

FATHER JEAN PIERRE de CAUSSADE
LETTERS ON THE PRACTICE OF ABANDONMENT TO DIVINE
PROVIDENCE

The second (and longest) part of Father Caussade's work are letters which he wrote to religious sisters, many of whom he directed. These letters are gathered together under seven themes resulting in seven books of letters.

BOOK ONE
ON THE ESTEEM AND LOVE FOR ABANDONMENT

1.1 Happiness and Peace in Abandonment

Give yourself entirely and solely to absolute abandonment to God's will. This straight path will lead quickly to a profound and unchangeable peace which will remain in the midst of the most violent storms. These storms will harm nothing, will increase the soul's merits, and will unite the soul's created will to the divine will. What happiness! What grace! Unalterable peace comes to a soul who belongs to God and has no other support, no other help and no other hope but God alone.

One sister was so consoled by this thought. It seemed that God became her director and friend. This fixed determination to seek God alone leads to a settled peace. How can created things disturb a soul which does not desire or fear these things? "I endure all until the worst and than I find peace in abandonment" (Archbishop of Cambray).

1.2 A Sure Way to Perfection

Theme: Abandonment is the shortest way to perfection.

Jesus said to the rich young man "If you would be perfect, go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and come, follow Me."

First, you must keep your rule. Second, you must divest yourself of your own views and your high notions of yourself. Give yourself forever to God's good pleasure by blind and absolute abandonment. Abandonment is just another word for love.

The purest love does not exclude personal salvation. However, as a soul approaches perfect abandonment, its ideas move away from self to God's infinite goodness. God doesn't repudiate the soul's personal interests but He has a right to be loved for Himself alone. This is pure love and the soul is perfect to the degree it habitually acts under this love and subordinates itself to God's interests.

Only God's Glory

Total abandonment does not think of self-interest but only of God's glory. It knows nothing else. The soul does not love from self-interest but embraces what annihilates its interests – darkness, weakness and humiliations! The soul's annihilations bring pleasure to the Beloved and that is all the soul desires. The soul wants to be lost in the abyss of God's will.

I have known souls who have crossed this pass of abandonment and have thrown themselves into God's incomprehensible will. They cry out "Oh, how infinitely adorable and kindly is God's will! If accomplished in me I will find satisfaction in life and eternal happiness because God's mercy wants only the greater good for His creatures. I can only be lost by a perversion of my will and by preventing God's holy plans. O God, help me to destroy any foolish resistance so I am assured that your will is done and my perfection is assured".

1.3 Peace in Turmoil

I wanted to remain all my life in Toulouse but now I have accepted a new assignment which goes against everything I would want. I saw the hand of Providence and was able to leave the place which I loved with a liberty of spirit that astonished me.

When I arrived at my new assignment there were untold business meetings, with the bishop, the parliament and the King's lieutenant – all sorts of grand people. Providence gives me a confidence and even a peace in the midst of a thousand cares (which I thought would overwhelm me). Peace comes because God has made my soul impervious to fear. After doing my best, I leave all to Him.

God is a good Father and, from personal experience, I know that He causes all to prosper for His children. Since He has already done so much, will He now forget us? I wait for success with confidence and peace. I accept what happens just to keep pace with His Providence. How can we, poor ignorant creatures, judge Him?

God will keep us at peace even amid the world's greatest disasters. We will be tranquil in proportion to our abandonment. When abandonment is neglected, no peace or rest is possible. Do not judge anyone harshly. This will preserve your peace. Console yourself by confidence in God alone.

1.4 Liberty of Spirit

Although feeling keen pain by being immersed in business affairs while longing for silence, I noticed God's grace giving me a liberty of spirit. I commend these affairs to God. I thank Him when they go well and offer the failures as a sacrifice.

Surprisingly, I have more time. Visits are few and the other priests know my taste for solitude. By grace, I don't worry about people who don't like my lifestyle. God alone is to be served. Soon I will appear before Him, and then only what I have done for Him really matters.

Being familiar with these truths should repose our hearts. Since returning to France, I look forward to the end of my life. Why should I not rejoice with the end of my exile approaching?

1.5 Recourse to Providence

I always experience the action of God's Providence. As soon as I sacrifice everything, he rectifies the situation. I thank Him always and He never fails. People usually act otherwise, substituting their blind selves for the all-wise Providence. They build on themselves and deprive themselves of God's help. What folly! God understands much better and arranges everything more wisely than we can. If we used a little sense we would decide to be led by God, even though we do not know His secrets.

Certainly we should be active, not expecting everything to drop right out of heaven for us. We must never cease working, even while depending on God. However, if we see ourselves as God's instruments we will act quietly, not worried about our past or our future. We would trust in God's fatherly Providence rather than rely so much on human means. Thus, we will be at peace and God will infallibly turn everything to our good.

1.6 Alone With God

I do not see my isolation here as a misfortune. It is really a happy stroke of Providence. I learn to live for God alone. Before coming here many events made me feel alive. Now I am in a desert, alone with God. How delightful! Great interior desolation is now joined by exterior solitude.

Although painful, I know it is good for me. It is a universal death even to spiritual matters, an annihilation which brings me new life in Christ. I am stripped of everything, even spiritual consolations. God wants me dead to self so I can live for Him.

Pleasing Only God

We must be firmly fastened to this strong pillar of His holy will. Don't pity me. This desolation is my joy. I accepted this extreme solitude (which came so quickly) only in my soul's superior part. Now my whole soul rejoices. The course chosen by Divine Providence is always the best.

I devote myself blindly and without reservation. I seek one grace – to please only God and never to offend Him. With this grace, I am rich in time and in eternity. If merit lies in sacrifice, is not the greatest sacrifice our own will? Let the uniting of our will to God's will be our only task. This will assure our salvation, even when all seems lost.

1.7 A Holy Community

Theme: The Happiness of a Poor Clares' Convent which practiced Abandonment

In this town, a convent of Poor Clares is totally separated from the world and lives completely on daily alms. Their superior is saintly. I was drawn to their community as they were to me. I will gain great graces from their prayers.

They practice Abandonment with remarkable perfection. I told them I would procure alms and they begged me to care only for their spiritual needs. They wanted my teachings to help them be detached. Their union and simplicity are unimaginable.

I asked if their great austerities did not shorten their lives. They said that few got sick or died young. Most lived past eighty. Fasting and mortification improved health and lengthened life. There is a holy joy I have found nowhere else.

They want spiritual conversations not gossip or worldly news. "What use is that to us?" they ask. What a favor and consolation to me. I had thought that these nuns were dead and buried.

1.8 Our Dependence on God

Theme: Motives for Abandonment based on God's goodness and greatness.

I have no new ways to grow in God's friendship. I only know what I have already explained – Abandonment to Divine Providence. I do not grow weary crying out everywhere "Abandonment, Unbounded and Unreserved Abandonment". There are two reasons.

1. God's greatness demands that creatures should bow down before Him. His infinite greatness absorbs all things in its immensity. Each moment all things receive their existence from Him. This is creation constantly renewed. All remains in God and never leaves His service. All is plunged and immersed in Him. Nothing lives or moves without Him. All exists by Him and in Him.
2. Things seem to exist but they possess substance only as a gift of God who alone exists by Himself. Because all belongs to Him and all will return to Him so He is glorified by all His creatures. Creatures without reason obey nature's laws perfectly. From rational creatures, God expects greater glory from our voluntary abandonment. What greater use of our liberty than by giving ourselves in return?

God gives us the power to render this homage and, if we profit from it, we must give Him the credit. The impulsion for this total thanksgiving is yet another grace. Each moment increases our debt and dependence on God. Our souls remain engulfed and lost in this abyss of God's dominion.

Complete Annihilation

Our merits (seen in this light) show our utter dependence. As we understand better we shall come to a complete annihilation of self before God. We will be in our proper state – nothingness! Scripture calls this state "Walking in justice and truth". Outside of this, we walk in falsehood (by flattering ourselves) and injustice (by robbing God of His glory).

Unless we abandon ourselves without reserve, God cannot give free rein to His infinite goodness. If we practice total renunciation, God can give us His infinite mercy. We give our limited being. God gives infinite riches. In the abyss of our abandonment where we expect to find nothing, we find infinitude. What an exchange! What divine ingenuity! What a surprise of divine goodness!

1.9 Goodness of God

Theme: A fresh motive – God's Fatherly Providence

Do not torment yourself about the future. It is in the hands of an infinitely good Father who understands all that is necessary. Have you forgotten that Divine Providence arranges everything? Then, why are we not submissive? God alone knows our future dangers and the helps we need.

God's Kind Refusal

St. Augustine said that God doesn't answer our prayers because He has compassion for our blindness. We often ask for what is contrary to our good. We are like people in madness. We ask for what would cause our death and God refuses in charity!

If we saw the truth, we would blindly abandon ourselves to all God's decrees. What peace we would have in outward events and in our inner state. Even in painful moments we should say, "God wills it by permitting it". This would end useless anxieties which destroy our peace and spiritual progress.

God's Advantageous Will

Let me place this principle of faith in your soul, "Oh God, may your will be accomplished in me because it is infinitely just and advantageous. But, you can only will what is for my greatest benefit. I need only to be submissive to you. Grant my wishes only if they agree with yours because otherwise they would be a disaster. If through ignorance, I persist in desiring what you do not desire, please refuse me from your mercy."

"Whatever happens, I will always side with Divine Providence" (St. Francis de Sales). By this greater enlightenment, you will judge very differently and have a new source of peace. How happy are the saints and how peacefully they live! How blind we are, preferring to be shut up in our darkness.

Always aim for conformity to God's will. Our inner rebellion demands that we sacrifice all things by an entire abandonment.

1.10 Continued Troubles

To profit from troubles remember these principles:

1. God wills or permits everything (no matter how small).
2. God is sufficiently wise to turn apparently disastrous events to the profit of those who accept what He permits.

Is anything more consoling? Our natural dislikes actually increase the merit of our sincere submission. An impatience which is only half voluntary only slightly diminishes this merit. These imperfections make us more humble and prevent complacency. "It is a great grace to be willing to suffer in small things through which we gain patience and humility." (Fenelon)

Staying on the Summit

In grievous trials, say "Fiat" twice and then remain at peace in your soul's superior part while the storms rage in the inferior parts. The inferior parts are like the base of a high mountain in bad weather. At the summit all is clear, so stay on the summit above every disaster.

God has placed us where we are and we must depend on Him alone. God also inspires others and all they do comes from Him. Thus, Divine Providence manages everything for the welfare of those submissive to Him. We must believe that God arranges all the circumstances for our best advantage.

God Arranges Everything

I know that my direction is very simple (and, therefore, hated by the world). Although I respect the wise, I am content to be simple and poor, like the people Jesus praises. God arranges everything but our fears imagine inconveniences which do not exist. Follow Divine Providence step by step. When we know what is needed, let that be our only desire because our misfortunes come from accomplishing our own desires.

Leave all to God. Abandoning all is the only way to serve our real interests (“Real” because false interests ruin us). Abandonment is not so heroic or difficult. It is the source of peace in all trying events. God repays us well for our sacrifices! Once the sacrifice is made, we have no other desires nor wish anything apart from His will.

1.11 Good Wishes to the Sisters

Your wishes for me are heavenly because your hearts value only what is divine and eternal. I return your wishes and ask God to increase within you.

1. The solitude and recollection needed for the interior life.
2. The charity, detachment and interior abnegation that preserve peace (the foundation of the interior life)
3. An attraction for the presence of God and prayer (the spiritual life’s mainsprings)
4. A desire to be all for God
5. A perfect union of your wills with God’s will

Nothing so enriches us as God’s will. By conforming to God’s good pleasure, do we not will all the virtues? In practicing abandonment, you find your peace.

BOOK TWO

2.1 Some General Principles

The Lord has given me some general principles (with an easy explanation) to guide your life:

1. A sincere desire to serve God without reserve is the mainspring of the spiritual life. Renew this holy desire frequently so it lasts and is more effective.

2. A firm resolution to belong to God alone must make you determined to think only of Him. To accomplish this, you must do two things. First, accustom yourself to reflect only on God, directly (when at prayer) or indirectly (when involved in the duties of your state). Let other thoughts just drop in the sea. Then this habit will come easily.

The second way is to deliberately forget everything else. Sometimes God places souls in this state (called emptiness of spirit or nothingness). This mystical death to one's own spirit prepares the soul for God’s action. It frequently produces a painful void in the will by which the

soul has no feelings for God or for the world. When God brings about this state, the person should not try to get rid of it. It prepares the soul for God's precious works. This two-fold void must be received with interior joy because it annihilates pride and self-love.

3. Give your whole attention to God's will, and don't worry about your spiritual advancement. Whenever we experience ideas for our self-interest we should say, "Dear God, I sacrifice all my own interests. On some occasions I must act and I ask you to show me when doing so would advance your interests".

The Great King's Generosity

Just imagine you have entered the service of the King. You would say "Lord, I give myself to you without reserve, not knowing how much you will pay me or when my time of service is over. I will serve your interests and leave my own interests to your generosity." Our great King will never be outdone in generosity.

The following are consequences of this principle:

1. If an intense desire comes upon me to acquire the love of God, I respond "Do not let me think of my interests. I am only to accomplish God's will. My progress is His business. To serve Him is my business."

2. If I realize I am imperfect and wonder when I will be freed from this, I respond, "I am not attached to my faults and I will be freed when God pleases. Removing my faults is His business."

3. When I think I am too blind even to see my faults, I respond, "I wish to know my sins and God will give me the necessary light. My progress is in His hands. I only can accuse myself of what God reveals to me."

4. If I wonder if I have ever made a good confession and am I in the state of grace, I respond "God has hidden my sins so that I abandon myself blindly to His mercy. I only want to know what He wants me to know. To know my state is His business. I will serve as well as I can."

5. When I have asked for certain graces, and it seems that nothing moves God, I respond "He is the Master. I desire nothing beyond what pleases Him."

The Three Degrees of Virtue

(A general plan for spiritual combat)

Scripture says that God has left man free to choose life or death, good or evil. Man's salvation depends on the good use of this liberty. Although man's will is weakened by sin, grace never fails him against any evil to which he is inclined.

Our will can practice three degrees of virtue:

1. The virtues essential to salvation. Neglecting these is a mortal sin.
2. The virtues whose omission is a venial sin
3. The virtues whose omission would lessen our merit.

The inclinations against virtues essential to our salvation cause our spiritual ruin. The inclinations leading us to venial sins can also cause our ruin because they can lead to mortal sins.

Inclinations against the third set of virtues will lead us to actions that will prevent us from gaining perfection. Therefore, every victory in which our will is strengthened is a sign of our predestination. Our aim, then, is to move our will toward virtue and against evil.

To do this, we must use three means:

1. Make great sacrifices in what costs us the most.
2. Make daily sacrifices, frequent and continual.
3. Use prayer that is inspired by the Spirit, “with unspeakable groanings” (as Paul writes) and like the Publican with humble compunction.

2.2 The First Work of God in the Soul

As we begin to meditate on the great truths we often experience keen feelings of compunction. This is a sign of the beginning of spiritual infancy. These feelings are often very overwhelming. As they continue, they will be more tranquil. The following are some needed guidelines:

1. As a beginner, your soul is like a bare, poorly furnished hall.
2. Only the Lord can give and arrange the furniture to make your soul a fit dwelling.
3. He will do this only in the silence of prayer. If you keep the hall clean through His grace, He will take care of the furniture.

Do not interfere with his work. See yourself as a canvas on which a great master will paint. This painting consumes considerable time for laying on all the colors. So, get stretched out and nailed to the frame by a humiliation of self and abandonment to God’s will.

2.3 Practice of Abandonment

“Not so much talk, or science or writings but more good practice” (St. Jane Chantal). Souls who avoid deliberate faults and fulfill their duties must take one more step. They must have a continual resignation to God’s will (both interior and exterior and present or future). St. Francis de Sales would constantly say, “Yes, heavenly Father, yes, always yes”. This reiterated habitual disposition of the heart is the straight path to the highest perfection.

To arrive there only two things are needed:

1. The soul must be profoundly persuaded that nothing happens (physically or spiritually) that God does not will or at least permit. Therefore, we submit to His will and His permissions.

2. We must believe that everything turns out for the good of those submitted to his will.

We rest in this two-fold assurance, acquiescing in humility to all his providential decrees, assuring God that we are quite content. We cannot always feel this in the inferior part of our soul, but this gains us even more merit to keep it in the soul’s superior part.

2.5 Means of Acquiring Abandonment

Among the greatest obstacles to the Spirit's reign within us is our human nature, which recoils from the death by abandonment which alone purchases the liberty and life of God. The Spirit has shown you this evil and will gain a remedy for you.

1. You must energetically will to acquire abandonment.
2. You must often tell God that you cannot acquire such dispositions but that his grace will make everything easy.
3. Remain peaceful, even though impeded from abandonment. Tell God that you await the moment of this decisive grace by which you die to self and live for Him.
4. You will not depend on interior sweetness but will value the Spirit's almost imperceptible actions. These are more divine.

Exactly in God's Place

You will be entirely for God, not seeking His particular action, but His very center. Be persuaded that you have a long way to go. Your prayer should be, "O God, my desires will always be measured by Your will. I desire sanctity at the time and degree you will it. I would refuse even a single degree more of grace and glory that You do not will. I prefer to remain exactly in the place you decide for me".

In all your actions, have only the motive of pure love for God and His greater glory. Do not include motives of hope or fear. Pure love should reign over all. You should desire your salvation and perfection. However, even here, you must seek more God's glory than your own happiness. This habit of mind will cause you to make great strides. The smallest actions done from love are of more value than the greatest actions from other motives. Progress comes from renouncing yourself, even in the smallest matters.

Don't forsake your good intentions. When people forget you or condemn you, rejoice that you are more like Jesus Christ. Profit from these slight trials realizing you are not worthy of greater ones.

2.6 Rules for General Direction

1. Do not be burdened with vocal prayers, except those of obligation. Apply yourself to mental prayer.
2. After committing faults, expiate them by doing penance.
3. Moderate your affections for those dear to you.
4. Profit by others' good example. Never show dislike for anyone.
5. Don't be upset by your own faults. Heaven is worth the battle and they will soon pass away.

6. Use a spirit of resignation to profit from bodily illness.
7. Renounce your natural inclinations and limit human tenderness. This mortification is better than corporal austerities in realizing God's plan.
8. Profit from all the assignments the Lord chooses for you.
9. Be earnest for your advancement in perfection, but never restless about this issue.
10. Be more and more interior, aspiring to perfection by regularity of life. Even if your faults are not totally conquered, at the hour of death you will still be fighting. Your weapons are divine love, confidence in God and contempt for self. Find increasing strength in Holy Communion, prayer, obedience and especially in interior abandonment.
11. Accepting sickness in submission to God's will expiates the past and helps us to die spiritually before our physical death. Apply yourself to interior mortification which destroys self-love. Be simple as a little child. When God finds this quality in us He hurries his work.
12. Increase in solid fervor and the perfection of your state. If God gives sensible devotion, use this gift to attach yourself to God. In dryness, just continue on, knowing that God wants you to prove your love.
13. Be humble and correct your own faults. See Christ in your neighbors and excuse them. Imitate Christ's patience with His disciples. Let us glorify God and live hidden in Christ. Be dead to all created things, so Christ can absorb your whole human life. Bear with yourself as you bear with others.

2.7 Rules for Direction

1. If you keep your good intention of belonging to God without reserve, then all things (even temptations and dryness) will turn to your spiritual profit.
2. It is not an illusion to experience peace in the middle of trials. Peace is the foundation (a great grace) which must be held onto against all the attacks of the devil. Be confident in your abandonment and do not vow yourself to anything.
3. It is a great favor to be completely severed from all creatures, both in your will and your feelings.
4. A sense of pending death must be discerned. If it detaches you and does not disturb you then it comes from God. If its effects are bad, then it does not come from God. When God permits darkness, all feeling for good disappears (like the sun at night). Just remain at peace and await the sun to reappear.

Excellent Advice on Prayer to Souls Called to Abandonment

1. Let prayer be a simple glance (by faith without any reasoning).
2. Pause longer on any thought which destroys self-love and brings humility. This will dispose you for God's gifts.
3. Don't worry about distractions. Just collect your mind by faith. The state of distractions is a cross which unites our will to God's will.
4. Prayer should lead to solid faith (incomparably better than sensible faith) and solid faith should lead to greater progress.
5. Assist at Holy Mass with boundless confidence in the Divine Victim.
6. Dryness and aridity are preferred over consolations. God sends these trials to those who have enjoyed spiritual sweetness for some time.
7. When God leads a soul into pure love, fear has no power over it. "Perfect love casts out fear" (1Jn.4:18). Directors should lead these souls into confidence. If the soul needs fear to avoid sin, God will give it. Avoid all anxiety (the greatest temptation on this road). Keep inner peace at all costs and see anything that disturbs peace as an envoy from hell.

The most perfect is the most simple (which contains the least of self). Prayer with a single feeling is better than having many thoughts. If the feeling lasts longer, the soul will more easily act and be touched by God. Divine love should be its ordinary goal. This will produce enthusiasm and let the soul run in holiness.

2.8 Dangers of Illusion Explained

Always listen to the great Interior Director, the Holy Spirit. When He speaks, set aside books. Stay in the interior silence unless God leads you to words. After this, just return to His presence. In this simple repose you will find all light, sweetness, patience and rest for your soul. Do not be afraid of darkness and dryness. You are safe in the union of your will with God (the most perfect prayer according to St. Teresa).

The Prayer of Recollection

No one should meddle with the prayer of recollection because this cannot be gained by good works or by personal effort. However, souls can dispose themselves for this by four purities – purity of conscience, purity of heart, purity of spirit and purity of intention. Having done this, the soul can listen and allow the interior spirit to receive.

