salt as soon as I came forth from the womb of my mother, whose hope in you was great. You saw, Lord, how when I was yet a boy I was seized one day by a sudden fever and cramps in the stomach, and was close

he would be laughed at and reprov'd. Now, though, he suggests that in fact grown men and women do often behave as children—as spoiled, irresponsible, and willful children.

³⁷ As we will see, worldly desires are like itches: they grow worse when we try to allay them by scratching.

to dying—you saw, my God, for you were my keeper then, with what passion and faith I begged, of the piety of my mother and your Church that is the mother of us all, for the baptism of your Christ, my Lord God. Then the mother of my flesh, deeply troubled, for with a chaste heart that trusted in you she was most dearly in the throes of labor for my everlasting salvation, now took all care and haste to see that I might be initiated and washed clean by the health-giving sacraments, after I had confessed to you for the remission of my sins; but all of a sudden I recovered. So then my cleansing was put off, as if I must needs get even filthier in sin by living longer, for obviously it would be a more serious and dangerous thing to be fouled with sins after the bathing than before.³⁸

So I was a believer at that time, as were my mother and the whole household except for my father, though he did not overrule in me the law of my mother's devotion, to hinder my belief in Christ, just as he himself did not yet believe. For she did all that she could so that you, my God, would be my Father, rather than he. And you came to her assistance, so that she overcame her man whom she served, though she was the better of the two, for in serving him also she was serving you, who had commanded her to serve.³⁹

I beg of you, my God, for I wish to know, if it should please you to tell me, to what end was I then put off, so that I was not baptized? Was it for my good that the reins of sin were then relaxed? Should they have been relaxed at all? Why then are our ears abuzz even now from this person and that person all around us, who say, "Leave him alone, let him do what he wants, he hasn't been baptized yet!" But when it comes to the health of the body, we do not say, "Let his wounds grow worse awhile, because he hasn't yet been healed!" How much better it would

³⁸ It was not the custom in North Africa to baptize infants and small children. Augustine sees in the delay an attempt to play God, as if we could arrange our times and seasons by our own efforts, and as if God must submit to the arrangement, or must be deceived by a sort of temporal trick.

³⁹ Saint Monica's submission to her husband, Patricius, may scandalize some of us now, but she did exactly what Peter recommends for wives of unbelievers; cf. 1 Pt 3:1.

have been for me to have been healed right away! And then, for my own diligence and that of my family to have made sure that my soul's health, which you had bestowed upon it, would remain safe under your guardianship! Surely that would have been better. But how many and how violent were the waves of temptation that were going to loom above me when my boyhood should pass! Of these my mother was well aware. So she would sooner expose to them the earth from which I was formed, than the image and likeness that had been created first.

12

Still, in that boyhood of mine, wherein there was less to fear for my sake than in my adolescence, I did not love my lessons, and I hated to be forced to do them. But they forced me anyway, and it did me good, though I did nothing good myself, for I never would have learned a thing if I had not been compelled. No man does good if he does it against his will, even if the thing itself is good. And those who compelled me did not do well either, but what was good for me came from you, my God. For they who made me learn could not see what I would do with my learning, unless it was to sate the insatiable lusts of a plentiful neediness and an ignominious glory.⁴⁰ But you, to whom every one of our hairs is numbered, made use, for my benefit, of the error of all those who insisted that I should learn, while you made my own error, since I did not want to learn, into the whip I deserved for my punishment, such a little boy as I was, and so great a sinner. So you did well for me from those who did not do well, and you paid me most justly what I as a sinner deserved. For you have commanded it and so it is, that every man's disordered soul shall be his own punishment.⁴¹

⁴⁰ As always, Augustine stresses the paradox of sin, that it should be and not be; it is a contradiction in being. Its glory has no glory, and its fulfillment empties the soul.

⁴¹ That evil is its own punishment was taught also by the Greek philosophers. It gives the lie to those whose idea of God is of an arbitrary and cruel avenger. Sin is a self-inflicted wound, a self-infecting disease.

