

# Simplicity of Life

## From the writings of Saint Francis de Sales.

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"Live in joy, brimful of God and of His Love!"

### OUTLINE.

#### RULE OF LIFE.

Rising.  
The Morning Offering.  
Mental Prayer.  
The Sacrifice Of The Mass.  
Holy Communion.  
Ejaculatory Prayers.  
Devotion To The Angels And Saints.  
Spiritual Reading.  
Examen And Night Prayers.

#### ORDINARY LIFE.

Social Intercourse.  
Recreation.  
Friendship.  
Spiritual Director.  
Annual Retreat And Preparation For Death.

#### MY DUTY.

Towards God By  
Simplicity.  
Confidence.  
Tranquility.  
  
My Duty Towards My Neighbour By  
Sweetness Of Heart.  
Charity And Gentleness.  
  
My Duty Towards Myself By  
Perseverance.  
Holy Abandonment.  
Evenness Of Mind.  
  
Devotion To Our Lady.

## RULE OF LIFE.

### Rising And The Morning Offering.

"We should make use of the night for sleep, each one according to his constitution, so far as is necessary for being usefully awake during the day. And I think there is virtue in the care which we take to go to bed seasonally in the evening, in order to awake and arise early in the morning. Certainly, the early morning is the most beautiful, the most agreeable, and the least distracted time of the day; the very birds do then invite us to awake and praise God; so that early rising is helpful both to health and to holiness."

"In the morning, as a general preparation for all the works of the day, you should:

1. Thank God and adore Him profoundly for preserving you during the past night.
2. Consider that the present day is given you that you may gain the future day of eternity, and make a firm resolution to employ the day well.
3. Forecast what affairs, what intercourse and what occasions you may meet with during the day to serve God, and what temptations may befall you to offend Him. For example, if I foresee that I shall have to treat of some matter with a person who is passionate and quick-tempered, not only will I resolve to refrain from anything that may offend Him, but I will prepare mild words to prevent his anger.
4. This done, humble yourself before God, and, as if you were holding your heart in your hands, offer it to Him, imploring Him to take it under His protection.
5. Invoke Our Lady, your good Angel, and the Saints, that they may assist you.

"But all these spiritual actions should be done briefly and fervently, before you leave your room, if it be possible; so that by means of them, all that you do throughout the day may be watered with the blessing of God."

## MENTAL PRAYER.

"Above all I recommend to you prayer of the mind and heart, especially that which has for its subject the life and Passion of Our Lord; for by beholding Him often in meditation, your whole soul will be filled with Him. As children by listening to their mothers, and prattling with them, learn to speak their language, so we, by keeping close to the Saviour in meditation, and observing His words, His actions, and His affections, shall learn to speak, to act, and to will like Him."

"Spend a certain time in meditation every day, if possible in the early part of your morning, because your mind will be less distracted and more refreshed after the repose of the night."

"When you have finished this prayer of the heart, you must take care not to give any jolt to your heart, lest you spill the balm which you have received by means of your prayer; I mean by this, that you must keep silence for a little while, if possible, and move your heart quite gently from your prayer to your occupations."

"The meditation must be closed by a little nosegay of devotion. Those who have been walking in a beautiful garden do not leave it willingly without taking away with them four or five flowers, to inhale their perfume and carry them about during the day; even so, when we have considered some mystery in meditation, we should choose one or two points, to remember them throughout the day, and to inhale their perfume spiritually."

“You must accustom yourself to know how to pass from prayer to all sorts of actions which your vocation and profession justly and lawfully requires of you, though they seem very far removed from the affections which you have received in prayer. I mean that the advocate must learn to pass from prayer to pleading; the merchant to business; the married woman to the duties of her state and to the cares of her household, with so much gentleness and tranquility that the spirit be not disturbed thereby. For, since both are according to the will of God, we must make the passage from one to the other in a spirit of humility and devotion.”

“Do not be distressed if sometimes, or even very often, you are not consoled by your meditations. Persevere gently, humbly, patiently, without forcing your mind, and read a book when you are fatigued; read a little, then meditate, then read a little again, and again meditate. Take it as a rule that the grace of meditation cannot be gained by any effort of the mind but by a meek and loving perseverance bounding in humility.”

“Although two or three times, putting myself in the presence of God without preparation, I found that I was extremely near to Him, yet I would not have dared to make a custom of taking myself away from the high road in order to make this the ordinary one. I love the way of those who have gone before us and of the simple; and to make a custom of no preparation, no thanksgiving, no offering, no express prayer at the end, is somewhat repugnant to me.”

“The sacred gift of prayer is in the right hand of God; He is only waiting until you have emptied yourself of self, of this love of your body and of your will, to give it to you. He speaks to ears that stoop low before God and man.”

“If we can speak to God, let us speak; if we are unable to speak, let us remain silent in His presence. Our patience will please Him; and presently, in wonderment we shall see Him take us by the hand, talk with us, and lead us hither and thither through the bypaths of His Garden of Prayer.”

#### THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS.

“I have not yet said anything to you of the Sun of spiritual exercises, which is the most holy, sacred, and supreme Sacrifice and Sacrament of the Mass, the centre of the Christian religion, the heart of devotion, the soul of piety, an ineffable mystery which contains within itself the abyss of divine charity, and by which God, applying Himself really to us, communicates to us munificently His graces and favours.

“Prayer made in union with this divine Sacrifice has an unspeakable force. Make every effort, therefore, to assist every day at Holy Mass, so that, together with the priest, you may offer the sacrifice of your Redeemer to God His Father, for yourself and for the whole Church. If for some unavoidable reason you cannot be actually present at the celebration of this supreme Sacrifice, at least let your heart be there, that you may assist at it by a spiritual presence.”

#### HOLY COMMUNION.

“Begin the evening before to prepare yourself for Holy Communion by many aspirations and movements of love. If you should awake during the night, fill your heart and your mouth straightway with some fragrant words, by means of which your soul may be perfumed to receive the Beloved.

“In the morning, rise with great joy because of the happiness for which you hope, and go with great confidence, but also with great humility, to receive this Heavenly Food, which nourishes your immortal life.

“Having received Him, stir up your heart to come and do homage to this King; treat with Him of the affairs of your soul, give Him as warm a welcome as you can, and conduct yourself in such a way that it may be known by all your actions that God is with you.

“If worldlings ask you why you communicate so often, tell them that it is to learn to love God, to be purified from your imperfections, to be delivered from your miseries; to be consoled in your afflictions, and to be strengthened in your weakness. Tell them that those who have not many worldly affairs should communicate often, because they have the opportunity to do so; and that those who have many worldly affairs should do likewise, because they have need of it; and that he who labours much and is heavily burdened, should also eat solid food and oftentimes.”

#### EJACULATORY PRAYERS.

“Aspire very often to God, by short but ardent movements of your heart; admire His beauty, invoke His help, give Him your heart a thousand times a day, fix your interior eyes upon His sweetness, give your hand to Him, as a little child to its father, that He may lead you. Our soul giving itself to secret and familiar intercourse with God, will be-come all perfumed with His perfections; and this exercise is not difficult, for it can be interwoven with all our affairs and occupations, without any detriment to them whatsoever.”

“Do as little children do, who with one hand cling to their father, and with the other gather strawberries or blackberries along the hedges; for in like manner, while you are gathering and handling the goods of this world with one hand, cling fast always with the other to the hand of your heavenly Father, turning to Him from time to time,, to see if your doings or your occupations be pleasing to Him.”

“In this exercise of spiritual retirement and ejaculatory prayers lies the great work of devotion; it can supply the lack of all other prayers, but the failure of this can scarcely be made good by any other means.”

#### THE ANGELS AND SAINTS.

“Since God very often sends us inspirations by His Angels, we ought frequently to send Him our aspirations by the same agency. Let us join our hearts to these celestial spirits; and as the little nightingales learn to sing in the company of the older ones, so, by sacred intercourse with the Saints, we shall learn better how to pray and sing the Divine praises.

“Make yourself very familiar with the Angels, see them often invisibly present in your life, invoke them often, praise them, and make use of their assistance in all your affairs, whether spiritual or temporal, so that they may co-operate with you.”

#### SPIRITUAL READING.

“Have always at hand some good book of devotion, and read a little of it every day with great devotion, as though you were reading missives sent to you by the Saints from heaven, to show you the way there and give you the courage to walk along it.

“Read also the histories and lives of the Saints, in which you will see, as in a mirror, the Christian life portrayed; and adapt their actions to your profit according to your vocation. For though many of the actions of the Saints are not to be imitated in every respect by those living in the world, yet all can be imitated to a greater or lesser extent.”

#### EXAMEN AND NIGHT PRAYERS.

“As to the examination of conscience, which should always be made before going to bed, everyone knows how it should be done.

1. We thank God for having preserved us during the past day.
2. We examine how we have behaved ourselves during all the hours of the day; and in order to do so more easily, we consider where, with whom, and in what we have been employed.
3. If we find that we have done any good, we thank God for it; if, on the other hand, we have done any evil in thought, word, or deed, we ask pardon of God, with a resolution to confess it at the first opportunity, and carefully to amend it.
4. After that, we commend to the care of Divine Providence our body, our soul, the Church, our relations, our friends; we ask Our Lady, our good Angel, and the Saints to watch over us and for us; and with God's blessing, we proceed to take the repose, which He has willed to be necessary for us.

“This exercise, like that of the Morning Offering, must never be forgotten; for by the morning offering, you open the windows of your soul to the Sun of justice, and by that of the evening, you close them against the powers of darkness.”

#### ORDINARY LIFE. SOCIAL INTERCOURSE.

“To seek the society of others and to shun it, are two blameworthy extremes in the devotion of those who live in the world. To shun the society of others savours of disdain and contempt for our neighbour, and to seek it is a sign of idleness and futility. You must love your neighbour as yourself; to show that you love him, you must not avoid being with him; and to show that you love yourself, you must remain within yourself when you are there. Now you are within yourself when you are alone.

