

SECOND PART

ON ORDINARY MENTAL PRAYER

OF ORDINARY MENTAL PRAYER

ORDINARY mental prayer includes meditation and its equivalents, affective prayer, and the prayer of simplicity.

These resemble each other inasmuch as they are in no way passive; the supernatural is latent in them. They differ in their ways of working. In meditation, considerations occupy more time, whereas they become fewer and shorter in the prayer of affections; and, in the prayer of simplicity, the work of the intellect is reduced to almost a simple look at God or the things of God. The affections, gaining all the ground lost by the considerations, follow an opposite course. In proportion as progress is made, they occupy more and more time, and end by occupying even the whole time of prayer. But, like the work of the understanding, that of the will also continues to become more and more simple; and the soul, which in the commencement had need of quite an equipment of considerations and verbose and complex affections,

advances gradually towards a kind of active prayer which is little more than a loving attention to God, and an affectionate conversation with Him.

We shall treat somewhat more at length of meditation, which, being the prayer of beginners, has a greater need of method and rules.

CHAPTER I

PRAYER OF MEDITATION—COMPENDIUM OF THE METHOD

§ I.—GENERAL IDEA.

THE prayer of meditation is a mental prayer composed of considerations, affections, petitions, and resolutions.

It is called simply mental prayer, because it is the portion of a very great number,¹ and the first stage in the ways of mental prayer. It is called also meditation, discursive prayer, prayer of reasoning, on account of the important part which considerations have in it, and to indicate that the mind proceeds therein not by a simple look, but by the roundabout ways of reasoning.

Let us note, first,² that all the parts of mental prayer or meditation ought to converge to one single end, the destruction of a vice, the acquisition of a virtue, or some spiritual practice which may serve as a means to this. We should occupy our-

¹ St. Teresa (*Life* xii.) even says that it is the portion of the greater number; but she includes in her "first way," under the name of meditation, all kinds of non-mystical prayer. (*Cf.* 2nd part, c. viii.)

² 1st part, c. ii. § 3, p. 14.

selves chiefly about our predominant sin or vice, about some fundamental virtue, or some more essential practice. Our subject, our considerations, our affections and petitions, should be chosen and regulated in view of this one object.

Let each one then accommodate his meditation to the state of his soul, the attractions of divine grace, and his own present needs. A sinner, and even the greatest of sinners, can make his meditation, but let him treat with God of his sad state in order to become converted; the man of bad will can and should pray, but let him converse with God precisely about his bad will in order to be delivered from it. The tepid soul should pray in order to abandon venial sin; the fervent should pray the prayer of the fervent, in order to love more and to persevere; the soul buffeted by trials the prayer of the tried soul, that humbles and subjects itself under the hand of God in order to recover peace.

This accommodating of our prayer to our present state renders it profitable and efficacious, sweet and easy; what can be more consoling and more easy than to converse with Our Lord about what we are and what we are at present experiencing? On the other hand, if our prayer is not accommodated to the present state of our soul, does it not, by the very fact, lose the greater part of its attraction and utility?

It is better, at least for beginners, to prepare the morning meditation the evening before during the last free time. Let them choose a subject, which they may divide into several points, each containing

sufficient doctrine to enable them to elicit affections and to draw practical conclusions; let them foresee in each point the reflections to be made, the affections and resolutions to be drawn from it. Yet the same one resolution may last them for a considerable time. It is good to fall asleep with these thoughts, and to run over them again on awaking. In this way, when the time of prayer comes, the mind will already be full of them and the will on the alert.

We may add, that the most effective disposition for prayer is a hunger and thirst after holiness, a lively desire to profit by our prayer in order to advance in perfection. "Without this desire, the evening preparation will be languid, the morning waking without ardour, the prayer almost always fruitless."¹ "This desire to belong entirely to God and to advance in His love is a continual prayer," says St. Bernard. We ought always to be on the watch not to let it grow cold, but ever to inflame it more and more. It is the very soul of prayer, as indeed it is also of the whole spiritual life.

Thus the soul, prepared remotely by the fourfold purity already described,² and proximately by the choice of a subject and a spiritual hunger, will secure the success of her prayer. But how is she to employ herself therein?

We shall explain further on, with abundance of detail, the essential acts of meditation, as well as some others which are rather optional. It will be a

¹ Fr. Chaignon, *Médit. rel.*, t. 1 p. 15.

² Cf. 1st part, c. iv. p. 34.

plentifully-served table, sufficient we hope for the various tastes and needs, and whence each one can pick and choose if he does not want to take all. But, for greater clearness, we shall begin by giving an abridgement of the method, which will include only the necessary acts; it will be short, simple, easy, yet full. We shall add a couple of brief explanations to convey a better understanding of the mechanism of the method; the details will come afterwards.

§ II.—COMPENDIUM OF THE METHOD.

Meditation comprises three parts, very unequal in importance and duration; the preparation, the body of the meditation, and the conclusion.

I. The preparation, or entrance into conversation, requires a few minutes at most. It essentially consists in placing oneself in God's presence, Who is looking upon us and listening to us. It is becoming to begin our conversation with a God so great and so holy, by acts of profound adoration of His Majesty, of true humility at the sight of our nothingness, and of sincere contrition for our sins. We then beg the grace of God, without which we cannot pray.

If the soul is already recollected; for instance, when we have just ended another pious exercise (as generally happens in the case of the meditations prescribed by our rule), the preparation is sufficiently made by the very fact, and we can enter at once into the body of the prayer, unless we prefer

to employ a moment in reanimating our faith in the presence of God, and in asking His grace in order to pray well.

II. The body of the meditation is the chief part of this exercise, and it occupies almost its whole time. It consists of four acts, which form the essence of meditation; these are considerations, affections, petitions, and resolutions.

1°. We *reflect* on a given subject, we turn it over in our mind again and again on every side in order to grasp it well and to become thoroughly impressed by it; we draw the conclusions and make the practical applications which flow from it. This is the meditation properly so called. It is not a mere speculative study, stopping short at the knowledge of principle; its remote end is to strengthen our convictions in the course of time, and its immediate end is to call forth affections, petitions, and resolutions.

We then *examine* ourselves with regard to the subject on which we are meditating, to see whether our conduct is conformed to it, in what we fail, and what remedies we are to employ.

This work of the mind is not yet prayer, it is only *introductory*. Along with the preparation it ought not generally to occupy more than about half the time of the whole exercise; the other half is reserved for acts of the will which constitute the prayer proper; these are affections, petitions, and resolutions.

2°. Certain affections arise of their own accord from the reflections we have been just making;

thus, hell arouses repentance and aversion from sin; heaven calls forth the contempt of this world and the thirst after eternal goods; Our Saviour's Passion excites love, gratitude, confidence, contrition, humility, &c. The examination of ourselves gives rise to regret for the past, confusion for the present, strong resolutions for the future. We may add at will many other affections, selected preferably from amongst those that are fundamental. We shall mention in their own place those that are most recommended.

3°. Petition is an important point, and we should dwell upon it for a long time with faith and confidence, humility and perseverance, while, at the same time, urging the reasons likely to move Our Lord, and invoking the aid of the Holy Virgin and the saints. We should first ask those graces which the subject of our prayer suggests, and then it is well to add petitions for divine love, final perseverance, the welfare of the Church, our country, our order, our house, our relations, sinners, souls in purgatory, &c.

4°. Resolutions end the body of the meditation. One single resolution, precise and thoroughly practical, suffices, provided only that it be kept.

III. The conclusion consists in thanking God for the graces He has granted us during our prayer, in asking pardon for our faults and negligences. Finally, we may again recommend to Him our resolution, the coming day, our life, and our death.

To sum up then, after having placed ourselves in the Divine presence, we reflect upon a pious subject,

examine ourselves, form suitable affections and petitions, make a resolution, and, having thanked God, we retire.

§ III.—TWO SHORT EXPLANATIONS.

Nothing can be simpler or more natural than the mechanism and working of this method.

