

Prayer Made Easy

By Rev Nicholas Walsh, S.J.

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INTRODUCTORY.

It is a divine truth that Grace, the Grace of God, is the only power or means by which man's soul is sanctified and saved. With it we can do all things, and without it nothing; nothing, in itself, supernatural and conducive to eternal salvation. It is also the teaching of the Church that Prayer and the Sacraments are the great channels of Grace instituted by Jesus Christ. He says to all:

“Ask and you shall receive.”

After His resurrection, He instituted the Sacrament of Penance, or Confession, as it is commonly called, when “He breathed on the Apostles and said: Receive, all you, the Holy Ghost, whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain they are retained.” The Apostles, in whom He founded His Church, were a moral body, to last to the end of time, in the exercise of the ordinary powers He gave them, and amongst these was the power of forgiving.

Lastly, in the sixth chapter of Saint John, when promising to institute the Blessed Sacrament, He said: “Amen, Amen, I say unto you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His Blood, you shall not have life in you. He that eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood has everlasting life, and I will raise him upon the Last Day. For My Flesh is meat indeed, and My Blood is drink indeed. He that eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood abides in Me and I in him.”

Prayer, and the Sacraments of Penance (or Reconciliation) and the Eucharist, are the great ordinary channels of grace between God and the soul of adult man. Of these three, however, Prayer and the Sacrament of Penance are more important, for the following reason. The Eucharist, it is true, has in itself the power of producing grace, but the amount of grace it imparts to the soul depends on the dispositions of the soul when receiving it. A soul very perfectly disposed will receive overflowing grace, whilst to a soul, not in mortal sin, but lukewarm, tepid, in a word, poorly disposed, probably but little grace is given; and of such a Communion the best and worst thing which can be said is that it is not a sacrilege. Now, Prayer and Confession are the great means for preparing and disposing a soul for a worthy and fruitful communion; therefore, in this sense, at least, the former are of more importance than the latter. It is true that a person who receives well the Blessed Sacrament is likely to pray devoutly and to make good Confessions, but still it may be safely said that the Eucharist is not the means towards Prayer and Confession being made well, as these are towards a worthy Communion.

If a person is attentive to his prayers and receives fruitfully these two Sacraments, he will have abundance of grace, and if he uses this rightly, he will be always able to fight and conquer his enemies, no matter in what form of temptation they show themselves. He will keep clear of them where he can, and where he must face them, he will gain the victory by “fighting them legitimately” on to the end.

THE POWER OF PRAYER.

We have in inspired Scripture many proofs that Prayer rightly made, is omnipotent, infallible in obtaining all good things, that is, all things which are good for us, according to God's mind and providence, with a view to our sanctification and salvation. First, in the Old Testament there are countless texts in which God commands, exhorts, entreats us to look to Him, to pray to Him, to cry to Him, et cetera, and that if we do, He will hear us, that His ears are always open, longing, as it were, to hear our prayer. But more, He meets an objection that some sinners might naturally make, saying: "Yes, He will hear the just and holy, but will He hear us?" by telling them that though their sins be as scarlet or as crimson, if they, rightly disposed, cry to Him, He will hear them, and make them white as snow. Saint Augustine, considering these countless texts, comes to the following most logical conclusion. "God is for ever urging us to ask. Will He refuse when we ask? Certainly not, for He would not so urge us to ask if He were not ready to give." In the New Testament, however, our Lord Himself gives us the strangest proof of all. In His Sermon on the Mount, when speaking to the multitude — to men of all time — He says: "Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asks receives, and he that seeks finds, and to him that knocks, it shall be opened. For what man is there among you of whom if his son shall ask bread will he reach him a stone, or if he shall ask him a fish will he reach him a serpent. If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father, who is in heaven, give good things to them that ask Him?"

Our Lord makes no distinction between saint and sinner, and says, to put it simply, that it is absurd to suppose that our good Father, God, could refuse anything good to those who ask Him. Again, in the parable of the lost sheep and of the Prodigal, He tells us of God's desire to take back the sinners who have ungratefully turned their backs upon and gone away from Him, above all if they come to Him in prayer, as the prodigal did.

Lastly, He was, as a rule, always with the poor and miserable of body and soul, and He received, with open arms and heart, all, even the worst sinners, who came to Him. I instance not Magdalene, or the thief on the Cross, or the outcast Canaanite woman, for all three came to or prayed to Him, but the wretched woman taken in flagrant crime who was dragged before Him.