“If then there is no cause for you to seek the company of others, or to receive it at home, remain within yourself and hold converse with your heart; but if company come to you, or some good reason invite you to seek it, go in God's name, and see your neighbour willingly and cheerfully.”

“Observe well the precept of the saints, which every one of them has observed who desired to be a saint: to speak little or not at all of ourselves, or of what pertains to self. Be silent unless the glory of the Master, as may happen, requires you to speak of yourself; and if it does require you, speak briefly, faithfully, observing simplicity. The love of ourselves often dazzles our eyes; our vision must be very steady and just, to avoid being deceived when we look at ourselves.”

“Touching worldly repartee and vivacity of mind, which you find so hard to resist, you must make up your mind that at any cost you will mortify yourself in this matter; often make the sign of the cross on your mouth, so that you may open it only for God. This merriment of spirit is certainly sometimes the occasion of vanity, and the tip of the mind can betoken more scorn than the tip of the nose; our words as well as our looks can be such filled with scorn. Walking on tiptoe in body or in mind is not safe, and if we stumble the fall is all the worse.”

“I quite approve of speaking little, provided that this little which you say is said graciously and charitably, and not morosely or affectedly. Yes, speak little and sweetly, little and well, little and simply, little and sincerely, little and kindly.”

“In conversation, when those with whom you are conversing do not keep quite strictly to the rule of devotion, show no disdain. Not only must you be devout and love devotion, but you must make it lovable and useful to everyone. In a word, you should, as far as possible, make your devotion attractive.”

“Take care not to let yourself be moody and out of humour with those about you, lest, attributing this to devotion, they despise devotion; on the contrary, give them the greatest pleasure and satisfaction you can.”

“The less we live after our own choice in our actions, the more solid is our devotion; we must sometimes leave our Lord in order to please others for love of Him.”

“Keep up the fight against your impatience perseveringly, always practise that holy and gentle “debonnairete” (good humour) especially with those you find the most provocative, and God will bless your efforts.”

“You will often be amongst the children of this world who, as is their wont, mock all they see or think they see in you that is not according to their own miserable way of thinking. Do not take the trouble to dispute with them, show no displeasure at their attacks, but merrily laugh at their laughter of you; be above their contempt, jest at their remonstrance, gracefully mock their mockeries, and taking no heed of them, walk always with a light heart in the service of God.”

“You see that necessary employments, according to each one's vocation, do not diminish Divine love, but increase it and gild, as it were, the work of devotion. The nightingale loves her melody no less when she makes her pauses than when she sings; the devout heart that loves not less when she turns to exterior necessities than when she prays: her silence and her speech, her action and her contemplation, her employment and her rest, equally sing in her the hymn of her love.”

## RECREATION.

“It is necessary sometimes to refresh our spirit and our body also, by some kind of recreation. Cassian relates that one day a hunter found Saint John the Evangelist holding a partridge in his hand, which he was stroking by way of re-creation; the hunter asked him how he, being so great a man, could waste his time upon a thing so mean and trivial. And Saint John said to him: ‘Why do you not always carry your bow stretched?’ ‘For fear,’ replied the hunter, ‘lest being always stretched it should lose its power of resilience, which is essential to its usefulness.’ ‘Do not be astonished, then,’ replied the Apostle, ‘if I sometimes relax the application and attention of my spirit, to take a little recreation, in order to apply myself afterwards more earnestly to contemplation.’ There can be no doubt that it is a fault to be so rigorous and unsociable as not to be willing to take any recreation oneself, or permit others to do so.

“To take the air, to go for a walk, to take part in cheerful and friendly conversations, to play or sing, to go hunting, are recreations so proper that, to make a good use of them, we need only use ordinary prudence, which gives to all things order, time, place and measure. Games, in which the success serves as a reward and recompense for skill and industry of body or of mind, are recreations good in themselves and lawful. The only thing that we must guard against is excess; for if we spend too much time in a game, it is no longer recreation, but occupation.

“But above all, be careful not to set your affection on such things; for however proper a recreation may be, it is a defect to set your heart on it. I do not say that we should not take pleasure in a game, whilst we are actually playing it, for otherwise it would not be a recreation; but I say that we must not set our affection on games to such an extent that we long for them, occupy ourselves with them, and become too eager about them.”

#### FRIENDSHIP.

“Love everyone with a great love of charity, but have no friendship save with those who can communicate with you in virtuous things. I speak not here of the simple love of charity, for we ought to have this for all men; but I speak of spiritual friendship. Do not form friendships of any other kind, I mean friendships of your own choice; for you must not forsake or disregard the friendships which nature and former obligations constrain you to cultivate with relations, with connections, with benefactors, with neighbours and others; I speak of those which you choose yourself.

“Many will tell you, perhaps, that we should not have any sort of particular affection and friendship, because it occupies the heart, distracts the mind, and begets envy; but they are mistaken in their counsels.”

“He who says all, excludes nothing, and yet a man may be wholly God's, wholly his father's, wholly his mother's, wholly his prince's, wholly his commonwealth's, his children's, his friends'. So that being all to each, yet he is all to all. This so happens because the duty by which a man is all to one, is not contrary to the duty by which a man is all to another.

