

# Thanks Be To God. Part 1.

## Part 1 – Meditations.

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Australian Catholic Truth Society No.0891 (1941)

Reconciliation.

GOD seems to make it a rule that we shall not be in perfect peace with Him if we exclude even one person from our affection. You remember His words about being reconciled to our brother before bringing our gift to the altar; if we won't do that, He won't admit us to His close friendship.

Is there anyone in the world towards whom you feel bitterness? Don't let the sun go down on your anger. You will get nearer to God, and many troubles will disappear. "Love your enemies — do good to those who hate you." How much it would teach us about Our Blessed Lord to put this into practice!

THANKFULNESS.

WHAT is a point of view which will put everything into its proper perspective, and is fitted for every sight, weak as well as strong? Thankfulness, in all places, in all circumstances, always. God is ever with us, we are ever with Him, we cannot help forming some opinion of Him: we must have some theory about Him if He ever enters our thoughts. What is it to be?

A good opinion, a sense of how much we owe Him. Even if we feel that we do very little for Him, and, indeed, are of very little account ourselves, we can at least thank Him for His kindness; we need not be ashamed to acknowledge it. Good manners teach us to say "thank you" for a service rendered. And God is at our service: He tends us, provides for us all day, all night long. We can surely say so much in our hearts without any loss of dignity on our part.

We may kiss the Hand that feeds us. We need undertake no new obligations, we need make no promise; we only meet a gift, a never-ending succession of gifts, with an expression of gratitude. We do not refuse His presents, we cannot refuse His presents if we are to retain our being; we give Him in return simply our thanks. A beggar would do no less and we need do no more.

Of course, He does not require a repetition of acts, but a disposition, a temper of thanksgiving. We can have His mercies for the asking, or unasked, if only we will acknowledge them. On what easy terms does the Eternal God open to us His stores! It needs no long practice of austerity or high contemplation to tell him that we are grateful for what we have received. All His gifts are not equally pleasant, but they are all from His Hand, and we know that they are bestowed for our good, although we do not see how.

If we ran our course with eyes always open to God's favours showered upon us and with grateful hearts, we should not have run in vain and should receive the prize.

Thankfulness ripens into love and love is the fulfilling of the law. How fond Jesus Christ was of publishing His thanks to His heavenly Father! How deeply He felt the slights put upon Him by Simon the Pharisee and, on the other hand, the atonement made for them by Magdalen's love!

"You gave Me no water for My Feet, but she with tears has washed My Feet, and with her hairs has wiped them."

Paradise was His thank-offering to the Good Thief for his defence of Him on Calvary. It will also be the sure reward of all whom no contradictions, no perplexities, can hinder from always praising, always thanking God.

Pure Gold for God.

WHEN we look back upon the huge pile of our past works, may we not fitly borrow the imagery of Saint Paul and ask ourselves how much of it is likely to abide the trial of fire, how much of it was "wood" and "hay" and "stubble" — trifles, vanity, or worse, and how much "gold, silver, and precious stones"? Saint Philip Neri used to say pleasantly with regard to spiritual reading that he liked the works, that is, the books of people whose names began with S, that is, of Saints. Suppose we were to take S as signifying not Saints but Self, to how many bundles of our past labours should we not have to attach the label S, Selfish, done for ourselves, for our own comfort, our own glorification, our own advantage. And, I much fear, how quickly and how brightly they would burn. How many of our witty but unkind sayings, how much of our un-charitableness, how much of our conceit, would crackle there! We may hope indeed that the fire would spare us something, would respect at least a few objects in that vast collection.

What are the "gold" and "silver" and "precious stones" of life? Here and there after the conflagration we pick up some articles over which the flames have no power, in some instances slightly blackened perhaps, because our motives have not been quite pure, but yet substantially intact and unharmed. What are these jewels? Sorrows patiently borne, injuries not resented, humble, gentle, kindly thoughts and words and deeds — above all the pure gold, which no fire can tarnish, of deeds done wholly for the love of God.

The Child Jesus.

THE Child Jesus was the flowering of the Root of Jesse; in Him, the Godhead dwelt corporeally; to Him, therefore, there could be wanting nothing of life's opening loveliness, and fragrance, and grace.

He came to make Himself known to men, and He chose His own method of doing so. He would introduce Himself to us at His own time and in His own fashion; and every circumstance should serve to tell us more about Him, to make it clearer to us how He wishes us to think of Him, and in what way to treat Him.

A child does not love ceremony; in fact, it does not understand it. It knows nothing of the distinctions of wealth and class; it welcomes all because it believes all to be its friends. There is in this one lifting of the veil, one Divine intimation, one hint, if we may so call it, of how God desires to be regarded. He has bent and bowed the heavens and come down to earth, not in search of pomp and parade — the courtiers He summoned were shepherds keeping the night watches over their flocks; the entrance of the cave was open to all corners as to the midnight air.

What are the qualities of a child? First of all, love for its parents, affection, affectionateness.