Sometimes this inner gift is given even though the soul still has great imperfections. St. Teresa had God's gift of prayer even though enlightened people could not reconcile this gift with Teresa's outward behavior at the time (spending much time in worldly relationships and gossip). She writes "All who knew me considered my prayer to be nothing but delusion". God sometimes gives this prayer gift to great sinners so their conversion takes place more quickly.

He also gives this to imperfect souls to correct their failings more easily. It is rare that this gift is retained if no efforts are made to correct the faults.

2.9 Delusions in Prayer

Fruitful prayer must come more from the heart rather than from the mind. By the prayer of love, the soul rests in God without knowing what it loves. God's reality is manifested by a warmth in the heart and the soul experiences irresistible attraction to God's center. Without seeing distinctly, the soul yields to God without any distraction and experiences a great facility which can continue effortlessly as long as desired.

When a person has this great recollection, but also experiences a great exertion of the mind, they should follow three steps:

1. Concentrate on the heart's affections and allow the sweetness and joy to engross the entire soul. The mind will find itself captivated by this feeling which is food for the heart.

2. If the exertion continues, then prayer should not last more than two hours. At other times, if God impels, the soul should just try to enjoy the sweetness.

3. The soul should examine how the prayer was made at its beginning, middle and end. What was its form? Did the prayer produce thoughts or was it too deep to remember? Did the prayer lead the soul to act and to please God alone? By this prayer, we can find God anywhere with the least effort, although we are not always aware of His presence.

Know that when you are not occupied with created things, you are occupied by God (even without your knowledge). An abandoned soul, when turned away from creatures, always seeks God. Gradually, she experiences outbursts of love. God's true presence brings about a forgetfulness of creatures. This divine gift of interior and exterior silence is the true earthly paradise containing a foretaste of heaven.

2.11 The Impressions of the Holy Spirit

Theme: Abandonment in different states of the soul.

The soul, by being docile to the interior spirit, rarely makes false steps because it is led so surely. Nevertheless, the soul should explain this to a priest. God blesses this humility. Sometimes a soul says "I do not care to write, speak or read much." This shows a well-occupied interior soul. Writers call this disposition "holy leisure" or "holy idleness". By apparently doing nothing all is done. By saying nothing, all is said. The following rules will guide you:

1. You have three dispositions which you experience alternately - faith is the most simple and does not favor self-love. Spiritual tastes and feelings are pleasant but demand detachment to attach the soul to God. Sufferings are painful and crucifying but are the best. By these the soul's interior is purified and disposed for divine union.

2. In all three states, it seems like the soul does nothing. Yet the soul is really at work but so quietly that its inner acts are not perceived. As the Spirit impresses more strongly, the soul's action is less necessary.

3. In times of distress, when the soul abandons itself and is contented for as long as God allows the trouble to continue, it advances more in one day than in a hundred filled with sweetness. This is a solid practice which can transform the soul.

4. Constant, universal abandonment practiced with confidence in union with Jesus Christ is the most certain to succeed.

5. Retain especially the grace to stifle the feelings of nature on every occasion. Correspond with these on the smallest occasions, even though you will never be free from natural desires.

6. When our imperfections displease us, we certainly have no desire for them and they are no obstacle to divine union. Therefore, work to lessen the number of your faults. If you fall again, rise courageously, asking forgiveness without any vexation or anxiety. Humility always turns our faults to our advantage. If you offend your neighbor, always make needed reparations.

7. When you involuntarily experience movements of any passion, give yourself time to recognize where these would carry you if God did not help you. In this way, you will acquire deep knowledge of the evil you would fall into without God's help. By these oft-repeated personal feelings, saints learned holy hatred of themselves and formed a solid foundation for their perfection.

8. When people show esteem or suspicion or contempt for you, see both as part of God's will. Do not try to clear yourself (unless necessary for your neighbor's edification). Concerning unjust accusations, just continue on your way with no change of conduct. In this way, you will live by faith in the middle of confusion. Neither flattery nor contempt will disturb your peace. If you have not acquired this state of independence, your virtues are superficial and not really solid.

9. Beware of the spirit of self-sufficiency. Criticism of others seems a mere trifle but it is very much opposed to religious simplicity and hinders the Spirit in granting the beginning graces of an interior life.

10. Resist temptations in a simple and imperceptible way. A simple look at God is better than other acts. Peaceful doubts after temptations come from chaste fear. Anxious doubts come from self-love. You can know the truth by its fruits. From good prayer comes amendment of life, practice of virtues and fulfilling daily duties. From false prayer comes no fruit or the opposite fruit.

God's path always includes faith, love and humility. Whatever leads away from these is dangerous and harmful. Following this rule will save you from evil and illusion. Abandon yourself completely into God's hands. Be content whether He gives or whether He takes away.

2.12 Peace and Submission

Peace is the foundation of the spiritual life because God acts freely only in hearts filled with peace. Trouble produces weakness, like a fever does in the body. Agitation is an obstacle to the soul's hearing the Spirit's gentle voice.

This peace will increase by abandonment. Never forget that everything happens by God's command or at least by God's permission. All is for the advantage of the submissive soul. By abandonment, our spiritual plans change into something better. Even violent tempests cannot trouble the soul's depths.

Receive With Thanks

Receive the prayer of sweet repose with gratitude. Do not be attached to these prayer gifts. This compels God to remove them because prayer should not lead to self-complacency. When dryness comes, bear it in peace. Only voluntary distractions are harmful. Don't try to fight obstinate distractions but let them pass through your mind.

God wants to grant graces so we remain in dependence on Him. Let there be a glance of faith to Him and a calm in your soul accompanied by complete detachment. God Himself, by inner attractions, will teach you and give you a facility to practice. Each soul must learn its own state and its own attractions and follow these without anxiety (as St. Francis de Sales teaches).

2.13 Peace and Confidence

Many souls do not advance because the devil constantly throws them into anxiety. They become incapable of giving themselves seriously to prayer and virtue. Peace of soul must be the great principle. When peace is attacked all else must be put side to regain this peace. In a fire, everything else is neglected to extinguish the flames.

"The Spiritual Combat" (a famous spiritual book) teaches that peace is the high road to heaven. Peace alone gives great strength to the soul, whereas anxiety makes the soul feeble like a sick body. Without peace, the soul loses any attraction for virtue and experiences discouragement (which the devil exploits). Under a thousand pretexts, the devil deprives us of peace. He makes us think that we have neglected grace, that God will forsake us or a hundred other tactics from which few people can defend themselves.

Principles of Discernment

The masters of the spiritual life give principles to distinguish God's inspirations from the devils. God inspirations are peaceful and lead to confidence. The devil's inspirations are intense and restless, leading either to discouragement or to presumption. We must reject whatever does not have the qualities of peace, submission, sweetness and confidence (the marks of God's seal). The following are some rules.

1. Approach God with the heart more than the mind. Nourish the heart and make the mind do some fasting. Desire and long for God without thoughts. Occupy yourself with belonging to God. Have a profound desire for imitating Jesus Christ rather than having a thousand useless reflections on his virtues.

Just raise your heart to God without a lot of these grand reflections. This is called "coming to God by attraction" and is more useful than beautiful lights. God gives these lights, but they should be united to an attraction for God.

2. God allows souls to suffer an emptiness of mind when it is useless to have distinct thoughts and harmful to reflect. Just acquiesce to God's will and retain in your soul a desire to belong to God alone.

3. When you find lights, which God gives, quietly dwell on them as long as you feel attracted. Then let them go and do not retain them. In this way, you depend on God's call for your interior life.

Sometimes, God continually gives and then takes away consolations to keep the soul dependent. By these changes, God brings the soul to true submission. God acts like a wise and firm mother who gives and takes away from her obstinate child so he becomes obedient and overcomes his rebellion.

Life's Vicissitudes

By understanding God's loving approach, we can have peace in the vicissitudes of the spiritual life. The constant principle is that the best road of spiritual progress is always to acquiesce in God's will. Desire nothing and be prepared for everything. This is walking before God in simplicity, a method that is not disturbing but is attractive like a sweet habit.

Often violent temptations to enjoy what you have sacrificed to God return immediately. This prevents self-complacency. Be at peace. God's grace led you to your sacrifices, so resist the temptation to retract them. These oft-repeated trials show our feebleness lest we claim a large share in the victory and oppose God by our vanity.

Our Unending Weaknesses

This unending experience of our own weakness protects the virtues we practice in faith. As we make progress, God enlightens us more about our poverty so we don't lose the treasury of His grace. God buries His treasures in our own nothingness which we keenly apprehend. This is why the saints always have the poorest opinion of themselves.

Our vanity compels God to hide our spiritual progress and our virtues from us. This shows God hides His favors so we don't take them to ourselves. To recognize and experience our sinfulness is worth more than attributing angelic virtues to ourselves. Engraving this rule on our soul will keep us at peace as we realize our sinfulness. This is God's favor.

2.14 Singular favors of God

Theme: Practicing abandonment during consolation.

When extraordinary circumstances surround a vocation, the spiritual director perceives that God has special plans for this soul and has suitable devotions according to His predilection. From these specially-loved souls, God expects a unique fidelity. They must correspond to his loving kindness or else they will offend his divine jealousy.

You must be prepared for vicissitudes in the interior life because change is the universal law. What must you do now while God is giving you light?

1. Prepare yourself for the absence of your Spouse. When he is absent, do not lose hope of His return.
2. Don't give yourself completely to the present consolations, but remain detached from them.
3. Right now, your prayer comes from God, not from yourself. Remain in humble docility and God will do a great work, even without your knowledge. Do not be curious. Trust God and abandon yourself so He can fashion you as He pleases.
4. Fear only getting attached to the consolations rather than to the Consoler. Value these graces as they inflame your soul and lead you to solid virtues. The devil is not the source of these favors and he won't deceive you if you try to live what the Gospel teaches. Do not put obstacles in God's way.
5. The best prayers are simple thoughts which lead to confidence.
6. God's inner favors often remove any antipathy that we have to our present state of life. This is His remolding.
7. God wills that we die little by little to all things and to live for Him alone. We must have no thoughts, desires, ambitions or love except for Him. To arrive at this mystical death, the soul must endure cruel agonies. So, prepare yourself as did the martyrs. God will uphold you and give you some breathing space (times of heavenly sweetness and heavenly manna to nourish you on the journey).
8. Let the heavenly Spouse unceasingly recall you within yourself, where He will reveal Himself and speak to you (often without words). This should be your permanent dwelling. Always re-enter this divine trysting-place whenever you have left it. This is most necessary.
9. Do not be surprised by aridity when the Bridegroom seems absent. All good souls experience this. By this dryness, God reminds us of our nothingness, so we can give Him all the glory for our good actions.
10. After coming into God's presence, do not get involved in pious conversations. The devil uses these to feed our pride. Gain the habit of speaking with your heart rather than with the intellect.
11. Jealously preserve a desire for silence in the midst of work. Later, you can put this into practice.
12. Although much self-love remains in our hearts, we must believe that the sacred fire of prayer will consume this, just like fire destroys straw. Be patient until all the straw is consumed.

2.15 Heartfelt Prayer

1. Sometimes souls experience a thanksgiving toward God which lasts for days. Accept the gift.

2. The heart has a language only God can understand. This is called heartfelt prayer. The Holy Spirit within the person instructs and forms this prayer. This action revives the soul even when it doesn't understand. The soul pleases God just by receiving the gift and should not oppose His plans.

3. The saints' happiness is the ebb and flow of God's happiness, which He gives in small parts to attract them to Himself and detach them from creatures.

4. Allow yourself to be shaped by the Divine Sculptor and do not destroy His work by actions against His plan.

2.16 The Operations of Grace

I have read your letter with joy. The following thoughts apply to you:

1. An attraction toward simplicity always brings the soul closer to God. This happens in three ways:

- a) Prayer becomes just a simple look at God. Sometimes the senses perceive a sweetness in this. At other times, God's action is hidden in the soul's apex (the highest point of the spirit).
- b) A profound silence guards the senses
- c) God leads the thoughts into simple, repeated words.

2. A sense of God's immensity leaves wonderful affects which no one can really explain. Do not interfere with this grace or be disturbed when taken away.

3. God dwells in a darkness which is inaccessible to man's spirit. When God leads a soul into this darkness, it becomes filled with light. The soul can see, hear and know all without seeing, hearing or knowing anything. This is wise ignorance or the darkness of the light of faith (St. Denis). Just know it is a grace and be immersed in it.

4. An attraction to mental prayer and inner silence result from the prayer of recollection. Another holy state is a kind of inactivity (like an empty space) where the soul waits for the Master to work "Like a servant sits with her eyes fixed on her mistress". Even if nothing is said, the servant is still in abandonment. If grace inspires acts then perform them immediately and return to silent attention.

5. Fervent and reiterated petitions to do God's will frequently precede a time of hard and crucifying trial. All we can do is abandon ourselves without any particulars. In our times we might lack bloody martyrs but Jesus always wants martyrs of grace where bodily torments are replaced by inner sufferings. The Spirit causes a sense of interior annihilation. Accept all the graces that have the sign of humility, and reject whatever has the shadow of pride and presumption.

6. After experiencing God's actions, the soul experiences a horror at its own efforts. Therefore, the soul should remain inactive, if this inactivity does not last long or it is a peaceful waiting. This is not an idleness. It is a loving attention to God in faith, the essence of true prayer.

Do not scrutinize this favor too much because this ruins simplicity. All that comes from God is gentle. What comes from self is marked by confusion and anxiety (St. Francis de Sales).

7. A very good prayer method is an attraction to know God by considering the mysteries of Jesus Christ and accompanying these thoughts with affections. However, this method does not always continue. When it has passed, return to a simple contemplation of the mystery with some gentle affections.

8. While praying, do not examine your method of prayer. This turns you to yourself and keeps you from looking at God. When the prayer of repose begins do not think of its sweetness. Instead, seek charity and the infusion of virtues. This state of prayer can be used for hearing mass or saying the Divine Office. Be prepared for God to wean you off this milk of spiritual infancy so you can eat strong bread.

9. If the soul is empty of created things then its capacity for infused love is greater because the soul has an insatiable thirst. When the soul is plunged into divine love, acts of love are not needed. Drink at the source without any commotion.

By the plunging and replunging of the soul into the fire, the heart is enkindled with pure flames. Think only of two things, detach your heart from everything created and allow God to act. He has brought this about. In this prayer, you can always ask for greater love. At times you will be impelled to do so.

10. God uses any tools he pleases, sometimes these are weak instruments. So, say whatever God leads you to say to those who come for advice. When God sends someone, we are not meddling in their lives but showing our love.

2.17 Attraction to the Interior Life

Theme: On docility to the Spirit's inner impressions

(This is a letter to the superior congratulating her on having seven sisters who are deeply committed to the interior life. This letter then gives her advice in guiding these sisters.) This is followed by advice.) Never forsake the road of plain faith which is God's almost imperceptible work in the recesses of the spirit.

Jesus said that we must worship the Father in spirit and truth and what the senses experience is only an effect of grace. The more the grace is imperceptible, the more it is solid and pure.

Peace is one of God's greatest gifts. So, follow all that it inspires. Remain in inner peace and listen attentively to the voice of God's Spirit. "Be faithful to the interior graces". "You have no need for man to teach you for His anointing teaches you all things". (1Jn.2:27). Follow this divine anointing. When it grows faint, wait patiently. In this way, you will not go astray.

Substituting Our Works

Why do we want to substitute our works for God's works when we make progress by not interfering and by abandoning ourselves? "Wait on the Lord," says Scripture. This is the best means of holiness. Souls who already fulfill God's precepts should apply themselves to "peaceful waitings" so they can acquire the spirit of prayer.

God is infinitely liberal. His hands are filled with the graces which He wants to pour out. We receive by hearts that wait in readiness. Spiritual waiting tires out impatient souls and disheartens selfish ones. There is no treasure in the world equal to God's gift but people rush after chimerical perfections. We should allow God's will to guide us. While we are hunting laboriously elsewhere, He will show us that the treasure is close at hand.

2.18 Desires to be Moderated

If fear produces uneasiness or discouragement, drive it away because this comes from the devil or self-love. Remain in God's presence and await His will concerning even saintly projects. Why? First, only God's desire should be our desire. To arrive at perfection, we must persevere in adhering to all the circumstances in which we find ourselves by God's permission. Divine Providence disposes everything. Giving up our own will is the important condition for sanctity.

God's Delays

Delays that arise in executing our good desires are excellent in gaining abnegation. God often delays His plans for years so that we practice faith (and think we are not). During these delays we can sustain ourselves only by bare faith and by a constant imploring of God's help.

God seemingly leaves us to our own devices, to show us how weak we are. What a great favor! We learn our weakness and experience a constant need for God to raise us up by His inner graces.

A deep desire to set aside your own will is a precious grace. Guard and increase it. Make every effort in prayer to sustain this. I wish you could spend your whole life in just allowing the Spirit to work. All is without effort because God dwells only in peaceful souls.

2.19 To Aim at Simplicity

One word of God in the soul's ear is worth more than all the teachings of man. One breath of God moves our ship safely into harbor – much more than our own rowing. You are learning this through God's touching proofs. Keep in this state. In one moment submission to God when He does not command us to act, softens our anxieties. Remain in this simplicity because multiplicity brings confusion. It and scatters our powers without us perceiving it.

Take the following truth to heart. "I have been created to please God. My task in this world and my glory in the next is for God to determine. It is His business. Hopefully, I will think of my business as willingly as God thinks of His business."

2.20 Holy Simplicity

Accepting the removal of interior consolations is infinitely pleasing to God and merits our receiving them more abundantly when the time comes.

God sees the heart. Perfection does not consist in a multiplicity of acts (even interior ones). In fact, as we advance, God removes our power to make us remain humbly in His presence. Be content and just renew the simple acts of faith, love and resignation.

A Soul at Peace

In all the changes just say “God, I wish what you wish”. This habitual act is your perfection. The soul is at peace even when trials and emotions war against it. As you maintain interior simplicity, God will help you advance. Don’t try to measure your progress. God’s work is spiritual and hardly perceptible. The following are some signs that God is acting in your heart:

1. a holy indifference making you insensible to things
2. a peace whereby you are not troubled by your own faults
3. an attraction for the things of God and a keen hunger (free of trouble) which leads you always to God’s will in spiritual poverty or abundance

Holy Simplicity

Jesus said that we must become like little children, so do not ruin your holy simplicity which men esteem so little and yet is so precious to God. Be always more simple in esteemed your opinions and behavior. Some people act from vanity.

Go and come from prayer with a well recollected mind. Then, you will always derive some fruit, even when God seems far away. Make just a few acts in prayer with great repose of mind and tranquility. During the day, do not force yourself to many acts or to feel fervor. Keep yourself in peace, resigned in an emptiness of mind and will. This will lead to divine union.

2.21 Different Attractions of Grace

Certain souls who are totally submissive to God experience two quite distinct attractions. At times, they are drawn to God by a humility mixed with love in which there is great delight. At other times, there is almost a total lack of any acts, a complete repose. They feel obliged to take a book to escape from this inaction. Concerning these two states, I give the following advice.

1. Both states come from God, but the second is better, because it is simple and more profound. It worships God in spirit and in truth.
2. The second state is less satisfying and therefore is more of a sacrifice.
3. The second state, because the Holy Spirit acts with the soul’s consent, is a more affective prayer.

When God acts more and the soul less, the prayer is more perfect. Therefore, when the soul is absorbed by God it should allow God to draw it on. To do otherwise would be to resist the Spirit and to act from self-love.

Letting the Spirit Act

If this attraction is not overwhelming, keep yourself in silence, giving the Spirit an opportunity to act. This applies especially to long periods of prayer. In short visits to the Blessed Sacrament you should make formal acts. Yet, even these acts should flow from the highest point of the mind without much effort. (St. Francis de Sales) The first type of prayer uses formal acts while the second uses only implicit acts. The more simple acts are more spiritual. This simple inclination of the soul says all to God. This prayer has many names, loving, waiting, simple looking, pure faith, pure simplicity, prayer of surrender (abandonment). Since this prayer has more value, you should use it more without neglecting the first.

2.22 Fidelity to the Call of God

(To a woman wanting to enter the Visitation Sisters. She eventually was accepted.)

God has certainly called you to the Visitation Order. You have this double vocation – called to religious life and to this particular order.

Fidelity requires three things:

1. In spite of obstacles (interior and exterior) preserve your attraction for God, so you will give yourself to His service.

2. You must hope (as Abraham did) that nothing can resist the all-powerful God, who overcomes all obstacles and man's opposition. He created the universe by saying "Let it be done" and He will remove all obstacles by saying "Let it be done". He allows these present obstacles to your vocation to test your trust in Him. Do not torment yourself. Just say, "Lord may all you will be accomplished how and when you will it. I sacrifice my own interests to please you in all things".

3. Be faithful to your exercises of piety (meditation, mass, confessions, examens). Raise your heart to God even in the dryness of grief or weariness. These trials detach you from creatures and unite you to God.

To perfect your abandonment God has permitted you to be forbidden to enter the Visitation Order at this time. Obey God by obeying those in authority. If the command prejudices your salvation, God will not allow it to remain.

2.23 The Value of Good Desires

(While the woman awaited an answer)

The increase of a desire to consecrate oneself to God is a great grace. Also, accepting the pain of not being allowed to fulfill these desires is a great grace. Self resignation is a martyrdom and God uses delays to test the soul's fidelity. Even if years pass by, the soul possesses the best part (strong holy desires).

Really, these desires are the entire sacrifice of self. Possibly, the soul's patience in not seeing these desires fulfilled is the greatest sacrifice. The soul must be at peace, for God takes our desires as if the work was performed. Needing nothing, He loves a heart ready for sacrifice.

Basis of Confidence

Fear of death and judgment is good as long as it causes no anxiety (which would come from the devil's illusions). Why are you afraid? Does God ask the impossible? You seem to think that you have done nothing for heaven. Do not try to acquire merit for personal assurance. Our confidence always lies in God's mercy not in our own wretched works. While trusting in God, let us accomplish what He demands and then hope in His goodness.