“Man gives himself wholly by love, and gives himself as much as he loves. He is therefore in a sovereign manner given to God when he loves the Divine goodness sovereignly. And having once made this donation of himself, he is to love nothing that can remove his heart from God. Now never does any love take our hearts from God, save that which is contrary unto Him.”

“For those who live in the world, and who embrace true virtue, it is necessary for them to form holy and sacred friendships with one another; for by this means they encourage one another, help one another, and lead one another on to good. Those who are in the world have need of friendships, in order to walk securely and help one another in the many difficult places through which they have to pass. Saint Thomas, like all sound philosophers, avows that friendship is a virtue: and he speaks of particular friendship, since, as he says, perfect friendship cannot extend to many persons. Perfection, then, does not consist in having no friendship at all, but in having only that which is good, holy, and sacred.”

#### SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR.

“Do you wish in good earnest to set out on the way to devotion? Seek out some good man to guide and conduct you; it is the admonition of admonitions. Since it is of such great importance that you should go with a good guide on this holy journey of devotion, pray to God with great earnestness, to provide you with one who may be according to His heart, and have no doubt; for even though He should have to send an Angel from heaven, as He did to the young Tobias, He will give you one that is good and faithful.

“And indeed, this guide ought always to be an Angel in your eyes; that is to say, when you have found him, do not look upon him as a mere man, nor trust in him as such, nor in his human knowledge, but in God Who will favour you and speak to you by means of this man, putting into his

heart and into his mouth whatsoever shall be requisite for your happiness; so that you ought to listen to him as to an Angel who comes down from heaven to conduct you thither.

“Treat him with an open heart, in all sincerity and fidelity, manifesting clearly to him your good and your evil without feint or dissimulation; and by this means your good will be examined and rendered more secure, and your evil will be corrected and remedied; and you will be eased and strengthened in your afflictions, moderated and regulated in your consolations. Have the greatest confidence in him, mingled with a holy reverence, yet so that the reverence diminish not your confidence, nor your confidence hinder in any way your reverence; confide in him with the respect of a daughter for her father, and respect him with the confidence of a son in his mother; in a word, this friendship must be strong and sweet, altogether holy, sacred, divine and spiritual.

“And for this reason, choose one among a thousand; for there are fewer than can be imagined, who are fitted for this office. He must be full of charity, of knowledge, and of prudence; if one of these three qualities be wanting in him, there is danger. But I say to you once more: pray to God to give you such a one, and, when you have obtained him, bless His Divine Majesty, remain constant and do not seek for any others, but go on your way simply, humbly, and trustfully, for you will have a very prosperous journey.”

#### RETREAT AND PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

·Saint Francis was born in 1567 and died in 1622, so he found the following ‘clock’ analogy useful. “There is no clock, be it never so good, but must be wound up twice a day, in the morning and in the evening; and then, in addition to this, at least once a year it must be taken to pieces, in order that the rust which it has contracted may be removed, the strained parts readjusted, and those which are worn out repaired. So he, that has a true care of his dear heart, ought to wind it up daily to God in the morning and in the evening; and in addition to this, he ought, at least once a year, to take it to pieces, and examine all its parts in detail, in order to repair all the defects which may be found there. This exercise will renew your strength impaired by time, will warm your heart, will make your good resolutions grow green again, and the virtues of your soul blossom anew.”

“Your life has been spent in the world, and in the management of its affairs. Now, it is not possible to live in the world, though we but touch it with our feet, without getting soiled by its dust. So let us begin our preparation by washing our soul of its affections to all that is of earth, before receiving the hospitality of our good God. We are to be transplanted from this wretched land to the land of life, and all the ties we have contracted here must be gently loosened and unbound. Not to have said goodbye, or to have made poor provision beforehand, is excusable in those who depart suddenly, but it is not so with those who know the probable time of their journey; they must make all things ready, and without impatience, tranquilly await the appointed hour.”

“Behold, I beseech you, this soul who, as a heavenly nightingale shut up in the cage of his body, in which he cannot at will sing the benedictions of his eternal love, knows that he could better trill and practise his delicious song if he could gain the air, to enjoy his liberty and the society of other nightingales, amongst the gay and flowery hills of the land of the blessed; wherefore he cries: ‘Alas! O Lord of my life, by Your sweet goodness, deliver poor me from the cage of my body, free me from this little prison, to the end that released from this bondage, I may fly to my dear companions, who expect me there above in heaven, to make me one of their choirs, and environ me with their joy. There, Lord, according my voice to theirs, I with them will make up a sweet harmony of delicious airs and words, singing, praising, and blessing Your mercy!’ Yes!”

## MY DUTY TOWARDS GOD. SIMPLICITY.

“Simplicity is nothing else than an act of pure and simple charity, having one only aim and end, which is to acquire the love of God; and our soul is simple when in all that we do or desire we have no other aim.”

“Learn from the dove to love God in simplicity of heart, having but one single aim and object in all that you do. Do not, however, only imitate the simple love of those birds in their having always only one mate, for whom alone they do everything, and whom alone they wish to please; but imitate them also in the simplicity with which they express and show their love. They do not practise little mincing ways, but only coo gently by the side of their mates, happy enough just to rest quietly in their presence.”