It is worth while dwelling a little on this affectionateness, this disposition to love, this quick response to affection shown Him by others, which was a characteristic of the Child Jesus. If it truly be a mark of Him as He is, and as He wishes us to know Him, it ought to have an important bearing upon our service of Him.

If affectionateness is the first sign of a good child, perhaps we may rank docility as the second. Docility, as we know, simply signifies teachableness, readiness to be taught, a willingness to learn.

Indocility, unteachableness, is a hindrance to human knowledge. How much more to Divine! The difficulty is not that God is not willing to teach us, but that we are not willing to learn. We do not know ourselves, our own weakness, our own pressing needs, our own greatest dangers; we live, as far as our souls are concerned, in a sort of fool's paradise, and how can we expect to know the Infinite God? He Himself alone can manifest Himself to us, for He is above our human searching out; and yet He cannot allow His Divine Light to stream into our souls because we are too proud to be taught. Our self-caused darkness is so thick that we do not feel the need of, nor do we crave for, light. It will be some kind of preparation for docility in the things of God, after the pattern of the Divine Child, if we strive to gain more docility in the affairs of our daily life. More deference to others, less insistence on our own opinions, a more real effort to enter into others' minds, to understand why they view things so differently from ourselves; such a training in humility, charity, and fellow-feeling will bring us very near to the Divine Child who was so loving to all, and who, though Infinitely Wise, did not disdain to go to school to His own imperfect creatures on earth.

Too Little Sentiment.

A SUFFICIENT answer to persons who bid us to check all feeling in our dealings with God is surely found in the example of our Divine Master Himself when He walked this earth and "went in and out" among His Apostles and disciples. He thought it no shame to weep passionate tears over Jerusalem on the day of what seemed His triumph, but which, as He knew, only preluded His doom.

His grief at the death of Lazarus made even His enemies cry out in wonder "behold how He loved him". He invited John to lay his head on His bosom at the Last Supper, and inspired him to put the favour on record for all time, as well as his title of "the disciple whom Jesus loved". He would not have little children scolded when they flocked around Him with the sure attraction of childhood to One who understood and loved them, "because of such are the Kingdom of Heaven".

If Jesus showed such feelings during His mortal life, and made a triple declaration of love by Peter his amends for his triple denial on that Thursday night, it would indeed be a strange conclusion to infer that Our Lord wishes us today to be as ice or marble in our converse with Him, never to move even the lips of our heart, but to hang our heads in His sacred Presence, terrified and abashed.

Has He, who while on earth was the most accessible of men, who put everyone at his ease, after whom, in the phrase of His enemies, "the whole world had gone out", suddenly changed His ways and nature, and forgotten what manner of Man He was at Nazareth, on Calvary, by the shores of the Lake of Galilee? It is not the excess of feeling, but the lack of it, which is the danger of the religious world of today.

Delight In the Lord.

THERE is such a thing as breaking with the world on many points and yet not getting possession of God; I do not mean of course not getting possession of God's grace, but not finding that peace and happiness in His service, which is more real and more precious than earth's keenest joys.

What is the matter with us if such is our state? Very possibly, we are taking the pleasures of a fervent life too sadly. Stiffness, coldness, exaggerated awe, do not kill indeed the Presence of the Blessed Trinity in the soul, but shut out Its sensible effects of light and warmth.

When God invites us to be glad in the recollection of His love for us, of all He has done for us and wishes to do for us both now and hereafter, we turn our eyes away to fix them on our unsatisfactory past, or perhaps our unsatisfactory present, and murmur to ourselves: "How can God love such a 'slacker' as myself? He really can't mean it." When God draws nearer to us, we draw back in fear as though we ought to keep our distance lest we be guilty of irreverence. What a parody this is of that happy, childlike living with God — the intercourse of a Father with His children — which was granted to our First Parents in the beginning, when they were allowed to hear the voice of the Lord God walking in Paradise at the afternoon air! We are now in many ways more blest than they; the 'felix Adae culpa', the happy fault of Adam, as the Church is not afraid to call it in the morning service of Holy Saturday, deserved to have the Redeemer with whom our union in His Sacrament is immeasurably closer than the strolling of God with His creatures on the lawns of Paradise when the early evening breezes had begun to temper the heat of the sun. [The phrase is now used in the 'Exultet' prayer of the Easter Vigil Service, not on the Saturday morning.]

God is Light, and Love, and Inexhaustible Joy; His Conversation has no bitterness nor His Company any tediousness (Wisdom 8:16): what wonder if His servants are happy in His service. He is glad in our gladness; He would have us joyful rather than sad; He grudges us no holiday if only we will take Him everywhere along with us. The world is wrong believing that it can be happy without Him, but it is sometimes right in suspecting that not all His servants value Him, as they ought. Do not let us at least deserve this reproach in our own instance.

The Heavenly Vision.

