

GOD IS LIKE A MOTHER

BY

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HERE is a man, forty years old, with a mother whom he respects and venerates. In spite of his own absorbing occupations, he visits her every day for exactly half an hour. He talks as a son should about this and that, always going away at the same hour and returning the next day at the stroke of the clock. More cannot be demanded of him, and from a mother's point of view one could wish that all men did at least as much.

That is a picture of the beginning of the life of prayer—each day the Christian making his or her meditation, and following a method point by point—this is necessary at the beginning. It is already something, but that something is only a beginning, although there are those who think they are doing wonders with their fine thoughts and meditations.

Let us suppose then that the person remains faithful, and that God increases his grace. Oh, how young the soul becomes! It is no longer like a man of forty giving just half-an-hour each day to his mother. It is now the young man of twenty, leaving his mother, indeed, for the sake of his work, but remaining tenderly united to her. For a well-brought-up son at twenty is still on intimate terms with his mother. But the soul may reach still higher, and become like a boy of fifteen. At this age he is still at home with his mother: he has all the precious illusions of a child still subject to his parents: his father's house is his world. Thus the soul enters the house of his heavenly father. Grace has been given him as in the psalm 'to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life.' This house is the house of prayer, a soul which has reached so far will not leave it. True, the soul does not speak yet without ceasing of God and to God, but she keeps looking at him for nothing is done unless under the movement of God. God enfolds the soul which has no thought of him. What an advance no more to leave the presence of God!

Nevertheless, the soul still goes forward. It enters the state of a boy of ten—an age at which a child does not yet know how to carry on a conversation with grown-ups, and yet his childish talk is not the less pleasing to his mother. What a progress then when

the soul begins to be unable even to speak, as in infancy. In this state there are no other sights but God, like a child who sees only its mother. Let us move on then, and think of a child of four years, an age so beloved of mothers because at this age mother and child are sufficient for each other. The language of the child is hardly more than a stammer, but how pleasing to the heart of a mother. She answers in baby-talk, and is understood. There is no need for more.

What a striking and sublime picture of the way of God with his saints! If some marvellous gramophone could repeat the prayer of the saints, how surprised we should be, astonished at their simplicity and childlikeness, at their love-babblings! This simplicity is necessary to will only God, to have need of God alone in the midst of their work and trials—the saints are fully sufficient for God. God wants nothing else. He forgets all, so to speak, in order to lose himself, to enjoy himself listening to the stammerings of his saints. While she is speaking to her child, what do her surroundings matter to the mother? It is a remarkable comparison. God forgets all the blasphemies—all the wickedness, which merit the destruction of the world. One wonders sometimes why God does not punish. . . . Ah! it is because God is with his saints, and when he is near them, he forgets, he no longer sees, he hears nothing else, and it is the baby-talk of the saints which obtains his mercy for us. But is that the end of the life of prayer?

We may continue the comparison. There is an age still to come—that of one year—when the child speaks not at all, nor even walks, an age at which the baby depends entirely upon his mother, and lies continually in her arms on her heart. That is the image of the great saints who do not speak—a holy silence beyond talking. They sleep on the bosom of God, feeding on him, unable to take any other nourishment being like children not yet weaned from their mother's milk. No more can the saints leave God. Is that the last word, the last step forward? For the child, the closest union with its mother is at the sacred period in the womb, when it is but one body with her; the babe cannot be seen, but lives in her.

Here then are the very greatest saints, when one cannot even see them, so far are they lost and melted into God, having but one life with him. They have disappeared so far as to seem dead, and yet they live an intimate and mysterious life with God. It is of this life that Saint Paul said: 'We are dead and our life is hidden in God'. We are dead, and we can no longer be seen.

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