“Our Lord says: ‘Unless you become simple as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of My Father.’ A child when very young is in a state of such simplicity that he has no knowledge at all but of his mother. He has one only love, which is for his mother; and in that love, one only aim and desire – his mother's breast, when he is upon that beloved breast, he wants nothing more. The soul, which has attained perfect simplicity, has only one love, which is for God. In this love it has one only aim – to rest upon the bosom of the heavenly Father, and there to abide like a loving Child, leaving all care of self to that good Father.”

“Children are, generally speaking, quite free from care, in the presence of their parents. Love occupies them sufficiently without anything else. Those whose one desire is to please the Divine Lover, have neither inclination nor leisure to turn back upon themselves; their minds turn continually in the direction whither love carries them.”

“This is simplicity, a virtue which looks straight to God, without ever suffering any admixture of self-interest.”

“Holy Simplicity troubles about nothing, but remains modest and tranquil in its certainty that God knows its desire, which is to please Him; that is enough.”

“Meekness, inward humility and simplicity are the three dove-like virtues which the Divine Bridegroom looks for in His lovers. Go on then practising them, keeping your heart, amid the turmoil of the world, where it aspires to be, in the bosom of God.”

## CONFIDENCE.

“The soul which has surrendered itself has nothing else to do but to rest in the arms of Our Lord like a child on his mother's breast. When she puts him down to walk, he walks until she takes him up again, and when she wishes to carry him, he allows her to do so. He neither knows nor thinks where he is going, but allows himself to be carried or led wherever his mother pleases.”

“Even as a tender mother, leading her little babe with her, assists and supports him as need requires, letting him now and then venture a step by himself in less dangerous and very smooth places, now taking him by the hand and steadying him, now taking him up in her arms and bearing him, so Our Lord has a continual care to conduct His children, making them walk before Him, reaching them His hand in difficulties, and bearing them Himself in such weariness as He sees otherwise insupportable to them.”

“Let us sweetly hide our littleness in God's greatness; and as a little chicken, covered over with the wings of its mother, lies so warm and safe, let us lay our hearts to rest under the sweet and love-full Providence of Our Lord, and warmly shelter ourselves under His holy protection.”

“See this little child cleaving to the neck of his mother. If one offer to take him thence to lay him in his cradle, it being high time, he struggles and disputes as far as he is able, in order not to leave that beloved bosom; and if he is made to let go with one hand, with the other he grapples, and if he is carried quite off, he falls a-weeping; and keeping his heart and his eyes where he cannot keep his body, he continues crying out for his dear mother, till by rocking he is brought to sleep.”

“The will which is dead to herself, that she may live in that of God, is without any particular will – as one might speak of a little child, who has not yet got the use of his will to love or desire anything save the bosom and face of his dear mother. For he does not think of willing anything, except only to be in the arms of his mother, with whom he thinks himself to be one thing. He never troubles himself as to how he shall conform his will to his mother's, for he perceives not his own, nor does he think he has any, leaving all the care to his mother, to go, to do, and to will, what she judges profitable for him.”

“Nothing is more desirable to the little child, whether he wake or sleep, than his father's bosom and his mother's breast.”

“Thus should we be, pliable to God's good pleasure, as though we were of wax, not giving our thoughts leave to wander in wishing and willing things, but leaving God to will and do them for us as He pleases.”

#### TRANQUILITY.

“Try to keep your soul in peace and in tranquility. For this you must, on rising in the morning, begin that exercise; doing your actions quite quietly, forecasting in the morning what you have to do, taking pains throughout the day not to let your spirit dissipate itself; continually observe whether you are in this state of tranquility, and as soon as you see yourself out of it, take great care to put yourself back into it.

“At the same time, I do not mean that your spirit is to be always on the strain after this peace; for all must be done with a simplicity of heart entirely founded on love, keeping yourself with Our Lord as a little child with its father: and when it happens that you commit faults, whatever they may be, ask Our Lord's pardon for them very quietly, saying to Him that you are well assured He loves you dearly and will pardon you; and this always simply and sweetly.”

“Do as little children do; whilst they feel their mothers holding them by the sleeve, they go boldly and run about, and do not alarm themselves when the weakness of their legs makes them slip a little to one side; in the same way, as long as you perceive that God holds you by the goodwill to serve Him which He has given you, walk boldly, and do not alarm yourself about those little baulks and stumbles you make, and do not distress yourself about them, provided that at intervals you throw yourself into His arms, and kiss Him with the kiss of charity. Walk joyously and open-heartedly, as far as you can.”

“It is not only requisite to rest on Divine Providence in all that concerns temporal matters, but still more in all that belongs to our spiritual life and to our perfection. It is certainly only the too great care which we take of ourselves, which makes us lose our tranquility of mind and ruffles our unsteady temper; for as soon as any contradiction arises, or if we only notice in ourselves some

small sign of an unmortified spirit, or if we commit the most trifling fault, it seems to us that all is lost! Is it so great a wonder that we sometimes find ourselves stumbling on the path of our perfection?"