God, for ever urging us to pray, suggests the thought that He considered no one could be lost who believed in the power and efficacy of prayer. And hence, in His desire to save all men, He goes on to prove again and again in the strongest way, as has been said above, that prayer is omnipotent in securing all good things. No wonder, therefore, that the greatest authorities in the Church speak of it as such. Saint Augustine calls prayer "The Key of Heaven;" with it we can unlock God's treasure house and enrich ourselves as we like.

He also says "the man who prays well lives well." Saint Alphonsus, on the other hand, says, "He who prays will be saved; and he who does not pray will be lost."

Saint Teresa tells us that "prayer is the channel of God's grace; give up prayer, and grace will not come. Prayer is the foundation of solid virtues; give up prayer, and they go to pieces." Also, "Prayer and sin cannot live together." Saint Chrysostom: "When a queen enters a city all the grandees gather round her; so also when the spirit of prayer possesses the soul, all virtues come in her train." Yes, even the worst sinner, if he prays, must come right and keep right.

A well instructed Catholic, if lost, will be the most inexcusable person on the Last Day. For if he should think of urging in excuse the number and the great power of his temptations, God may say:

“But you knew the omnipotence of Prayer, and had you used it I was pledged to give you grace by which you could have conquered each and all, and merited eternal glory by doing so.” Or let me suppose the following parable: A rich man said to a poor one, who lived close to him: Come every morning and I will give you food and drink, also, at times, coal, clothes, et cetera, according to the season, and if you are prevented from coming yourself, send a friend and I will give them to him for you. Well, after a time, this man gave up doing what he was told, neglected the very easy condition of asking, and when dying of want blamed his charitable and generous friend as the cause of his death. How unreasonable, and false as well. Yet, still more so the lost Catholic, as the condition of asking was the easiest possible, because he was always close to God, closer than one man could be to another — his lips, as it were, ever at God’s ear. The lost Catholic can justly blame no one but himself.

EASY TO PRAY.

As men are often under the delusion that Prayer is a hard, difficult work, I now wish to show that it is a very easy work. Prayer consists of two things, to think of God and say a word to Him. In the word “God,” I include, of course, the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity, Our Lord, God made Man; and the same applies to the ever Blessed Virgin and the angels and saints, to whom we may pray, as they are the friends of God in heaven, and have an intercessory power with Him. By “a word”, I mean that which is right or becoming, that we should say to God. Let us keep this definition of prayer well in mind. “To think of God and say a word to Him.” Where you have These you have prayer; where they are absent there is no prayer.

Hence, if a man, when at his business or work, or even at his recreation, thinks for a moment of God and says a short word to Him, he prays: whereas a person prostrated before the Blessed Sacrament, but wilfully distracted, or talking mindless, heartless babble, does not pray at all. Our Lord seems to tell us this truth in His parable of the Publican and the Pharisee. The Publican, the typical sinner of the Jews, “standing afar off” — at the door of the temple — “would not so much as lift his eyes towards heaven, but struck his breast, saying, with a repentant heart, O God, be merciful to me a sinner” — eight words — “went down to his house justified.” Not so the Pharisee, who, standing so as to be seen by all, probably as close to the Holy of Holies as was permitted, dared to address God in a long prayer which was a boastful account of his own good works as he thought them, and a contemptuous comparison of himself with others, and so went away worse than he came.

Prayer is the easiest thing in the world, at least in the matter of speaking. This is clearly true, if we bear in mind the definition, and the fact that God is the easiest being in this world to speak to. Consider it as follows: ‘if we wish to speak to our fellow man, we may have to go a distance to meet him, or from one part of our house or grounds to another to find him, and when we do and stand face to face with him, we must form words and speak them in an articulate manner, so that he can hear us: or, if we cannot communicate with him “viva voca”, we must sit down and write him a letter’. Now, in speaking or communicating with God, none of these things is necessary. God is everywhere, at all times, we cannot get away from Him, even if we should wish and strive to do so. He tells us that if we ascend to heaven, or descend to hell, or go to the ends of the earth, He is there, and it is His hand which upholds us. We may say truthfully that our lips are ever at His ears, and that He hears the gentlest whisper of the heart as well as if we spoke in the loudest tone. Saint Chrysostom puts this truth before us by saying, if you wish to approach a king you must engage some influential person or bribe flunkies, in order to do so, but nothing of this kind is necessary in order to approach God. You can, of yourself, be with Him at any moment.