13

But why I hated Greek, which I was steeped in when I was little, I still have not quite puzzled out. For I fell in love with Latin—not with the rudiments, but with what those who are called men of letters teach. As for those rudiments, to read, to write, and to do numbers—they were no less a burden and a punishment for me than was everything Greek. Since I was but flesh, and a breath that passes and does not return,⁴² where could this come from, if not from sin and the vanity of this life? For those rudiments were better, as they were more certain. From them was first wrought in me what I still possess, the skill to read what I find written, and to write what I want to. Better, than those later lessons whereby I had to commit to memory the wanderings of some Aeneas or other, while I forgot my own, and to weep for the death of Dido, who slew herself for love, when at the same time I, most pitiable, bore with dry eyes my own dying to you, O God, my life.⁴³

⁴² Ps 78:39.

⁴³ With remarkable insouciance, Augustine has reduced the legendary founder of Rome, Aeneas, to “some Aeneas or other.” The story of Aeneas is told by Virgil, in his epic *Aeneid*, the basic text for schoolboys in the Latin-speaking world for centuries. Aeneas, it was said, was a prince of Troy, and on the night when the city was being destroyed, he and other refugees fled the land, guided by a prophecy that he would settle the people in a new land, Italy, and there be the progenitors of a great nation and empire. Aeneas thus wandered about the seas, like Odysseus before him, but unlike Odysseus, who was notable for his cunning and trickery, Aeneas was notable for piety, which the poet Virgil wished to identify as the most Roman of all virtues, combining duty to one’s family, to the household gods, to the fatherland, and to the great gods. Amid his journey, Aeneas and his ships were blown by storm to the shores of a newly founded city in North Africa, Carthage. There, the queen Dido, herself a refugee and a victim of evil and cunning, welcomed Aeneas and the Trojans, and, by the machinations of the goddess Juno, who wanted to keep the Trojans from reaching Italy, and the goddess Venus, Aeneas’s mother, at enmity with Juno, she falls madly in love with Aeneas, going so far as to offer to make the Trojans equal to her own people. But when Aeneas, warned by the gods, must abandon Carthage after all, Dido erupts into fury, and curses Aeneas and his descendants, as she dies by her own hand. The wandering of Aeneas, whom the learned of Augustine’s time knew was but a fictional character, proceeds from Troy to Carthage to Italy, and thus to the Rome that is to be. Augustine’s history would bring him also to Carthage and then to Rome—but his will be the history of a true pilgrimage. Since the *Aeneid* was for the Romans a sacred text, Augustine’s dismissal of it was a direct challenge to the heart of imperial paganism and the myths upon which it attempted to found itself.

For what can be more pathetic than this? That a pitiable fellow should have no pity on himself, but should shed tears for Dido who died from loving Aeneas, but shed no tears for his own death, which comes from not loving you, God, the light of my heart and the bread for the mouth of my soul within, the virtue that weds my mind and the bosom of my thought? I did not love you, and I fornicated against you, and from everywhere came cheers for the fornicator, “Well done, well done!” For to be friendly with this world is to fornicate against you, and so often do we hear, “Well done,” that we are abashed not to be so. But I did not weep for that. I wept for *Dido who came to death by the sword, seeking after the last things*,⁴⁴ all the while I sought the lowest of your creatures, abandoning you; I, mere earth, sinking to earth. But had I been forbidden to read these things, how sad I would have been—sad, not to read what made me sad! Such mindless stuff was thought to be more profitable and commendable than those lessons by which I learned how to read and write.

But let my God now cry out in my soul, and let your truth speak to me, “It is not so, it is not so; that first learning was far better.” For look now, I am far readier to forget the wanderings of Aeneas and everything else like that, than to forget how to write and read. Sure, they hang curtains to veil the entry to the grammar schools—not as a cloth of honor for some mystery, but as a cover for error. Let those buyers and sellers of literature not cry out against me, my God, for I do not fear them anymore, as I confess to you what my soul desires, and I take my rest in reprehending my evil ways, so that I may love your ways that are good, let them not cry out, if I should put them to the test and ask, “Is it true that Aeneas once came to Carthage, as the poet says?” The less learned among them will say they do not know. The more learned will say it never happened. But if I ask them with what letters “Aeneas” is written, everyone who has gotten so far in learning will reply with the

⁴⁴ *Aeneid*, 6.457. The words are spoken by Aeneas in the underworld, when he sees the shade of Dido, and he appeals to her to speak to him, since he did not leave Carthage willingly. Dido will turn away without a word.