Certainly, it is easier to be saved as a religious than to live in the world. Yet many must remain in the world. Their hearts are religious and God is, so to speak, obliged to care for them. So, remain in the world with perfect confidence. Subject your heart to the spirit of religious practices because God sees you even now as His beloved spouse.

2.24 God's Call to Religious Life as a Sign of Predestination (Her call is not yet fulfilled)

See God's call to His service as a sign of predestination. Besides eternal salvation, temporal happiness will also come from this call. The world is so depraved, that people outside of religious life often lose courage and give up. So, thank God. He has preferred you to those others, who find such sorrow and disappointment in the world.

Secondly, trust God that His plans will have a successful completion. God often delays our accomplishments and seemingly allows His plans to be thwarted to show that, after all is done, He remains the Master. Without Him we accomplish nothing. With Him we accomplish the impossible.

Total Resignation

Thirdly, resign yourself totally to God's will, telling Him frequently that you have no other will than His. This will avoid all interior stress (which is so opposed to God's grace). When your own desires are set aside, resist all impulsiveness and renounce your own will. If you feel any aversion to God's will, go immediately to prayer to overcome this self love (even in holy things).

Since God wants us to do all in our power to fulfill His good desires within us, follow these guidelines:

1. Frequent the Sacraments as often as possible.
2. Live in purity of conscience and avoid the slightest fault.
3. Spend time in spiritual reading every day.
4. During the day, raise your mind and heart to God as frequently as possible. This will gain fresh inspirations. Be faithful to these and God will give you final perseverance.

2.25 God Desires Only What We Can Give

(The woman is still not accepted)

There is a martyrdom in conforming your will to God's. By faith we know that God wills everything except sin. Nothing happens without His hidden will. Sometimes God postpones a sacrifice (like entrance into religious life), and then gives graces to sustain that suffering. Losing our interior peace in these difficulties shows we are indulging our self-love, instead of loving God. We should always be content.

God seeks only our desire for self-sacrifice. This desire should be peaceful and in accord with His plan. Sometimes God wants only the desire for a sacrifice and not the sacrifice itself. Look at Abraham. God did not require the actual sacrifice of Isaac. Many saints desired martyrdom and God did not permit this sacrifice.

Restless Struggles

You desire to be a religious but, for now you must live in the world. Don't let vain fears ruin your peace. God can make you stand firm in the world. So renounce your own restless struggles. These feelings of vexation do not come from God.

Many times you have feelings of vexation after committing faults. A humble soul always returns gently to God, seeking forgiveness without inner turmoil.

2.26 Abandonment in Tasks and Undertakings

Everything that God wills always succeeds because He knows how to use human opposition to gain His purposes.

When things are for your benefit, men will oppose you in vain. If your desires are not for your good, then God uses their opposition to fulfill his will. Only God can see future consequences. Why should not we, blind creatures place all matters in God's hands? What could be more secure? What safer refuge exists? Only in God are our hearts at rest. Solid peace does not exist elsewhere. What is not of God is a danger to our salvation.

2.27 Acceptance of Duties

(To a Sister just elected to lead a religious community)

Retain your present dispositions and the new office will not hurt your spiritual life. Duties do not hurt us, only the anxieties that accompany the duties and our desires to succeed in the eyes of others. The saints were as recollected amid duties as at prayer. We could be the same if detached from self-seeking. Do not refuse the office. "Desire nothing and refuse nothing" (St. Francis de Sales). Just ground yourself in unreserved abandonment and unlimited confidence.

It is an error for Sister N. to refuse duties in order to stay prayerful and recollected, for she was offered these duties but she refused. Her perceived incapacity was no excuse because she did not seek the office. This incapacity would have occasioned many acts of vigilance and charity. However, she did not have the courage to face the sacrifices but was led by self-love disguised as humility.

2.28 To Will Only What God Wills

It is a unique grace when the prayer of repose lessens the power of our passions. Do not allow fear, sadness or voluntary despondency to enter your heart and destroy God's peace. When you are free from concerns, you can find a delightful solitude everywhere (although the difficulties allowed by Providence are preferable to solitude). Although painful, these difficulties are meritorious.

Therefore, many ways lead to God and each person must follow their individual path. Our maxim is "Not to will other than God wills". Let us do all that God asks, and then remain peaceful, abandoning all to His will.

2.29 To Leave All to God

Theme: Only God knows what is expedient for us

Do not worry about the time of my return. I do not know it and do not wish to know. I abandon myself entirely. Taste the sweetness of this hidden manna, desiring only God and letting Him satisfy our desires. By blind abandonment, we are delivered from all cares and can advance to perfection, without examining the past or reflecting on the future. Our confidence in God focuses the present and lets the good Father lead us by the hand.

Remain in Abandonment

I seek no light concerning my future assignment. I prefer to remain in ignorance with no cares, like a little child at his mother's breast, desiring nothing contrary to God's will. This happy state protects me from a thousand useless thoughts and uneasy desires about the future.

God has sent me to many places where good was mixed with hardships. If asked to live these years over, I could never make my own choice. I let God (who always knows what is expedient) choose for me.

Our only important business is our eternal salvation. No need to be troubled about anything else. I am like a bird sitting on a branch. I have no certainty of my stay. This leads to abandonment and peace. I know that I will arrive safely at journey's end, led by Divine Providence whose steps I follow.

2.30 Resignation In Sickness

(To a Sister who is gravely ill)

Your incurable sickness is a sort of martyrdom, a kind of purgatory. Accepted without complaint it will certainly sanctify you. Do not worry about the occasional signs of your impatience. These will not impede your union with God. Your life, filled with pain and trial, will be your purgatory in this world. So, I dare not ask God to deliver you from a trouble which will soon end and bless you in eternity.

I will ask God for patience and resignation. To feel no fear at the thought of death is a grace from God. All spiritual advice is reduced to one phrase. At all times say, "Let God's will be done" but especially in your present crucified state to which God has reduced you. This is all that the saints did. Let us imitate them.

2.31 Conduct in Sickness

(To a Sister with a not-so serious illness)

I know you feel unprepared for death. Let me speak about those fears.

First, always say “Whether prepared to die or not, I am always disposed to do God’s will”. St. Francis de Sales said, “God would not condemn the world’s greatest sinner who, at the last moment, generously offered his life and abandoned himself entirely to God’s Providence”. Such an act is perfect love, able to remove all sins without confession (like Baptism or martyrdom).

Frequently make these acts because we are like little children whose father (to try their dispositions) makes them return some candies he had given them. Should they not say at once, “Father, you can have them all”. Would not the father be touched by their generosity and be even more generous in the future? This is how God acts with us.

2.32 Patience With the Faults of Others

To see others behave badly and to feel no indignation is a great grace. If there are reasons to speak about their faults, watch over your tongue and speak only from good motives.

Keep alive your desires to belong to God alone for He must finish the work He has begun in you. Many sacrifices precede the moment when God by His pure love takes possession of our hearts. Sigh for this happiness and always beg for it. Purchase it with generous sacrifices (no price is too high).

Our hearts exist for love, so go to God’s heart to be set on fire and transformed. Let us abandon ourselves and then keep straight on the road that God has marked out from all eternity. People argue about predestination. The best way to insure eternal salvation is to accomplish God’s will continually.

2.33 Patience With Ourselves

We must submit to God in everything. This includes our present state of life and our own character, nature, mind, temperament and inclinations. So, be patient with yourself. This will allow you to have peace and to put up with yourself with the gentleness usually reserved for others. This is an important matter for your sanctification. Make frequent acts of submission because you can gain this gift only with great efforts.

When God reveals to a soul its own faults, it becomes a great burden to itself. We always carry ourselves around, going everywhere with our imperfections. See God’s goodness! Sorrow for our faults is their remedy, unless we fill the sorrow with bitterness. Then it does not heal wounds but poisons them.

Sorrow from God is full of resignation. It delights in a humiliation which profits the soul. Cease tormenting yourself for your faults. Offer God your sorrow and He will send little crosses to make up for your infidelities. Arm yourself with a patience that will give God more glory and give you greater progress.

2.34 Preparation For the Sacraments

Abandonment to God and desiring to be one with Jesus are the best preparation for the sacraments. The devil tries to disturb the soul's inner peace. He knows that as peace is firmly established the soul flies along on the way of perfection. So, don't be deluded. Go to God with simplicity. Seek Him with an upright heart.

At prayer, don't worry about distractions. Make your interior turning to God so frequent that this alone will take the place of prayer (without leaving it go). Read the letters of St. Francis deSales. It is as if the Holy Spirit dictated them just for you.

I ask God to give you the following graces:

1. A moderation of your external conduct so you speak and act quietly without any impetuosity.
2. Interior gentleness toward yourself and others.
3. Total abandonment so you do not worry even about your advancing in virtue. "I wish only what God wills".
4. A peace of heart that even your sins cannot disturb. After sinning, always return to God knowing you are assured of His pardon.

2.35 Conduct in a Time of Rest

(To a Lay Person)

During your vacation:

1. Approach the sacraments as often as possible.
2. Offer to God your recreations, because He is pleased to give them.
3. Since you are less busy, read good books. Place yourself in God's presence. Read a paragraph, and then stop to assimilate what you have read. If you pause a long time, this is even better.
4. Use this method for your meditation.
5. Occupy yourself with the duties God has for you.
6. Remove vain and useless thoughts.
7. Especially, remove all anxieties.
8. Say, "God remove any dangerous self-confidence. Substitute your Spirit for mine" and "Teach me, O God, the secret of interior peace which allows you to change my soul. I desire this so that your reign of ineffable peace be established within. I will prepare for this by fidelity to small, daily practices. May you bless my blind submission".

2.36 On Life and Death

I am in Albi (a place I love so much) with people who kindly give me so many invitations (when I prefer solitude). God places crosses everywhere, but an intention to bear them (made beforehand) makes them lighter.

I rejoice to be where God wants me. His fatherly solitude redoubles my confidence. These rapidly passing years will soon bring me to my eternal goal. My thoughts of death appear good when I can see their effects.

A Vast Eternity

In later years, time passes so quickly, but what are a few years for us who will live forever with God? Those who went 100 years before us and those 100 years behind us will be neither before or behind in the vast eternity. This thought softens the rigors of these years, for what compares to the eternal life to which we are all hurrying?

I must prepare my equipment (as St. Francis deSales says) and the best equipment is the crosses we carry. Our consolations at death will be all our submissions to God's will in spite of our self-love.

The vicissitudes of good and evil, health and sickness, are God's way of keeping us in continual dependence on Him. Making holy use of sufferings mitigates these trials and makes them profitable. Accepting daily sufferings makes us martyrs. These sorrows are like the tyrants who killed the Christians. Use the present evils to escape the eternal ones for we should rejoice in the days when God humbled us and in the years when we saw evil (Ps.89:15).

2.37 Not to Desire Consolations

Fear at the sight of death should be united to a more-powerful confidence in God. A person should believe in God's special graces at death and abandon themselves to the Father.

There should be no anxious pursuit of consolations. I seek for strong souls who persevere in the absences of the Bridegroom. For God alone is all and excessive fear arises from lack of abandonment.

BOOK THREE

OBSTACLES TO ABANDONMENT

3.1 About Vanity and Infidelities

Before God takes away your vanity, He allows you to experience its ugliness to convince you of your powerlessness. Therefore, do two things:

Examine this ugliness and await the moment God has fixed for your cure.

The Secret

You must separate what is from you and what is from God. I can teach you this secret in a moment but you can learn to practice it only when you have peacefully experienced all your

miseries. “You cannot put on perfection like you put on a dress”. (St. Francis deSales). The secret of goodness works its way gradually into your soul.

All good comes from God. All sin comes from you. All evil inclinations and habits are your share. The small amount of good you have done is God’s share. Do not be complacent. All the good belongs entirely to God.

You often say “Lord, have pity on me”. Keep constant in this and God will do the rest. If you are faithful, God will work great things. Just place no obstacles in His way, but place absolute confidence in His goodness.

Remember the following:

1. Knowing your own weakness and need of God’s help opens the door to all good especially a self-annihilation that is pleasing to God.

2. You cannot see God’s work in your soul. This is hidden by your weaknesses. Allow your goodness to be buried in the abyss of your sins. Under this heap of refuse, God hides the fruit of His graces. Otherwise our vanity would destroy His works.

When you are able to enjoy your good works, God will open your eyes and you will praise Him for Himself. For now, endure your temptations with pain. God demands this little sacrifice before giving you His delights for your heart exists for His love alone.

3. God seemingly takes delight in plunging you into the abyss of your corruption and His mercy. These are the two poles of the interior life. Seeing yourself as corrupt is perfectly true, but God does not leave you to yourself. He gives this grace of full self-knowledge to few (because few can bear it). Trust God without anxiety or discouragement.

4. Lament your frequent infidelities and return to God. This will happen all your life. As long as these infidelities come through the frailty of your nature, there is nothing to be concerned about.

God knows our weakness. If we, too, know our sinfulness, we are rescued from self-confidence. Do not be discouraged even when your resolutions fail. Instead, enter more deeply into your nothingness. Learn complete distrust. Repeat, “Lord, I can only depend on your all-powerful grace. Let my hope bring down your mercy”. You cannot have too much confidence in God.

5. Don’t try to figure out how you stand with mystical death. You will never know (and should not know) in this life. To know would give new life to self-love.

6. The experience of God’s holiness causes confusion and pain but does not cause the soul to lose peace. The soul must not resist this grace but should let itself be abased (like Jesus in Holy Communion). Discouragement is a sign of self-love because the soul wants to improve itself. Be satisfied with what God wills. This is the rule. Limit your own desires to His will.

Never get it in your head that you have arrived at a certain state. Progress is measured by how much we distrust ourselves and confide in God.

Each day say, "Today I am going to begin". Never cling to your own judgments. Do not excuse yourself. Keep silence, even though you sacrifice the good opinion of others. Endure every accusation without saying a single word. This is the spirit of the Gospel.

Within us, we carry a font of natural corruption that, like stagnant water, gives off a stench. God has given you a keen perception of this truth. From this corruption should come complete distrust, the core of humility. This is a great grace.

3.2 The Defects of Beginners

(This was written to a sister conducting a retreat for a laywoman who sought to be a religious but was detained for two years.)

At times, God uses superiors to uncover a secret pride which rebels at any humbling correction. The person must rid themselves of this pride, especially about supposed virtues which are possessed. As worldly pride feeds on the beauty of the body, spiritual pride feeds upon the beauty of the soul. It spends too much time looking in the mirror and flatters itself about its supernatural gifts. The remedy for this diabolical evil is:

1. To imitate modest people who drive out all vain thoughts
2. To focus instead on the soul's defects
3. To imagine what we would be without God's help. If we neglect this, God allows temptations and even sins to cure us of this inflation of the mind. When God uses this remedy, we must not rebel.
4. In these moments, we should remain at peace in God's mercy and let the storm pass. Struggling only aggravates the evil.
5. Do not ask to be delivered but only to be patient until they end.
6. We must be like children toward those who guide us.

3.3 The Illusions of the Devil

(Written to a Religious Whom Father Caussade knew well)

I insist on the same directions that you have followed and from which you received such benefit. Why now allow yourself to follow the delusions of the devil? Do not let your confidence in me be in vain. If you are sincerely resolved, then just remain at peace. Satan always tries to prevent this peace.

The Greatest Evil

Anxiety is the greatest evil in your soul. Thank God it is not incurable! However, it is more dangerous than painful because it makes you incapable of hearing the Spirit, of receiving His

consolations and of fulfilling your duties. Physically sick people need three things – rest, good food, and obedience to the doctor. So, I give you the following counsels:

1. Be obedient. God has given priests the task to guide and He asks that souls follow them blindly. So, renounce your own judgment and do all that your director asks. In this way, you will not entertain thoughts against his advice nor scrutinize everything. If any such thoughts come, just reject them as temptations.

2. Earnestly acquire peace and rest for your soul. I will tell you how:

a. Do not allow thoughts of depression or sadness to remain on your mind. These are more dangerous than temptations to impurity. Resist them by fixing upon contrary ideas and making inner aspirations. Let this struggle be energetic yet tranquil.

b. Avoid all hurry and natural activity. Walk, pray and read quietly and slowly. Do not worry about these temptations. Your free will feels only a horror at them. Stay at peace in these temptations as you do in your other trials.

3. Next, a sick body needs a strengthening diet. Read good books very slowly with frequent pauses. “Books are like the tree’s bark but our interest is like the sap which feeds the soul” (Fenelon). Be like a glutton, enjoying these books even after they are swallowed. Speak on useful subjects with those most capable of leading one to God. When suffering interior trials don’t waste time on useless conversations. God does not want us to seek consolation elsewhere while He is trying us. He decides the moment of our consoling.

4. Apply yourself to interior prayer, remaining still in God’s presence, making acts (or desiring to) of love and repentance. “Desire is with God what words are to others. Our desires say everything to God who knows our petitions and inner acts” (Bossuet). To God, a cry in our hearts is equal to a cry that pierces the heavens.

5. Practice this type of prayer all during the day, raising your inner attention to God. In the morning, foresee all your circumstances. Plan what prayer you can say in each circumstance. If prevented, then place your inability before God.

The best food is to will all that God wills in all the day’s circumstances. In temptations say “God, keep me from sin but I accept interior humiliation as long as you will”. Following these teachings, even the most enfeebled soul will recover its lost peace.

3.4 Interior Troubles (Same Person)

If my letter troubled you, I rejoice in its good effects, that is, to humble yourself in a gentle way. You are not disobedient by your fears but you cling to them. You study them instead of putting them away. Without absolute confidence in God, you will have no peace.

No Fear

What can you fear in abandonment? Don’t let your good works give you security (which should rest only in God’s mercy). You say I would be distressed to know your faults. I hear this all the time. Really, this keen perception is a grace because:

1. It keeps you humble

2. It occasions an heroic abandonment to God's mercy. Those who know their faults retain no confidence in themselves. This absolute distrust opens the door to God's consolations especially those of unalterable peace and holy joy.

If you only knew the gift and holy assurance of salvation which is hidden in abandonment, you would have no fears. You seem set against this abandonment but you must come to it – at least at the moment of death. Unless a person has an express revelation of their salvation, they are compelled at death to abandon themselves.

False Self Love

You say, "If only I lived a holy life, I could abandon myself". This is self-love which seeks self-confidence instead of trusting Jesus. You haven't grasped the central point. You have not risen above your fears to throw yourself on your Father's breast. You want self-assurance before abandoning yourself to infinite goodness. You are like a criminal who wants a pardon before abandoning himself to the court's mercy. Is this hoping in God or being a slave to fear?

I insist on this. This is the final battle of grace (and the one that costs the most). Abandonment is not throwing yourself into an abyss with your eyes closed. Instead, we are driven to despair with ourselves so we hope only in God.

You do have two great graces:

1. a powerful attraction to abandonment
2. a penetrating insight into your own powerlessness

Thinking Only of the King

You ask, "How can I work out my salvation?" You do not understand. A man who truly serves the king thinks only of what needs to be done and "lets the king take care of the recompense".

You ask "Are we not told to watch over ourselves and to be detached from the world?" At the beginning of religious life, "yes". But later, we must be drawn away even from spiritual self-interests. God allows you to find only fears so He can say to you "Forget yourself and find peace in me. You can only be the cause of your own destruction".

God's Light

You say, "Then, I will never know my sins". Ridiculous! Sins are apparent in the light of God's presence. Self-examination is not needed when there is divine light which then burns away our faults like straw.

The human heart is an abyss of corruption and God's light reveals this. However, the soul knows that this humility is the foundation of perfection and that this knowledge inspires solid confidence in God alone Who is never confounded.

The Two Springs

I know many souls who gain greater confidence in God as they see their own faults. This self-knowledge brings self-distrust and God imparts a total confidence that leads to abandonment. Distrust of self and trust in God are the two springs of the spiritual life. By abandonment we actually regain everything. We are delivered from the torture of self-engrossed souls who seek salvation for their own interests and not God's.

Certainly God commands us to seek our own salvation but we must understand that God created us for His glory, the only purpose He could possibly have. Due to His mercy He arranged this for our interests also. Self-love reverses God's order. We provide first for ourselves and God is given second place.

God's Response

God looks upon this reversal with a jealous eye. He sends these souls (whom He has blessed with graces) secret trials to destroy this self-love (which is so harmful). Thus, they think less of themselves and quietly abandon themselves. Jesus has said to many souls "Busy yourself with my glory and I will take care of your eternal welfare".

By always worrying we tell Jesus, "I will be lost if I don't care for myself and I can only seek your glory now and then. After conquering my faults, I'll give more time to your glory. For now, I know you want me to work out my salvation". To this Jesus says, "Whoever loves his life will lose it and whoever loses his life will keep it into life eternal". In fact, the souls that always think of Jesus have the greatest horror for sin and make the greatest sacrifices.

Regaining Everything

Obviously scruples and excessive fears show a preoccupation with selfish interest and not with God's glory. Love for God should take precedence even over charity to ourselves. In loving Him, we will regain everything.

Seeing your own corruption should not distress you. All is well because keen insights into personal sins is a great grace. Great souls find their happiness by being engulfed in their own weaknesses because they dwell in truth and in God. In prayer you should also be engulfed in your sins and, at the same time, in God's peace. Stay as you are. God will do the rest.

Do not tremble over your spiritual state. I am blessing God for that. I just wish your self-humiliation would be mingled with peace and trust in God. "Heroic virtue is to always rise again without losing courage" (St. Francis deSales).

3.5 On Love of Neighbor

Affection for a loved one is good but when it disturbs inner peace something is wrong. To sanctify this, do the following:

1. Do not be engrossed in thinking of her.
2. In her sufferings, you must submit your feelings to God. By giving her to God's care, you help her and yourself.