I. Prayer is an audience with God.

No human motive should lead us to pray : neither routine, nor the habit of doing as others do, nor a thirst for spiritual consolations. No, we should go to prayer to render homage to God. It is not, however, a common-place visit of propriety, nor a conversation without any precise object ; we want to obtain from Him some definite spiritual good, such or such progress in the uprooting of some vice, in the acquisition of some virtue. We have, therefore, a purpose upon which we are bent, and all our considerations, affections, petitions, and resolutions should combine for its attainment.

God is there, surrounding us and penetrating us ; but we were not, perhaps, thinking of this. We must, therefore, withdraw our powers from the things of earth, gather them together, and fix them upon God ; thus it is we place ourselves in His presence. Naturally, we approach Him by saluting Him with a profound and humble act of adoration. In presence of so much greatness and holiness, the soul perceives herself to be little and miserable ; she humbles herself, purifies herself by an act of sorrow ; apologises for daring to approach

a being of so lofty a majesty. Powerless to pray as she should, she represents her incapacity to God, and begs the Holy Ghost to help her to pray well.

The preludes ought to be short, in order to come quickly to the proper object of the interview—that is, to the body of the meditation.

The work of the considerations is to show how desirable the spiritual good we have in view is, and that of the examination to show how much we stand in need of it. They may be made as an internal soliloquy, a solitary meditation, in which we labour to convince ourselves in order to excite, along with repentance and confusion, ardent desires, fervent petitions, and strong resolutions. It is more becoming, however, as we are in God's presence, not to be so intent on our own reflections as to neglect Him, but to make our considerations as though speaking with Him, and to mingle with them pious affections. In this way, our prayer will be a devout pleading, wherein the soul, whilst urging its reasons before God, becomes inflamed with a love for virtue, a horror of vice, understands the need it has of prayer, and begs with all the ardour of conviction the grace it wants, whilst at the same time it labours to persuade God, to touch His heart, to open his hand, by means of the most powerful motives it can think of.

We came to ask a definite spiritual favour, and we should urge this request in a pressing manner; but we should not forget that God, who is liberal almost to excess, loves to find empty vessels, into which He may pour His gifts, to meet with hands opening

wide to receive them ; and the more he is asked for the better pleased He is, such joy does it give Him to bestow good gifts on His children ! We should profit, then, of this audience to expose our other needs, to ask for all sorts of favours, general and particular.

God has given His grace, we must now co-operate with it. Hence we form a resolution which will make that grace bear fruit.

The audience ended, we thank God for His goodness, apologise for our own awkwardness, ask a final blessing, and withdraw.

II. According to the beautiful doctrine of M. Olier, mental prayer is a *communion* with the internal dispositions of Our Lord.

The well-beloved Master is, at the same time, both the God who has a right to our homage and the model whom we should imitate. It is impossible to please the Father without resembling the Son ; and equally impossible to resemble the Son without pleasing the Father. For a religious, who is seeking God and tending to perfection, all may be reduced to his adopting the interior sentiments of Our Lord, following His teaching and copying His example. A soul is perfect when it is an exact copy of the divine model. Nothing, then, is so important as to keep Him continually before our eyes in order to contemplate Him, in our hearts in order to love Him, in our hands in order to imitate Him. This is the whole economy of mental prayer, according to M. Olier.

If I want to meditate upon humility, my object

in the *adoration* will be to honour the humility of Our Lord, in the *communion* to attract it into my heart, and by the *co-operation* to reproduce it in my conduct.

I place myself, then, carefully, in presence of my divine model; I contemplate His interior sentiments before the infinite greatness of His Father, while bearing the shame of our sins; I listen to the teachings, by which He preaches humility to us; I follow Him for a moment throughout the mysteries in which He most annihilated Himself. This can be done rapidly. I adore my infinitely great God in His abasements, I admire and praise His sublime annihilations, I thank Him for His humiliations and His example, I love Him for so much goodness, I rejoice in the glory which God the Father receives, and in the grace which comes to us in consequence, I compassionate the sufferings of our humiliated Lord. These various acts form the *adoration*, the primary duty of prayer.

There is next question of *drawing into myself* the interior sentiments and exterior life of humility which I have just adored in Our Lord. This is the *communion*, and it is accomplished chiefly by prayer. I shall need an ardent desire, so that I may open very wide the mouth of my soul, and a prayer, based upon a deep conviction, so as to receive into my heart not the body of Our Lord, but His interior dispositions. I shall hunger for them and ask them as I ought, if I first understand that these dispositions are for me sovereignly

desirable, and that I am in want of them. I shall make a prolonged consideration of my divine model, in order to engrave His features upon my mind and heart, in order to be smitten with esteem and love for Him; either by recalling, in general and by a simple view of faith, the motives which I have to imitate Him, or by leisurely running over in my mind these reasons one after another by a sort of examination, or, in fine, by striving to deepen my convictions by close and solid reasonings.

I may make such reflections as the following, or similar ones:—Oh! my Jesus, how humility pleases me, when I contemplate it in Thee; Thou dost seek for humiliations with avidity, and dost communicate to them a surpassing virtue and sweetness; so that there is no longer anything in them which should repel me. I should be ashamed to be proud, mere nothingness that I am, when my God makes Himself so small. Thou wouldst blush for Thy disciple, and our common Father would not recognise me for Thy brother, if I resemble Thee not in humility and humiliations. My pride would harmonise badly with Thy annihilations, and would inspire Thee with horror. It is not possible to be Thy friend, Thy intimate, if I have not Thy sentiments, &c., &c. And yet how far I am from all this!

These considerations suggest reflections upon one's own conduct; I examine my thoughts, words, and deeds to see in what I resemble my divine model, in what I differ from Him. This

examination easily excites sorrow for having imitated him so ill in the past, shame for my miserable pride in the present, and a will to do better for the future.

These considerations and this examination will make me esteem, love and desire the humble dispositions of Our Lord. It is chiefly prayer that attracts them into my soul, it is by it that, properly speaking, the *communion* is effected. I shall, therefore, dwell upon it with special insistence, striving to make my petition humble, confiding, ardent, and persevering; I shall pray and implore Our Lord to impart to me His dispositions; I shall place before Him the reasons which seem to me the most moving, and shall invoke in my favour the intercession of His blessed Mother and of the saints.

It now remains to transmit to my hands—*i.e.*, to transmute into works, this spirit of Our Lord which I have just drawn into my soul. For sentiments, to be of any value, must lead to action. I take, therefore, the resolution to correspond with the lights and graces received in my prayer, by imitating Our Lord in such or such a practice of humility; this is the *co-operation*. I then terminate my prayer as before.

§ IV.—SOME COUNSELS.

1^o. As we have already pointed out,¹ it is as much an illusion to despise method as to be enslaved to it. Beginners, inexperienced in the

¹ Cf. 1st part, c. v. § 3, p. 55.

ways of mental prayer, have need of a guide to lead them by the hand. When we have become familiar with the divine art of conversing with God, and our heart desires to expand more freely, a method might be an obstacle; it would especially embarrass us in the prayer of simplicity, and be an impossibility in mystical contemplation. We must, therefore, have the courage to follow it as long as it is of service, and the wisdom to dispense with it when it becomes an obstacle.

2°. It is not necessary in the same meditation to go through all the acts of our method. Those which we have briefly indicated, and which we will now describe in detail, are sufficient to enable a soul with a turn for meditation, and who is not plunged in aridity, to occupy herself without much difficulty for hours in prayer, whereas the time assigned by our rule to each exercise is rather short. Are you penetrated with a lively feeling of the divine presence in your preparation? Receive it as a grace, and take care not to pass on so long as it is doing you good. A consideration touches you and excites pious affections, leave other reflections aside so long as this one is nourishing your soul; a pious act, say of divine love, of contrition, of gratitude, attracts and occupies you; do not leave it to pass on to others; you have found, cease to go on seeking. Nevertheless, it is always to affections, petitions and resolutions we should more particularly apply ourselves, as being the principal end of prayer.¹

¹ Cf. *The Method of St. Sulpice*.