truth, according to the rule that men established among themselves to govern these signs. And if I should go on to ask which would make for more difficulty in this life, to forget how to read and write, or to forget these figments of poetry, who would not see right away how to respond, unless he had forgotten himself completely? And so I sinned, still but a boy, when I gave more love to those empty things than to these that were better for me—rather, I hated these outright, but I loved those. To tell the truth, “one and one are two, two and two are four,” was for me a detestable jingle, but what a sweet spectacle of emptiness it was, the wooden horse full of men at arms, the burning of Troy, and *even the shade of Creusa*.⁴⁵

14

But why then did I hate Greek literature, that sings of such things? For Homer was skillful at weaving tales, and is a most delightful liar,⁴⁶ and still he was a bitter pill for me when I was a boy. I suppose Virgil is the same for Greek boys when they are forced to study him, as I was forced to study Homer. The difficulty, the sheer difficulty of learning a language from a far-off land, sprinkled with gall all the Greek delicacies of those fabulous stories. I understood not a word of it, and yet was I threatened with savage terrors and punishments to make me understand.

Now, when I was a baby, I did not understand a word of Latin, but by observation I learned it without any fear or torture, just by the sweet baby-talk of my nurses, and the jests of those who laughed

⁴⁵ *Aeneid*, 2.773. Creusa was Aeneas’s wife. She was to follow him as they made their way through the burning city of Troy, but she lost the path, and when Aeneas tried to retrace his steps, crying out for her, her shade appeared to him and told him to leave Troy, to be at peace, and to care for their child, the boy Ascanius.

⁴⁶ Plato had accused Homer of weaving lovely falsehoods about the gods, and that is why, in the *Republic*, his Socrates banishes the poet from the ideal city he is imagining. Thus was pagan instruction based upon what the most learned men acknowledged were fictions, but perhaps useful fictions for governing the people.

with me, and the happy chatter of my playmates. So I learned to talk without any grievous pain to goad me on, as my own heart led me to make its conceptions clear, and it never would have been so, unless I had learned words not from teachers but from people who talked to me, into whose ears in turn I brought forth whatever I was thinking. Hence it is clear that for a child learning a language, free curiosity has more power than does enforcement, bristling with threats. But by your laws that enforcement restrains the wild tossing of liberty, your laws, O God, from the birch rod of the master to the trials of the martyrs, your potent laws that mingle the wholesome and the bitter, to call us back to you from the plague-ridden pleasure whereby we had first wandered away from you.

15

O Lord, hear my prayer, and let not my soul faint under your discipline, let me not grow faint in confessing to you your mercies, by whose means you pulled me up from all my worst ways.⁴⁷ Hear me, that you may be sweeter to me than all the enticements I always followed, and that I may love you with all my strength, and lay hold upon your hand with all my heart, and that you may draw me away from every temptation, unto the end.

For behold, O Lord, my king and my God, let whatever useful things I learned when I was a boy serve you, let whatever I speak and write and read and reckon serve you, for you gave me discipline while I was studying those empty lies, and you forgave the sins I committed in taking delight in them. In those studies, I learned many useful words, though I could have learned them from things that were not mere vanity. And that is the truly safe path for children to walk.

⁴⁷ Cf. Ps 6:1–2. Discipline is literally a means of instruction. The worldly teachers applied the rod to beat falsehood and false ambitions into their young charges. God's discipline is at once gentler and sharper, to bring the soul to humility and the truth.

16

But woe to you, river of human custom! Who can stand against you? How long must it be before you run dry? How long shall you keep on tossing the sons of Eve into that great and terrible ocean, which they who have set sail by the mast-tree hardly manage to cross? Was it not in you that I read of Jove thundering and committing adultery?⁴⁸ In truth he could not do these two things at once. It was all put-on, that someone might have the authority to imitate adultery in fact, with the false thunder playing the part of a pander. But which of our long-robed teachers can with a staid ear hear a man of their own field crying out and saying, “Homer made these things up, and gave human features to the gods—I’d rather he had given divine features to us!”⁴⁹ But it is closer to the truth to say that Homer made these things up indeed, attributing godlike features to wicked men, so that crimes would not be reckoned as crimes, and anyone who committed them would seem to be imitating not lost men but the gods in heaven above.