This view of prayer has a very practical side for all, but particularly for men of very busy lives, for these can pray much by esteeming and making aspirations or ejaculations, which may be defined as a few words breathed or shot forth from the heart to God at any time or in any place. It is true, and of universal custom, and becoming, — if not commanded, that we should in certain places and in certain circumstances appear before God bareheaded, bowed down, kneeling, et cetera; but the posture of the body is in no way of the essence of prayer. If a man in his office, in the market-place, travelling on foot, by railway, or on a ship, lying awake at night, or even on a racecourse recollects himself for a moment and says a word to God, he prays. Saint Chrysostom says that long prayers are somewhat difficult because of the strain on the mind they demand, but aspirations are easy, and adds, “Make these often, in the shop, in the mart, or any place; make one at least when the hour sounds, that the order of prayer may go along with the order of time.”

That these short ejaculations are real prayer and very powerful, we have on the highest authority, that of Our Lord Himself. We read in the fourteenth chapter of Saint Matthew two instances of the power of aspirations. The disciples are at sea in a boat, “tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary,” but seeing Our Lord walking on the sea towards them “they cried out for fear” an ejaculation, and immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying: “Be of good heart; it is I, fear not!” But Peter, with Our Lord’s permission, “going down out of the boat walked upon the water to come to Jesus, but seeing the wind strong he was afraid, and when he began to sink he cried out, Lord save me,” — three words — “And immediately Jesus stretching forth His hand took hold of him, and when they were come up into the boat the wind ceased.” Here we see how two aspirations, one by the disciples and one by Peter, were answered. Immediately, by Our Lord!

We have a sea in many ways dangerous to us who must voyage it, storms little and great, currents in the wrong direction, gentle and pleasant at first, but getting stronger by degrees and sweeping towards rocks of which the most to be dreaded are those that are just a little below the water. Or, to put it plainly, we have temptations of many kinds, leagued, as I may say, with the passions of our corrupt nature. Now, when beset or attacked by any of these, make an aspiration; say, like Peter, “Lord save me,” or, like the disciples, “Lord, save us, we perish.” God will be with us at once and give us “Good Issue,” that is, victory! And if we patiently make an aspiration now and then, as long as the temptation lasts, or as often as it returns, we drive the enemy off the field. I have said patiently, for often, if we make an aspiration as fervently as a saint, the temptation will not go away, or, if it does, will return again and again. Let us patiently and trustfully make aspirations and there will be no sin, even if the temptation dogged us for days.

We have another instance of the power of an aspiration, told us by Our Lord. The sinful Publican, in humility and sorrow for his sin, cried out: “Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.” Seven words, and he was justified. It is a good and salutary custom to make short acts of contrition like the above for our sins forgiven, as well as not forgiven. Another instance of the power of a few words is when Martha and Mary sent this brief sentence to Our Lord: “He whom You love is sick.” He went and did more than heal Lazarus; He raised him from death to life. Again, the thief on the cross cried out: “Lord, remember me when You come into the kingdom,” — nine words—and his prayer was at once answered.

But perhaps the most instructive instance of the wonderful power of aspirations, and of persevering in them, is given by the poor Canaanite woman when she came to our Lord to ask relief for her daughter, who was grievously tormented by a devil. Her first ejaculation was “Have mercy on me, O Lord, You Son of David; my daughter is grievously troubled by a devil.” She asks, with

reverence, in a few words, the grace she needed. But Our Lord, for His Own wise reasons, “answered her not a word.” Nothing daunted, she came nearer, and made her second aspiration, adoring Him and saying: “Lord, help me.” Three words. He now answers her appeal by a word which implied, as the Fathers of the Church and Commentators say, an insult, “it is not good to take the bread of the children” — namely, those of Israel, to whom, first of all, His mission was — “and cast it to the dogs.” Again, patient and hopeful, she seizes Our Lord’s words, and turns them against Himself, and finds in them an argument in her own favour, saying: “Yea, Lord, for the whelps also eat of the crumbs which fall from the table of their masters.” This was her third aspiration, full of humility and faith. Our Lord then and at once granted her request, “and her daughter was cured from that hour.”

In the Old Testament, the Psalms are full of aspirations. It is well to remember that aspirations may be said anywhere and in any posture; also, that they can be said with perfect ease, and without distractions. Persons often dislike long prayers, because, when saying them, they are so tempted and troubled by distractions. Now a man, even of the wildest Imagination, can throw his heart into three or ten words without any fear of distraction. We should not commit ourselves to aspirations made, as it were, for us unless we fancy them or find that they suit us better than to make them in our own simple way and words. No one knows the thoughts, desires, difficulties, wants, et cetera, of a man, as he knows them himself. A poor, uneducated man in the fields will speak his word to God better than the most learned and saintly ascetic could make it for him.