3°. For a stronger reason there is no necessity to make the acts in the *order* marked out above. We had, of course, to describe them in their logical sequence; but, if a movement of grace urges you to adopt a different order, follow then the guidance of the Holy Ghost; the method is meant to aid and not to embarrass us. St. Francis of Sales insists much on this advice¹:—
 “Although, in the usual course of things, consideration ought to precede affections and resolutions, yet if the Holy Ghost grants you affections before consideration, you ought not to seek for consideration, since it is used only for the purpose of exciting the affections. In short, whenever affections present themselves to you, you should admit them and make room for them, whether they come to you before or after any consideration. . . . And this I say, not only with regard to other affections, but also with respect to thanksgiving, oblation and petition, which may be made amidst the considerations. . . . But as to resolutions, they should be made after the affections and near the end of the whole meditation.”

4°. Let us apply our powers energetically to prayer, our mind by a firm and sustained attention, our will by animated and energetic acts. There is a vast difference between the prayer to which we wholly devote ourselves, and that to which we apply ourselves only languidly. But as we must

¹ *The Devout Life*, 2nd part, c. viii.

fear the laziness which will go to no pains, so we must equally fly a too intense application, which oppresses the head, strains the nerves, fatigues the heart and chest, exhausts the strength, and may end by repelling us altogether from an exercise which has become too painful.

5°. Prayer *is more the work of the heart than of the head*; it should, therefore, be simple, affective, and sincere. Let not the mind, then, weary itself in seeking for beautiful thoughts and sonorous phrases; we meditate not to prepare a finished sermon, nor to address God with fine rhetoric, but to nourish our soul with reflections which may enlighten and move us, and excite holy and generous resolutions; we make these reflections for ourselves alone, let them, then, be simple as well as pious. In affections, likewise, we seek for the practice of virtue, and not for the pleasures of a refined egotism. Let us never confound our sensible feelings with our will, or mere emotion with devotion. None of these acts need be made with a feverish ardour, nor in a tone of enthusiastic fervour. When protestations of friendship, gratitude, &c., are addressed to ourselves, the more simple and natural they are, the more they please us; the moment they appear forced, their sincerity becomes suspected. Above all, our prayers should be the faithful echo of our interior dispositions; our affections should express the sentiments which reign in our heart, or which we wish to form there; our petitions should proceed from a real desire; our every resolution should be a firm purpose of

the will, and thus our whole soul will be upright and sincere before God.

Imagination, sensibility, emotions are by no means required, nor are they sufficient for this work. It is the will that makes the prayer. Though our heart be in desolation and coldness, and devoid of all feeling, yet, as long as our prayer proceeds from an upright and resolute will, it is pleasing to God, who beholds our interior dispositions.

6°. Let us not prolong our prayer solely from the motive that it is consoling; this would be to seek ourselves rather than God. Away with vain complacency and spiritual gluttony! Let us receive sensible devotion with humility and detachment for the purpose of uniting ourselves more closely to God, and of being enabled to make for Him those sacrifices which we have hitherto refused Him. Let us make use of it and not be its slaves. In order to hide it beneath the veil of humility, and to preserve our health against its excessive ardour, let us moderate, if necessary, "those emotions of the heart and those not uncommon movements of devotion, which tend to break out into external manifestations, and seem as if they would suffocate the soul."¹ . . . Reason should hold the reins in order to guide these impetuous movements, because nature may have its share in them; and it is to be feared that there is a good deal of imperfection mingled with them, and that such

¹ St. Teresa, *Life*, c. xxix.

movements are in great part the work of the senses, . . . whatever is merely exterior ought to be carefully avoided." "Tears, although good, are not always perfect. There is ever more security in acts of humility, mortification, detachment, and the other virtues." ¹

Let us never imitate those "indiscreet persons, who through the grace of devotion have ruined themselves, because they wished to do more than they could, not weighing the measure of their own littleness, but following the affections of their heart rather than the judgment of reason." ²

7°. On the other hand, let us not shorten our prayer solely because it is full of desolation. A duty in which we find no pleasure is none the less a duty. To please God, to do good to our own soul, is the end of prayer; if consolation is withheld even till we reach heaven, the reward will be only all the greater. Hence, let us not yield to weariness, disgust, murmuring or discouragement; but let us begin by examining ourselves. Perhaps that fourfold purity, of which we spoke,³ has been covered with some dust; perhaps we have been obstinate in our own opinion or yielded to self-will, offended charity by some antipathy, or entertained some inordinate attachment, broken silence, or given way to dissipation, committed more petty faults than usual, or multiplied our irregularities. The hand of God, as merciful as it

¹ St. Teresa, *Way*, xviii.

² *Imitation*, b. iii. c. vii. 2.

³ Cf. 1st part, c. iv. p. 34.

is just, punishes our failings, and recalls us to our duty; let us adore with submission His fatherly severity, and not sulk with unrepenting pride. Perhaps God wishes merely to preserve us in detachment and humility, to test the solidity of our faith, to try the constancy of our devotion, the strength of our will, the disinterestedness of our service. Or perhaps this desolation is but the prelude to greater graces. However that may be, let us never doubt the loving heart of our Father, "Who chastises us because He loves us."¹ Far from abandoning our prayer let us continue it with courage. The soldier remains at his post in spite of danger and fatigue; the ploughman bends over his furrow despite the inclemency of the weather. There is, in fact, nothing less troublesome than this powerlessness of the mind and this desolation of heart, when the soul has the courage, either to suppress what may be their voluntary cause, or to embrace this cross with love, and to persevere in prayer with patient energy. During long years, St. Teresa sought in vain for a little consolation in prayer. She persevered, however, and, as a reward, God inundated her soul with His favours, and raised her even to the heights of contemplation and of perfection. Our Lord deigned one day to say to her with an accent of the most tender affection: "Be not afflicted, my daughter; in this life souls cannot always be in the same state; sometimes you will be fervent, sometimes without fervour; sometimes in peace, sometimes in trouble

¹ *Prov.* iii. 12.

and temptations; but hope in me and fear nothing." ¹ God is very near the soul that generously does its duty in spite of dryness.

8°. Our prayer being ended, all is not yet done. It should, moreover, embalm with its divine perfume the Work of God, our free time, and the manual work which may follow it. We must strive, therefore, to preserve during our other exercises the recollection, the pious thoughts, and holy affections we experienced in our prayer. We are like a man who is carrying a priceless liquor in a fragile glass vessel; he will look now to his feet lest he make a false step, now to the glass lest it be tilted to one side and be spilt. No doubt we must pass from prayer to action, but, while abandoning ourselves for God and under His eyes to our various occupations, we must also "keep an eye upon our heart, that the liquor of holy prayer may be spilt as little as possible," ² through our natural activity, dissipation, routine, stress of business, or even the artifices of the demon.

9°. "You must especially bear in mind, after your meditation, the resolutions you have made . . . in order to put them in practice that very day. This is the great fruit of meditation, without which it is very often . . . almost useless. . . . You must then endeavour by every means to put them in practice, and to seek every occasion, great or small, of doing so. For instance, if I have resolved to win over by gentleness the minds of

¹ St. Teresa, *Life*, xl.

² St. Francis of Sales, *Devout Life*, 2nd part, c. viii.

those who offend me, I will seek on this very day an opportunity of meeting them, and will kindly salute them;”¹ I will render them some little service, I will speak well of them, if permitted to speak; I will pray for them and carefully avoid causing them any pain.

¹ St. Francis of Sales, *Devout Life*, 2nd part, c. viii.

CHAPTER II

OF THE ENTRANCE INTO MEDITATION

§ I.—NECESSITY OF THE IMMEDIATE PREPARATION.