"We must take all the care which God wishes us to take about perfecting ourselves, and yet leave the care of arriving at perfection entirely to Him. God wishes our care to be a calm and peaceful one; that we should repose in His Fatherly care, trying as far as possible to keep our soul at peace, for the place of God is in peace, and in the peaceful and restful heart."

"You know that when the lake is very calm, and when the winds do not agitate its waters, on a very serene night, the sky with all its stars is so perfectly reflected in it, that looking down into its depths the beauty of the heavens is as clearly visible as if we looked up on high. So when our soul is perfectly calm, unstirred, and untroubled by the winds of superfluous cares, unevenness of spirit and inconstancy, it is very capable of reflecting in itself the image of Our Lord."

"Let it be enough that God wishes us to obey, and in this way we shall bring down our minds, to walk simply in the happy path of a holy and tranquil humility, which will render us infinitely pleasing to God."

"Do not think Our Lord is far from you while you are in the midst of the bustle and pressure of affairs, and that were you in the delights of a tranquil life this would not be so. Such is not the tranquility, which draws Him near. Not the feeling we have of His sweetness, but the loyalty of our love, and the welcome we give to the accomplishment in us of His holy will, is what most attracts Him."

#### MY DUTY TOWARDS MY NEIGHBOUR. SWEETNESS OF HEART.

"Let us make our way by the lowly valleys of the little and humble virtues; there we shall see roses amid thorns, charity shining forth amid inward and outward afflictions; the lilies of purity, the violets of mortification."

"Above all, I love these three little virtues: sweetness of heart, poverty of spirit, and simplicity of life; and those homely good works of visiting the sick, serving the poor, consoling the afflicted and the like."

"Be very sweet and gracious amidst all the affairs you have to see to, for everybody looks to you for good example. It is easy to steer one's course when there are no adverse winds to be opposed – to pass an uneventful life – but amid the hustle of affairs, as amid the winds, it is very difficult to keep on the right track. For this reason, you must be very watchful over yourself, your actions, and your intentions, always showing that your heart is true, just, sweet, humble, and generous."

"Study but little what others do, or what will happen to them; but regard them with a simple, kind, gentle, and affectionate eye. Do not require more perfection from them than from yourself, and do not be surprised at the diversity of imperfections; for imperfection is not more imperfection for being extravagant and odd. Do as the bees do; suck honey from all flowers and herbs."

"Remain in peace, walk faithfully in the way wherein God has placed you; take good care holily to give satisfaction to those whom He has made your companions; and like a little honeybee, while you faithfully make the honey of sacred devotion, make duly also the wax of your domestic affairs. For if one (the honey) is sweet to the taste of Our Lord, Who being in this world ate butter and

honey; the other (the wax) also is to His honour, since it serves to make the lighted candles of edification of our neighbour.”

#### CHARITY AND GENTLENESS.

“Perfumers, though out of their shops, bear about with them for a long time the scent of the perfumes which they have handled. In like manner, those who have been in the cabinet of heavenly ointments, that is in holy charity, keep for some time afterwards the scent of it.”

“Only this you lacked. Your zeal was quite good, but defective in that it was a little bitter, a little severe, punctilious, restless. Now it is purified of all this; henceforth it will be suave, mild, gracious, helpful to others.” (Advice given in Saint Francis’ Letters, page 95.)

“Be good in bearing the imperfections of all, especially of those at home.” (Advice given in Saint Francis’ Letters, page 102.)

“I must tell you the truth. I always fear that with regard to things which are not of the essence of our salvation, these desires may be partially from self-love and for the gratification of our own will, these keen, desires for the advancement of others in perfection; and we may let ourselves be so taken up with them, as not to leave room in our souls, for what is essential to ourselves, humility, meekness of heart, and such-like. Such are my fears in such desires. Do not fall into them; do not importune those whom you want to persuade to this perfection; do not even let them see that you want it, for that would only hinder the matter. Throw little holy thoughts and inspirations into their minds now and again, without any apparent intent; in this way you gain much more than in any other, above all if you add prayer.” (Advice given in Saint Francis’ Letters, page 89.)

“Do not undertake too many vigils or austerities. Go rather by the way of the love of God and of your neighbour, of humility and cheerful gaiety.” (Advice given in Saint Francis’ Letters, page 115.)

“I never vary in my opinion that we ought not to be sowing our neighbour's field, however beautiful it may be, whilst our own is in need of seed!” (Advice given in Saint Francis’ Letters, page 142.)

“Why dig your neighbour's garden when your own wants digging? If you divide your attention in this way, your own plot will never be perfect.” (Advice given in Saint Francis’ Letters, page 99.)

“Take particular care that your servants and family are not inconvenienced by your remaining too long in church, practising too great retirement, and neglecting the care of your household; or, as sometimes happens, making oneself the controller of other people's actions.” (Advice given in Saint Francis’ Letters, page 103.)

“I persist always in telling you that you ought to serve God where you are, and do what you are doing. Not that I would wish to hinder the growth of your good works, nor the continual purification of your heart; but do what you are doing and do it better, if you can.” (Advice given in Saint Francis’ Letters, page 153.)