LET us examine our own experience of God's dealings with us in the past. We find bad habits of temper or uncharitableness or worse things installed within us. Turn back upon them the lamp of memory steadily, widely, so as to bring into view all attendant circumstances and light up God's admonitions and inspirations as well as our own perversity. Try to recollect how often the voice of conscience has striven to make itself heard, in gentle whispers first of all and then in loud remonstrance or remorse, until quelled at last, it has seemed to die in sobs or in murmurs far away. How many fires of noble purpose have been lit in our souls by stirring words or great examples, or suddenly, in the strangest fashion in most unexpected places or at most unlikely times by the Holy Spirit, who alone can touch the inmost heart, and afterwards have burnt low and then to ashes because you would take no pains to feed them!

Saint Paul says he was not "disobedient to the heavenly vision". We indeed have no claim to such a wonder as wrought his conversion, but I believe that glimpses of the Unseen, and high impulses, and high yearnings for better things, not the work of imagination but of the God "in whom we live and move and have our being," are not so uncommon as is often fancied in these days of ours, perhaps because there are so many lying spirits abroad just now trying to deceive us. The Lord is not a hard man, but in the words of the prophet Joel, "gracious and merciful, patient and rich in mercy, and ready to repent of the evil". Believe Him to be gentle, kind, generous, and compassionate beyond the tenderness of the most devoted mother, and you will find your anticipations fall infinitely short of the truth. The one thing that He cannot bear is that you should mistrust His love.

My Day's Journey.

IN what thoughts can I find inspiration and comfort at the beginning of each day? In God with us and therefore we with God.

My day's march has been carefully mapped out for me, "before Abraham was made", in the Divine counsels, its windings allowed for, the ambushes of my enemies forestalled.

I may be quite assured against surprises or superior force, if only I leave myself unhesitatingly in the hands of God. And then what a fine thing it is, enough to stir one's pulses at a suitable time and place, but true even when one is not in an enthusiastic mood, to know that the feeblest of us has a bit to do, a work to accomplish, under a commission, not signed by earthly emperor or king, but from the Sovereign of Heaven itself! Further, every weary pace I count, if it so be that the way is long or tedious, is taken under the eyes of Him for whose sake I have begun the march and who will at its end give me a rich reward.

I can make for myself a Friend who will accompany me through my day, step by step, who can and will, if I do not fail Him, always guide me, always uphold me, in whom I can trust unreservedly, and who is so generous that while He has no need of me and I have every need of Him, He actually regards my leaning upon Him as a favour done by me to Him and is most anxious to reward me for obeying what is not only my duty but the dictates of my own interest and advantage.

To halt for a few seconds or minutes to clear the head. Why should not the thoughts during my day's work be only to rest (eternally) and be thoughts of God, His goodness, our need of His assistance, or our fervent wishes for the welfare of those dear to us, and therefore our supplications for them to the throne of grace, why should they not be suitable at such times? No painful effort, no strain would be needed or desirable. If after a little practice we were to find the attempt a strain, would not this alone prove to us how much we have yet to learn about the proper method of intercourse with God — how stiff and formal, inelastic and cold our own way is, so unlike the conversation of a child with his Father and therefore so unlike the model of prayer taught us by Our Lord Himself. God is always at our elbow, God is always in our heart, God encompasses us on every side. He reads all our thoughts, He intimately knows every aspiration, every fear, every hope of our soul — He understands us without any need of our explanation, He can supply the answer to the problems which perplex ourselves. Why do we not consult Him more, open our hearts to His love, lean on Him in our weakness, implore His succour in our wants? He has not shrunk from abasing Himself to earth in order to share my human toils and troubles and trials; and shall I refuse His Company, as far as I can, and deny my confidences and reject His Friendship? If He loves to be with me, my answer must be that I, above all, desire to love to be with Him.

Misjudging God.

IF I place myself between the source of light and what I want to see, I stand in my own light. In the same way, I unwittingly interpose myself between God's light (vouchsafed to me in prayer or at other times) and God Himself, and I mistake my own shadow for the Divine Beauty.

I am unfortunately selfish and mean and unforgiving and dreadfully suspicious, and I cannot believe that the qualities which exist in myself are not also to be found in God. I am judging God by myself; I am reading my own petty thoughts into the Divine Mind. A moment's reflection will show us how terrible a mistake this is, how fatal to all worthy conceptions of God and therefore to any noble enthusiasm in His service. I verily believe that this error has done more than any other of our

day to chill fervent spirits and to sicken loyal hearts that would otherwise have beaten high with the love of the Master.

We have unconsciously dragged our God down to our own level, made Him in our imagination as petty and as unlovable as we are ourselves, and have then been surprised that we do not feel it easy to burn with devotion to our Father whom we have misunderstood.

If the turn of the phrase be not too familiar, I would lay down that God's good opinion of us chiefly depends on our good opinion of Him. I do not mean that God is open to flattery or that it can matter to Him in itself what we choose to think of our Creator, but that our behaviour towards Him is founded on our thoughts of Him, and noble thoughts beget noble deeds. Intimate thoughts lead to intimacy, and confiding thoughts of God, to trustfulness and hope in Him.

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