UNLESS the soul be already recollected, everything shows that it is a duty to make some immediate preparation for prayer:—1°. The majesty of God, Who claims our respect; to come before Him, without taking the means to arouse our attention and devotion, would be to insult Him. 2°. The importance of the matters of which we have to treat. Orators prepare their speeches; wise men, before a conversation of grave concern or a difficult negotiation, reflect seriously in order not to compromise its success. Now, what is greater, more noble, more important, than treating with God, the author of our being, and master of our destiny, about the affair of our eternal salvation? 3°. The difficulties which prayer itself offers. The human mind raises itself to God only with difficulty; it is not easy for it to enter the supernatural world and there treat about spiritual things with invisible beings; the demon hates prayer and does all he can to hinder it or to render it sterile; men for the most part, especially beginners, are habitually dissipated and full of profane thoughts and pre-occupations; often their heart is agitated by passion,

their will bound to the earth by attachments; they have, therefore, much need to disentangle themselves from these trammels beforehand, and to bring themselves into a state of recollection, silence and peace, according to the precept of the Holy Ghost:—"Before prayer, prepare thy soul, and be not like a man that tempteth God." ¹

§ II.—FIRST MANNER OF MAKING THE IMMEDIATE PREPARATION.

The proximate preparation by which we begin meditation consists of three acts:—1^o. To place oneself in the presence of God. 2^o. To confess that we are unworthy of being allowed to appear before Him. 3^o. To ask for grace, without which we cannot pray well.

1^o. *To place ourselves in the presence of God.*—Meditation is not a solitary occupation, like study or reading, when the soul is alone with its books and its thoughts. It is a conversation with God or with Our Lord, sometimes also with our heavenly brethren. The moment we speak to the most Holy Virgin, to an angel or to a saint, those we address, all invisible as they are, hear us, and the conversation is as real as when we converse with an absent person by telephone. As to God, like to the deaf and the blind, we cannot here below either see or hear Him; but faith gives us the most perfect certitude that He is here present. It is we ourselves who are not present, when recollection is

¹ Eccli. xviii. 23.

wanting. The exterior senses, the imagination, the memory, the mind, the heart, and the will—all our faculties, stray away from us, and run in a vagabond fashion whithersoever our curiosity, our dreams, our memory, our every frivolous thought and foolish attachment or impulse of passion may lead them. We are everywhere, except at home. Before prayer, therefore, we must gather in our scattered faculties, summon them to prayer, place them in the presence of God Who is within us, but of Whose presence we were not thinking, saying in the words attributed to St. Bernard¹:—“Intentions, thoughts, desires, affections, and my whole interior, come let us ascend the mountain, let us go to the place where the Lord sees or is seen. Cares, solitudes, anxieties, labours, pains, and external duties wait here for my return.”

This recollection of our whole soul is of supreme importance in mental prayer. A want of this is the reason why we sometimes lose our time or profit but little: we throw ourselves on our knees thoughtlessly and by routine, we enter right off into our meditation, instead of beginning by withdrawing our thoughts from the things of earth in order to fix them on God. There are, indeed, other elements of ill success, but this is not the least important of them. “On the other hand, when this beginning is well made, it penetrates the soul with a feeling of respect, which confers upon it stability for the whole time of the exercise; for,

¹ St. Bernard, *De contempl. Deo.*, c. 1.

says St. John Climacus, he who, while praying, is filled with the thought of an ever-present God, remains in prayer like an immovable pillar.”¹

Should our mind wander during prayer, we must briefly recall it to the presence of God, by saying, for instance, with Jacob: “Truly the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.”

The way to place oneself in God's presence.—A choice may be made amongst several methods, some of which appeal to simple faith, others to the eyes, and to the imagination.

By simple faith.—St. Francis of Sales² points out divers considerations:—

1^o. God's presence everywhere. He is in everything and in every place, nor is there any place or thing in this world wherein He is not by a most real presence, so that as the birds meet always with air whithersoever they fly, so we, whithersoever we may go, always and everywhere find God there. . . . This was David's thought when he exclaimed:—“If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there; if I descend into hell, Thou art present.”³

Truly God “is not far from every one of us; for in Him we live and move and are.”⁴ He surrounds and envelops us on all sides, we are immersed in Him as fish in water.

2^o. His presence in us.—“As the soul being diffused throughout the whole body is present in

¹ Fr. Chaignon, *Méd. rel.*, t. 1, p. 16.

² St. Francis of Sales, *Devout Life*, 2nd part, c. ii.

³ *Ps.* cxxxviii. 8.

⁴ *Act.* c. xvii. 27, 28.

all its parts," so God penetrates our whole being and dwells in its every part, imparting to us life and movement. And "as the soul . . . resides nevertheless in the heart in a more special manner, so God is in a most particular manner in your heart, and in the very centre of your spirit, which He vivifies and animates, being, as it were, the heart of your heart and the spirit of your spirit."¹ And if we are in the state of grace, our soul is a sanctuary wherein the Holy Trinity dwells, imparting to us a divine life, the power to do divine works, light and help to enable us to act after a divine manner. We have, then, no need to seek God very far away, since He fills our body and our soul with His most holy presence.

3°. The third means is to consider our Saviour, who, in His human nature, looks down from heaven upon all persons in this world, but particularly upon Christians who are His children, and more especially upon those who are engaged in prayer, whose actions and deportment He minutely observes. Now, this is no mere flight of the imagination but the very truth; for although we see Him not, yet from above He beholds us. It was thus St. Stephen saw Him at the moment of his martyrdom.²

By the eyes and the imagination.—"The fourth way consists in making use of simple imagination, representing to ourselves Our Saviour in His sacred humanity as though He were beside us just

¹ St. Francis of Sales, *Devout Life*, 2nd part, c. ii.

² *Ibid.*

as we are wont to represent to ourselves an absent friend.”¹ We may picture Him to ourselves as in the Crib, in His infancy, in His hidden or public life, or His cross, amidst the splendours of His glory, according as it does us more good, provided that this be done without any violent straining, and that we do not confound the realities of faith with the creations of our own imagination. We may also make use of a statue or any other pious image, to draw our soul away from the earth and fix it in God.

But when we are making our meditation before the Blessed Sacrament, the most natural manner to place ourselves in God’s presence is to raise our eyes to the tabernacle. For the more advanced this will suffice to fix their attention lovingly upon Him Who “standeth behind our wall, looking through the windows, looking through the lattices.”² He is their Well-Beloved, their God, their All; they will contemplate Him, they will love Him. As for those who are beginning, or even have already made some progress, they may need to reanimate their faith by pious considerations. “He is there, I see Him not, but I am more certain of it than if I beheld Him with my eyes, for faith reveals Him to me. He has His eyes upon me to observe all the movements of my soul, and to fathom the dispositions of my heart. He beholds how I keep my body in a modest posture, my mind recollected, and my will devout. He

¹ St. Francis of Sales, *Devout Life*, 2nd part, c. ii.

² *Cant. of Canticles* ii. 9.

knows me better than I do myself, and I can hide nothing from Him." Who, then, is He? Beginners will chiefly see in Him the master of their life and of their eternity, the judge who hates evil, who has created hell, purgatory, and the other punishments of sin, and they experience that saving fear, which is the main-spring of the purgative way. Those who are making progress will consider Him chiefly as the model they ought to resemble, the source of light and strength, the happiness which shall crown their virtues; and this view will reanimate the hope which is their support. The holy tabernacle, therefore, speaks to all, but accommodates its language to each one's special attraction. If in the course of our prayer our thoughts wander, a glance upon "Him who is in our midst" will bring them back.