“My child, while God wishes you to be in the world, for love of Him, abide there willingly and cheerfully, for we are happy in doing His will, since it is all we care about. Abide in peace, then, and perform faithfully the duty, which keeps you in the world. Believe me, in so doing you will please God better than by a hundred quittings of it through your own will and inclination.” (Advice given in Saint Francis’ Letters, page 184.)

#### MY DUTY TOWARDS MYSELF. PERSEVERANCE.

“Persevere faithfully in overcoming yourself in the little daily contradictions which you feel. Know that God wishes nothing else of you save what he sends at the moment, and do not be on the lookout for other things. Have no desire to be other than what you are, but have a strong desire to be thoroughly what you are. Few souls have a liking for what is their duty, and God's will for them!

“What is the use of building castles in Spain when we have to live in France? It is my old lesson and you know it well, but tell me, my child, do you practise it well?” (Advice given in Saint Francis' Letters, page 76.)

“It is not possible to be mistress of your soul and hold it in your hand from the very start. Be content to gain from time to time some little advantage over our rebel passions. We must bear with our neighbour, but first of all we must bear with ourselves and have patience with our imperfections.” (Advice given in Saint Francis' Letters, page 76.)

“You ask me to send you something about peace of soul and humility. Of a truth, you cannot have one without the other. Self-love and self-esteem are the only things that trouble us. We are worried, disappointed, impatient, when we fall into some imperfection or sin; because we thought ourselves resolute, steady, good for something; and now we find it is all a mistake! If we only knew ourselves, instead of being surprised at our fall, our astonishment would be that we had not fallen, and were still on our feet!” (Advice given in Saint Francis' Letters, page 85.)

“We must be sorry for faults with a repentance which is strong, settled, constant, tranquil, but not troubled, unquiet, or fainthearted.”

“I seem to see you agitated and restlessly anxious in your seeking after perfection. But I tell you in truth, as it is written in the Book of Kings, God is not in the strong wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in those fires, but in the soft and tranquil breathing of a wind that can scarce be felt. Eagerness, agitation, does not help on an undertaking at all. Here the desire is good, but let it be without agitation. It is this eagerness, which I expressly forbid you, as the mother-imperfection of all imperfections.”

“You say, ‘I should like this or that, I should be better here or there’ – these are all temptations. Our Lord knows well what He does; let us do what He wills, let us stay where He has placed us.” (Advice given in Saint Francis' Letters, page 146.)

“This temptation of turning against the world, when we have of necessity to be in it, is a very severe trial. The Providence of God is wiser than we. It seems to us that if we change the ship, we shall get on better; yes, if we change ourselves. I am a sworn enemy of these useless, dangerous and bad desires, for although what we desire is good, the desire nevertheless is bad, since God does not wish this kind of good for us, but another, in which His will is that we should exercise ourselves.” (Advice given in Saint Francis' Letters, page 144.)

“Never harbour the temptation to sadness; it is the enemy of all devotion. Why should there be sadness in a servant of Him Who will be our joy forever? Nothing but sin ought to make us sad; and even our sadness for sin is not without the holy joy and consolation that follows contrition. Abide strong in peace, and feed your heart with the suavity of heavenly love, without which our lives lack happiness.” (Advice given in Saint Francis' Letters, page 148.)

“If you are grafting a rose tree, and put a grain of musk in the cleft of the stock, all the roses that spring from it will smell of musk; cleave then your heart by holy penitence, and put the love of God

in the cleft; then engraft on it what virtue you please, and the works which spring from it will be all perfumed with sanctity, without need of any further attention,"

#### HOLY ABANDONMENT.

"Do you ask what I desire should remain most deeply engraved upon your mind, so that you may put it in practice? What shall I say, except those excellent words I have so often already recommended to you: desire nothing, refuse nothing. Those words say everything, for they teach us the practice of perfect indifference. Look upon the Baby Jesus in the Crib. We are never told that He stretched forth His little hands to his Mother's breast; He left her to provide all that was necessary to Him, but at the same time, He never refused the little comforts, which she gave Him. So, too, ought we to desire nothing and to refuse nothing, but to suffer and to receive with perfect evenness of mind all that the Providence of God may permit."

"Laugh at these old fears about money matters when they attack you, and remain firm in the words of our Master: 'Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all things', necessary for this life, 'shall be added unto you.' This is our port of safety; allow no afterthoughts, my child, no 'buts' whatsoever. . . ." (Advice given in Saint Francis' Letters, page 217.)

"Let us serve God faithfully, and not say: 'What shall we eat? What shall we drink?' It is for the Master of the house to have this solicitude, and for the Lady of the apartments to furnish them; and our house belongs to God and to His holy Mother." (Advice given in Saint Francis' Letters, page 222.)

"He who can preserve sweetness and peace amid the worry and multitude of affairs, is almost perfect. This equableness of humour, this gentleness and sweetness of heart, is rarer than perfect chastity; but it is all the more desirable for that."

"Let us serve God well today; as to the morrow, God will provide for it. Each day should bear its own burden. Have no solicitude for tomorrow, for God Who reigns today, will reign tomorrow."