There is another use of aspirations which we may need where we shall most need prayer, and may find long prayers very difficult, namely, in time of serious illness, or when we are coming towards the end of life. In these circumstances, owing to weakness, great physical pain, semi-unconsciousness, et cetera, long prayers are practically Impossible, whilst a few words, breathed forth earnestly and fervently for a moment are easy. Yes, when we shall need prayer most, the form of ejaculatory prayer is easiest and best, and at times the only possible form of prayer.

It is to be feared that men of busy lives will not pray as much and as often as they ought unless they train themselves to this practice of aspirations. I say, “train themselves,” because as prayer does not come naturally to us and we are diverted from it by the hurry of life and by sensible material things, it is necessary to patiently labour to acquire this habit, and the labour will be well repaid. We can do this by placing a mark here and there in a book we are reading, something to our eye out of place in our room or house, when catching sight of a church from a railway carriage, when passing one, something which will call our attention to the resolution we have made and the practice of it, by making an aspiration at the moment. I have delayed perhaps too long on this form of prayer, but I have done so because many men of the world know little or nothing about it, or do not esteem it at its proper value because it is such a small thing, or they identify prayer with posture of the body, their prayer-book, and prayers composed by others. But, above all, because it is a great help to lay people, for whose practical instruction this little book is written. We could make a hundred aspirations or more every day without interfering with business, work, or recreation.

A WORD ON LONG PRAYERS.

Short prayers are, as has been proved, very easy; long prayers are not very difficult. By long prayers, I mean morning and night prayers, assistance at Sunday and daily Mass, such devotions as the Rosary, et cetera. To say these and such prayers well, it is necessary to attend to a few things: and if we do, our prayers must be good, even though there be no sensible fervour and though they

may seem to us to be said in a cold or dull manner. God tells us: "Before prayer, prepare your soul, and be not like one who tempts God." (Ecclesiasticus 18:23) In other words, use the ordinary means settled by God as necessary for a good prayer, and your prayer will be good; but if you neglect these, you are like one tempting God to work a miracle which He will not work, for He never gives extraordinary helps towards anything when the ordinary means are at hand and available.

These ordinary means are as follows: (1) "Before prayer, prepare your soul," that is: prepare for and begin prayer with as calm a mind and heart as you can command. Put away all distracting thoughts, and keep yourself in a reverent state of mind. On awakening, or when about to get up, make an offering of yourself to God, make aspirations when dressing, so as to keep yourself united with God, and as a preparation for morning prayer.

Act in a similar way when going to hear Mass, or to practise any other devotion, so as to quiet and calm the mind as best you can. A good beginning is half the work.

(2) Place yourself in the presence of God by a simple act of faith. No strain or trying to picture God after a sensible manner is necessary; nay, this would disturb or distract. Faith tells you that you are close with God and that prayer is to speak to Him, that He is a greater reality than the priedieu or bench, or anything else in your room or in the church. You may use a homely parable with advantage. Suppose you were about to have an interview with a king, an emperor or a Sovereign Pontiff, would you not be careful about your external appearance and manner; also determined to listen to them with great respect and attention, and to study the most becoming and best words you could command if obliged to speak to them. But now, in prayer, you are talking to One who is infinitely above them all, and yet Who does not require that external show which they exact. How just and becoming, therefore, that you should, with all your soul and all interior reverence, hold converse with Him.

(3) Though you begin your prayer in the most recollected manner, still distractions will come, we cannot help them; there is not a venial sin in a million of distractions as such. (a) Do not deliberately introduce them; (b) when they come turn again and again away from them to God, and if you had nothing to offer to God but the patient care with which you prevented distractions from becoming wilful, you would have an offering very acceptable to Him, though you yourself may think your prayer a very poor one on account of the many distractions. Distractions when not allowed to be wilful give additional merit to prayer. The hard prayer is the best. (c) In long prayers we should keep the senses, particularly the eyes, under mortified control, even when alone in our own room; also the imagination. When about to hear Mass, we should bear in mind the words of the Council of Trent: "No holier work could be done in this world than the tremendous sacrifice of the Mass." Moreover, we should keep the eye under proper control, for when we look about us we necessarily create distraction, and cannot hear Mass or make our visit well, because we neglect one of the ordinary means of doing so. We should, of course, devoutly hear Mass, attend Vespers (Evening Prayer), make our visits to the Blessed Sacrament, et cetera, but the Church gives no command as to the precise way in which we should do so. We are free in this matter if we be reverent and devout. Some persons use their prayer book or missal when hearing Mass; others never use a book, but meditate, or use vocal prayers, which they have by heart, each in his own way. {Since this was written, it is much more common to have Mass in the vernacular. The Church encourages us to participate in the Sacred Liturgy with a 'full, conscious and active' participation. Thus, one should endeavour to actively listen and reverently respond to the various prayers and readings of the Mass.}

We generally find out after a time that a certain way, the simpler the better, of thinking of God, of Our Lord, et cetera, and of talking to them, suits us best and helps us best at our devotions; if so, let us by all means keep to and cultivate it.