"Make use, then, of some one of these four means to place yourself in the presence of God before mental prayer, but there is no need to employ them all at the same time, you need use only one, and that briefly and with simplicity."¹

2°. *To confess that we are unworthy of being allowed to appear before God.*—Entering, then, into conversation with God, we begin by saluting Him. Struck with a sense of our own nothingness and of His greatness, kneeling if circumstances permit, let us prostrate ourselves in spirit before Him in profound adoration, let us make ourselves quite small before such lofty

¹ St. Francis of Sales, *Devout Life*, 2nd part, c. ii.

majesty, contrite and humbled by the memory of our sins in presence of so pure a sanctity. We may express this second point of our preparation in some such terms as these :—“ I believe, O Lord, that Thou art here really present, that I, dust and ashes, am going to speak to my Lord and my God, that Thine eyes are upon me and that Thou deignest to listen to me. Thou art my God, I humbly adore Thee; Thou art my Sovereign Master, I submit myself to Thy absolute authority. Deign to look upon me mercifully and to bear with me indulgently, for I am most unworthy to appear in Thy presence; unworthy, because Thou art infinitely great, and I am but nothingness; unworthy, especially, because Thou art holiness itself, and I, poor sinner, have so often offended Thy Divine Majesty, especially by such or such a fault; even still, I have such or such a defect which I have not corrected, such or such a bad inclination which puts me to shame. To appear in Thy presence I ought to be as pure as an angel. Oh! how far from it am I! but Thou knowest that I love not my faults and spiritual miseries; I am ashamed of them before Thee, I beg Thy pardon for them, I will correct them with the aid of Thy Holy grace, and it is even for this purpose that I come to Thee, hoping that ‘Thou wilt not despise a contrite and humble heart’; and, if I am not sufficiently penetrated with this salutary compunction, deign Thou to pour it into my soul and I shall have it. ‘Purify my heart and my lips, O Omnipotent God, who didst purify the lips of Isaias with a burning

coal,' and then I shall be less unworthy to converse with Thee."

You may say the *Confiteor*.

As Our Lord is our mediator it is good to unite ourselves with Him, in the following way, for example: "I do not deserve, O Lord God, that Thou shouldst pay any attention to me; but the prayer and the merits of Thy Son Thou canst not reject. Now, He prayed for me and still prays for me in heaven and in the holy tabernacle, He offers to Thee His homage, pleading for me with His lips and His heart, by His past labours, His tears and His blood. He adores Thee, He thanks Thee, He implores Thy mercy and begs graces for me. Whatever He says to Thee, I say the same; I make all His homage mine own by joining Him in intention. It is while invoking Him, holding Him by the hand, and sheltering myself under His merits, that I dare to present myself before Thee with a firm confidence of being heard."

3°. *We must acknowledge ourselves incapable of praying of ourselves, and invoke the Holy Ghost.*—O Lord, I am not of myself capable of having a good thought, but my sufficiency is from Thee.¹ I am not able to concentrate my thoughts if Thou dost not control them, nor to raise my heart to Thee, unless Thou dost attract it; nor to love Thee, if Thou dost not inflame me; nor to form a good resolution, still less to put it in practice, if Thou dost not give me "to will and to

¹ II. Cor. iii. 5.

accomplish.”¹ I renounce, therefore, my own thoughts, which are not capable of guiding me aright as to what concerns my salvation, and my own affections, which are wont to tend towards evil. Come, then, O Divine Spirit, have compassion on my indigence, I abandon myself to Thee, in order that, illuminated, moved and guided by Thee, I may make my meditation well; come, enlighten my intelligence, inflame my heart and convert my will, that my prayer may contribute to Thy glory and to my own spiritual advancement.”

N.B.—The object of these last words is to remind us of the purity of intention we should bring to prayer, if we would seek God, and not ourselves. Father Crasset² very justly remarks:—“Be resigned to pass this time (of prayer) either in light or in darkness, in consolation or in desolation, without seeking any other satisfaction than that of doing the will of God. This resignation is important, in order to receive His grace, and to remain peacefully in whatever state He may place you. If you leave off your prayer with a satisfied mind, after having done what you could to make it well, it is a sign that you entered upon it with a pure intention; if you leave it off saddened and cast down, it is a sign that you sought in it your own satisfaction and not God’s will.”

¹ *Phil.* ii. 13.

² Fr. Crasset, *Méd. prép*

§ III.—SECOND WAY TO COMMENCE OUR PRAYER.
OF THE COMPOSITION OF PLACE AND OTHER
PRELUDES.

You may, *if you prefer it*, begin your meditation in the following manner. Put yourself briefly in the presence of God, and ask the grace to pray well. Then make the *composition of place*, according to the method of St. Ignatius and St. Francis of Sales.

This consists “in placing before our imagination the substance of the mystery we are about to meditate, as if it were really taking place before our eyes.”¹ If I want to meditate upon our crucified Lord, I will transport myself in spirit to Calvary, and will recall to mind all the scenes of the Passion. I behold my Saviour covered with bleeding wounds; I assist at the scourging, the crowning with thorns; I hear the sarcasms and blasphemies, &c. I may do the same when I meditate on death, on hell, or on any mystery where there is question of visible and sensible things. It is otherwise “with regard to such truths as the greatness of God, the excellence of virtue, the end for which we were created, which are all invisible things.” However, if I am meditating upon some saying of Our Lord, I may imagine myself as present amongst His disciples, that it is to me He addresses His words, or that He speaks to me from the holy altar. But we should avoid subtle imaginings, and act “so that our mind be not too much

¹ St. Francis of Sales, *Devout Life*, 2nd part, c. iv.

engrossed in the work of inventing images.”¹ For, if these representations do not occur to us as if of themselves, and without effort, it is better to confine ourselves to simply recalling our subject to mind.

With these restrictions, the composition of place cannot fatigue the mind, it fixes the imagination by confining it to an object which interests it, and thus hinders it from wandering hither and thither; or, if it does wander, to recall to mind this mental picture suffices to bring it back.

To this prelude St. Ignatius always adds at least one other by which “we ask the grace, not now in general to make a good meditation, but a special grace conformable to the fruit we wish to derive from the meditation. We ask for light and strength; light to know, strength to will and to accomplish. Lastly, when our subject is some historical fact, St. Ignatius would have us recall briefly the fact in question, before the two preludes of which we have just spoken, which makes a third prelude.”²

These preludes not being required by all the methods, there is no objection to our not making use of them if we find them embarrassing; we thought it right to mention them for those who might wish to employ them. In short, we may limit the whole immediate preparation to placing ourselves in the presence of God, adoring Him humbly, and asking the grace to pray well. This hardly requires five minutes. But should we be

¹ St. Francis of Sales, *Devout Life*, 2nd part, c. iv.

² Fr. Chaignon, *Méd. rel.*, t. i. introduction.

strongly impressed by the thought of God's presence, by sorrow for our sins, by a feeling of the need we have of grace, &c., we should abandon the subject we have prepared and hold on to this thought which is doing us good; for, as we have already remarked,¹ it is unprofitable to continue searching when we have already found what we need.

¹ 2nd part, c. i. § 4, 2nd counsel, p. 97.

CHAPTER III
BODY OF THE MEDITATION
CONSIDERATIONS

§ I.—OPTIONAL ACTS WHICH MAY SERVE AS AN
INTRODUCTION TO THE BODY OF THE MEDITA-
TION.—OF ADORATION.

THE method of St. Sulpice enters upon the body of the prayer by adoration, which Tronson thus defines:—"We call the first point *adoration*, because in it principally we discharge our duties towards Our Lord, we adore Him, we love Him, we thank Him, and fulfil our other obligations towards Him. As adoration is one of our first and principal duties, it gives its name to this first point. . . . This point consists in contemplating the subject of our meditation as it is in Jesus Christ, and, under this aspect, which is necessarily a religious one, performing towards Him those acts which the virtue of religion requires us to perform. For instance, we want to meditate on humility: the first thing we must do is to consider humility in the person of Our Lord.

to contemplate Jesus Christ as humble and under this respect to tender Him our worship. Two things, therefore, are to be observed in this point.

. . . 1°. To contemplate Jesus Christ as humble; now there are three things which we may consider in Him; the disposition of His heart respecting humility, the words He spoke of it, and the humble actions He performed; and these three things we may consider in all kinds of subjects.

2°. To discharge towards Him our duties of religion; now there are six principal ones upon which we may usually dwell, adoration, admiration, praise, love, joy, gratitude. . . . These are the six chief duties of a religious soul, not that it is necessary to make all these acts in every prayer, but we may dwell now on some of them now on others, according as we are drawn thereto by the Holy Spirit, or find ourselves impressed by them. But if we are meditating upon some sorrowful mystery, as the Passion of Our Lord, then we may abandon ourselves to sentiments of compassion instead of sentiments of joy.”¹

Nothing is more fitting than to refer to Our Lord in everything, since He is the rule and model of virtue. These numerous acts may seem complicated, but custom renders them easy; at the most we mention them only as optional; it is for each one to see whether they are a help or a hindrance, whether he ought to make use of them or to leave them aside.