God Arranges All

Do not place much trust in your reasoning faculties. Humble prayer is more effective. Our sadness at relatives' illnesses are an occasion for merit because faith lifts us above our natural feelings. Has not God arranged everything for the good of those seeking perfection?

This abandonment is the most infallible road to salvation. A wise pagan wrote "A person with refined and generous feelings has great difficulty in not being moved by any hardship encountered by a loved one".

We combat this by the following:

1. Reflect on the uselessness of our worry.
2. Refuse to think about it. Only eternal salvation is necessary. In this way, these feelings can pass like shadows.

Inner Solitude

Are not worldly people consumed with business and important projects? Jesus told us to learn from them. We are saved not by exterior solitude but by interior solitude which banishes superfluous thoughts and is absorbed by God's interests. Purely temporal matters (pleasures or sufferings) are only shadows. They appear to exist but are really nothing.

3.6 On Attachments

You have the great grace to make many little sacrifices and to moderate even harmless attachments. Remain faithful and you will escape many dangers. Many make no progress because of this snare.

Allowing attachments places a barrier to God who would inflame our hearts. These souls are distracted by foolish amusements. This was a snare for St. Teresa of Avila. So, detach yourself more and more and be drawn to God. When the heart is empty, God fills it and all things become easy.

3.7 Personal Attachments

Your too frequent involvements with your family and friends presents a serious obstacle to your advancement. Personally, I find it difficult to keep my communications within bounds. I make only necessary visits and my conversation is about God and eternal life (a rule laid down by St. Ignatius). People who like my approach will profit from it. Those who do not, will not return for another visit.

You will make no progress if your mind is filled with outside news. Limiting communications is part of the religious life. Useless communicating scandalizes people and loses grace for the religious.

3.8 On Natural Activity

Your excessive activity (unless under grace) will cause you great harm. The world mistakes this for virtue but it is disastrous for sanctity. Natural activity is the enemy of abandonment. It spoils the workings of grace and substitutes the human spirit for God's Spirit.

Too Much Self-Confidence

Our impetuosity for good works comes from self-confidence and makes us imagine that we do great things. We would be more reserved if we realized that we are powerless (except for doing evil). Please use the following means to uproot this evil:

1. By experience, be convinced of your own weakness.
2. Perform all your acts without hurry (St. Francis deSales).
3. Do the same in spiritual exercises, undertaking these only under the impulse of grace.
4. Avoid all sensible ardor in your prayer. Let your interior acts flow from your mind's highest point (St. Frances deSales). These quiet acts make a deeper impression on the soul.
5. When you feel God's stirring, remain still so you do not ruin it.
6. When God gives strong emotions in prayer accept them with reserve.
7. During the day, experience a peaceful waiting.

The Expectant Beggar

Be like a beggar at a rich man's door. He is not idle but fills the day with interior acts. So, a soul waiting before God acknowledges God's infinite power and mercy and knows only its own emptiness. The soul hopes in God and expects to receive by its abandonment. These acts are not specific. They lie at the bottom of the heart where God sees all our desires.

With God, our desires are like already spoken words which He hears clearly. The Psalmist claims that God knows the slightest turn of our hearts to Him.

When In Darkness

It is even more powerful to bear the darkness patiently. It is God's specific remedy used to suppress natural activity. This inordinate activity of natural powers is overcome only by constant efforts to act under God's Spirit (never under our own). We act blindly when we complain of these divine benefits which extinguish natural activity and destroy self-love.

3.9 On Excessive Fervor

Good desires can become too strong when nature and passion get mixed in with grace. This makes us restless and hasty. To avoid this, God withdraws them for a long time. Only desires from the Spirit (not those from nature) deserve a hearing with God. Stay in peace and joy, because grace makes its way easily into calm hearts. Those filled with uneasiness are open to evil influences.

3.10 Restraint of Over-Eagerness

I sent you the book "Christian Hope", but to gain the most fruit from it you must restrain your eagerness to read it.

Read it in the time allotted. Enter into its consoling truths in a practical way pausing to let these truths enter your soul. The Spirit will use these peaceful pauses and imprint His heavenly truths, which enter your heart more easily than your mind.

Mark the chapters that seem important to you so you can read them again. Read little and digest much. Right now your soul needs simplicity. Reading should lead to recollection, a gift God will give you if you seek it quietly and simply. Ask God to detach your heart so you may love and enjoy only Jesus Christ. He will possess your heart and make it His.

3.11 Intemperate Zeal

Zeal for your neighbor's perfection is good but self-complacency and severity towards your neighbor can lie hidden in these zealous feelings. Such zeal does not come from God but is the devil's illusion and harms you. This evil can be cured if you apply the following remedy.

Forbidden to Use

I command you never to use this zeal again until this prohibition is expressly removed. I take full responsibility for any ill effects.

If you are tempted, just say, "God, charity is the queen of virtues but I am not allowed to act until this zeal does not disturb my peace of soul and until I can use it with thoughtfulness to my neighbor. I need a charity which does not embitter. I need a patience to endure the faults of others as you endure mine. When I am neither troubled nor astonished, this prohibition will be removed. Until then, I turn my zeal on myself".

When your humility is deep, I will urge you to use your zeal. Remember God often allows those with indiscreet zeal to fall into greater sins.

How to Speak of God

Speak of God only with a gracious spirit, never with bitterness or severity. In your present state of mind, you will do only harm. Did not Satan quote the Bible?

Your peevish temper is like a smoked glass which prevents you from seeing in a true light. Guard against your temper and feed on the opposite feelings. Talk about God's infinite goodness and our confidence in His mercy.

Demonstrate virtue which places no restraints on others. Keep silent if you cannot say something good. Severity revolts and embitters people. It does not convince them. Meekness repels evil while harshness makes evil incurable. Meekness builds up. Severity destroys.

3.12 On Obedience

(To someone reluctant to accept comforts)

"I will have obedience, not sacrifice". Do not refuse the comforts prescribed by doctors and nurses. In this way, you will renounce your own ideas and judgment. Some devout people forget this, get attached to their own ideas and grow obstinate. They are deluded and forget that self-love spoils holy practices.

Renounce your own judgments for God's love and you will make great progress. Know only what you are ordered and do it joyfully. This is easy when you seek only His holy will.

Follow God's will in what pains you and in what gives you pleasure. Follow His will in consolations or in deprivations. Blind obedience makes no exceptions. It sacrifices everything – judgments, inclinations and aversions. You can see why this sacrifice is so pleasing to God. Without it, all else is of little value. The obedient man will gain many victories.

3.13 Attachment to One's Own Judgment

(To the laywoman who was finally accepted into the Congregation)

At last you are freed of worldly ties and have embraced a religious vocation. The longer you waited, the greater should be your thanks.

You will find many more difficulties than those who entered younger, but simplicity and spiritual infancy will diminish and remove these problems. You will be preserved from subtle pride by which novices try excessively hard and even reject comforts provided by their Superior. This is disguised vanity.

Be ambitious only to follow the ordinary course, not one iota beyond. Allow yourself to be treated as a little child. Don't seem strong and courageous. This delights God more than an austere life (which often conceals pride).

Those who were most devout in the world always cause the most trouble since they were always admired by others and approved by their directors. It is more difficult for them to be humble than others who are untrained or even worldly.

Since we must become children, I hope they will treat you as a sixteen year old. When they lighten your burdens, say nothing. Be satisfied to be treated this way. Admire the sisters' loving charity for you.

Those with pretended devotion are far from real greatness. They should go to Bethlehem and become a little infant handled by everyone. Follow this example and you will merit the kingdom.

3.14 On Reserve With a Director

(A sister has a dislike of being open to her director)

Struggle against any aversion to open your soul to your spiritual director. The devil inspires your fear because he knows that souls who have the courage to reveal themselves are quickly cured and greatly consoled. The devil also knows that unrevealed wounds can quickly become poisoned. From self-love we deceive ourselves and have a false conscience. Only one way exists to remedy this. We must make our thoughts known to our directors so they can guide our conscience.

A fresh danger exists – that of misleading those who give us advice. The best approach is for your director to learn about you from others. You should be thankful if a charitable person has

spoken to your director so he could better guide you. This attitude is usually found only in perfect souls.

Many who want to instruct others, do not themselves want to be instructed. This again is a two-fold illusion, so examine yourself.

3.14 On Discouragement

(To the same sister)

The temptation to discouragement is one of the most dangerous. Resist it and trust that God will complete His work. Your foolish fears about the future come from the devil. Use the present well. That assures the future.

Be detached even in the smallest details. God allows daily faults to keep you humble. It is easy to use daily faults to gain humility. Admire God who uses our faults for the greater good. Just dislike them and rise above them.

Fulfill your duties and depend on Divine Providence so you can have a tranquil heart. If you are faithful, you will live at peace in the middle of great problems.

3.15 Fear of Singularity

(To the same sister)

God has given you an inner desire to serve Him unreservedly. The more vehement this desire, the more you must fear being deceived. This fear is a fresh gift but you must know how to use it.

Two Deceptions

Because of your desire to serve, the spirit of darkness will employ tactics to spoil and corrupt it. He uses two kinds of deception. First, he makes the fear excessive to weaken the soul and send it into depression. To remedy this, just laugh and say, "God will finish this work because He chose me when I shunned Him." Remember, a good beginning is the best guarantee of perseverance. Fears always accompany conversions. They are the first temptations of beginners.

Secondly, the tempter seeks helpers. He can find these among good people who will complain about any grace that moves a soul in a unique way. They are always ready to offer advice. These say that what is not common never lasts and that exaggeration is blamable. This is human respect in the cloister. It is dangerous and prevents the soul's conversion to holiness.

Set Aside Foolish Remarks

We must overcome these false human impressions and learn, by Jesus' grace, to set aside these foolish remarks. Compare the gospel sayings with these human reasonings which are filled with a carnal spirit. I know these are pious people but they don't judge by the gospel's pure light. They follow natural considerations. They are blind not to see a true conversion and a change of heart.

Obviously, these conversions have to be noticeable. They lead to changed conduct and to an inner peace which is shown by infallible signs. Unfortunately this irritates the jealous self-love of others.

Awkward With New Habits

At the beginning, the new conduct seems uneasy because the changed person and others are not used to the altered way of acting. Ease comes with habit. After all, how can a soul that is trying to restrain itself in a hundred ways seem free and amusing? If it were otherwise, I would doubt the person was experiencing any interior change.

Some people are both interiorly devout and exteriorly gracious, but this is after long experience has made their virtue seem natural. When they began, the same things were said about them. Yet, they went their own way.

Needs Long Practice

Some day you will attain that state called “the liberty of God’s children”. Your recollection will come easily and you will please people by exteriorly manifesting your inner peace caused by pure love. This doesn’t come suddenly. It requires long practice and the beginnings are uncomfortable. Later, restraint will be natural and you can regain your gaiety. In the beginning this would spoil something.

While God is doing great things within you, the remarks of these clever reasoners are like the judgment of this world. Religious who do this are led by the father of lies. Just bear this trial and rejoice interiorly at their folly and mockery. In the Lord’s service, every position has honor.

Regaining A Holy Freedom

Now you seem awkward but wait patiently and things will change. Your faculties are now in bondage but they will regain the freedom of holy liberty.

The sight of your imperfections is willed by God for your humility but your excessive severity, sadness and a belief that you will be lost come from Satan, who tries to spoil God’s gift. These thoughts will return but you will be victorious. Perfection is not the work of one day. “You cannot fly before you get your wings” (St. Teresa). So, be content with what God give you and you will avoid the self-agitation that the devil so loves.

Spotting Self Love

Self-love is easily spotted in the vexations that the soul feels by seeing herself at the bottom of the ladder when she thought she was at the top. You must behave differently. Love to be at the bottom. We would lose everything if God gave us instant perfection. We would be as high as Lucifer and, like him, fall into an abyss. God lets us be lowly until we can be raised up without self-satisfaction. Let us admire God and feel sad for souls who cannot understand His merciful trials even when explained to them.

BOOK FOUR

THE FIRST TRIALS OF SOULS CALLED TO THE STATE OF ABANDONMENT

4.1 Aridity and Weakness

(Written to a sister who gave Father deCaussade a complete account of her vocation)

I hope the Holy Spirit enables you to understand what I have to say:

1. Your vocation has the marks of God's seal, a solid guarantee of your eternal predestination.

2. Your attraction to serve God completely is a highly valued grace which is more real because hidden from the senses.

3. Why then do you remain at the door of the interior life and not enter it? I will tell you. You have misused this attraction by over-eagerness and by natural activity which stifle grace's gentle action.

You have a secret presumption causing you to rely upon yourself. God wants to moderate your ardor that goes beyond His grace. You have aspired to do more than God desired. Avoiding worldly ambition you have been carried away by another subtle ambition – to have a high place in the spiritual life.

4. Your present state of obscurity pleases God who asks you to walk in this darkness of faith.

5. This dryness makes you share in Christ's sufferings. God sees your desires for His helps. "A cry pent up in your heart is a cry to heaven" (Boussett).

Apply these principles. Our prayer is efficacious in spite of an aridity which never prevents our desire to pray. God sees all the acts of prayer we wanted to make just as He sees the fruit even before the springtime buds are formed. Make these maxims your own and they will sustain you on a thousand occasions. Good will is everything to God, even when you seem to do nothing.

6. Perfection consists in submission to God's will in all things and everywhere. To do this is to do all. Without this, exterior practices and austerities are nothing in God's sight. When we experience our own involuntary opposition to this submission our reward is greater because more effort and sacrifice are needed.

7. Knowing and fearing all the traps (interior and exterior) enable us to avoid them. We will always be victorious if we are humble and trust God's power. Sometimes God lets us fail in minor matters. This is salutary and keeps us distrustful of our own powers and as nothing in our eyes.

8. Seek your peace in the higher part of your soul. Pay no attention to the revolts of the lower part. God pays no attention to these. These are just the courtyards of the castle. (St. Teresa)

Be like the saints. Finding your courtyard filled with unclean animals do not stop there. Go quickly into the soul's sanctuary and stay there where God dwells permanently.

9. You were right in abandoning yourself and leaving go of the memories of your own sinfulness. These dispositions are the foundation of that complete distrust which draws down God's grace when we are convinced of our powerlessness. "When I am weak, I am strong". (St. Paul)

10. You are praying best when you think you are praying worst. Why? A firm desire is real prayer of the heart. In these times, you pray without complacency and without vain reflections. You pray by silence and submission and when the prayer is over you are greatly humiliated.

11. St. Frances de Sales calls the sincere desire to be all for God the "pillar of the spiritual building". This pillar can sustain everything. Fear nothing as this desire remains in the superior part of your soul. Don't even think about what happens in the inferior part.

12. We conquer self-love with great trouble and it is God's work more than ours. Take advantage of little combats and victories. Seeing your efforts in little things, He will complete what you cannot.

Therefore, always beg God for the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit we might spend a lifetime in imperfections and fall even lower with the risk of being lost.

13. Only in Holy Communion can we find power and support. What a great difference between those who receive frequently and those who do not. The latter deprive themselves of riches.

4.14 Remedies For Troubles

(The use of trials)

To apply the needed remedy, I need only point out the cause. Evil begins when you are ignorant of your attractions of grace. Divine grace gives different attractions to each soul (some sweet and some crucifying). To some, God gives prosperity and to others He gives difficulties. He apportions all by His wisdom. Perfection for you is to follow the path according to God's attractions.

1. You forget that you make more progress by suffering than by doing. So, be patient with yourself.

2. You also forget that perfection does not consist of spiritual favors but in doing God's will.

3. Your problems come from this forgetfulness. Your own anxieties have doubled your pain and deprived you of peace (the foundation of inner life).

You then sought others in whom to confide when God alone wanted to console you. You must act differently by following these principles:

a. Say, "My way is hard and bitter but I must submit to God's will because God, as sovereign Master, has a right to dispose of me. He is a loving Father who can only will what is good for me. I shall never find any peace except by resigning myself to all He wants. I can take a step only on the road marked out for me. I cannot make my own path for I am blind and this would lead to destruction."

b. You should will only the perfection God desires for you and the means He has chosen. A different desire for perfection exists which comes from pride and self-love. This is restless and not dependent on God. Give yourself to the first desire and resist strenuously the second one.

Suppress Anxious Desires

Therefore, suppress those desires which show disquiet and anxiety for they come from the devil. What comes from God leaves the soul tranquil. Why do you desire with such fiery eagerness inner joys and other gifts if these do not please God? This is perfection for your pleasure not for God's. This is serving God according to your caprice.

Should you be resigned to a life of spiritual poverty? Certainly, if God so wills. Then, your poverty will be pleasant and you will be wealthy (for God is quite rich).

Patience and Gentleness

Heroic virtue consists of patience in weakness, darkness and fickleness. Those who aspire to perfection need much patience and gentleness toward themselves. (St. Francis de Sales)

Let us carry our burdens as we should carry our neighbor's. When the will suffers spiritual tumult, it is ready to give way. By keeping firm, we can gain fresh victories and merit. If the will goes astray, it must be regained by humbling itself gently.

Doubling Your Merit

You say that these problems make your spiritual exercises useless. Not at all! Your will decided to fulfill these and this remains valid (except by long and voluntary distractions). You really gain double, the merit of the prayer and the merit of sacrifice. These are not performed from self-love nourished by consolations but from holy humility.

You say that you won't feel contrite. Contrition is not a feeling but comes from the higher part of the soul. Sensible contrition can feed self-love and is not required by God. You worry about having contrition. Believe firmly that God has given it. While confessing you need contrition only once to remit all sins, past and present.

If you saw your state as I do you would thank God instead of afflicting yourself. Stay at peace. Achieving peace means all is complete. Repeat always, "I wish only what God wills. Nothing more. Let none of my blind and perverse wishes be done.

4.15 Trials to be Endured Peacefully

1. I want you to be perfect but it is no crime that you are not there yet. God gradually accomplishes this work by confidence in Him and fidelity. Jesus told St. Catherine of Siena that some do not become perfect because they talk so much in prayer that they do not listen to Him. They act and don't let Him act.

2. It delights me that you know God supports you in your suffering. Enduring suffering peacefully advances you in a calm way. Use your energy to practice patient endurance in your soul (if not in your feelings). What God requires, He also bestows. Unite with me in giving thanks, for this is God's most precious gift. From it the saints experience unchangeable joy.

You say that, due to your temperament, it seems impossible to have an interior life. With God, everything is possible. At present, He is making you experience your own weakness, but rejoice in hope. He loves to see His grace triumph over our greatest weaknesses.

3. "Lord, have pity. You can do all things" is the best possible prayer to gain God's help. Keep to this practice of expecting nothing from yourself and everything from God. You will see the results. Unless prevented by your infidelity, God will do great things. Just place no obstacle.

4. Attach yourself to God alone and to His will which arranges everything for our happiness. In this blind submission rests our perfection.

5. It is a great grace to realize the folly of worldly pleasures. Contempt for the world is a great motive for religious life. Although just a novice, you love religious life. The rest will follow, so moderate your spiritual ambition.

6. You are indifferent concerning how people treat you. That is a grace. Put up with the times of sadness and discouragement. This kills self-love. Certainly, you should expect some consolations, but do not be troubled when God withdraws them. Count on God when others default. Trust him in dangers like children trust their parents. This childlike simplicity will gain from God all we ask and more.

7. Understand Jesus' words to St. Catherine about the excessive activity of souls. Do your daily works without excitement while listening to Divine Wisdom speaking in our souls. Even in our prayers, we should work quietly and without confusion. We must pause often to give the Spirit time to do what He pleases.

8. You fear that your faults are greater because you realize God's presence. This fear comes from the devil who tries to diminish your devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. Continue with this prayer and the fruits will be evident.

9. Your gaiety has been temporarily removed by God. When it returns, you will be completely changed with a joy that is peaceful and comes only from God.

10. Continue your prayer method. During pauses, receive any inclination quietly. Tend toward the Lord more by affections than by ideas. Be satisfied with what God gives. His least repose is greater than what we say. Let this conviction impel your heart. Don't interrupt God's repose of your soul. These are precious minutes of a friendly audience.

BOOK FIVE

FRESH TRIALS, SUFFERINGS AND PRIVATIONS

5.1 Rules to be Observed in Illness

You will derive great profit from your illness because:

1. You suffer peacefully (even without energetic acts of acceptance). This is to suffer well.

2. You suffer in a feeble way, somewhat overwhelmed by the illness, with no feelings of great courage and often at the point of losing patience. This is suffering in lowliness of spirit. Your heart would swell with satisfaction if you suffered with strength. This would bring on spiritual pride.

You feel weak before God. This is very consoling. Remember, when you experience both the cross and your own weakness, you submit in simplicity at the very center of your soul. This is sanctifying – to be humble knowing you are lacking in courage to suffer (Fenelon). If good people knew this, they would be at peace in their sufferings. Apply this truth every day, especially to daily annoyances.

3. Take all that the doctors and the infirmarians order. Obedience is more pleasing to God than mortification. Forgetting this, many people are unmortified in their mortifications. Don't forget this, because self-love spoils everything. Be happy to renounce your own ideas for God's love.

5.2 Different Sufferings

There are great trials and also daily vexations. Because these latter are multiple, we must take advantage of them. By these daily crosses, God destroys our self-love. We should be glad to get rid of our vanity which embitters us and causes a thousand faults and constant annoyance. Even if the sufferings are greater, remember that we feel badly if we have carried them badly.

So let's rejoice in making a virtue of necessity. To do this, you must not make a fuss about your sufferings. There is great spiritual fruit and temporal blessings in resigning yourself in all things to God's will. Not a hair falls from our head without His permission. No event (great or small) happens in this world without God's providence. This is consoling. We could cast off all our cares if we could see ourselves as children of a loving Father. He loves us most when administering bitter remedies. Please don't refuse the medicine that will bring you life. Many senseless people don't accept these truths even though revealed in Holy Scripture.