In connection with this subject of long prayers, it may be well to say a word about devotions — that is, certain pious practices which are not of duty, or commanded by God or His Church. It is not necessary to caution men against having too many of them. At the same time, they will find help, consolation and grace by having a few which will fit into their daily life, without interfering with business, or even recreation. Let me suggest a few.

A beautiful devotion, in honour of Our Lord and the Blessed Sacrament is, when not too inconvenient, to hear Mass on weekdays — call it daily Mass. There is, of course, no obligation; therefore, it is the more pleasing to God and the more meritorious, and the merit is increased when a person puts himself to some inconvenience, by getting up earlier, anticipating or putting off something which can be done at another time, in order to assist at the Holy Sacrifice. We should never allow mere sloth to interfere. It is paying a very poor compliment to Our Lord, if not making little of Him, that when He is being offered up on the altar within a few minutes' walk of where we are, we will not go to pay Him that honour which He has richly merited, at such cost to Himself, by dying for us. Forgetting, too, that He longs for our coming, and is desirous of pouring grace into the souls of those who do come to Him.

Another devotion is to make a short visit to the Blessed Sacrament every day, and above all on days when we have not been able to manage the daily Mass. Persons living in or near cities, towns or villages, must often pass a church where Our Lord is a 'Prisoner of love' as we sometimes say. What more natural or more becoming than that we should turn in to pay a short visit to our dearest and best friend; or, if not, to at least lift the hat in salute, and send the heart to Him by an aspiration as we pass.

Of devotions to the ever Blessed Virgin, Mother of God, I would suggest three. First, three Hail Marys in honour of her Immaculate Conception, the Brown Scapular, and the Rosary, or Beads.

Wonderful things are told of the graces received by the young particularly in return for a faithful practice every day of the first devotion, not a minute's work.

The Brown is the oldest of all scapulars and very richly indulgenced. Persons should bear in mind that once rightly invested in this scapular they may always invest themselves by putting on a new one when the old is beyond use.

The Rosary is a beautiful and ancient devotion, nor is it too much to ask men of the world to practise it. Let them carry about with them a set of small strong beads, and as they are often alone, they will find many opportunities of using it, namely, in their office, during a break in business, when travelling alone, et cetera. They need have no difficulty in breaking the five decades when there is some reason for doing so. The Rosary is also a very beautiful family devotion.

Lastly, bearing in mind all that has been said about aspirations, men of busy lives may practise devotion to the Holy Ghost, the Giver of Gifts, the Heavenly Banker; to Saint Joseph; to their patron saints and Angel Guardian, by making aspirations, by saying a word to them often, at least once a day.

MENTAL PRAYER.

Having said so much about vocal prayer, I wish to say a word now about mental prayer, the religious study of the great truths, meditation — call it which of the three you like. There are persons poorly, or not at all educated, who know, however, and understand their catechism, and with whom simple lively faith is as an instinct. These can get on very well without any formal study of the divine truths. It is not so, as a rule, with those who are intellectual, educated, in constant contact with men of every religion and no religion, who read books and serials, many of which contain articles cleverly written, but dangerous to faith. Such persons, even though they be not troubled by any doubts about the truths themselves, cannot hold their own as good practical Catholics, unless they give some time and thought to the study of divine truths, with the purpose of keeping them well in head and hand, and effective in their lives. The word “cannot,” may appear too strong, but it may be safely stated that such a study is certainly powerful in giving these truths a leading and dominant influence. When I use the word “study,” I do not mean a study in order to know these truths, or to learn the grounds and arguments on which they rest; but a study, in simple faith, of truths already accepted and believed, in order to understand the responsibilities and consequences which the accepting of and believing in them really involves, and to strengthen and stimulate the resolution of forming our daily lives according to them.

It is scarcely possible for certain classes of Catholics, living in the world, to lead the lives to which they are bound unless they be persons of religious study, consideration, reflection, meditation — call it which or what you like.