¹ Tronson, *Manuel du Sém.*, entr. 7.

§ II.—OF CONSIDERATIONS—THEIR RÔLE AND EXTENT.

Now comes the meditation properly so called, in which we consider the subject in itself by means of considerations, and in ourselves by means of self-examination. Let us first see the part which considerations play and how far they are to be extended, we shall afterwards examine the practical manner of making them.

Their *rôle* is to strengthen in the course of time the spirit of faith, and to give rise in our present prayer to affections, petitions, and resolutions.

So long as a person has not begun to practise meditation or its equivalents, his faith may be all right, but it has little influence on his life, because it remains upon the surface of the soul, and does not penetrate into its depths. If he reflects upon the great truths of faith at distant intervals only, these will have only a passing influence upon him and, at other times, will be just as if they did not exist at all.

A long practice of meditation brings them constantly before the mind, fixes them in our memory, obliges us to turn them over and over in every sense, to examine them minutely in order to get a thorough grasp of them, and to penetrate our mind with them. Little by little our convictions thus become deeper and more vivid; they exert a continual and really effective influence on our thoughts, our words, our resolutions, our works, and our sufferings; faith becomes the spirit of

faith which animates our whole life and gives it a supernatural character, as the soul communicates to the body natural life and action.

This first operation of meditation requires years, and brings forth its fruits only by degrees. The equivalents of meditation may, indeed, effect this, and supply for the want of meditation; spiritual reading for instance, well made, produces almost the same results; but meditation produces them with more vigour, because the affections and resolutions fertilise the reflections, by making the mind's convictions act effectively upon the will and whole conduct.

The immediate end of meditation is to call forth affections, petitions and resolutions; the work of the mind has for object to set the will in motion. Considerations in fact are not prayer,¹ which is by no means a mere study; we don't meditate to acquire knowledge as we study in order to learn. Although faith is enlightened and our convictions strengthened by meditation, our chief object is to inflame the will by ardent affections, and draw it to make generous resolutions, by bringing before it convincing arguments. In a word, meditation is not so much prayer as the agency which moves us to pray.²

Rodriguez makes use of a familiar comparison which well depicts the rôle meditation plays in prayer:—"In order to sew we have need of a needle; yet it is not the needle but the thread which

¹ See below, 2nd part, c. iv. § 1 p. 133.

² See 2nd part, c. i. § 2 p. 89.

sews; and a man who would spend his day in running a needle without any thread through a piece of cloth, would be doing a very unprofitable and ridiculous work. Yet this is almost what those do, who, when praying, meditate and reflect much, without ever applying themselves to make acts of the will and of charity. For meditation should be as it were the needle; it should go before, but only in order to draw after it the thread of love and the affective motions by which our will is united to God.”¹

This being so, what time must we give to our considerations? We must devote more or less time to them according as we have more or less need to strengthen our convictions, and especially to excite affections, petitions and resolutions.

I am making my mental prayer, for instance, on the shortness of life and the endless duration of eternity, on the nothingness of goods which pass away and the importance of those which are eternal, &c.; so long as I have as yet but little reflected upon this class of ideas, I shall require some time to get a grasp of them, I have need to turn them over and over in my mind, to examine them in all their aspects; and it is only with toilsome effort that they penetrate my mind and will. In the beginning, therefore, I shall need long considerations. Afterwards, when habit shall have rendered these thoughts familiar, a moment's reflection, perhaps even a mere remembrance, a rapid glance, will suffice to make these thoughts take

¹ *Christian Perfection, On Prayer, c. xi.*

hold of me, and revive their influence on my prayer and my conduct.

So likewise, if there is question of exciting prayerful acts, I ought to use the needle of meditation only in as far as it is needed to introduce the thread of the affections. I shall, therefore, impose silence on my reflections, as soon as they shall have given rise to affections and petitions; and, since prayer, properly speaking, consists in these acts of the will, I shall occupy myself with them as long as I can, and shall resume consideration only in as far as it is needful in order to bring back, maintain, and energize the affections.

All this varies much according to the state of the soul. At first our convictions are weak, our passions and our faults darken the mind, creatures occupy and absorb it, things divine enter it with difficulty; the heart is cold in God's regard, the will difficult to move, countless attractions tie it down to earth. Therefore a long and painful labour of meditation is necessary, in order to make the light shine amidst so much darkness, and to enkindle holy affections in a heart as yet benumbed by the glamour of the passions. But, in the course of time, mental prayer produces that fourfold purity of which we spoke; and that purity, as it increases, has for effect that the mind is sooner convinced, the heart is more quickly warmed, and the will is more prompt to move. Hence considerations are at first allowed a large place in our prayer; afterwards they are gradually allowed less space, and, little by little, we progress towards that better state,

in which our prayer becomes more affective than meditative, when the soul, more fully purified, need do hardly more than keep its interior eye fixed lovingly upon God in order to converse with Him heart to heart.

It is quite natural that, in monasteries of our order, the soul should from the beginning have less need of considerations, and that it should attain to affective prayer sooner, because our frequent spiritual reading, the Divine Office, the hearing of the word of God, the habit of thinking on heavenly things, fill and saturate the mind with pious thoughts, whilst our austerities, by purifying the heart, facilitate its union with God.

We may say in a general way of those souls who are still at the stage of simple meditation, that something less than half the time of their prayer would be amply sufficient to devote to the preparation and the considerations. Even from the commencement, it is profitable to intermingle some pious affections and petitions with our considerations, so that these latter may be a beginning of conversation with God, and not degenerate into a mere study.

§ III.—PRACTICAL WAY OF MAKING CONSIDERATIONS.

Considerations are differently made, according as there is question of a fact or sensible mystery, which appeals to the imagination, or of a purely spiritual truth.

I. If the subject of the meditation is a fact or

sensible mystery, such as death, judgment, heaven, or hell, the life and Passion of Our Lord, and such like, I shall try to represent to my mind the subject with its different circumstances, as if the fact was taking place before my eyes; taking care, however, not to fatigue my brain and nerves by too much intensity of thought, guarding also my imagination from vain dreaming and distractions, and not taking all its creations for realities. Whilst it reproduces in its entirety and its details the event or the mystery, my mind will strive to draw from them the lessons which they contain, and their practical application to my own case. I may run over in this way the different circumstances mentioned in the well-known Latin verse.—

*“ Quis? Quid? Ubi? Quibus auxiliis? Cur?
Quomodo? Quando?”*

Who, what, where, by what means, why, how, when?

If, for instance, I am making my prayer upon the Passion, I may ask myself: *Quis?* Who is it who is suffering? It is the son of God.—*Quid?* What pains is He enduring? Here I may represent to my mind, the multitude and immensity of His sufferings.—*Ubi?* In what place? I transport myself in spirit to the different places where Our Lord suffered: to the garden, the pretorium, to Calvary, &c.—*Quibus auxiliis?* By what means? His abandonment by His Father, His Mother's desolation, the flight of His Apostles, the treason of Judas, the denial of St. Peter, the hatred and perfidy of the judges and witnesses, the

popular feeling, the weakness of Pilate, the rage of the executioners, &c.—*Cur?* Why? Our Lord's love for His father's glory and our salvation, His hatred of sin, our faults, &c., &c.—*Quomodo?* How? He voluntarily abandons His body and soul to suffering, He delivers Himself up to His enemies of His own free will, and chooses the most ignominious death, &c.—*Quando?* When? At the Paschal time, when foreigners, the inhabitants of Judea, those who had heard Our Lord, and witnessed His miracles, were in crowds at Jerusalem, &c.¹

It is easy to see that this method of considering the subject with its various circumstances furnishes an inexhaustible fund of matter capable of occupying us for whole hours, and often requiring to be divided into several meditations.

II. In the second case—*i.e.*, when the subject is purely spiritual—I make use of my imagination at the most only to represent to myself that I see Our Lord giving me the example, and that I hear Him formulating the precept. I content myself, therefore, with recalling what faith and reason teach upon this matter; I consider all its various aspects in order to grasp its whole import; I endeavour to engrave it in my mind, to apply it to my actual needs, to draw from it practical conclusions, by weighing the motives which urge me to it, by examining what has been my past conduct in this matter, and what should be my resolution for the future.