5.3 On Public Calamities

The public disaster (of which you speak) is a visible scourge by God which can save souls. At the same time it can lead to eternal reprobation if used badly. Why give resistance to God's chastisements? Isn't He doing us a favor by detaching us from what would cause us to lose our souls? Think often of the Church Fathers saying, "God is so good that even His anger comes from His mercy. He strikes only to save us."

Like a wise surgeon, He cuts away the infected skin to prevent the infection from spreading. If we see everything in this light of faith, then events, desires and fears will have no affect on us. Men are blind and attached to their own ideas.

We rarely meet anyone who admits he needs advice. Let us understand that our sins have led us into a depth of blindness. In this way we will distrust our own ideas. St. Catherine of Siena understood this and cried out (for all to hear) "Lord have pity on me". Your saying "Let it be done" to present pains and future fears will gain joy and consolation in all pain and fear.

5.4 Opportunities for Practicing Charity

Congratulations! You now have a chance to practice charity because the person you are with is so different, and her manners so annoying, that any charity you show must be supernatural. You will be amassing a treasure of pure gold. Be gratified to God and follow these rules:

1. Bear patiently the feelings caused by sister's behavior just as you would bear with a fever.

2. Speak only kindly of her. Remember her good qualities. God also allows you to be a trial to her. "God polishes one diamond with another." (Fenelon)

3. If you commit a fault against charity, use this to your advantage. By our daily faults God reveals our pettiness.

4. Do not meddle. If everything perishes, it is nothing as long as we save our souls. You ask "But what do I do if such or such a thing should happen? Please take no notice.

Author's Approach

I live day to day and hour to hour in absolute dependence. I have no thought of the future, not even tomorrow. God, who sustains us today, will sustain us tomorrow. The manna was given each day in the desert. Whoever gathered for tomorrow found it was spoiled.

Let us not make unnecessary provisions for ourselves, when God's foreknowledge provides all. Let us abandon to him both our earthly and our heavenly interests. This abandonment binds God to take care of us for we pay honor to his sovereign dominion.

5.5 Profit to be Gained by Patient Endurance

It is a grace to show charity toward the person who tries your patience. Profit by these precious occasions which win God's heart. Often we want God to forgive our deliberate sins and we won't forgive others. "Forgive us Lord, as we forgive others". God told us that He would act

toward us as we act towards our neighbor. So, show charity and God will treat you in like manner.

This gives you the daily opportunity to practice the solid virtues of meekness and kindness which will bring forth an eternal harvest. These virtues are the best way to gain the continual presence of God and interior prayer.

5.6 Various Kinds of Difficulties

As long as we live on earth, we will always need patience to put up with each other. So, profit from the faults of your neighbor. I acknowledge that your present position is difficult but this is the only way of peace. What a treasure in heaven! If this lasts and you practice abandonment, you will attain, in a short time, the grace of an interior life. So, do not seek an easier assignment. The saints sought eagerly for these trials because they understood that they bring about a union with God.

Why a Temptation is Dangerous

You have been attacked by a temptation which is dangerous because you do not understand the basic truth that everything except sin comes directly from God and the ordering of His will. God never wills sin nor the injustices suffered by His elect. He does will that his elect should suffer persecutions, injustices and even martyrdoms in a thousand different ways.

A man, through his own sins, might fall into poverty or all sorts of afflictions. God, detesting the sin, wills the consequences. The man should say, "Lord, I thoroughly deserved this. You permitted this. Thy will be done." Job knew this principle "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Praised be the name of the Lord." He didn't say "The devil has taken away" because the devil has no power without God's permission.

Uneasy By Illusions

Because you are not imbued with this principle you don't know how to submit to certain events or to remain in them peacefully. The devil makes you uneasy by a hundred illusions. If you just end such a mistake you will also end all your vexations and your rebellious feelings.

Accustom yourself to submit to everything that comes through others, the devil, yourself and even your sins. God has permitted them. "Fiat. Fiat." Your painful situation is very sanctifying, a penance imposed by God himself. Your fears are an illusion. They deprive you of God's peace and make you sad.

God Uses All Things

Many in the world are unhappy because they do not understand this principle. They would be spared many a torment and amass much merit if they believed that God uses all things for His glory and for our benefit. They can derive benefit from a total, general and blind submission. I want to inscribe this truth on your mind in my blood! God will do this gradually if you cooperate. I entreat you to submit (despite your repugnance) and you will be holy.

5.7 Rules for Difficult Circumstances

(On the same subject)

I agree that keeping an immovable patience amid diverse personalities is very difficult. The constant friction causes us to fall (a weakness) but we can rise again (a virtue). Little by little God gives everything. You will not be perfect at once. Therefore, moderate the agitation of your desires, or you will be broken. If you cannot prevent this collision, don't torment yourself.

Reading about the injustices towards you troubles my heart. Our only remedy is to say "Lord, you permit this. May your will be done. May this cross expiate my sins and get me to heaven." This is the best remedy. I can find no other. Inevitably, you will experience slight movements of revolt and bitterness. Just return to God and ask patience.

5.8 Annoyance Caused by Good People

1. Your annoyances are more painful for they come from people you admire. Each person is convinced of their own ideas and that God is on their side. If they would put themselves at the bottom they would trust more in God.

God permits good people to cause suffering in each other so they become detached. On these occasions just resign yourself. Abandonment allows us to turn a deaf ear. Whenever we recall what happened, there are always specious reasons to be upset. Do not worry. These irregular emotions deprive us of peace, which we must value highly.

2. You can speak to your director to gain peace, just do it with charity. It is more perfect to keep silence. Tell all to God, our friend and director. This is called the prayer of confidence, an outpouring of your heart which gains strength and consolation. If you continue as you are, trying to improve in proportion to your weakness, your salvation is assured. Don't let your fears keep you from Holy Communion. Be patient with what you feel is a hardness of heart. This is God's affliction to increase your merit.

5.9 How to Bear These Trials

(To the same sister)

God has subjected you to painful trials and you must be very holy to let these things pass unnoticed. Try to dismiss all those feelings which would embitter you. If impossible, just say, "O God, you permit this. Let your adorable will be done. You are the Master. Be blessed in everything." Then add, "I forgive the person who causes this and I ask blessings and every happiness for them." If your heart resists just say, "God, you at least see my desires to forgive." If the feelings persist, just resign yourself to them in the higher part of your soul.

5.10 To See God in Our Trials

With all my teachings, I am surprised that you cannot see God's hand in the misunderstandings among good people. God often permits his servants to make mistakes or have illusions. This sanctifies them by the troubles they cause each other. We see this in the lives of saints (recently of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque). Do not judge by weak and blind human judgment but by the infallible divine judgment. This will insure your peace.

5.11 To Seek God's Help Alone

(On deprivation of Human Assistance)

You seek to be pitied because you are deprived of God's help. Really, you are to be pitied for lack of abandonment. You are a chosen soul, called into God's service and overwhelmed with graces. Yet, you are not content with God, but look to His creatures. A soul should cry with joy, "My God, you are my all. I desire only what you give me." God will take the place of the reed you depended on.

No Need For More Advice

Yet, you feel you still need advice. You have received so much advice you can give it to others. Don't despair just because you have a serious doubt. Raise your heart to God. He will lead you when human guidance is removed. Then do whatever you believe to be the best course. Whatever the result, believe you could not have done better. God loves simplicity and is satisfied with what we do after asking divine light.

You say that in your isolated condition everything is an affliction. What a grace! This will produce complete detachment. God gives this grace to those He loves the most. You say "Only God can know all that I suffer." St. Teresa spoke those same words in her trials. To find life sad and bitter is a good sign. Death is terrifying because judgment follows. This terror comes from the Holy Spirit as long as it causes no disquiet. I fear for anyone who does not have this dread.

5.12 God Alone

(On the Absence of a Director)

Do not be cast down by the departure of your director. Overcoming this feeling will bring great merit and gradually detach you from creatures. To be in God alone is safety for the future life and peace in this one.

One sister wrote me that for a whole month this thought "God alone. I have only God" gave her so much support that she had joy instead of regret. God took the place of the director. She said, "Father I bid you farewell for this is God's will" and ever since she has suffered much with great resignation.

5.13 Reliance on God Alone

(To the same sister)

I know that a qualified visible guide is a grace and a powerful help. If God removes the guide, then say "God, you are all I have and desire". This obtains whatever would be gained by a director. God often removes outside help so He can become our sole confidence. By lack of help from others, we experience a great liberty of spirit.

Freeing From Attachment

If you feel otherwise it shows how far you are from pure love. This is evident from the extreme sorrow which comes when the soul has an immediate attachment to human helps. This attachment excites God's jealousy. Take courage! God will use this severe trial to moderate and then to free you from this attachment altogether. Allow God to complete this purification. Follow His designs faithfully.

If you cannot detach yourself immediately, at least desire this. Moderate the sorrow you cannot get rid of. Show God your weaknesses. That is all He asks because that is all you can do.

Do Not Seek the New

Rise quickly from your falls (which are only imperfections). Go to confession and Communion as usual. Follow the rules given you before. Do not seek something fresh and new. This would be purposeless and would cause many imperfections that block spiritual progress.

The fear of not knowing your sins is used by the enemy to destroy your peace. Be content just to mention in confession what your conscience sees as important. In this way your confessions will be peaceful and fruitful. The devil knows that interior troubles destroy most of the fruit of confession. If you have no sins, just mention a sin of your past life.

5.14 Abandonment in Trials

(To the same sister)

1. You need patience and abandonment to God. God alone is all. Everything else is nothing. He has plans for us that we cannot fathom. Abandonment is the only consolation for our sufferings and the sure way of amassing an eternal fortune.

2. See your ills as a less expensive payment for your purgatory. One simple “Fiat” to your pains can make you a saint. St. Frances de Sales said, “Sister, repeat every day ‘Yes Heavenly Father. Yes and Yes’”. This is a practice easily done.

3. Congratulations on your finding little consolation in creatures. Take this as a merciful punishment for your excessive affection for your friends. This trial will refocus your affections upon God for whom we are all created.

4. Your greatest trial is the deprivation of external help. Certainly, a director is a great grace. Yet for some people, this withdrawal is an even greater grace. When God is jealous for a soul, His greatest favor is to deprive the soul of whatever it could not surrender itself. God saw that, after becoming detached, you still had confidence in your spiritual guide. This was the same feeling the Apostles had for Jesus before His Resurrection.

This jealous God cannot accept this division of affection and has removed your guide. This has attacked a sensitive spot in your heart. You claim that you do not miss the consolation but you miss His assistance to your spiritual progress. This is an illusion of self-love.

“Fiat – Let it be” has more merit than the most consoling direction in the whole world. You feel you would commit fewer faults. I say that these faults are less displeasing than the smallest attachment, no matter how little. I admire God who has led you to this privation. Presently, God is attacking your body by illness and your soul by weariness. He wants to detach you from all sensible help. Allow Him to act. Adhere to God by pure faith. “In the higher faculties of the soul” says St. Francis de Sales.

The longer I live the more clearly I see that all depends on God, and if we leave all to Him, all will go well. When I sacrifice everything, all goes perfectly well.

5. It is good to think that others carry heavier crosses. Don't let the weight of your cross prevent your being resigned. Most of the time God deprives the soul of any feelings of consolation so there is no vain complacency. In fact, God often leaves the soul groaning under the weight of its afflictions.

6. God gives each soul unique graces to bear extraordinary troubles. The pagan philosopher said "Patience makes bearable what we cannot change." As for us, we look at the crucifix and think of eternal happiness.

5.15 The Use of Afflictions

(To the same sister)

Because your trials are of infinite value, I do not ask that they cease but that you seek from God a perpetual state of sacrifice. By using your crosses well you will advance your eternal interests. All will soon end and you will have a boundless eternity. Let this thought console you for we have little time to gain this infinite happiness.

Fruit From Submission

Your soul has gained much fruit from the trial you passed through. You learned to remain interiorly crucified, to make painful sacrifices and to be submissive to God. "How has this been done?" you ask. Your higher faculties accepted these troubles even without your knowledge. You were not aware of your own submission and often felt you did not possess it.

How admirable is God! I knew this but you did not. Your vain-complacency would have ruined God's work. In our blindness, God works very well, especially when we believe that all is lost! I wish you had more confidence in God who arranges everything. What peace this would produce because He turns all things to our advantage.

Attaining Freedom

We attain this freedom gradually and by imperceptible degrees. So seek it always and ask God for it. You will have many occasions to say, "God, since this is your will, I also will it for love of you." Make these acts even in the midst of repugnance. The first involuntary moments of rejection are not from our higher faculties and actually make the acts of patience more meritorious.

Dangers on Earth

On earth, we are in continual danger. We need to take those precautions which prudence suggests and then trust all to Divine Providence. Remain in God's arms like a little child. To know and use this practice is a treasure of peace. Always act like this. Make it your interior spirit. Nothing more pacifies impulsiveness or prevents bitter annoyances and uneasy feelings.

Concerning the other sister, God afflicts her at life's end to sanctify her. What a consolation to suffer for God before going to meet him. Consolations are a blessing, but trials and sufferings are greater. A mediocre virtue uses consolations. It takes heroic virtue to accept sufferings.

5.16 Detachment

1. I am not surprised at the difficulty caused by your grievous trial. Yet, I ask you for resignation to God's will. Such an act will win great rewards! That is why I preach incessantly the virtue of perfect abandonment. I want you to be tranquil as well as holy. You have not yet attained this, but you will.

2. I have a relative who remains in sickness because God wants to convert the whole family. When this happens, I will bless God because conversion is worth more than all earthly fortunes.

3. I am about to lose my best friend upon whom I most relied. Let God's will be done.

4. Blessed be God who knows how we can sanctify each other. God makes one diamond polish the other. Remembering this will prevent our scandal from being hurt by good people.

5. Even in natural disasters, we can derive profit for the expiation of our sins. By our "Let it be done" we experience less pain in these occurrences.

6. By constantly thinking of death we shall cease to shrink from it. "By considering death as salutary, it will at least appear almost pleasant," (Fr. Bourdaloue) A holy Jesuit at his death said, "I did not know it was so sweet to die". (Fr. Suarez)

7. People say "I no longer have help to strengthen me or instruction to encourage me". All instruction does not equal a simple "Let it be done". The Our Father points out this road, "Thy will be done". With this interior disposition nothing is wanting to you. Find repose in all difficulties because all becomes right when God pleases. The wicked are rarely converted by the afflictions which make good people perfect.

8. If we want only God, then He will make up for everything. To gradually lead us to this disposition He deprives us of consolation and mixes bitterness with worldly pleasure. What fortunate disappointments and happy privations that come from God's goodness!

5.17 Conduct During Trials

You should be able to overcome your fears because you know that your mind creates many imaginations that lead you to these idle fears. If you cannot prevent these imaginations, make them an occasion of profit by practicing abandonment to God's decrees. Like you, I have never desired pains and contradictions. What God sends is enough. We need to prepare to carry them properly.

His Favorite Practice

This is my favorite practice. I offer God all the sacrifices which come to mind. These are fears of future evil that God does not intend to send. When He sends consolations, receive them without clinging to them because when joy is outside of God it feeds self-love.

You will have solitude because the person you rely on is absent. This will be good and you will make many acts of resignation in your illness. There will be many holy affections and God will see the good will in your heart.

Each person has a particular path and must follow God's light. In your present sadful circumstances, these cause you to make incessant sacrifices. The sins of each person can be surpassed by the penances and mortifications which God sends us in His mercy. The chalice is bitter but infinitely more bitter is the chalice of hell, or of purgatory. Since we must drink of this chalice, let us make a virtue out of necessity.

A Future in God's Hands

Interior sufferings are harder to bear and more meritorious. After enduring these, all else seems easy, including perfect abandonment in filial confidence. Your reflections on this are true but too human. We should always have hope in Divine Providence. What else can we do? We depend on God because He knows exactly what is needed.

We deceive ourselves (even in our prayers) by trying to arrange everything for a future which belongs to God alone. He takes away what we think is necessary and then supplies what we really need in a thousand hidden ways. Heaviness of heart accepted with patience is better than the advice of the best director. For now, this is your path. God asks only submission, silence and sacrifice (without violent efforts).

5.18 Will of God to be Preferred

End your fears. Trust God who brings everything to serve His purposes. Men only act by God's will or permission and whatever they do accomplishes God's plans. He attains His goals by contrary means, refreshing His servants in a fiery furnace or having them walk on water. We can only experience this Fatherly Providence if we abandon ourselves.

A recent experience has taught me to pray that I never get my own will (which is always blind and dangerous) but only His beneficent will. If you knew what a pleasure it is to find no peace except in doing God's will, you would desire nothing else.

The Gift of the Cross

Never see pain as a sign of being far away from God. Crosses are a gift of His goodness. Don't say "What will become of me if..." That comes from the enemy. Why torture yourself ahead of time? Why give in to these forebodings which do so much harm? We create our own problems and lose out in time and eternity.

Be faithful in sacrificing these fearful obsessions to God. You will induce God to treat you favorably and you will gain an abandonment which will be better than any other practice. Profit by your submission to God (which is better than reading pious books). Without this submission, no spirituality counts for much. When people have only exterior practices they have only a thin veneer. True piety wills what God wills and how He wills it. When you have this, God's Spirit will reign in your heart and supply all your needs. Very few pious souls realize this and they are kept back by their own blindness.

God immerses us in complicated affairs. These experiences are equal to contemplation if one says, "God, because this is your will it is also mine". Keep firm to this practice and you will experience its results, including a peace of mind and a gentleness toward others and yourself.

Humble yourself gently after your faults and return to God. Rely on His Providence. Do all with simplicity, gently and quietly. How many anxieties and disappointments you will get rid of!

5.19 The Happiness of Resignation

Sister, you find God's ways difficult to understand. So do I. We both know God arranges everything as He pleases and uses whomever He decides. All we can do is resign ourselves to Him who disposes all things.

We then must await things at His time rather than our own. Our abandonment binds God to find a solution in all our needs. Remember, "Everything passes away. God alone remains." Even abandon your loved ones. Then you can say with David, "We have rejoiced even in the years when we saw evils." Patiently endured suffering is the lot of the elect. The greatest consolation in our trials is faith in God who sent expectation of eternal life and these trials.

Impatience aggravates the evil while patience lightens it. God has different chastisements for each country. He uses many different rods to punish our sins, but always with a father's love to save us more certainly. May He be blessed forever!

BOOK SIX

THE CONTINUATION OF TRIALS AND FEAR OF THE ANGER OF GOD

6.1 On Temptations

Sister, this is certainly your worse trial because fear of offending God is worse than any other. To be filled with bad thoughts and to feel your heart carried away by violent temptation is a cruel anguish to you but a cause of satisfaction to your director. The stronger your fears and the greater your horror, the more evident it is that you will give no consent. In this, blindly follow the advice of your director.

All your fearful temptations, inner revolts, discouragement and despair occur in the inferior parts of your soul without your formal consent. The superior part is also troubled because it cannot discern whether it has consented. In this painful trial, take courage! Cast yourself quietly at Jesus' feet, imploring God's help through His mother. The God who pursues us when we flee Him will certainly not let us be lost when we are pursuing Him.

6.2 The Fear of Temptation

Don't have too great a fear of combat. Don't shrink from an occasion for virtue under the pretext of not wanting to commit sin. Soldiers don't act that way. For us (soldiers of Christ) life is a continual struggle and the crown goes to those who fought violently.

When you are contradicted and humiliated, it is time for the victory. Even if you commit some faults, it is as nothing compared to the merits of the victory. If your temptations are interior, get rid of that fear also. Resist these indirectly by a recollection of God's presence. If they stay, endure them patiently.

Open Your Eyes

Distrust of these temptations will cause more dangerous ones. What temptation is more evident than your feeling that you will not succeed in the spiritual life? Are not all religious, and you particularly called to the spiritual life? Isn't your feeling that you can only find peace in the religious life a clear sign that you are called?

Open your eyes. All these discouraging thoughts come from the devil. He wants to steal the spiritual strength you need to overcome your nature. Do not fall into this trap. Do not see the revolt of your passions as a sign of your distance from God. Becoming convinced of your own feebleness and perversity will teach you to depend on God alone.

6.3 The State of One Tempted

Theme: Explaining the soul's state and God's plans.

There are many texts of Scripture which teach us the necessity of temptation and the good results when souls are not disheartened. It is compared to a furnace that purifies gold. It is a sign of God's friendship and a necessary lesson in the science of the saints. Recall these truths and you will not be sad.

In temptation you can unite yourself to God more often than in fervor. Just suffer with peace and resignation as you would endure a bodily fever. Would you not tell a sick person that impatience only aggravates the illness and makes it last longer? Say this to yourself.

Obedience

Obey your director who told you to go to Holy Communion. Don't say, "But I have committed a mortal sin". You are not the judge. Just obey blindly. There is a principle that even if the confessor is mistaken, the penitent is still not misled. You also say, "How can he know better than I what happens in my soul?" Useless curiosity! It is not a question of knowing but of obeying.

I want to be kind to souls not experienced in spiritual warfare, so I will reply to your questions. Every person's soul has two parts. The inferior part is animal and earthly. The superior part is spiritual where the free will resides. All that happens in the inferior part (imagination, feelings etc.) are indeliberate and involuntary. These tempt the will but cannot compel free consent.

Fears of the Tempted

When God permits the temptation to be strong, the superior part cannot clearly discern because of the great disturbance in the inferior part. Thus arises fear of having consented. This causes great trials in good souls, which God permits to test them. Confessors easily discern this and the soul's excessive fear is clear proof of non-consent. Those who consent have no fears. The greater the pain, the greater the proof of non-consent. Therefore, follow these rules:

1. Don't examine or accuse yourself of these things.
2. Bear patiently this interior martyrdom. You will understand when it is over.

3. Make this prayer. “Lord, preserve me from all sin but I accept the inner pain which cures my self-love and destroys my pride. Let these remedies have their effect. Let there be a low opinion of myself which is the solid foundation of perfection”.

