

THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT  
AN OUTCAST FOR CHRIST<sup>1</sup>

BY  
GERALD VANN, O.P.

25

*Elegi abiecta esse in domo domini mei*—I have chosen to be an outcast in the house of my Lord.

Dear Sister, the ceremonies of your profession are themselves so lovely a sermon that you can have no need of further words. Yet it is a joy to speak a little of your joy, and in particular to think over with you the particularly lovely antiphon which you are soon to sing: I have chosen to be an outcast in the house of my Lord.

I have chosen. Our Lord once said to his disciples: You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you. And yet God in his mercy when he calls us to his service, gives us the power to give him back his gift. Your vocation is his choosing of you; yet it is also your choice of him; an act of your own will. And that is why we are told that a religious profession is something that wipes wholly away whatever there was of darkness, of sin, in the past; it is a complete renewal of heart and soul, a complete cleansing—why? Because it is a complete act of love.

But to have that effect it must be a *perfect* act. It is not enough to say I have chosen to be in the house of my Lord. You have to say, as you do say, I have chosen to be an outcast. *Abiecta*: it means thrown aside, poor, unnoticed, forlorn. Whatever your lot in his house may be, you do not care, you are prepared: it is because you choose his will, and choose it unreservedly, because that is what love means: it is not your will you are come to do, but his; and if he wants you to be an outcast you are happy because it *is* his will. That is indeed the glory of the hidden life that is lived for God: there are vocations that bring with them some sort of fame or renown, and they may therefore have their consolations though they will also have their crosses; but there are the other vocations, the lives that are completely hidden from the world: and they are the lovelier, if only because in them you can be sure that it is not yourself you are loving, but God. You who, in this religious family, live under the banner of the assumption of our Lady, her glory and her crowning as heaven's queen: remember that she became that because when first we meet her in the gospel story she is saying *Ecce ancilla*, Behold the handmaid, the slave, of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy word. For these two things are indeed but two aspects of one single thing: to be as humble, as wholly lost in God's will, as Mary was is to be, as Mary is, a queen. And so you too, who say *Elegi abiecta esse*, you must rejoice; for to you too, and for the same reason, there is given an everlasting

<sup>1</sup> Sermon preached at the religious profession of an Assumption nun, Aldenham Park, August 29th, 1944; Reproduced by kind permission of the Editor of the *Assumption Chronicle*.

crowns.

You choose the will of the God you love in all things, in sorrow as well as in joy, because that is what love means. Soon you are to be covered with a burial pall: it is a symbol of the fact that the new life you are given is also a death: the death of all selfishness within you, the death of the self that grabs and seizes for itself and cannot give. For the religious vocation is indeed contained in that one word: to give. You give yourself to God, wholly and without reservation; and you express your love of God first in your love of your own sisters, and then in your love of the world that God so loves; and always the test and the sign of your love of God is the degree to which you can give and give to the world, the degree of your generosity.

In joy or in sorrow it is the same: it is love that you choose. That brings me to the third point I would put to you. A profession is the mark of a certain *maturity* of love, a love that has been tried and tested. With some God is very gentle, to some he sends many sorrows and trials; but always there is in the early years of religious life a period in which love is meant to grow deep and strong, to become a deliberate act of will, a deliberate *choice*. And that is shown us in the words which follow in this same antiphon: *quem vidi, quem amavi, in quem credidi, quem dilexi*; whom I saw, whom I loved, in whom I trusted, whom I chose out and made my own . . . First you saw: you saw the beauty of God's house, and indeed you saw something of the beauty of him who dwells in the house, though you saw it only darkly, as in a glass, through faith. Still you saw: and because of what you saw you loved. Draw me, I will run after thee, we read in the Song of Songs: you saw and were drawn and you ran; and you knew the fresh loveliness of that love, you knew the thrill of the 'first league out from land', the happiness of one who has found him whom her soul loveth. But then perhaps there came the trials and the temptations and the dryness; and God seemed to have made himself very remote from you and very distant and you could see no longer; and again like the bride in the Canticle you sought him and you found him not. And then was the time for trusting: you had to cling, with a sheer act of will, to your love, for it was no longer easy; you had to say: Even though he slay me yet will I trust him. And so, through that darkness, you came to the final stage: *quem dilexi*: the love that is fire-tried, the love that is a strong, unbreakable choosing—chosen, as the same Song tells us, out of thousands—the deep love of the will that nothing can harm, nothing can lessen, nothing can frighten, because it is a deep and permanent oneness of mind and heart, the love of which it is said that many waters cannot quench it nor floods drown it, the love that is strong as death.

Be glad then, dear sister, because of the glory that is given you this day. In your happiness find a little time to pray for those—and alas there are many of us—who were once given what you are being given but have not kept their gift and their love very well; and you who are witnessing this ceremony, pray for this child whom God has chosen out of thousands, that the act of total love which she is making may never diminish in her heart but on the contrary may grow in strength and fullness; and that her love of God, and of her sisters, and, in and through her sisters, of the world may come to resemble the generosity—the prodigality—of the love of God.

Be glad today because you are given today a crown. 'The king made a marriage for his Son': you are given a crown because it is a royal marriage. But it is a marriage also that is eternal, in which death is but an incident; and so the flowers of which the crown is made are flowers that will never fade. Be glad because what you are given is a promise of eternal joy; and while you rejoice over the crown that God gives you, rejoice still more over the ring which will soon be set on your finger. For a ring is a sign of a contract, a promise; and a contract is a two-sided thing. You have promised yourself to God wholly and without reservation; but remember that he too has promised himself to you, bound himself to you, and bound himself also without reserve. You hope and pray that you for your part will be faithful to what you have promised; as for the promises of God you have no need to hope and pray: you *know*. God's promises are never broken. And so in the ring that marks your contract you have the symbol of your greatest happiness: you have a joy that is safe, and secure, and everlasting; you have a word which you know, whatever the appearances, can never be broken. You need never fear therefore; for as long as you try your best to be faithful for ever to your love you know that it is something that can never be taken from you: you have the right, now and for ever, to say of the heart of the Godhead: I have found him whom my soul loveth: I have found him and I will not let him go.

---



---

## A TREATISE ON THE INEFFABLE MYSTERY OF OUR REDEMPTION

BY

LUIS OF GRANADA, O.P.

(*Translated by a Nun of Stanbrook*).

### CHAPTER V.

*The promptitude and joy with which the Son offered Himself to undergo all the sufferings necessary for our Redemption.*

We have explained how the most excellent means chosen by Divine Wisdom for the salvation of the human race was to unite