¹ Abbé Saudrea, *Degrés de la vie spirituelle*, b. ii. c. iii. § 2.

For all prayer, we repeat, should aim at reforming ourselves with regard to some special point; for instance, such or such habitual sin to be corrected, such or such a virtue to be practised. Considerations, affections, petitions and resolutions, the details and the whole body of the exercise are like soldiers and an army manœuvring to attain this end. The strategy which regulates all these movements in mental prayer should never lose sight of this end.

Hence, "if we are meditating upon some virtue," says Father Crasset, "we must consider its nature, properties, beauty, utility, necessity, the means of acquiring it, and the occasions of practising it. If it is a vice we are meditating upon, we should realise to ourselves its malice, its bad effects, and find out the remedies to cure it."

As regards the motives for coming to such or such a practical resolution, they may be reduced to three:—1°. Duty; nothing is more just; the will of God, His rights, those of my neighbour, gratitude for favours received, &c., all urge me to it.—2°. Our interest; nothing is more advantageous for this life and for the life to come; it is the means to preserve and augment in myself and others the life of grace, virtues and merits, peace with God, with my conscience, and with my neighbour; then there is heaven, purgatory, the temporal punishment of sin, &c.—3°. The facility of it; so many others have succeeded with the aid of grace! Why should not I do as they have done? ¹

* Abbé Saudreau, *Degrés de la vie spirituelle*, b. ii. c. iii. § 2.

It is easy to see to what a number of developments these motives may give rise; and it is profitable to dwell upon them and to penetrate one's mind with them. But nothing obliges us to consider them all; on the contrary, we must learn to confine our thoughts to one or two, so as to leave due space for the acts of the will. "If your mind," says St. Francis of Sales,¹ "finds sufficient relish, light and fruit in one of these considerations, you should rest there without passing on to others; acting in this like the bees which never leave a flower as long as they find on it any honey to gather. But should you find nothing to your taste in one of these considerations" (or when that point is exhausted), "after having made a few efforts and tried it, you should pass on to another point from which you may derive considerations and affections, and so on."

"Louis of Granada and St. Francis of Sales counsel those who have a difficulty in reasoning to make use of a book, especially in the beginning; to read the first point, and, if no good thought occurs to occupy their mind, to recommence and read over again some lines, and then to apply themselves to reflect a little, to produce affections of gratitude, grief, humility. When they find something which touches them, they should dwell upon it in order to draw from it all the fruit they can."² St. Teresa declares³ "that she spent

¹ St. Francis of Sales, *Devout Life*, 2nd part, c. v.

² Fr. Chaignon, *Méd. rel.*, t. i. introduction.

³ St. Teresa, *Way*, xvii. and *Life*, iv.

more than fourteen years before she could meditate otherwise than whilst reading." We must not, however, allow our meditation to degenerate into a mere spiritual reading, or curiosity in reading and slothfulness in reflecting to hinder the personal work of the mind. "God takes account of our good will and rewards it. Little by little reflections diminish and affections abound, the heart tastes, is nourished, is inflamed; sometimes a single word suffices to occupy it for a long time." But, when this is the case, we are entering upon affective prayer.

There are very few minds, excepting those who have passed beyond the prayer of meditation, who cannot, by means of this method, find enough matter to occupy them. We must sometimes shake off the torpor which benumbs our faculties and conquer their sluggishness; but whatever courage may then be necessary, we must always try to avoid overstraining our mind. "These reflections¹ should be neither subtle nor studied, but simple and natural." "Proceed quite gently and simply in this business without being in any hurry," says St. Francis of Sales.

"It is strongly recommended to make acts of faith on the subject we are meditating. It is in fact on the manner more or less clear with which the truth is grasped, on the more or less lively faith which is given to it, that the operations of the intellect and those of the will depend. This first exercise of faith well done sheds over the whole

¹ Fr. Chaignon, *Méd. rel.*, t. i. introduction.

matter of our meditation a certain glow of truth, which singularly facilitates considerations and affections." ¹

Such is the generally accepted method of making considerations.

The Redemptorists, following St. Liguori, recommend another more simple method, but which seems to us less suitable for beginners than for those who, after a long use of meditation, have arrived at affective prayer.

We take some pious thoughts from memory or from a good book; for our time of mental prayer which is so short, two or three will generally suffice. We repeat them over to ourselves—*i.e.*, we are satisfied with saying them over interiorly, but rather slowly, in order to give ourselves the time to grasp them fully; we avoid long and abstruse reasoning upon them, in order to confine ourselves to a kind of attentive look at them, a look steadied by many acts of faith, which fix the truth in the soul; and we ask of God the grace to be deeply impressed by them. For instance, if I am meditating on the Passion, I shall again and again say to myself with attention:—"What a prodigy of love! Jesus Christ died for all, for me; I believe it; O my God, make this belief penetrate my soul." These thoughts, acts of faith and prayers, may occupy about a third of the time of my prayer; and I should repeat them if needful as often as required; then I should pass on to the conversation with God properly so called.

¹ Fr. Chaignon, *Méd. rel.*, t. i. introduction.

Or rather, it is better still to make the meditation itself a conversation with God. With this object, after having read and whilst reading, we may thank Our Lord for the truth He teaches us, ask Him for the grace to call it frequently to mind, declare to Him that we believe it with all our heart, beg of Him an increase of faith and the full understanding of this truth, &c. In this way faith enlightens us, and the conviction it produces strongly influences our will.

Of these divers methods each one after trial may choose that which succeeds best with him and brings him most profit. All that we have just been saying will receive fresh elucidation in the chapter on the equivalents of meditation.

§ IV.—SELF-EXAMINATION.

After having considered the truth in itself, we examine it in ourselves. I have meditated on such a mystery: to what degree am I impressed by it? Upon such a virtue: how do I practise it in my thoughts, words and conduct? Upon such a vice: how do I preserve myself from it? I run over in my mind my days and my occupations; I examine my sentiments, language, manners; I probe my private conduct and my way of acting in my office or employment. I make this examination briefly and without anxiety, with the sincerity of a soul that desires only to discharge its duty, with that calm which confidence in God and a good will inspire. The end I propose to myself is rather to

know my *dispositions* with regard to the object of my prayer, than to make out a list and enumeration of my faults; I have not in view sacramental confession, but the acquisition of a virtue, or the correction of a vice; it is sufficient, therefore, for me to see in what I fail, and what firm and definite resolutions I should take against the evil.

We have special need of this examination when we wish to excite certain affections, and it is more necessary still to aid us in making petitions and resolutions. I don't indeed need it in order to adore God, to praise, admire, love Him, &c.; but I shall pay Him a higher tribute of gratitude, if I first enter into myself to learn how little I have merited the favours which He has showered upon me. How can I conceive regret for the past, confusion for the present, and a true desire to live better for the future, if I have not recognised how wanting I am in that perfection which Our Lord requires of me, and how far I am from my Divine Model? That humble and suppliant prayer may spring forth from my heart and my lips, it is not sufficient that I understand the beauty and value of a virtue, the ugliness and evil consequences of such or such a fault; it is also above all things desirable, that I should fully realise the extent to which this virtue is wanting to me, or this vice reigns in my own heart.

Lastly, how can I take a firm, definite, and practical resolution, if I do not feel any need of it, if I do not know exactly the evil to be remedied?

We must, therefore, after having considered our subject in itself, apply it to our own case, and thus the meditation is completed by self-examination

CHAPTER IV

BODY OF THE MEDITATION (*Continued*)

AFFECTIONS

§ I.—THEIR IMPORTANCE.

IN the considerations and examination we have seen the principal work of the intellect. Now we have to speak of the work of the will, which consists in affections, petitions and resolutions.