There are Catholics quite at home and well instructed in their religious duties, who yet neglect some of them. They do not heed that saying of God: “if you know these things, happy are you if you do them.” “A trite saying,” writes [Blessed John Henry] Cardinal Newman, “it is nothing to know what is right unless we do it.” and again: “He who knows well the will of his Master and does not do it will get double stripes.” In this matter, it is not no knowledge, or little knowledge, but great knowledge that is the dangerous thing. Laymen may say meditation is very good and necessary, perhaps, for priests and religious, but not so for us; beside, as a rule, it is hard work and we do not know how to do it. Well, in the following instruction I shall substitute the word “Religious study” in place of the more formidable one, “Meditation.” and I hope to be able to show (1) that religious study of the great divine truths is of great importance in the life of a layman; (2) that it is not hard work, and that fairly educated men of the world can do it well and profitably if they only take the right view of it. It will be put before them in a way suited to their capacity.

What is this “Religious study” of which I speak? It is a very simple thing. It is to take some divine truth, such as Death, Judgment, the Sufferings of Christ, one of the Sacraments, Penance or the Eucharist, et cetera, and to look at and study it, not in a passing superficial perfunctory way, but thoughtfully, studiously; to consider it as a truth which has some deep meaning for myself, because revealed by God with a view to my eternal salvation. I place my life side by side with this truth, under its light, bring it straight home to myself, and examine myself according to it. In this examination I may see, and be forced to see, that there is something in my life which is out of keeping or opposed to this truth of God, and therefore a lie, bad for myself and displeasing to Him, and to be got rid of and kept rid of; and then an honest practical resolution is made to do so. Or it may be put in other words. The truths of God are the only true standard of life; I place my soul and life under their light, and then make a severe raking examination of myself, and finding that certain things are out of order, because out of keeping with those divine truths; I admit it and resolve to put my hand to the work and to order my life aright.

A saying of Saint Bernard has become an axiom: "I do not meditate to become more learned, but to become better." We do meditate or study divine truths to become more learned about God, ourselves, and our mutual relations, but then to use this knowledge in the bettering of ourselves.

Someone may say, but to do all this, simple though it looks on paper, is not an easy work.

Still, it is not a difficult work. In fact, we do nothing deliberate, as human act, without meditation or study, without considering certain facts, circumstances, truths, called by logicians "premises," drawing a conclusion from them and putting the conclusion into practice. It is true that we sometimes see the conclusion so quickly that we do not advert to the premises, and the reasoning, which had really gone on in our mind.

Let me give a few homely examples.

A man wishes to buy a horse. He will consider the purpose for which he intends him — dray, carriage, riding, hunting, et cetera — the price he can, and is ready to give. With these in mind, he will examine a number of animals, and his practical conclusion will be to buy that horse which he believes is best for the work and within his price. A person is about to take a vacation. He will, consider what would please him most — of countries, home or foreign: of places, cities, sylvan (bush or woods), or mountain scenery; the money he may spend and the time at his disposal; and then he comes to that conclusion which he thinks the best, and carries it out. The same may be said of buying a house, a coat, and of most other things we do.

Now, we have merely to employ our faculties of intellect and will in a similar way on divine truths and spiritual subjects, and we have meditation or religious study. Let me give some examples of this study on certain truths or subjects, which should at times claim the attention of men living in the world.

I consider, for instance, the malice, the moral turpitude of mortal sin. It is a vile, ungrateful, inexcusable insult and outrage offered to the great God, Who loved me and died for me. I turn my back upon Him, and contemptuously throw Him over for some wretched inclination or passion of my own. It is the only evil, bad in its consequences to me who commit it, even in this world, but terrible and awful in its eternal consequences. But I have, often perhaps, committed mortal sin; I am this moment in mortal sin, my soul murdered by my own hand. (Am I?) A conclusion is forced upon me. Repent! Be sorry for your sins, and in the future keep clear of the dangerous occasions of sin, and, when you must face temptation, use the means of conquering it.

Or I take for the subject of my study, Death. There seems to be a special providence in the fact that God has made this awful truth so certain that men, who have denied all the other divine truths, even the existence of God, cannot deny this. Experience is ever proving the truth of those inspired words: "Where is the man who has lived and has not seen death?" And if we needed a proof of the necessity of meditation or religious study, we have it in the fact that this terrible preacher, Death, is always in our midst, speaking with no uncertain voice, and yet thousands do not heed him. They go on loving the world and sin, though they know and believe that death must come soon and put an end to both. In this study of Death, I may take as my text that striking saying of Job: "When man is dead and stripped and consumed, I pray you, where is he?" (Job 14:10) Or this saying: "O Death! Of all things the most terrible, because the moment upon which depends eternity."

