

SELECTIONS FROM PÈRE LALLEMANT

II—PERFECTION

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HUMILITY

ST LAURENCE JUSTINIAN used to say that we do not know what humility is unless we have it in our hearts. Only those who are humble of heart can understand it; that is why our Lord said: 'Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart.'¹

In order to acquire humility we must omit none of those exterior actions in which we can practise it on suitable occasions according to our state of life. We should also ask God for true sentiments of humility to accomplish well these exterior actions, which are sometimes performed for vainglory. Then we should very often make interior acts of humility by recognizing our nothingness and deficiencies and by loving humiliations; we should judge ourselves ceaselessly and condemn both ourselves and all our actions.

We should never reprove anyone without being convinced and acknowledging before God that we ourselves are far worse, and our actions are far worse than those of him we reprove.

When we begin to exercise some charge such as preaching a sermon or being Regent or Superior, we should prepare for it by some practice of humility like visiting the prisoners or the poor in hospital, serving at table, or something similar.

The offices of humility and charity are the best because humility preserves peace and God's other gifts within us while charity keeps us busy with our neighbour. Let us be humble, patient, mortified and united to God, and he will bless our work. Its success depends entirely on his blessing, without which all our talents and energy are nothing.

God keeps for himself the dominion of the gifts he grants us. He wills to have the glory from them alone; he does not give them because of our excellence, but to manifest his own. We have, and should have, only their use; they are for God's glory alone and not for our own interests. This must be understood of all

¹ Matt. 11, 29.

kinds of graces, gifts and privileges, and even of natural qualities and talents. God leaves for us the profit and the utility of the good we accomplish and of the gifts we possess, but he reserves the glory for himself and does not will that we should attribute this to ourselves.

But we are not content with this division; we usurp God's share and want to have the glory as well as the profit from our good actions. This injustice is a kind of blasphemy, for nothing is due to Nature considered in itself (which is how we should consider it) except lowliness and humiliation. We should aspire to these with insatiable desire, because our true greatness consists in this: all the rest is only presumption and vanity, illusion and sin. Thus those who have the greatest desire for abjection are the greatest in God's sight. These are the ones who walk in truth more than anyone, and they are all the more like God because they seek only his glory. This is his own possession; glory belongs to him alone. But nothingness is our element, and if we claim anything else as our own, we are robbers. If we love the world's esteem and applause, we are mad and we are feeding on air.

We usually have a false idea of humility because we think it lowers us. In fact it does just the opposite; as it is pure truth and gives us true self-knowledge, it brings us closer to God. Thus it brings us true greatness, which is sought outside God in vain.

Humiliation lowers us only in men's esteem, which is nothing; but it raises us in God's esteem, in which our true glory consists. In these encounters to which nature is so sensitive we should remember that if men see us despised, derided and ridiculed, God sees us exceedingly ennobled. Through the very same things which diminish us in men's sight Jesus Christ delights to see us wearing his livery and the angels envy us this honour.

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Someone will say: 'I cannot believe that I am a greater sinner than the others. Even if I do break rules, I see others who break more; if I commit certain faults, I know others who do worse.'

The difficulty we find in having a humble opinion of ourselves comes from the fact that we are still hardly spiritual. When we are more advanced, we will achieve it. There are secrets in art and science known only to the masters: so also in the science

of the spirit, most excellent of all because purely supernatural, there are certain maxims which can only be understood by the saints who are its doctors. St Francis Assisi and St Francis Borgia were excellent masters of humility: they believed themselves the greatest sinners in the world, not just as a manner of speaking, but sincerely from the depths of their hearts. Their minds were quite convinced of the truth of what they said.

LOVE OF CROSSES

St Ignatius the martyr had the love of the cross and of his own annihilation so much in the forefront of his consciousness that, when condemned to be eaten by animals in the amphitheatre, he wanted the lions to consume his very bones after tearing his body to pieces: thus there would remain nothing of the holocaust he had consecrated to God in order to be his true disciple. He counted himself happy to be annihilated in his sufferings so that nothing of his body should remain in the eyes of the world. 'The world,' he said, 'will see my body no more', and he rejoiced at this thought.

Just as our Lord accomplished the redemption of the world only by his cross and death and the shedding of his blood and not by his miracles and preaching, so too the ministers of the Gospel bring to the faithful this grace of redemption only by the crosses and persecutions which they suffer. Hence great fruit should not be expected from their labours unless these are accompanied by reverses, calumnies, insults and suffering.

Some people think they are doing wonders when they give clever sermons which are well prepared and composed and agreeably delivered, and when they are in fashion and welcomed everywhere. They are in error. The means on which they rely are not those which God uses to accomplish great things. Crosses are necessary to gain the salvation of the world. It is by the way of crosses that God leads those whom he uses to save souls such as the Apostles and apostolic men like St Francis Xavier, St Ignatius, St Vincent Ferrer and St Dominic.

We should not consider our crosses and afflictions as evils which make us suffer, nor as mortifications which disparage us in the eyes of the world; instead we should follow our Lord's example and look at them in God's eternal purpose and his providential order and in consideration of his love for us. We

should also consider them in the heart of Jesus Christ, who has chosen them for us and offers them to us as the material for our crowns and a test of our virtue and fidelity in his service.

In the early stages of the spiritual life we should not yet ask God for sufferings; instead we should be intent on cleansing our consciences and obtaining purity of heart, recollection and knowledge of the interior life. Thence we rise to peace of soul and contact with God, then to the infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost. After that God instils his plans and wishes, leading some by their labours like St Francis Xavier, some by sufferings like St Lydwine, and others by reverses and persecutions like St Ignatius. We however should not choose a particular way for ourselves or we should always be in trouble through not yet having enough virtue for trials and crosses; it would be trying to carry a giant's load without the necessary strength. But when God calls us to enter states which are laborious, difficult and humiliating, neither will labours oppress us nor persecution trouble us; even great austerities will often not spoil our health.
