



THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

!Man must turn to prayer!

Would thou attain in Christ the height of perfection, and by a nearer and more direct approach to thy God become one spirit with Him? Before undertaking this greatest and noblest of all imaginable enterprises, thou must first learn what constitutes the true and perfect SPIRITUAL LIFE. For many have made it to consist exclusively in austerities, maceration of the flesh, disciplines, long vigils and fasts, and other like bodily hardships and penances and externalisms . . . Others, especially women, fancy they have made great progress therein, if they say countless vocal prayers, recite many Rosaries each day, hear many Masses, frequent many churches and receive many Holy Communions. Others are persuaded that perfection depends wholly in long periods of prayer, living in silence on one's knees and in retirement. And thus, some in these practices, others in various similar actions, suppose that the foundations and perfection are laid in these ways.

But it is not so indeed; for as some of these are means to acquire grace, others fruits of grace, they cannot be held to constitute Christian perfection and the true life of grace. They are unquestionably most powerful means in the hands of those who use them well and discreetly. Thus, different people place perfection in different external practices; but it is certain that they all equally deceive themselves. As exterior works are no more than either dispositions for becoming truly pious, or the affects of real piety; it cannot be said that Christian perfection and true piety are absolutely contained in them. No matter how powerful such pious practices may be, they are of efficacious value only when employed by discrete, properly instructed and well-balanced souls. When properly used, such pious practices as these are a great help in the avoiding of evil and the doing of good.

The case is far different with those who ignorantly and with lack of well guided religious experience, place their devotion in exterior works and prayers and devotions which frequently are the cause of their perdition, and of worse consequences than manifest crimes – not that these practices are in themselves harmful, but only from a wrong application, and perhaps a Jansenistic point of view. Their attachment to such works is so great that they utterly neglect to watch the secret motions of their hearts. Giving them full scope, they expose these exterior works to corruption and the wiles of the devil. Then it is that the seducer, seeing them go astray and all puffed up with pride, not only encourages them to pursue their way, but fills their imagination with empty ideas: they already taste the joys of Paradise; the delights of the Angels; they see God face to face; they visualize all sorts of visions and all such like. When taught, these souls have been taught everything that is to be known about God – unfortunately, in spite of their instructions, they do not know God!

However, a little reflection on the conduct of these people discovers their error, and the great distance existing between them and that quality of perfection others of us are presently