Having asked grace, light to see the important bearings of this truth on myself, and strength to carry out the resolutions forced on me by them, I begin my study.

(1) I rest on the fact that death is the most certain of all things. It must come to me — I must die. Death will “strip” me of all earthly things, even those most loved, most sinned for, and most sinned by. My body shall be cast out to be “consumed” by rottenness and vermin.

My soul must go forth and face the just and avenging Judge.

(2) I rest on the truth that death, though the most certain of all things, is as to when, where, or how, the most uncertain of all things.

(3) I reflect that the moment of death is the critical, the only critical moment of life, because “the moment upon which depends eternity.” As I am found then, decides my fate, “either to exult for ever with Christ in heaven, or to weep for ever with the lost in hell.” Besides, I can die but once, and I cannot, therefore, repair in a second life the mistakes made in the first.

(4) I then turn to myself, and ask and answer such questions as the following: Have I any guarantee against a sudden death, against a death-sickness in which great physical pain or unconsciousness will make a real repentance and preparation for death very difficult, if not a moral impossibility. Can I safely hope for, or risk, a deathbed repentance? In what state am I this moment? In mortal sin, perhaps, or drifting towards it, or in a very doubtful and unsatisfactory state of conscience and soul. If so, what conclusion is forced upon me by right reason and common sense? Is it not to repent now, and to be about it, to put myself right with God, and in the future to use the means necessary that I may keep myself always ready for this dread summons, so awful because so far-reaching and so uncertain?

I may use with great effect parables, which will bring home the study, so as to make me surprised with or ashamed of myself. If some temporal loss depended on certain circumstances, would I not take the wisest precautions and protect myself against them? If a serious illness were upon me, would I not go to the limit of my means, perhaps beyond it, in order at most to prolong my earthly life for a few months or years? If I knew that an assassin was secretly and cunningly hanging about in order to murder me when off my guard, would I not take every care that he should not have a chance?

But what about my soul? Is not its life far more than that of the body and the unending world of heaven and hell far more than that of a passing moment? Order, therefore, your house and keep it so.

Or, again, I take the Passion, or some scene from it. The New Testament tells me its history.

By the use of memory and imagination, I can picture it to myself, and then by the use of the intellect and will I study, reason over it, draw my conclusions, and form my practical resolutions.

(1) I rest on the question, Who suffers? The Eternal Son of God.

(2) How did He suffer? Most really, most keenly, most intensely, in that human nature which He took, which was His, just as mine is mine, and in which He felt pain, torture, agony, just as I should if subjected to similar torments, but more intensely than I could. He suffered as if He were only man, and all the more, because He was God. I can imagine myself subjected to only one of His tortures, the scourging, or the nailing to or hanging on the Cross, and try to realise how I should feel. What then of Him racked in every capability of suffering — body without and soul within — as long as human nature could endure, by so many tortures.

(3) For whom does He suffer? For me, for love of me; for love of me, a sinner, and His enemy. He suffers to atone for my sins, to redeem, to buy me out of slavery, at the highest price He could pay — His heart's blood and His life; to merit graces for me, which, if rightly used, will lift me out of hell and enthrone me in heaven.

(4) I should then honestly and severely study and examine myself. How have I treated Him? What have I done for Him? What return have I made for His immense unselfish love of me? Forgotten, ignored he has been. Yes, I have even sinned against Him, seldom thinking of Him, seldom speaking to Him, meanly and selfishly gratifying my own will in open opposition to His. Could I bring myself, from mere human motives, to so treat a man who had willingly sacrificed one finger or one hand for love of me? How should I feel if a man, for love of whom I had suffered, treated me as I have treated Our Lord? Am I to make less of my God tortured unto death for love of me and of His infinite love, than of a mere man and his human love? Am I to make less of ingratitude in myself to God than of ingratitude of a fellow man to myself? Greater love of Jesus Christ should be the result of meditation on the Passion: and when we find in Catholics, instead of love, coldness, indifference, offensive conduct, we may trace these to the fact that they have not studied Him, and therefore do not really know Him. He is not the reality to them that their fellow men and material things are.

