

As A Man Thinketh In His Heart . . .

“Listen, O my son, to the precepts of thy Master, and incline the ear of thy heart . . .”

These are the very first words of *The Holy Rule* of St. Benedict. It is in the heart that perfection lies. Love is the supreme law.

Praiseworthy though it be to seek God by good works, and especially the works (the keeping) of God’s Commandments, we must yet be forearmed against a certain false idea of perfection, which is sometimes to be met with in not very enlightened souls. It often happens that the whole of perfection is placed in the merely outward and material observance of God’s law. Although it may sound severe, the above approach to perfection borders upon pharisaism or risks leading to it. The Pharisees passed, in the eyes of the multitude, as holy personages. They were God’s spiritual leaders on earth. They esteemed themselves saints – justified – and made all perfection consist in the exactitude of outward observances. Their fidelity to the letter of the law and the exactitude they demanded were so tedious that the examples given of their formalism were often ridiculous. Our Lord called it “the tradition of men”.

As we struggle to save our immortal souls we cannot help being concerned. We ask: “what, then, is the Christian life? What is the ‘Sensus Catholicus’ that we often hear mentioned? What is the proper atmosphere of Catholic living? Is Catholic life a list of observances? a schedule of things one must do? Is good Catholicism a ‘church going’ practice where one never misses mass on Sunday, or fails to receive the Sacraments regularly? Is it abstaining from candy during Lent?” In no way! IT IS THE DIVINE LIFE OVERFLOWING FROM THE BOSOM OF THE FATHER INTO CHRIST JESUS AND, THROUGH HIM, INTO OUR SOULS.

Without a good supernatural foundation all that we do is nothing – nothing at all! Are we to understand by this that all exterior prescriptions of our Catholic life are to be put aside? Far from it. Their observance should be the normal condition. But their observance must be the manifestation of the interior life: – their observance must be guided by the condition found in one’s heart. It is wrong to place the Christian life mainly (and maybe only) in the outward observance of material ordinances. At this point it is quite necessary to insert a warning. The warning is directed at those who in these days of turmoil have turned to the traditional way of Catholicism. The distress of these good people can, at times, be very great. But they must remain alert to the fact that the placing of our gift (our life, our good works, our prayers, etc.) on the altar of Tradition does not automatically make the gift acceptable! This is very important to remember, but our instructions sometimes overlook this point. The essence of Catholic living does not consist in a carefully structured life.