Nonetheless, O floodwater from hell, the sons of men are cast upon you, and they even pay money to learn these things. And a great production is made of it, when they stage the fables in public, in the marketplace, and the teachers by law are granted a salary over and above the tuition the students pay. And you crash against your rocks and roar, “Here, here are words to learn, here you gain skill in speaking, the skill you need above all to persuade when you need to persuade, and to make your thinking plain!” Else we would never have understood these terms, the Shower of Gold, the Lap, the Makeup Trick, the Temples of Heaven, and all the other words written in that place, where Terence

⁴⁸ Augustine is perhaps thinking of the myth of Danae, whom Zeus (Jove) impregnated by means of a shower of gold. In general, the adulteries of the chief of the gods were frequent and utterly untrammelled from considerations of good and evil.

⁴⁹ Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, I.26.65. Cicero (106–43 BC) is discussing the nature of the gods and of the human soul, in part to console himself after the loss of his beloved daughter, Tullia. What divine features? “To live, to know, to find things out, to remember.” Augustine will return, in the final books of the *Confessions*, to those divine features of the soul.

leads on stage a lewd young man who wants to use Jove as a model for his own corruption. For he gazes at a painting on a wall, portraying the tale in which Jove pours a golden shower into Danae's lap, a makeup trick to fool the girl. And look how he rouses himself to lust, as if by some teaching from heaven:

*What god do I follow, but him who shakes the heavens with
thunder?*

*Shall I, but a man, not do the same? I have, and I love it!*⁵⁰

There is no way, none, that these words are more easily learned by this filthy stuff. Rather, by these words is the filthy deed perpetrated with the firmer confidence. I do not accuse the words, which are like choice and precious vessels, but the wine of error in them which our drunkard teachers gave us to drink, and unless we drank, they beat us, and we had no sober judge to appeal to. And even so, my God, in whose sight my memory can rest secure, I learned these things with a will, I took delight in them, poor fellow, and was accounted a lad with good prospects.

17

Allow me, my God, to say a little about my inborn talents, your gift to me, and upon what raving nonsense I wasted it. I had a task to do, full of trouble to my soul, with praise for a reward if I did well, and shame and the dread of beatings if I did not. I was to speak the words of Juno in her wrath and sorrow, because she could not *turn away from Italy the king of the Trojans*.⁵¹ I had heard that Juno never uttered those words,

⁵⁰ Cf. Terence, *The Eunuch*, 585. Terence (d. 159 BC) was, with Plautus, one of the two great comic playwrights of ancient Rome. The play hinges on a trick played by a young man who uses Jove as an excuse for his wickedness. Since he does not have a beard, the boy passes himself off for a eunuch and slave, and once he is admitted into the household, he rapes the girl he is in love with.

⁵¹ *Aeneid*, 1.38. Rage and inordinate desire are, in Virgil's poem, the two most destructive forces in human life. Augustine has criticized the adulterous lust of Jove; now he strikes at

but we were compelled to wander off and follow in the footsteps of these poetical fictions, and to speak in free prose what the poets had spoken in metered verse. And the boy won the most praise if, in accord with the dignity of the personage he was shadowing forth, he gave the most lifelike semblance of wrath and sorrow, dressed up in words most fit for the meaning.

But what was that to me, O my true life, my God? What was it to me, that for my recitation I got more acclaim than did so many of my fellow readers, my own age? Was that not all just smoke and wind? Was there nothing else for me to exercise my talents and my tongue on? Your praises, O Lord, your praises, through your Scriptures, might have propped up the young vine of my heart, and it would not have been ravaged by empty frivolities, a prey to winged spirits of filth. For there is more than one way to offer sacrifice to the transgressing angels.

18

What wonder was it that I was carried along into vanities, and that I left you and your house, my God? For I was encouraged to imitate men who, if they recounted things they had done that were not evil, and they slipped into some bad style or bad grammar and were criticized for it, would be covered with confusion; but if they told of their lusts in a polished style, rich in words well-chosen and properly placed, they would glory in the praise they got. You see these things, O Lord, and you keep silence, for you are long-suffering, but shall you keep silence forever? Even now you will draw up out of this most horrible pit the soul that seeks you and thirsts for your delights, whose heart says to you, "I have sought your face, your face, O Lord, will I seek."⁵² For I had wandered far from your countenance, in the dark fog of my desires. For we do not depart from you or return to you on foot, by

the fury of Juno, Jove's much sinned-against wife.