You are ignorant about temptation. It comes from the devil or your own temperament but since God allows it we adore His permission in all things except sin. Therefore, do not be troubled or harassed. This is more to be feared than the temptation itself.

You say you are traveling a dark path. That is the “way of faith”. It’s obscurity demands abandonment. Why not abandon yourself to God who desires your good more than you?

Fear and Detachment

You say, “I worry about sin and this deprives me of the peace of God’s children”. For the present that is true but, in the long run, the fruits are good – a salutary fear and detachment from creatures. Only those who have shared trials can have the true peace of God. Peace is purchased by war and enjoyed only after victory.

If you could see the good results, as I do, you would be thanking God. You say you are as deeply involved as great sinners. Isn’t that what we are – great sinners? Don’t we have tendencies that would lead to grave disorders except for God’s grace? God wants us to understand this to give us a solid foundation for our eternal salvation and perfection.

A Quiet Fear

Fear of God’s judgment is a great grace but do not be troubled or uneasy. God’s fear is quiet and accompanied by confidence. When contrary effects result you must reject these fears as from the devil.

You sometimes wish God made you differently. Don’t you know that to bear with your weaknesses, defects, follies and imaginative fears serves for victories in the interior combat.

You say, “I empty my heart of one object and another takes its place.” The heart cannot be emptied at once. This is a work of time. As space is made, God fills it gradually. God’s plentitude comes when we are completely empty but that requires many trials. Have confidence and you will see the gift.

6.4 Different Temptations

In your trials, you have unknowingly made great progress.

1. To understand the value of inner peace and to try to acquire this peace in spite of the drawbacks is a step forward. The rest will come as the result of self-gentleness.

Grow accustomed to accept all things from God’s hand. What causes the most grief will end up for your greatest advantage. If needed, make more sacrifices to obtain fresh graces.

2. Feelings against your neighbor (if not accepted nor shown outwardly) are meritorious. Guard charity carefully and all will subside. If you cause pain or bad example repair it. You gain more by an apology than you lost by the fault.

3. Want of feeling when receiving the sacraments is painful. God allows this to purify souls of self-love.

4. Use everything during the day as a help to raise your mind to God. Be submissive to what Providence arranges. This is better than all your spiritual exercises. Seek what pleases God. This is the principle of all perfection.

6.5 The Fear of Lacking Submission

May I make your present trouble salutary? This trouble is not new. Because I see no change in your soul I have no new remedy. Let me repeat my previous advice which I have now placed into rules and practices. Please reread this letter often, especially when you experience mental agitation. While the storm rages, other reading is useless. Even an angel could not console you because no intelligence can remove from God's hands a soul He is purifying by suffering.

Rule 1 – Be convinced that every trial comes from God's mercy more than His justice. God remembers us even when He is angry.

Rule 2 – To convert or sanctify worldly people God sends illness or misfortune. To religious, He sends interior trials. So with you. Although you suffer bodily, your greatest afflictions are mental. This makes your illness more painful.

Rule 3 – As we preach patience to worldly people in their afflictions, so we must preach abandonment to religious.

Rule 4 – When someone no longer commits mortal or venial sins, they make more progress from suffering than from activity. So, to ensure your salvation just endure your painful situation with patience and total confidence in Christ's merits. This is your difficulty but it will come easier if you do the following:

1. Make the prayer "Thy will be done" your favorite act.

2. Pay no attention to your inner rebellions.

3. Resist them indirectly by your "Thy will be done" prayer. You wonder if these inner rebellions prove you are not submissive. You deceive yourself. The most cruel trial is to think your submission is not real. By God's permission you are like worldly persons who experience unruly compulsions but do not consent to sin. In these persons, the involuntary pleasure they experience or the tremendous disturbance to their inferior powers is so great they cannot discern if they consented or not.

True, but Hidden, Submission

God allows you to experience these greater trials while true submission lies hidden in the superior part of your soul. However, I see clearly that you have true submission, although it is hardly perceptible. You wonder how I can see in your soul what you cannot see. I will tell you but this knowledge might not diminish your pain because God wants to purify you. Let's compare this with other temptations. A sister will speak of great temptations and the fear of having sinned. This proves that she has fear of God and horror for sin. It also shows me that her interior condition could not give full consent. At the same time the very force and frequency of the temptation might lead to some negligence, but here also, full consent is not possible. Those who consent fully feel no uneasiness. Now, apply this to yourself. The more you fear you have sinned the more certain you are that you haven't. God doesn't show this to you so that you can remain longer in the trial and be purified.

Accept this apparent absence of submission as you do your other trials. Sometimes, God will even deny you the consolation of feeling you have endured your trials well. Therefore, when you feel the greatest sadness or the greatest fear of God's judgments say, "Lord, you do not even want me to know my own state of submission."

To regain inner peace say, "By God's grace I at least desire submission for the fear of not having it distresses me more than anything. A desire for submission is of equal value to attaining it." When nature despairs of any remedy or consolation, then self-love is dying. Let this demonic enemy of our souls die!

Practice blind submission to your spiritual guides and do not omit a single order. You claim "a frightful indifference towards God". That is only what you feel. You are certainly saddened by not feeling you love God. Really, in your apparent coldness, God has enkindled a great fire which will grow through your fears of not loving Him.

A Hidden Purification

You ask, "Why does God remain so hidden?" God's goodness is purifying you because if you were satisfied with your love for God it would injure this love. The sweetnesses of God often make us forget about God Himself. We are attached too much to the enjoyment.

"Am I to stop asking for this love?" you ask. Your heart asks without your knowledge. All of your fears are really petitions. Be at peace! Fear nothing! God Himself will direct you. In all things, abandonment. Amen.

6.6 Fear Caused by Self-Love

Theme: How fear of displeasing God might come from self-love.

In reading your letter I see many graces of God and much self-love. Your uneasiness makes your pain worse. Pain serves to purify in these interior sufferings. Uneasiness comes from self-love.

You also experience an inability to make your mind active. Reasoning wearies you. Obviously, God wants you to do away with your petty acts and substitute His divine action. Otherwise, your progress will be slow.

You also fear wasting time. This is another effect of self-love which always relies on self-certainty instead of God. Your directors reassure you on this point.

State of Abstraction

You always feel in a state of abstraction which makes you seem stupid and under an illusion. Being in a state of abstraction is one of God's greatest graces. I congratulate you. What you call abstraction is really profound recollection leading to everything good by the divine union which is forming in your soul.

You are at great peace. This solid peace established by God is always without sensible sweetness. God only deprives the soul of sweetness when it nourishes self-love. His depriving you is a great favor to kill your self-love. Don't complain about this infinite mercy of God who alone knows how to purify you.

God' Free Hand

Your complaints show that you would not have the courage to end this self love which impedes the divine reign. God only asks that you give Him a free hand.

You fear that past unfaithfulness will prevent His work. Don't let either past infidelities or present darkness terrify you. Only your lack of submission and voluntary annoyance are the real obstacles.

Waiting For the Storm to Pass

Darkness without anxiety facilitates God's action. Fear only your own fears. Let me tell you how to act. Keep a peaceful waiting, like someone in a shelter waiting for a storm to pass. Let God calm the elements. Patience in inward storms produces the greatest good.

Your fears about past confessions also comes from self-love. You want certainty. God deprives us of absolute certitude that pleases self-love. Sacrifice your certainty to the Master who wants us in complete dependence.

When you do violence to yourself you have imperfect dispositions but you still please God. Don't fall into that snare which would prevent you from doing good or cause you uneasiness when you do.

Two Dispositions

With it all, I am deeply pleased with you. Besides mistakes that come from inexperience, I find in your soul two essential dispositions. You have a firm resolve to belong to God and a firm will to avoid the smallest fault. Keep these dispositions. Guard against the secret seeking of self-love and God's reign will be established.

6.7 The Want of Good-will

In spite of your ceaseless agitation, apply all your energy to abandonment.

1. Your greatest mistake is to think you are wanting in good will. You certainly lack a good will that you can feel but I perceive a good will in the very center of your soul. Let my decision tranquilize you.

God deprives you of what feeds self-love so He can preserve far more precious gifts. Your abandonment will powerfully purify you, even though you feel an absence of good will. Keep firm and you will see from experience.

2. You also mention a lack of power. This prevents you from making acts of turning to God. At times, God does not require these acts and to force them is a lack of fidelity. What can you do? Just form a simple desire to act. God can see this. Cease to lament your weakness. Your “Let it be done” has more value than your own ideas.

I allow you to say “I want to turn to God but I am not able. God sees my desire and I should be at peace.” You ask, “What if I lose this desire?” Why are you anxious? You experience pain because you are attached to these acts.

The Pain of Holy Desires

You are not in pain over beauty or riches which you don’t desire. You are in pain over these holy desires because you truly want God. You experience this lack of strength because, at this time, this is all God asks. Remain at peace in your spiritual poverty (which is the real treasure).

You have never understood nudity of spirit by which God detaches us from our own actions. This reduces us to acts of bare faith. This is a true, inward, crucifying death to self that is soon rewarded by a resurrection and living for God alone.

Be Consoled!

In your blindness you grieve over the lack of any guarantee of spiritual progress. After mounting the first steps of perfection, the soul only makes progress by deprivation (even in spiritual things).

God cannot be felt or seen. O daughter of little faith, you despair over what should console you. Let your self-love die of despair while you yourself rejoice in God.

3. You feel a violent desire to belong to God followed by the feeling of an invisible hand repulsing you. Don’t conclude that you are cast away. Rather, this two-fold feeling is an infallible sign of the Spirit who brings about the death of self by inward crucifixion. However, if God allowed you to understand this the trial would cease. So, be happy not to know. Don’t increase your stress by reflections that are not true.

4. What happens if you cannot make acts of abandonment? Your “Let it be done” is perfect abandonment and it charms the heart of God. Earthly lovers sometimes arrive at this through

their insane love. Your sacrifices have led to this “despairing love” which God wants from your interior weaknesses.

5. God allows souls to believe that these afflictions will never end so they lead to a more complete abandonment – without limit or measure.

6. You are only powerless to do what God does not want done. God, then, is doing an inner work which would cause you to prostrate with thanksgiving if you understood. Your weakness prevents you from interfering with the Holy Spirit. I can see this but God is keeping you blind to it.

7. You don’t need to explain your troubles and doubts. Just bear them with submission. God makes it impossible for you to speak or even to form clear ideas because silence (interior and exterior) sanctifies pain. Your “Let it be done” lies hidden in a simple desire seen only by God. This desire tells God all He wants to know and allows us very little consolation or certainty. This terrible agony drives self-love to despair. Alleluia!

6.8 The Love of Creatures and of God

Theme: On the fear of loving creatures more than God

I’m glad my letter showed you the difference between our love for creatures and our love for God. If we were more holy we would love God more ardently. Lack of sensible devotion should not trouble us. It becomes a source of grace when we learn to endure it without self-love. To see these miseries and to try to remove them by prayer is to no longer have them in the sight of God.

True Spiritual Love

Be imbued with this little-known truth. Coldness toward God does not prove we are deficient in loving Him. Jesus said to St. Catherine of Sienna “I leave sensible love to you. I reserve to myself the love that is purely spiritual.”

This love resides in the apex of the soul, whose key is held by free will. If charity is still there nothing is lost. If your sensible coldness does not come from your own negligence it increases merit.

A Christian mother might weep at the death of her child but would not have him return to life at the cost of a venial sin. This horror for sin is more heroic because it conflicts with her felt love for the child. True acts of love are produced in the soul’s highest faculties and are accomplished without our knowledge. This is a great advantage because we poison everything. Therefore, God hides His graces. Our own blindness is His most precious grace. We kiss God’s hand when it is heavy upon us.

6.9 The Love of Creatures and of God

I bless God because He prolonged the trials. Now I can see your complete sacrifice and abandonment to God’s good pleasure. I want you to amass great treasures and your prayer under trial is very fruitful. I cannot dispel your fear for it is God’s trial. It is enough to know its

source. You would do anything for God and these fears of offending Him are only idle imaginations. If God wills these, then take no more notice than you do of flies.

I am surprised at your attention to these interior changes. It is as if you had to note the changes in the weather. Just as God established rules for weather changes, so there are changes within us. In good weather, you know the bad will come and when it does you patiently wait for it to pass. Do the same here. Just keep yourself in God's presence in interior submission.

The Follies of the Imagination

Self-love always wants to feel but God often does not wish this. Put a stop to the follies of your human mind, especially of the imagination. When these thoughts leave, others will come. All must be accepted with patience.

I rejoice that God has inspired you with abandonment and with death to self. How could God abandon you when He has already done such marvels in your soul? What more could He give you? Ecstasies and revelations are nothing compared to abandonment. Lose nothing of this gift as God deprives you of feelings. Let Him take away and give again. Is He not the Master?

6.10 Fear of Making No Progress

Theme: Not Doing Enough Penance

Don't be surprised at making no progress. Spiritual advancement is unique, the work of a lifetime. Your natural vivacity intrudes and causes discouragement that leads to distress. Here is the remedy. Be content with your sincere good will, your appreciation for God and your courage to begin again. Bear patiently with your own weaknesses. Expect progress only through God who will work in a hidden manner in your soul.

God's Crosses

You are uneasy about your penances when the best penance is to bear the crosses coming from God. These certainly come from God when they are part of our state. Crosses from God are much easier to bear than crosses that we fashion. He alone knows what sanctifies. If we are submissive, we will find rest in His crosses, have unshaken peace and experience the divine anointing which belongs to His cross.

You ask, "How is the spiritual life compatible with troubles and darkness? Please do not share in the illusions of many. A gentle, tranquil spiritual life is had by only two groups – those totally separated and detached from the world and those living in the world who, by dint of sacrifice, are not of the world.

6.11 On Fears About Confession

God wants you to do penance by enduring personal offenses, by interior trials and by troubles of conscience. I ask you to submit to these trials as you submit to illnesses. I forbid you to dwell on the uneasiness that torments you concerning your confessions. You are never deceived by blind obedience. The best sign of true contrition is to avoid grave sin and remove venial sins.

Because you are infirm, these troubles will suffice instead of fasting, self-discipline or the hair-shirt. These latter might satisfy self-love. The others come from God's pure will.

6.12 Rules to Free Oneself From These Fears

To free yourself from these fears of confession be docile to the following safe rules:

1. Never ask to be freed from these troubles so nothing spoils your love for Him. God alone is your support. He knows you cannot attain pure love by heroic sacrifices (like the saints) so He leads you by less painful means.

2. Prepare for confession by doing your best at examining your conscience (not too long). Then say to yourself "I would not commit a mortal sin for the whole world. I have a horror for venial sins (although I commit these). I need only make an act of contrition and put it all in God's hands."

3. If you find no definite fault to confess just accuse yourself in general of your past sins and accept the tranquility that comes from absolution.

What could be easier? Adopt this method and be free of all anxieties.

6.13 On Fears About Contrition

You want to feel what is not perceptible to the senses. This is impossible. True contrition is entirely spiritual and above the senses. Sometimes persons do feel contrition but that does not increase their merit. That tenderness is not essential to the remission of sins. Rather, the experience of coldness is one of God's best penances. True sorrow is the one least felt. You must seek it from God and wait until He produces it.

Don't fall into the devil's trap. Sometimes we are emotionally touched by our sorrow and at other times we are insensible. Just be resigned. God gives us what we need. His graces are not always the most agreeable but they are always the most necessary.

6.14 On General Confession

Reject your fears. The anxieties which come after a general confession made in good faith are idle scruples used by the enemy to destroy peace. Don't fall into that trap. Abandon the future to Providence and profit from the present. Let your prayer "Thy will be done" become your habitual disposition and it will lead to your perfection.

You do not tire me by writing of your miseries. Finding poverty in myself, I am not surprised to find it in others. Because you submit to God and work to diminish your faults, it is as if you had no faults. Please understand this teaching of Fenelon "We must live and die in the deepest uncertainty, not only about God's judgments but about our own dispositions". Augustine said "We have only our sins to present to God but then we have His mercy. This is our only title to the merits of Jesus Christ". Reflect on these sayings. Let them bring you certainty in the middle of doubt.

6.15 Different Fears

Because my advice cannot relieve you of your fears about confession, just resign yourself to these trials but never voluntarily think of them.

You are distressed that the sublime states which you see in others are beyond your powers. Here are two remedies. Humble yourself that you don't have these states and then seek a desire for them. This desire to desire will become a real desire which will take firm root. Recall often that God made you for Himself and He can do with you as He wants. Abandon yourself. Your eternal happiness is why He asks you to endure these trials.

6.16 Hatred of Sin

Do not be worried about your seeming lack of submission during suffering. Let this lead to a profound humility that will please God. You find only imperfections in yourself. That will be always true in this life. The following are some remedies:

1. Accept these feelings of contempt for yourself without any uneasiness or discouragement. God uses this bitter remedy to free us of self-love.

Stay cheerful in the midst of these imperfections. You will find greater ones as you advance. This distinctive knowledge kept the saints humble and they loved spiritual poverty. God hides His best gifts under our imperfections. When you shed your tears, do so for God. You will find a hidden sweetness that increases inner peace and submission.

2. Don't worry about your seeming lack of contrition. Signs like tears are not needed. The best contrition lies in the higher parts of the soul and is not felt.

3. Don't give way to self-love that wants to feel sorrow. God doesn't want this. He wants you in holy fear. Enter into His plans. Offer Him your dread of not having sorrow. He leads you by obscurity, a path to which the saints abandoned themselves.

4. Remember that your annual review of sins is not obligatory. Follow your confessor. There is no necessity of a general confession at death. A person can accuse themselves in a general way of graver sins. Acts of resignation and confidence are more meritorious. The best preparation for death is to seek abnegation and desire union with the Lord every day.

5. Don't be concerned that you are receiving more creature comforts in your illness. Accept everything with simplicity. Exercise patience and gentleness. These are more sanctifying. Many seek sanctity in exterior works and forget about inner self-love. These are deplorable illusions that I hope you can avoid.

6.17 Remorse and Rebellion

Theme: Remorse of Conscience and Rebellion of the Passions

I want to calm your soul because your uneasiness has no foundation in fact.

1. When the reproaches of your conscience place you in depression and discouragement they certainly come from the devil who fishes in troubled water (St. Francis de Sales). You must

stifle these troubles. St. Teresa would say, “My weaknesses will be helped by God’s grace. Concerning perfection He will lead me where He wants in His good time.”

2. Constantly make these two acts. The second will produce abandonment, the special attraction of souls belonging to God.

3. The rebellion of the passions and the excessive sensitiveness that causes you to be put out should not discourage you. This discouragement is more harmful than the temptations.

Be persuaded that this rebellion and sensitiveness are sent by God so we can gain victories. Little sins expand our humility and sometimes are more useful than our victories. This is an encouraging truth. Be convinced that God allows our weaknesses to remove self-confidence. All that is bad comes from us. All that is good comes from God. To acquire this thinking we must pass through many difficult personal experiences.

4. A day of great recollection is often followed by a day of dissipation. The saints passed through these, so if it happens humble yourself. Regain self-control and return to God by abandonment.

5. In prayer, continue your submissive attitude which is greater than a multitude of acts. This submission comes from the heart, although not sensibly felt. God removes multiplicity to give you simple acts which unite you with Him.

6. Your friend truly loves God. She is just deprived of prayer’s sensible pleasure. Let her be consoled. She can love God more when she has no need to be certain about it.

7. Your thoughts and your feelings are in constant opposition. “The spirit wars against the flesh and the flesh against the spirit” (St. Paul). This interior war is more violent within some people (also at a certain age or time). No harm occurs if the soul fights well. The greater the attack, the greater the victory and the recompense. These results are even more certain when humility results.

Valuing Interior Abjection

If this interior abjection were valued, all would desire it! God declares that He draws close to a humbled soul. If it is good to be humbled in others’ opinion, it is better to be lowly in one’s own. Let us profit from God’s humiliations. “Practice humility without vexation” (St. Frances de Sales). Vexation comes from pride as irritation comes from impatience.

Want of feelings is not callousness. Dryness and trials are inevitable. Constant trials are even better. This is God’s preparation for pure love. To souls in this state, I say “Peace, peace. Stay within yourself.” A desire for the interior life is enough to keep you one with God. You need peace. Do not lose this peace. Never worry. Distress will harm you more than anything.

6.18 God Alone Can Remove These Trials

1. To alleviate your trials, I’ll say the following. All things come from God. Our task is to accept His will which will inevitably be accomplished. Unite yourself to His will and fear

nothing. Anguish increases the merit of abandonment. If you fear you are not abandoned, just say, "Lord, I want to have total submission and I offer you my anguish over this issue."

2. Avoid useless reflections. They only embitter the heart. Be patient with your own impatience.

3. You can find support and consolation in books but God alone can remove the trial. In the past, you have counted too much on those human helps which God has now taken from you. Just trust Him. Remember, the more violent the trial, the more certain I become about your salvation and perfection. Later, you too will understand.

4. Jesus wants you to be like Him, so He sends you crosses. By our fidelity, these crosses become our riches. Seeing all that Jesus suffered makes our crosses seem quite easy. What is difficult at first soon becomes sweet.

6.19 On Relapses

Your account of trials has filled me with compassion. The remedy is always the same, humility before God and patience with yourself. In a future fall, offer God your interior confusion that is occasioned by your weakness. Each time turn to God with fresh confidence and bear patiently the remorse of conscience. In doing so you will hardly lose anything and really gain much. Whatever faults occur, if you act as I said, you will make great progress. Few know the value of this interior abnegation! To humble yourself sincerely and to rise in great confidence in God remedies the past and protects the future.

Keep away from argumentative discussions (as you are doing). These are filled with petty illusions. Self-love intrudes everywhere. When we see this in others we must excuse them and watch our own conduct in these matters.