#### HOLY EVENNESS OF MIND.

"You know very well that I have always tried to bring before you this most holy evenness of mind – this most lovable and desirable evenness of spirit, amid all the changes and contradictions which are to be met with on the path of our mortal as well as of our spiritual life."

"God has willed that the seasons, should be diversified, and that summer should be followed by autumn, winter by spring, to teach us that in this world nothing is lasting, and that temporal things are perpetually mutable, inconstant, and subject to change. Our want of recognition of this truth is what makes us unstable and changeable in our humours."

"Most people in the world allow themselves to be governed by their passions and not by reason; therefore, they are, generally speaking, inconsistent, variable, and changeable in their humours. If they have a fancy to go to bed early or very late, they do just whichever they please; if they want to get up early to go to the country, they do so; if they prefer to sleep they do that. If they want to dine or sup early or very late, they arrange so; and not only are they inconsistent and changeable in these matters, but they are the same in their intercourse with others. They wish people to accommodate themselves to their humours, and will not accommodate themselves to those of others."

"By the use of reason, the wise man will remain firm and constant amid all the various events and accidents of this mortal life. Let the weather be fine or let it rain, let the air be calm or let the wind

blow, the wise man pays no attention to it, knowing well that nothing in this life is lasting, and that this is not a place of rest. In affliction, he does not despond but waits for consolation; in sickness, he does not torment himself but waits for health, or if he sees that his hurt is such that death must follow, he thanks God, hoping for the repose of that life immortal, to which this life is but a prelude.”

“In what can we display caprice and fickleness? It is in the changes of our tempers, wills and desires. At present, I am joyous, because all things are succeeding as I wished; very soon, I shall be sad, because a little unexpected contradiction will have arisen. But did you not know that this is not the place where pleasure, pure and unalloyed, is to be found, and that this life is full of such troubles? Today, because you have consolation in your prayer, you feel encouraged and thoroughly resolved to serve God; but tomorrow, when, dryness comes upon you, you will have no heart for the service of God.”

“Your peace and repose of heart depend upon your getting a clear idea of Eternity: whosoever lets his thoughts dwell on Eternity, troubles little as to what happens during the three or four moments of this life.” (Advice given in Saint Francis’ Letters, page 186)

“I am very glad you make a fresh start every day. There is no better way of attaining the spiritual life than by always beginning anew and never thinking you have done enough.” (Advice given in Saint Francis’ Letters, page 97.)

“As for sadness, how can it be profitable to holy charity, seeing that joy is ranked amongst the fruits of the Holy Ghost, coming next to charity?”

“Live in joy, brimful of God and of His love!” (Advice given in Saint Francis’ Letters, page 145.)

#### DEVOTION TO OUR LADY.

“Honour, venerate, and respect with a special love the holy and glorious Virgin Mary, who, being the Mother of Jesus Christ our Brother, is also in very truth our Mother. Let us then have recourse to her, and let us – as her little children – cast ourselves into her bosom with perfect confidence, at all times, and on all occasions, let us call upon this sweet Mother, let us invoke her maternal love, and whilst striving to imitate her virtues, let us have truly filial hearts in her regard.”

#### ACT OF CONSECRATION OF SAINT FRANCIS.

I salute you, most sweet Virgin Mary, Mother of God; you are my Mother and my Mistress; and therefore I entreat you to accept me as your child and your servant; I wish to have no other Mother than you. I beg you then, my good and gracious and most sweet Mother, to deign to console me in all my troubles and tribulations, both spiritual and temporal. Remember, most sweet Virgin Mary, that you are my Mother, and that I am your child. You are all powerful, and I poor, weak and vile. Nevertheless, I beseech you, O sweetest Mother, to keep me and defend me in all my ways and in all my actions, for alas; I am poor and wretched, and in need of your most holy protection. Do then, my beloved Mother, preserve and deliver my soul and body from all dangers and evils, and make me share in your blessings, your virtues, and, in particular, in your holy humility, your surpassing purity and your ardent charity.

Tell me not, gracious Virgin, that you cannot do so, because your Son gave you all power in heaven and on earth. Neither tell me that you ought not to hear me, for you are the common Mother of all poor mortals, and of me in particular. If you could not grant my prayer, then I should excuse you,

saying: 'It is true that she is my Mother, and that I am her child, but she is not able to help me.' If you were not my Mother, then, indeed, I should have patience, saying: 'She is rich enough to be able to assist me, but alas! not being my Mother, she does not love me.' But since, most sweet Virgin, you are not only my Mother, but are also powerful, how can you be excused if you do not console me, and come to my relief and assistance? You see, my Mother, that it is difficult for you to reject any request that I may make you!

Be then exalted in heaven and on earth, glorious Virgin and dear Mother Mary, and, for the honour and glory of your Divine Son, Jesus, accept me for your child, without regard to my miseries and sins. Deliver me from all evil of soul and body, obtain for me every virtue, and first of all humility; and bestow upon me all the benefits and graces necessary to make me pleasing to the Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Saint Francis often repeated this Act of Consecration to the Queen of Heaven, in which the beauty of his soul and the purity of his heart are well depicted.

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