⁵² Ps 27:8.

change of place. Truly, that younger son of yours⁵³ did not look for horses or wagons or ships, nor did he fly away on a wing that could be seen, or move his legs to go on that road where he might live in a far country and spill away what you had given him, you the sweet and gentle Father, for you gave him his portion when he set out, and you were sweeter still to him when he returned destitute. No, he left you by the lust of his desire. That was the darkness, that was to be far away from your face.

See it, O Lord my God, and see it with patience, as you ever do; see how careful the sons of men are to observe the rules of letters and syllables they have received from speakers before their time, and how careless they are with the rules of everlasting salvation they have received from you. Suppose someone holds to and teaches the old rules of pronunciation, and suppose, contrary to good grammar, he fails to aspirate the first syllable and says *'uman* instead of *human*. He will make men more disgruntled than if he should hate a human being, though he himself is one. It is as if he thought that some enemy of his could be more pernicious to him than his own hatred that goads him on against the man; or that he could work more destruction on the man he persecutes, than on his own heart by his enmity. Surely the knowledge of letters is not more interior than is this law written in the conscience, that we are doing something to another person what we ourselves would not endure.⁵⁴

How secret you are, dwelling in silence in the heavenly heights, O God who alone are great! By a tireless law you cast blindness as a penalty for unlawful desires. When a man seeking fame for his eloquence stands before a human judge, surrounded by crowds of men, assailing his enemy with the most savage hatred, he is on the strictest watch lest by a slip of the tongue he say *among 'uman beings*. But he has no

⁵³ The prodigal son: cf. Lk 15:11–31.

⁵⁴ Cf. Mt 7:12, Lk 6:31. The sin, again, is a self-contradiction, setting man not only against his fellow man but against himself.

fear lest by the fury of his mind he take from *among human beings* the human being he hates.

19

So there I was, a wretched boy, lazing about at the threshold of these customs. And that was the arena where I was more wary of committing a grammatical blunder, than I was of glaring with envy, supposing I did commit one, at those who committed none. I say these things and confess them to you, my God. For such was I praised, and to please the sorts of men who praised me seemed a life well lived. I did not see the whirlpool of filth into which I had been cast from your eyes. What in your sight was fouler than I was? For I displeased even such people, and told any number of lies to deceive my tutor, my masters, and my parents, all for the love of play, and for my restless passion to gape at spectacles that meant nothing, and to imitate what I saw on stage.

I even stole from my parents' pantry and table, either because my gullet commanded me, or because I needed something to give to the boys to play games with me, because they sold their play, though they enjoyed it as much as I did. And in these games, overthrown by an empty desire to be regarded as excellent, I would often cheat to win. So what I would never put up with, but would most bitterly protest if I caught someone else at it, I would do to others. But if I were caught, I would protest, and would rather rage than give in.

Is that childlike innocence? It is not, O Lord, it is not. I beseech you, my God; for these are the same things, the very same, as we go from tutors and teachers, from nuts and sparrows and balls, to governors and kings, gold, booty, property for sale, just as we grow older, as the birch rod gives way to greater punishments. It was therefore, O King, the stature of the child you approved as a sign of humility, when you said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Mt 19:14.

20

Nevertheless to you, our Lord and God, I owe thanks, to you, most excellent creator and ruler of the universe, even if you had willed that I should be no more than a boy. For I existed, I was alive, I could perceive things; I took care for my well-being, and that was a trace of the most secret unity whence I had my being; by an inner sense I brought my outward senses into one fold, and in these little things and in my thoughts about them I delighted in the truth. I did not want to make mistakes; I had a vigorous memory; I was well taught in speaking; I was soothed by friendship; I fled from pain and sorrow and ignorance. What in such a living soul was not marvelous and worthy of praise?

But these were all gifts my God gave me; I did not give them to myself. And they were good, and all together they made up myself. Good, therefore, is he who made me, and he himself is my good, and I rejoice before him for all those good things that made my being when I was a boy. But this was my sin: I sought delights, and lofty places, and truths, not in him, but in his creatures, in myself and in others. And so I rushed headlong into sorrows, defeats, and errors. Thanks be to you, my sweetness and my honor and my trust, my God, thanks be to you for your gifts! But preserve them for me, and so shall you preserve me too, and what you have given me will grow and be brought to perfection, and I shall be with you, for my very being is your gift.