6.20 On Depression During Trials

1. Don't reproach yourself for lack of abandonment. A certain depression inevitably follows great afflictions. Faithful souls rise with confidence even though this seems impossible. Use this weakness to remain peacefully in your own nothingness. This fulfills God's plans. He allows this depression to show us our weakness. He wants us totally devoid of self-confidence so we rely solely on Him.

2. There is a great grace to which you pay no attention. You are deeply convinced of your nothingness. Now this grace is in proportion as we walk in the light. Divine light gives us a knowledge of our corruption, the surest sign of progress in the spiritual life. Think of this and be grateful (not proud).

Strive for holy abjection which always begins with this deep knowledge. When attained, you will have made a decided advancement. God, in His goodness, enriches you by your poverty which becomes a treasure to those who understand. Joyful acquiescence must include a desire to rid ourselves of faults. We must hate our defects and try to get rid of them.

3. When prayer is interrupted by worldly business which is willed by God, these interruptions are equal in value to prayer. This is the prayer of patience. When you lose your patience in these distractions know that God allows this pain. Humble yourself quietly and gain more than you lost.

4. I understand the keen pain you feel but this heartache is a prayer more excellent than ecstasies. Learn how to use these difficulties:

- a) Pray for the person causing the trouble.
- b) Do not think of the problem.
- c) Speak to no one about it.
- d) Do not give way to bitterness.
- e) Speak well of the person.
- f) Even do her a favor when needed.

6.21 On Humble Silence and Patience During Trials

Do not imagine you are far from God. You have never been nearer. Remember Jesus in the Garden. Violent anguish was compatible with His perfect submission. Groanings show the hardness of the sacrifice. To do and say nothing is perfect submission flowing from love.

If you know how to keep in silence and abandonment you will sanctify and lessen your sufferings. Acquire the habit quietly, not giving in to discouragement.

Then, depend on grace. It will not be refused to you. When God sends great crosses for us to bear, He supports us invisibly. The degree of resignation and interior peace grows greater as the cross is greater.

Let me conclude. Everything consists in having a good will. God does the rest. Knowing your incapacity for good, He Himself works the good in us. To accept our present moment and state, gives us peace and progress without undue eagerness. Adhere to this practice.

The signs that we are not deceived are:

1. We desire only what pleases God.
2. We have a horror for sin.

6.22 To Bear With Oneself

(To a sister overwhelmed by her sins and external difficulties)

As Jesus said to Martha “Why so much uneasiness?” You confuse the needed care about your salvation with an uneasiness that God does not want. Abandon your spiritual progress to God just as you abandon your temporal goods. Don’t dwell on thoughts like “I am little recollected. I am imperfect.” These are diabolical. They afflict the soul and bring sadness.

By this pretended humility the devil deprives you of strength to avoid your faults. Bitterness spoils everything. Gentleness cures everything. Bear with yourself patiently and repent in peace. Calm will bring you more progress than agitation. When the soul feels peace, it easily recollects itself.

Total Confidence

Abandon yourself with total confidence to God and you will see His constant support in all your needs. He will become your Master, Protector and Invincible Upholder. Possessing God you possess all. To possess Him you need only to have recourse to him in all things, great and small. Speak to Him in great simplicity, “Lord, what shall I do now? What shall I say? How should I act?”

I am sorry for your current difficulties but patience in trials permitted by Providence brings more progress than the most recollected life. The quiet life can flatter self-love while trials force us to gain true union with God. When you cannot say a single prayer, just stay in God’s presence. Be like a criminal before the sentencing Judge. Here, silence is worth more than any acts of speech.

Rejoice!

While praising God for His gifts to others, you must also rejoice in His plans for you. The greatest improvement I want is that you never get embittered and always treat yourself gently. You do not reproach your neighbors bitterly. You ask them gently to reform. Let this gentleness be in your own heart for yourself. If the heart is filled with self-harshness nothing is achieved. I insist on this because it is essential. Acquire interior and exterior gentleness as if this is the only virtue you need.

Other virtues will follow. After some time you will see that a life without an impetuosity which drives away sweetness will gain much more with less fatigue.

6.23 On Past Sins

1. The terrible ideas you have about your past disorders are used by God to purify you for divine union. I see with pleasure your keen realization of your spiritual poverty and I know it is forming true humility within. This sight, which now causes you horrors, will someday overwhelm you with joy and peace.

It is only when we reach and are firmly established in the abyss of our nothingness that we can “walk before God in spirit and truth”. Pride, based on a lie, prevents God from enriching us. Humiliation willingly accepted draws down God’s favor even on the most wretched souls. Do not desire any other condition – in life or in death. You should have escaped to this safe refuge of voluntary annihilation in your recent illness. Don’t let Satan trap you again.

In our final hours, self-love likes to have the sensible consolation of recalling good works. Let your support be only the mercy of God. All the rest is vanity.

2. God hid from you all the good accomplished in your illness. Otherwise you would have a thousand self-complacent thoughts. I know what took place. God supported you in your weakness. Thank Him and don’t reflect on your own efforts. Forget yourself. Think of Him.

3. Don’t try to offer excuses to others for your melancholy disposition. Let them think what they want. You just please God. Otherwise, you increase self-love.

4. I am charmed that you can find peace where least expected. God wills you to have peace only in His will. I did not pity you because I always see illness as gaining blessings for the soul.

5. You are convinced that you are sunk in your nothingness! How lucky you are! The moment you have this conviction you are united with God Who is all in all. Your nothingness is a treasure, a necessary state so God can fill you. Only souls emptied of created things can be filled with the Spirit. What troubles you should really be a cause for joy.

6. Accepting all things (present and future) is one of the most perfect sacrifices, worth all else you can do. So adhere to all God's arrangements (interior and exterior). Do nothing else. God will do the rest.

7. God requires us to fulfill our duties but not to discover our merit. You are too preoccupied with yourself and your advancement. Follow God alone. He will raise you when He wants. He wills your sanctity, so just will what He wills.

Perfection is to follow God and not our own inclinations. This is within our grasp. It means sacrificing our dearest interests (which we have no wish to do). We want God to make us holy according to our ideas. What blindness!

6.24 Results of Imprudence

I have told you that nothing should trouble you. So, don't be cast down by your acts of imprudence. No trial so mortifies self-love. We can easily accept humiliations that come from outside ourselves or from sins that no one sees. But a simple imprudence is seen by all as the greatest of humiliations. Because this so mortifies self-love we should go beyond a "Let it be done" and say "Glory be."

You are an innocent cause of a mistake which has some consequences. Rejoice. This is better than many acts of virtue. Just intend to take steps to bring about peace.

Let All Else Go

Get accustomed to act this way. Without this kind of submission you will have no rest on your earthly pilgrimage. Think only of pleasing God. Let all else go. If God is with you, you lose nothing. Don't be surprised by these inner rebellions. They do not impede your higher faculties. God hides your submission for your own good. Don't sadden yourself. Perceive peace in the greatest tempests. It is good that you do not see what God is doing in you.

When my own head is filled with thoughts that make the least thing assume monstrous proportions, I act like St. Paul. I defy this problem to separate me from Christ's love. With God I can do all things. I ask God only to keep me from sin. Concerning the interior crucifixion and the exterior confusion before others, I accept all that pleases God and I want to place no obstacle to His will. If I do, I ask God that it not succeed.

His Beneficent Will

His will, besides being holy, is also beneficent to me. My will is always blind and poorly regulated. Therefore, I fully subscribe to what the Father decrees. If He commanded this, then what must I fear? As a result:

1. I maintain an inner peace that surprises even me.

2. I consider myself fortunate to bear these trials. They are worth more than all I could arrange. My soul becomes stronger. My attachment to my own will is destroyed.

6.25 Interior Suffering

Theme: Rules to follow during trials

To raise souls to perfection God sends crosses to purify and to detach them from created things. The most severe cross is to be severely reprimanded by others and by self. The soul hears (inwardly and outwardly) the sentence of death. In this state the soul has nothing to fear. God has His plans. The director must speak to the soul only of peace and resignation and tell the soul to repulse all uneasiness.

Staying at the Foot of the Cross

The poor souls to whom God sends these trials cannot master their own anxieties. This is their greatest affliction. The soul must be taught to stay at the foot of the cross and pray, "O Father, you arrange all afflictions for the good of my soul. You act only for my eternal salvation. Do anything you will."

Let the soul cease all self-examinations. Leave the cries of her conscience behind and just go forward. These vain scruples are the devil's device to rob the soul of peace. The devil's troubles make the soul too weak to practice virtues. If the soul preserves peace of mind, she will regain spiritual health just as a body that takes good nourishment regains physical health.

Follow these methods.

1. Repulse any thought that is troubling. What comes from God always gives confidence. He dwells in peace.

2. Make acts of submission to God's paternal goodness and see these afflictions as purifying.

3. Choose books that inspire confidence in God. Make no changes. Continue to go to confession and Communion as always. Don't listen to the devil who would deter you by fear. Just follow the Church's holy practices.

6.26 On Different States of Resignation

(On the same subject)

1. I congratulate you on your efforts to always stay in abandonment. Even here, you must learn to distinguish between the feeling and the will. There is an abandonment that can be felt by quiet repose and another that is not felt. This latter comes without pleasure and with inner revolt. The first is good but the soul can get attached to it. The second (painful to self-love) is more perfect and less dangerous because based on pure faith and perfect love.

Accustom yourself to act from faith and love. Otherwise, when the sensible attractions end you will do nothing. Sensible attractions often fail us but faith never does. To make us act from faith, God gradually removes sensible devotion. Otherwise, we would remain in spiritual infancy. So, don't be surprised by weariness and revolts.

If you fear that human motives are mixed with your mortifications just say: "I will judge this at another time when I am more calm" and "If there is some human element, God will make me more perfect when He pleases. On this matter I will just be calm."

2. Your dislike of your duty adds to your trials. Look at what the martyrs endured!

3. In your state it is natural to be inclined to the solitary life, but a life of obedience is of greater value.

4. Stay on the cross that Christ has given you. Bear your interior trials with the same patience that you bear other misfortunes.

5. Look upon earthly trials as treasures of the spiritual life. Make every effort to hide your inner troubles. If they appear, even by your own fault, accept the humiliation. Do not dwell on the pain involved in recollecting your thoughts. To desire to be recollected serves quite well.

6. You say that the more you desire to pray, the less you know how to do so. Here, you may be seeking sensible devotion more than God. Come to prayer intending to please God. Recollection will leave you if you are eager to retain it and will remain if you are abandoned.

7. Remember, loving spiritual poverty is a great treasure. It keeps you in profound humility. But to feel yourself lost because you seem to lack the feeling of faith is a dangerous illusion. In these temptations say, "I shall always be what God wants and I will serve Him alone, no matter what happens in this world or the next".

8. Although you cannot describe your trials, I will tell you that these temptations are in your soul's inferior part. They are a perpetual confusion caused by the devil and self-love. In your soul's superior part is a ray of faith (imperceptible because of these troubles). This is God's finest thread which is as strong as a cable and stronger than an iron chain.

9. It is false humility to stay away from the sacraments. Do not follow others. You do not know their motives.

10. You say that God deprives you of a sensible feeling of being in the state of grace. Do you aspire to be higher than saints who have been deprived of this for years? They lived by the same faith that we have – one that seems like darkness. They did not even know if they were pleasing to God. Self-love would demand that God work miracles. Instead, just humble yourself.

11. To want to be occupied with God and then to fall back upon yourself is like experiencing the flies in Autumn. Just drive them away and move on.

Because of our imperfections, we compel God to humble us and yet we have so little humility. I believe that you have been deeply penetrated for a long time with the sense of your own unworthiness. This is a great treasure. Do everything to preserve it.

In re-reading my letter, I realize that with a single glance you can get the general drift of the direction you should take in this trial.

BOOK SEVEN

THE LAST TRIALS

The Fruits of Agony and Mystical Death

7.1 Temptation to Despair

Your last letter gives me the greatest consolation. You have no idea of your circumstances while I see everything clearly.

1. Your state of dullness and weakness is God's gift which produces works of grace. No need for you to know these, because God would not have you understand. I can give assurances that will satisfy you.

I am surprised that God treats you like an advanced soul (for this usually happens after long years of combat). The soul enters this when God is satisfied with its diligence to die to everything.

Death to All Created Things

2. God leads the soul to a death to all created things, even to all spiritual pleasure and to all light. In this way, the soul can be freed of the senses.

When God bestows this grace, the soul need only endure this harsh work in peace and accept God's gift in silence. In a sense, this is easy – like a person submitting to surgery. He suffers patiently, expecting a total cure. You are in the hands of the great Physician.

3. The violent assault of your passions is part of this. It gives you an opportunity to acquire the opposite virtue and to be humbled.

4. Temptations to discouragement and despair are another consequence. They have a great power to purify. Your intentions are contrary to the temptation, so you commit no sin. Your soul is like gold that boils in the crucible and is purified. You are truly in God's hand, so give thanks.

5. Your prayer is good – the simple, peaceful waiting upon God.

6. In prayer, follow your attractions. Just remain in this great destitution without any formed thought. Love this state as a gift of God. I have never found a chosen soul whom God has not led through this dry desert before it arrives at the Promised Land.

7. The Spirit reproaches you for the slightest faults. This is His special care. He allows nothing to escape His notice. Souls that are the objects of the Spirit's jealousy cannot allow themselves to do what others do. Divine love's jealousy is according to His predilection. Don't pity yourself about God's rigor toward you.

8. Have no particular desire to make a retreat. All is abandoned. God will determine the time and manner of His works. You just endure. Some results are extremely severe. The most bitter are the most sanctifying. Keep yourself quiet and allow the Physician to bring about your cure.

9. In this trial, do not be upset if my letters and my books are of little help. God often extinguishes all light to operate in your soul's depths. What God does is infinitely better than what you can bring about. Be like a beast of burden – led wherever the Master wants.

10. Your loss of hope is your greatest trial. You believe that at the hour of death you will experience fearful destitution. I pity you for this suffering more than for the others. Let me give you some light to cure you.

You want to take comfort in your good works. God does not want this. Should you lean upon yourself and your accomplishments? God wants to deliver chosen souls from this self-love. He wants to destroy all help and confidence from themselves so He can be their only hope and resource. I am pleased that God destroys this accursed hope in yourself by this state of darkness.

O happy poverty, the delight of all saints, especially Francis de Sales. Let us love this poverty and we will find all our confidence in God. When God has destroyed your self-confidence by keeping you for some time in utmost spiritual poverty, then confidence in God becomes your only hope.

11. You ask "What value are good works if they are not grounds for confidence?" These works obtain a complete distrust of self and confidence in God. This is how the saints used them. Are not our good works so spoiled by self-love that God should chastise us rather than reward us? Do not think that your good works should tranquillize you at death's hour. Reflect only on God's mercy, Jesus' merits and the saints' intercession. Place no confidence in your works.

12. In this dryness, God will frequently give you something to say to others. You will console them while you are in desolation. Say your words with sympathy to others. This is not hypocrisy.

13. Do your duties quietly without anxiety. “Since God’s love is gentle and sweet, all that it inspires has the same qualities.” (St. Francis deSales) When self-love enters these works it introduces anxieties. You say, “I feel these duties prevent my progress.” Unfortunately self-love intrudes everywhere, even into your desire to advance. This then becomes an obstacle for prayer.

14. You fear that your want of feeling is the source of your peace. This is true and it is God’s gift. I want the Spirit to give you greater insensibility to all created things. You are getting there by degrees. Praise God! Only by this insensibility can you remain peaceful.

St. Margaret Mary was always tender with others but in control of herself. Concerning your desire for solitude, remember St. Ignatius’ words to Father Laynez. “To have this desire in the midst of work shows you are safe. When you lose this desire it is a bad sign.” So preserve this desire for solitude amid all your works.

7.2 Good Symptoms

(To the same sister)

Fenelon said “We only learn our spiritual ills when they begin to be cured.” Being overwhelmed with your spiritual ills is good as long as you are not discouraged.

1. During this dryness, remain firm in your desire to be all for God. This is all you can do.
2. As I said, God usually gives this state to chosen souls. At times, however, He gives it to imperfect souls because He blesses whom He pleases. This is your case. So be submissive at every moment. You will see the results of your fidelity. I, myself, rejoice even now. You are suffering without merit or fidelity. God wants you to believe this, so remain as you are.
3. You see nothing in your present state and still less since my last letter. All the better! May God increase this darkness which I can see through. Go through the darkness by blind obedience. This safe guide has never led anyone astray.
4. Because you find it impossible to make acts, put yourself in a more perfect condition – an interior silence of submission. This silence says more to God without self-complacency. This is true mystical death which precedes the supernatural life of grace. For you to arrive at spiritual life, God must find in you this second death. This death is to spiritual consolations which are so pleasurable that they are obstacles to perfection.
5. God and I know what occupies you. That should be sufficient. It is good to be reduced to complete destitution. (One saint completely forgot his native language.) What forms your greatest pain today will become your greatest delight. Only God knows when that will be.
6. Your peace diminished when you left this state of destitution for a short time. This shows you that peace is filling this void.

7. Don't try to explain this matter to yourself. I see it clearly. This is not eccentricity. This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

8. Sometimes everything will weary you. "At time, I had no strength to crush an ant for God's love." (St. Teresa). Passing through these states of absolute powerlessness is the only road to self-distrust and confidence in God. What marvelous effects!

9. What you experienced on retreat was an increase in your trials. Although this was like the paroxysms of a fever, the increase was salutary. Be still. God is leading you, although in a crucifying manner. Let your Physician act as He knows how. You were ill without knowing it. Now your cure is assured.

10. Although your prayer is bitter, it is very good. Remain resigned in your higher faculties.

11. On former retreats, you experienced sensible devotion. Your lack of feeling has more value on this retreat. I see clearly that you are much better. Even though you experienced sadness, the time passed quickly. Doesn't this show that you were well occupied?

12. Your terror over past sins is painful and dangerous so dismiss these diabolical tricks. Think only of doing God's will in the present. Your dryness is not a punishment for past sins (as the devil would want you to believe). Who assures you that these are real graces, although bitter ones? I do – by God's authority!

13. To hear your general confession would be to fall into the devil's trap. Just obey the priest who speaks in God's authority.

14. Your indifference to created things is a great grace. They formerly gave you pleasure. Now there is a void which is so bitter. This remedy is painful but comes from your kind Physician. Just stay in God's will, like a rough stone in the sculptor's hands. The architect will decide where you belong in His building after you have been shaped.

7.3 Interior Oppression

For the crushing weight that is always upon your spirit, say "Let it be." You won't feel that prayer but God will hear it. You cannot believe how many wonderful acts are contained in your feeling heavy of heart. A greater grace than you can imagine! It is a means for compunction so valued by the saints.

Take up your cross with submission, telling God that even in your holy desires you seek only His measure of virtue and eternal happiness. Communicate as often as permitted and accept the trials that this will occasion. Humility supplies for any want of disposition.

Lack of sensible devotion will be compensated by abandonment. Your rule and your illness are your best penances. Don't worry about pleasing yourself by not fasting. Obey your doctor. Worry only about following your own ideas. Offer God your illness and your fears.

7.4 Purification of the Heart

The crushing weight you feel is God's purifying action on your heart, like fire among greenwood. The damp wood crackles and smokes, but burns quietly after it has been dried. This will be your state after these crucifying spiritual actions. So endure with courage and avoid all worry.

This is penance enough and is better than physical austerities (although all should practice these according to their health.)

I also see a good sign. You seek what is lacking in you. This is because your heart is freed of creatures and feels keenly the longing for God Who alone can satisfy. This ardor to enjoy God is greater because the void is greater. This is what you are waiting for. Continue to wait and you will obtain. Only ardent desires can buy this enjoyment of God. Waters are given to those who thirst. Only heavenly food appeases the soul's hunger.

7.5 On Emptiness of Heart

I approve your patience in enduring emptiness. You make more progress in one month than in years of consolation. This is the desert to the promised land. I am not surprised that the emptiness itself seems like a support. God is present.

See your distaste for all that is not God as a grace. In His time, God will fill this void and create a fresh distaste for the world's pleasures. Say farewell to all creatures. Rejoice when they leave you. I am delighted that you receive such little consideration. This is salutary. Get accustomed to it and make great progress.

7.6 Fresh Suffering

(To the same subject)

Since you enjoy my letters, I will always reply.

1. Faults against submission do not prevent submission from dwelling in your heart. To atone for faults, just return to filial abandonment.

2. I understand your anguish of heart. I myself was in the same state over something insignificant. I tried to recover the ground and then I saw the advantages of the trial. I saw the numerous graces and thanked God for the cleansing. God will do the same for you and you will give thanks.

3. In severe illness you can only stay in silence and peace. You cannot make consoling acts. God sees your submission. Where there is less consolation there is more merit.

4. You can ask God to take away the troubles, especially the violent ones. You must always add, "Your will be done". The lower nature resists these words but the superior part accepts them.

5. Continue to frequent the sacraments. Staying away is dangerous. Don't let depression, trouble or interior difficulties keep you away. These painful conditions are more meritorious than fervor. They extinguish self-love while fervor can feed it.

Destroying self-love is true progress. Without this abnegation there is only the appearance of piety. In your illness accept your remedies and resign yourself to not fasting. Sacrifice these spiritual inclinations. To do otherwise is a real illusion.

7.7 Supernatural Fears

(This letter is addressed to one sister about another.)

After the great favors this soul has received (a high degree of recollection) I was astonished that she has not suffered the usual trials until now. So I am not annoyed by this trial. In these fresh sufferings, the soul can apply what it already knows. Since God placed her in this state, not even an angel can withdraw her nor give the slightest consolation. I'll explain a few details.

1. I can judge that this is a trial and an effect of her spiritual progress because:
 - a. It results from a sense of faith and a lively fear of death and eternity.
 - b. She has been consoled for a long time by abandonment.
 - c. This painful trial has come with no apparent cause or any reflection.
 - d. Even if her natural temperament has contributed to the trial, the pain is still supernatural because it is beyond nature. She is suffering what mystical writers call "the crucifying gift of God". She should not fear losing her reason. Let her abandon herself. She will have the merit, without actually making the sacrifice required by God. Like Abraham, God asks the sacrifice of the heart without its completion.