I have given, as best I could, what religious study or meditation is: a very simple thing. And also a few examples to show that any fairly instructed Catholic layman may make such without any great difficulty. But I must go farther, for I can safely assert, on the unanimous opinion of great spiritual writers, an opinion backed out by experience, that men living in the world, particularly the educated and wealthy, exposed, as they usually are, to grave temptations, must be men of religious thought, if they desire to be true practical Catholics.

Holy Scripture has many texts to prove this. Isaiah writes (Isaiah 5:12-14): "Harp and viol and timbrel and song and wine in your feasts, and the work of God you regard not, nor consider the work of His hands. Therefore has hell enlarged her soul and opened her mouth, without any bounds, and their strong ones and their people, and their high and glorious ones shall descend into it." So, says Father Parsons, the Prophet speaks of the careless, thoughtless nobility and gentry of Jewry.

King David was a man of the world and of war, and at one time a great sinner. Yet, he became the model penitent and a saint. He tells us how, "I meditated in the night in my own heart and I cleansed my soul." (See Psalm 76:7 in the Vulgate or Psalm 77:6 in the Hebrew.) "I meditated on Your works, O Lord, that I might not forget them, and I buried them in my heart that I might not sin for ever." (See Psalm 118:10-11 in the Vulgate or Psalm 119:10-11 in the Hebrew.) "Unless Your law, O God, had been my meditation, I had then perhaps perished." (See Psalm 118:92 in the Vulgate or Psalm 119:92 in the Hebrew.)

In the New Testament Our Lord, and His inspired Apostle, Saint James, denounce those who hear the Word, and therefore know it, but do not do it. "But he that has looked into the perfect law of liberty, and has continued therein, not becoming a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word; this man shall be blessed in his deed." (James 1:25 and compare it with verse 23)

Our Lord calls them fools, like to the man who built his house on sand, which, of course, becomes a ruin under the pressure of the first storm. It won't do to look at a truth as a man looks into a mirror, and though finding, or rather clearly seeing that something is wrong, face dirty, coat torn, goes away and forgets all about it and leaves things as they were. But if a man, by looking on them again and

again, “has continued therein,” and by studying them often had, like David, “buried them in his heart that he might not forget them,” (see Psalm 118:10-11 in the Vulgate or Psalm 119:10-11 in the Hebrew) he will become “a doer of the Word and shall be blessed in his deed.” (See James 1:23) In a word, we have the authority of God and of His gifted servants who have written on this subject for stating that men in the world cannot hold their own and be good practical Catholics, unless they be men of religious thought, study, reflection. But a man who reflects on God, on Our Lord, on their love for Him and His necessary relations with them, on the malice of mortal sin, and its awful punishments, will not sin forever.

One word more. There are many texts in Holy Scripture by which we seem to be commanded “to pray always,” “to never fail in prayer,” to “pray without ceasing.”

Is this possible? Is it possible to pray always? Certainly, and easy to do so; I shall briefly explain how this can be done. I presume that a man is in the state of grace, the friend of God. Well, if he, besides his ordinary prayers, has that purity of intention by which he does all his daily works for God, he prays always.

Let me suppose that a man offers up all his thoughts, words, and actions to God. He can do this when he awakes or is dressing, and can do it in one short sentence. We are bound to do our works for God, as the Apostle says: “Whether you eat or whether you drink, or whatever else you do, do it for God.” (1 Corinth 10:31) Note, he mentions here the most animal things of our nature, eating and drinking. “Whatever else you do” — your business life, your recreation, your sleep, et cetera it is not a mere opinion, but the certain teaching of theologians — I might say of the Church — that everything done with this intention by one in the state of grace is meritorious, just as prayer is.

Hence, the old-time saying: “Laborare est orare,” “to labour for God is to pray.” And the prayer of the brain and of the hand is generally more difficult than the prayer of the heart and lips, and therefore the more meritorious. Nor is this purity of intention a difficult thing — nay, it is very easy. Make the short morning offering, and let God be the dominant motive in all your actions. I emphasise “dominant,” because human motives will, of course, come. They are often not bad, and are of help; but keep them in their place; do not allow any of them to become the dominant motive. Offer all to God, and then do not throw Him over for any one else. Besides, when a man in the world does his work, whatever it may be, for God, he is more likely to do his work well, and to be a success, even in this world, than a man who ignores God. Let a person, therefore, be faithful to his daily prayers and do all his works for God, and his life is really an unbroken prayer — an unbroken prayer, even though when doing his work he does not for hours think of or say a word directly to God. The morning offering has offered it up, and this is sufficient.

And so, surely, from this little book it is clear that prayer, real prayer, is not hard, that with a little good will one finds that prayer is pleasant and prayer is easy.