Let her hope against hope. All will turn out for her advantage. Let her defer her retreat. If she wishes to continue, she should meditate only on confidence in God. Her reading should nourish her soul and require little effort.

2. Don't let her reflect on the suffering. This lessens merit and increases the evil. She must forget herself and think of God. She should not talk about her afflictions.

3. If solitude plunges her more deeply into this anguish then she should converse with you. I forbid the annual confession because of the difficulties it will bring.

4. Certainly this state has produced good results. Even after the extreme anguish has ceased, there will be a long period of interior humiliation that will produce excellent results. Her fear that this state will return will force her to trust God and will prove a blessing.

5. Since there is no human remedy, point out the following. Let there be submission so God can act. Don't make many inner acts. Jesus asks only passive submission so God can act.

7.8 Violent Temptations

1. You must make your retreat according to your inner attractions. Take the spiritual books that grace gives you at this moment. Above all, be strengthened by abandonment in all the subjects of your fears. God delights when we hope for the impossible.

2. Concerning your horrible temptation, I cannot conceive anything worse. Don't be overcome by it. God makes his chosen souls go through these grievous trials. I am directing many souls who are in these horrible states. Our interior nature is encompassed in darkness but

God upholds our free will and yet does not let us know He is there. He gives us pure faith. This leaves the senses in darkness, seemingly delivered over to the devil. This is frightful desolation and true martyrdom. While being afraid, let us always tend toward confidence.

3. Don't be embarrassed about how to confess these suggestions of the enemy. You must never mention them. The best way to resist these thoughts is a simple glance at God, a turning from creatures to the Creator.

Make use of this grace always. Occasionally make an act of direct resistance without violent effort. "O God, let me die rather than sin. But the pain of anguish and desolation I gladly accept as long as you please".

4. Thinking of God's justice and the inner anguish this causes is another trial from God. The peace you experience comes from your abandonment. This peace, with the interior conviction of your own uselessness, is well known to spiritual directors. It comes from God who dwells in the soul's recesses.

Your alarming feelings come from the devil who is allowed to produce them in the soul's lower part. This makes your soul a martyr. Only submission brings you peace.

If you saw this as clearly as I do, you would have no trial. Be content with the almost imperceptible light that comes from God and a confused feeling that somehow brings you peace. If the feeling leaves, let obedience suffice. "O God, I should continue to trust in you even if I find myself at the gate of hell."

God never abandons those who confide in Him. Say, "O God, when I confide entirely in Your goodness, my salvation is assured. If left to myself, I spoil everything".

5. If you are in submission, the torment in your lower nature cannot destroy your peace. This is called solid, not imaginary, peace. Let the troublesome thoughts drop off. If this doesn't succeed, just suffer in patience as you do with bodily illnesses.

6. Your "fiat" to what is happening is all God asks. I know some souls who would be happy to experience your consolations.

7. Profoundly desiring recollection is a very real recollection. It is more meritorious because less consoling. It appropriates all graces because it possesses nothing.

8. Impatience due to a sense of your nothingness comes from self-love. "Just learn to bear your own imperfections." (St. Francis de Sales)

9. I am not surprised at the increase of your trials. They produce the good effects of purifying your heart's secret recesses. Bless God. He reserves these for souls He wants to detach from creatures.

10. Do some exterior penance, but not too much and with discretion. In this trial, your first penance is your submission. You still have a way to go to reach abandonment. Keep your eyes on submission and don't be distracted by other mortifications. Your spiritual troubles will cease only by abandoning yourself without limit and forever. God be praised!

7.9 Death of Self-Love

Theme: Annihilation and Spiritual Agony

1. Your lively impression of your own nothingness is a grace of the Spirit. I know the suffering. The soul feels annihilated. Yet it is nearer to true life. The more we see our nothingness, the closer we are to truth, for God created us from nothing. Our voluntary annihilation is our continual homage to God that makes His friendship certain. It is our holocaust consumed by divine fire.

2. Self-love revolts against this death blow. The soul must suffer this death agony before arriving at the fullness of union with God. Just imitate Jesus Christ. Commend your soul to the Father and endure this agony as long as He pleases.

3. During these crucifying works, your memory and understanding are in a void of nothingness. Love this void. God will fill it. Agree to every abasement.

When these agonies begin, just say, "I desire your will in union with Jesus". There is no fear in His company. In temptations, cast yourself at God's feet and they will cease. He will give you the victory.

4. God permits the revolt of your passions and all these inner troubles to humble you by showing what you become without His mercy. These weeds of death must be uprooted from your soul by the skilled hand of the gardener. After clearing the ground he can plant choice fruits.

Let him cultivate this rough ground. Otherwise, only thorns will grow. Be content to be humbled in the mire and wait for God to draw you out. You are pleasing to Him. Doesn't the prince splash his favorite girlfriend with water as a sign of His love?

When filled with fears, just say "I can do nothing but all is possible with grace. In Him alone do I hope."

The most difficult trial is the piercing thought that God rejects you as worthy of His favors. Really, this is God's kind conduct towards you. You have never loved God so purely and He has never loved you so much as now. This is so hidden that only your director can recognize this. Be patient. A brilliant light will follow the fearful darkness.

Please believe me. The bitterest trial is the idea that God is plunging you into hell. This is the most divine of His works, completely hidden under contrary appearances. It seemingly destroys the soul while really purifying it. You are happy without knowing it!

Gives But Hides

You are dear without understanding what God is doing. Our self-love forces God to give us graces and then to hide them from us. We would spoil them by foolish self-satisfaction. This is the mystery of God's obscure dealings on your behalf. You have nothing to fear even if you were in hell with the devils. Nothing can happen without God's permission and He permits only what benefits you. Confide in so faithful a friend, so passionate a lover. Scripture gives Him these tender titles and He fulfills them with you.

7.10 On Mystical Death

I know that the state God places you in is painful. I'm surprised you don't realize that He desires your mystical death to bring you to divine life. A hundred times you have asked for this mystical death. Now He is giving you the spiritual poverty described by the mystics. These will explain your state well.

"What should I do?" you ask. Nothing. Just let God act and do not obstruct His work. Even abstain from sensible acts of resignation (unless led by grace). Remain like a block of wood and see what God does in this night. Self-love refuses to be reduced to nothing. You, however, bless God for this treasure.

The Gift of Deprivation

Know that God gives very few the gift of going through such a state of deprivation. Your fear of aridity is an ordinary experience in which God invisibly sustains you. This is proven by a peace that is not a part of your senses.

You only need patience and resignation, yet even these will not be felt. God sees the depths, even your hidden cries. Leave off self-reflection. Just give yourself and never take back your offering. God ties your hands and feet so you don't interfere. Your efforts are in vain. You struggle even though God asks you to remain peacefully chained. Just do your outward duties while God works within. Feeling your own corruption shows God's presence. He withdraws Himself to give Himself more completely.

Your preliminary imprudence gave you confusion and brought much humility. You acted in good faith so think no more. Did not God, in His Providence, allow you to escape a false position, so you could be consoled and humbled by the same act?

Remaining Passive

Allow your fear of death and judgment to increase. Do nothing to increase it or escape from it. Put yourself in God's hands as if you were a dead body, moved as He pleases.

Just remain passive while God acts. This torments our human nature which fears loss of activity as much as it fears death itself.

7.11 For the Time of Retreat

(To the same sister)

Your retreat will be simple but painful because of your present trial.

1. Having passed through the first degrees of the spiritual life, you will make progress by losses and annihilation. To arrive at a spiritual life, you must die to all sensible and created things. So, in retreat, you will not enjoy sensible lights or even a desire for God. You will fall into greater darkness, distaste and apathy.

Occupy yourself only with what God gives you. Your soul is a great territory that belongs to Him alone, whether in light or darkness, pleasure or disgust. This nothingness is terrible to self-love but profitable for the soul. God will complete this work if we become convinced of our nothingness. Our resistance limits our acquiescence to His will.

2. In this despoilment never use subjects for prayer that do not suit you. Meditate on the mysteries of Jesus. Read the letters on trials by St. Frances de Sales and St. Jane Chantal. Read lives of the saints on this same point.

3. During the day stay united with God in all the circumstances. This is recollection without slothfulness.

When you feel an attraction to make acts, follow these graces without effort. These acts should come from the higher faculties. When they require effort stop making them. Stay in repose in the depth of your heart. Take no thought of exterior things. Be faithful to the retreat exercises.

Following these rules, do not fear wasting time. Fear only self-love. Guard your simple recollection (however dry and barren) as a great treasure. Only by recollection can God do His work.

United to Him, you are sure He is acting, although imperceptibly. He disposes you so He can enrich you. When, by grace, you find no satisfaction in your good works, just put up with yourself. Happy the person who has destroyed self-love and has no estimation of himself. He has only pure love because he sees himself as worthless. You must experience many more trials before self-love is replaced by pure love. May God give you this grace.

7.12 After the Retreat

(To the same sister)

1. I rejoiced when I read your letter because what I said came true on the retreat.

2. You know I love the keen feeling of powerlessness. We despair of ourselves so we trust in God who then performs hidden miracles within the soul.

3. God did not let you follow your own desires which is a very wholesome grace.

4. You felt devoid of faith, hope and love because God deprived you of this perception and gave you an opportunity for complete sacrifice.

Only human nature grieves over spiritual dryness which is a necessary death to receive life divine. Some souls have such terrible agonies that every minute seems like their last. Have courage. God favors you by giving you some slight perception of His help. The good Master allows you a vivid recollection of your own sins to purify you like gold in a crucible. I congratulate you. You are like the martyrs who were happy in the middle of their torments.

5. Guard against the illusion of seeking the consolations of past retreats. This has been a very useful retreat with little consolation. You even feel that God has rejected your sacrifice. This is another temptation permitted by God. If He takes away your peace of mind, let it go. You shall love Him with greater purity.

6. Your keen feeling of frailty and the sense of falling at every step inspire you with great self-distrust and blind confidence in God. St. Paul claimed that his weaknesses inspired him with confidence in the power of Christ.

7. To derive great profit from your crucifying state just have your heart habitually say “Thy will be done”. Do nothing else from morning to night. It will seem like you are doing nothing but really you will be accomplishing everything with profound humility.

7.13 The Fear of Reprobation

Theme: On the purification of the soul

I read your letter describing your suffering I cast myself at Jesus’ feet in thanksgiving. A thousand experiences convince me that interior trials purify and sanctify better than external crosses and penances. So, I bless God and encourage you. Just follow these points:

1. Throughout this trial expect only those consolations which God pleases to give you. Even an angel cannot deliver you from this suffering.

2. God sends greater crucifixion according to his greater plan of divine union.

3. The fear of being lost is common to all the souls going through this trial.

4. God seems to be accepting your weakness by giving you a perception of your own abandonment. Many souls are deprived of this consolation.

5. God leads you by His inner actions to do exactly what He wants. Be convinced of two things. First, the present trial is the greatest grace you have ever received. Second, God teaches all that you need to know.

As I re-read your letter, I want to add that your belief that God seems to have withdrawn His mercy is part of the trial. God wills you to endure a deep fear of reprobation. This is your

martyrdom. These thoughts are the devil's arrows sent by divine permission. Although piercing your heart, they have great merit.

God Permits Trials

That the measure of your sins is filled up comes from the father of lies. Although God does not cause this trial, He permits it for your good. This humiliating suffering causes a fire which will purify you according to the intensity of the flames and according to the frequency that your soul is plunged into the crucible. Your dryness and want of feelings come from these flames. They will not consume you but purify you so that you can be consumed by divine love.

This applies also to your efforts to rush toward God. He seemingly repulses you. These rushes and repulses are so violent in some souls that they are called despairing love. Despair is only the appearance. Underneath is true love.

An additional grace is to make (as St. Francis de Sales teaches) the heroic act, "Even if separated from God for all eternity, I will still love Him." Make use of this help but do not depend on it. God might take it away.

6. Multiply the times you receive Holy Communion. This is a necessary support.

7. Abandonment and confidence are powerful aids but God might remove even the consolation attached to these acts. If so, just abandon yourself entirely and God will sustain you imperceptibly.

The poor soul imagines itself completely forsaken and experiences a grief that is a kind of hell. Although you are only in Purgatory even this is purifying and filled with treasures. I ask God not to remove you until you are enriched with eternal treasures. So many souls have already been enriched through these trials.

8. Your peace in suffering is God's peace. Instead of fidelity and fervor you experience only infidelity and lack of devotion. This is the effects of the happy state of annihilation.

A holy person told me their fear of being removed from this trial. I asked why. "I might lose my sense of nothingness before God which is more delightful than consoling graces."

God leaves little for your director to do and to consult him often would be infidelity to the great Master. Here are just a few words.

9. God has made the most of your weakness. Darkness is a trial. It is less painful but fruitful because the soul perceives nothing. This is the acme of grace, when our will is lost in God's will. Such love is sheltered from all illusion.

10. The ineffable consolations experienced before this dryness began came from the mercy of God who wanted to establish His dwelling in the soul's very center so He could work imperceptibly. These consolations were a great grace but this dryness is a greater grace.

11. Remain in the state of simple surrender. Leave it only under the impulse of grace. Don't set aside attractions but don't go beyond them.

7.14 Explanations and Directions

Theme: Explanations of certain trials

As long as you abandon yourself, God will never abandon you. Your experiences (past and present) guarantee your future. Although these trials are hard for nature, the Master helps you to see the advantages and even necessity of these trials.

Destroying Pride and Presumption

This is God's usual way and I know few whom He has not led along this path when they are abandoned to Him. Why this heaviness of heart and depression? It is to destroy the pride and hidden presumption in those souls called to perfection. God uses bitterness to overcome that self-love which feeds on spiritual pleasures. Self-love dies for want of food as a fire dies for lack of fuel. This death, however, is not in one moment and much water is needed for this great conflagration.

Self-love has many heads and many lives which must be killed successively. You have gained much by making self-love to die to nature and to senses. Self-love recovers from these defeats and attacks on other grounds. It begins with sensible devotion (a more subtle and more powerful attack). Pure love cannot put up with this because God will not share our heart with sensible devotions.

God's Jealous Love

What happens? There are less privileged souls for whom God does not have such a jealous love. To these souls He allows sensible devotions and is content that they have sacrificed the sense of pleasure. This is the course with ordinary devout persons. God is less exacting because they receive fewer graces. These are ordinary spouses who cannot wound His heart so keenly.

However, He has far more requirements and plans for His chosen souls. His jealousy equals His tenderness. Desiring to give Himself fully, He wants to have their whole heart without division. He destroys the final vestiges of self-love which feeds on spiritual consolations.

Withdrawal of Consolations

To bring about this second death, He withdraws all consolations. The poor soul feels suspended between heaven and earth. This seems like annihilation with no pleasure and no love. In this state, the soul must use its very essence to be attached to God alone. This act is barely perceived by faith. By this two-fold death the soul enters a pure alliance with God and enjoys the delights of purified love.

You lament the number of your false steps. Just begin again. You say, "But I do this with such sadness and trouble." This increases the merit. You are acquiring solid virtue "at the point of a sword" (St. Francis de Sales). I understand perfectly that all seems depressing to you.

God's purpose is to gain your whole heart. Give your heart against your inclination. Then, sweet grace will return without being felt.

You say "I do not know if I do love. I certainly try to love." That is all God needs. He gives grace to him who does all in his power. Your efforts will certainly end in love. Your desire to love is a gift. Just say to yourself "I would be overwhelmed with consolations if I felt like I try to feel. However, God removes these consolations so I might experience the second death which always precedes pure love."

Staying on the Cross

You write, "I will remain on my cross even if I have to die there." How I rejoice! God gives you courage. What need you fear? Your second death is more precious than life.

You write, "I would be glad if God removed this trial". The saints felt the same way but the more you want to be freed, the more merit there is in staying on the cross. God is with you. He bears the weaknesses of His friends and forbids them to be distressed. He wants all to have unalterable peace. So, frequently tell God you love Him. This is an excellent remedy for fears about judgment and predestination.

I am happy you realize that the feeling of not loving God is the devil's illusion. Wanting to feel our love for God comes from a self-love which loves God for His rewards. To love God because He is God (our great reward and sovereign good) is the saints' love. To love one's supreme happiness (God) is to love God alone, loving God as He is.

Some ask, "What if God were not our eternal happiness, should we still love Him?" What a pitiable supposition, as if God were not God. Let's just love God as simply as we can. He will lift and purify that love. As for you, just stay the path. St. Jerome endured the fears of God's judgment and eternity. So accept these as long as God pleases. Let your will be lost in your always loving God.

7.15 Perfect Detachment

The following are some consoling truths for souls seeking the interior life.

1. The soul attains union with God to the degree it is detached from created things which are the source of continual corruption.

2. This attachment, when attained perfectly, is called mystical death. We must die to two things, creatures outside of ourselves and within ourselves (our own ideas and interests). The external detachment is shown by an indifference to what is exterior. Although attained by grace, it can seem totally natural. God permits this so we avoid self-complacency.

3. Interior privation is more difficult, as if we were being flayed alive. When self-love cries out, it shows the power that links us to creatures and the need for the surgeon's knife. The

4. The more vital we are, the greater our resistance. The soul arrives at perfect detachment only by privations and by a heroic heart which has been stripped in the midst of abundance.

God does us a favor by stripping us of all consolation. What does the soul do while God denudes it? It shows no resistance to the deprivation and pays no attention to inner rebellion. Sometimes the soul even feels it is improperly accepting this trial. These feelings must also be accepted.

5. If the soul wonders if the trial comes from God, it should know the following:
 - a. God never gives us an assurance of our eternal salvation (except in a special revelation). He wants us to walk in darkness and to merit by faith.
 - b. He keeps us in a state of humility to conquer our pride.
 - c. He keeps us totally dependent on Him both temporally and eternally.

This makes religion somewhat terrible, but if we submit then God consoles us. He gives us a firm hope. This substitutes for certainty and gains merit. This hope rests totally on His mercy, on Christ's merits, on the graces we have received, on the decisions of our directors, on a faith that cannot deceive and on our efforts to overcome sin and to practice virtue, which is indeed imperfect.

Chaste and Peaceful Fear

With all this, we still have fear. This is a chaste and peaceful fear which we must always retain. Not to have fear would be the devil's illusion. An uneasy fear would come from self-love.

What happens after this total desolation? Remain in simplicity. Leave all and you will find God in darkness and deprivations. This is God alone. This desolation puts self-love to death and brings forth the life of grace. It is difficult to spend a whole life like this but what does some sweetness matter when life is so short. We suffer destitution so imperfectly. I want God to save me from suffering it courageously! Secret complacency would result.

God's invisible hand supports you so you are humble even in your victories. Better to endure feebly than powerfully! May our own victories humble us. Let us admire God who knows so well how to mix strength and weakness in just the right proportions so nothing is spoiled.

7.16 Explanation of Apparent Despair

Never take the extreme expressions of otherwise orthodox writers too rigidly. Instead, enter into their meanings. Sometimes in the violence of temptations, chosen souls speak of no hope of eternal happiness, words that savor of despair. Don't be scandalized and don't imagine this is real despair.

A Hidden Confidence

Confidence is still present. It is just hidden in their souls. Sometimes criminals come before judges with a rope around their necks. They do this because they believe in mercy and hope to obtain pardon by their excess of sorrow. Will God be less good to the abandoned soul? He will not take literally what are really just cries of abandonment.

Because you did not understand this, you wanted to erase some expressions in the book “Interior Christian”. When I read these I admire the excess of a confidence uttered in a moment of excitement. These are miracles of grace, raising the soul without destroying it. They don’t appear contrary to God’s wisdom. They just make me admire it.

7.17 Abandonment in Trials

Thank you for your charming letter. I would say the following:

1. When God withdraws all support, He even withdraws the director. The only help is to remember the guidance he gave you.

2. I really have nothing to add to my previous letter.

3. In spite of your darkness, you have an immovable support because you give yourself to the One who has seemingly abandoned you. This shows that you realize you have never been more forsaken or less friendless in your whole life.

4. Doesn’t your fear of not being able to abandon yourself show that you have a true hidden abnegation? Does not God see these desires? Yes, and these acts are better than the ones you can feel.

7.18 Fruit of Death to Self

Praise God for these graces. Now you must guard them.

1. Your rest in God comes from the Spirit. Don’t ruin it by multiple acts. Your simplicity must resemble God’s infinite simplicity.

Abandonment is based on a simple principle. God always gives what is best to His children in every situation and our perfection is a constant adhesion to this loving will. In this way, all our desires are absorbed and transformed.

2. May your illness gain you one fruit – to recognize the continual loss of grace when a soul pays scant attention to interior movements.

3. Speak to your spiritual daughters of the duties of divine love and the priceless advantages of a spiritual life. Few understand this and fewer practice it. The emphasis these days is on the exterior life. We must worship God in spirit and in truth. Where are these worshippers?

4. Do not be surprised by your weaknesses. A keen recollection of your sins is a great grace – the source of self-distrust and confidence in God.

5. Your devotion to the Sacred Heart is a real treasure. The riches are inexhaustible.

6. Your spirit of sacrifice is excellent but you can continue these only by an interior life.

7. The humbling of the heart appeases God and draws down fresh light so the person can remain in this humbled state before God. Then we are walking before God in truth. In any other state we would be in error.

8. Continue to govern in gentleness. Avoid all faults coming from a bitter and indiscreet zeal. Toward the aged, be full of wisdom and charity. Toward the young, (who are weak and not yet generous) be doubly gentle and act with moderation.

9. Never leave off the self-forgetfulness which I have encouraged and which God has given you. Our true self is God, the life of our soul. He has created us for Himself. When you fall, just get up and continue in peace.

Let us be engulfed in God so we might be engulfed in heaven during the infinite duration of eternity. Amen