Here we come to the very heart of mental prayer, and so to speak the whole of prayer. So long as I am satisfied with reflecting and examining, I am neither adoring, nor thanking, nor asking pardon nor soliciting any grace; therefore, I have not been praying; but still, as I make these considerations in order to bring about affections, petitions and resolutions, they are the introduction to prayer, the needle which should draw after it the golden thread of the affections. Hitherto I have merely understood the truth, now remains the most necessary act—namely, to do what I know to be my duty. The intellect does no more than make a rough sketch of divine union, it is the heart and the will which perfect it; to know God and what He wills me to do is something; to love Him and attach myself to Him is all.

We meet pious persons who misapprehend this elementary truth; they pass a whole half-hour in reflections without once speaking to God. No doubt the intellect has not been alone in its action, the heart has been warmed, the will has conceived some holy desires; but, if the soul has not unbosomed itself to God by affections and petitions, the union is very incomplete, there is only a beginning of prayer, and such meditations are almost sterile.

“No one,” says St. Bernard,¹ “arrives at the highest point at one bound; it is by climbing, not by flying, that we reach the top of the ladder. Let us climb, then, as it were with two feet—viz., with meditation and prayer. Meditation shows us what we want, prayer obtains it. The former shows the way, the latter leads us along it. By meditation we learn the dangers which threaten us, by prayer we escape them.”

We should, therefore, attach supreme importance to affections, petitions and resolutions. We should devote to them on an average not less than half of our prayer-time. In the beginning, however, we cannot rise to this point, because we feel more need of reflections, and later on the affections tend to pass beyond this limit, and they will end by occupying our whole time; we shall then have reached affective prayer.

¹ St. Bernard, *First Sermon on St. Andrew*, n. 10.

§ II.—OF THE AFFECTIONS WHICH ARISE FROM THE
SUBJECT OF OUR PRAYER.

“We call affections,” says Father Crasset,¹ “certain movements of the soul, which arise from the consideration, or from the mere thought of some subject; such as are the acts of all the virtues; of faith, hope, charity, adoration, admiration, praise, thanksgiving, oblation of oneself, grief for one’s sins, shame for one’s past life, and such like.” These affections constitute the first three functions of prayer; we have mentioned some of them on a former page.² We shall point out many more of them when speaking of affective prayer.³

Some of these arise naturally out of the considerations. After having meditated, for instance, on some one of the divine perfections, it is quite natural to adore God, to admire, praise, love Him, &c. . . . When we reflect upon Hell we shall be inclined rather to humble ourselves, to ask pardon, to repair the past, to fly sin.

Other affections spring from self-examination; if we find that we have been faithful, we must give the honour to God, and thank Him with humility. More frequently we shall find that we have been in fault; then we should, *for the past*, accuse ourselves before God, beg pardon, and willingly make atonement; *for the present*, be ashamed of our misery and our poverty, blush to see ourselves so far from resembling our divine model, so opposed

¹ Fr. Crasset, *On Prayer*. ² 1st part, c. i. § 1 p. 2.

³ C. viii. art. 2 p. 187.

to what Our Lord requires of us; *for the future*, desire ardently to get out of this state.

At other times, the affections are not excited either by the considerations or by the self-examination; it is the abundance of the heart, which overflows and pours itself forth; or it is the will, which deliberately selects such or such an affection which appears to it profitable.

It is quite natural to begin by making the acts which arise spontaneously from the meditation or examination. However, it is good to add one or more fundamental acts, to which Christian piety loves to have recourse every day; thus our affections will not be left to the impressions of the moment, but will proceed from a reasoned choice and a formed habit.

§ III.—AFFECTIONS FOREIGN TO THE SUBJECT.

We shall indicate the principal ones, following St. Liguori.¹ It is not profitable to make all these acts in one and the same prayer; it is better to take only a few of them, and to make them thoroughly, dwelling upon each of them until we are penetrated with it, and taking care not to pass on to another as long as the present act is doing us good. We may choose sometimes one, sometimes another, a single act or several, in such a way, however, that none of these fundamental acts is habitually omitted.

¹ See Fr. Desurmont, *Retour continuel à Dieu* and *Divine Art of Mental Prayer*.

1. First of all let us mention acts of true repentance, which others call "*spiritual confession.*"

This means—1°. To beg for a contrite and humble heart, for in order to repent we have need of God.—2°. Humbly to confess our sins to Our Lord, Who knows and detests them; I mean not only the sins which relate to the subject of our prayer, but all the faults of our past life, and our present miseries, especially our principal failings and our predominant vice.—3°. To make a serious act of contrition, and of good resolution. According to St. Alphonsus, acts of contrition and of charity are the most excellent part of meditation. Let us excite ourselves then to repentance by fear or by hope; let us aspire especially to that sorrow which springs from the pure love of God; and let us never forget that, if it is necessary to wash away the past by tears of repentance, our principal care ought to be to make sure of the future by a firm and efficacious resolution.—4°. To offer to God in atonement some voluntary sacrifice; above all, to accept those penalties, which our rules and the dispositions of Providence may impose upon us; to renounce, for instance, such an irregularity, to resolve to bear with such a brother, to receive as from the hand of God such an infirmity, or such a pain of mind, because we have deserved a much greater chastisement. This secret and interior expiation excellently disposes the soul for the outward accomplishment of the sacrifice.—5°. To implore the grace of pardon and amendment. St. Alphonsus recommends nothing more frequently

than this petition; in this, imitating Our Lord, Who, in the *Pater*, places it upon our lips, and the Church, which makes us repeat it continually. For, in fact, "there are sins which are pardoned and not pardoned; pardoned, since absolution or contrition has blotted them out; not pardoned, because God may still hold a reckoning with them,"¹ either by inflicting temporal punishment for them, or, what is more to be feared, by withholding from us the special graces He had destined as a reward for our fidelity. Full of sorrow for having offended a God so worthy of love, a good heart never wearies of expressing its regret.

Such is the spiritual confession or act of repentance in prayer. We may at times confine ourselves to one or more of these acts, at others, elicit them all; it is very good to employ the whole time of one's morning meditation, on the days we have to approach the Sacrament of Penance, in this exercise of compunction; and, on all occasions, let us be sincerely penitent in our relations with God.

This spiritual confession is particularly suitable for beginners; it remains still profitable for proficients, and even for the perfect; these last, however, simplify it as they simplify everything. If it be a great misfortune to have sinned, it is great wisdom to draw good from evil, to spread, by means of these penitential acts, the manure of our sins over the field of our soul in order to fertilise the germs of humility, mortification, generosity, hatred of self, avoidance of everything which separates from

¹ Fr. Desurmont, *Retour*, 2^e part, xii.

God, gratitude for His mercies, and repentant love. Whosoever has found compunction has found a treasure, and this is above all true in an Order which makes penance one of its special ends; the contrition which springs from love, gives in reality soul and life to our austerities. This is why St. Benedict makes this spiritual confession the 58th instrument of good works: "To confess every day in prayer to God with tears and groans one's past sins, and moreover to amend them for the time to come," and he repeats this with earnestness, especially in the chapter on the observance of Lent.

II. *Acts of humility, confidence, and thanksgiving.*—Prayer is the great means of transforming our life. Spiritual confession begins this conversion by cleansing the soul; trustful humility and humble confidence go to the root of the evil. Is not man's greatest infirmity since the fall pride, that strange compound of presumption and discouragement, of self-sufficiency and diffidence? Under various guises it is always the same evil, confident pride, discouraged pride, pride self-satisfied, pride soured and cross. Here, however, we have an easy means of remedying the evil.

It is of supreme importance to multiply acts of humility in order to develop this virtue which is the foundation of all others, on account of its removing their chief obstacle.

Let us multiply also acts of confidence in God's grace, which will sustain us, in His mercy, which is ever ready to pardon us; for, without confidence, the heart contracts, the will is paralysed and

has no longer any energy, we dread God and avoid Him.

It is right to unite these two acts and but rarely to separate them. For they mutually poise, correct, and balance each other; if one becomes excessive the other brings it back to the golden mean. Confidence prevents humility from degenerating into discouragement and pusillanimity; humility hinders confidence from falling into presumption. The one is not a true virtue without the other. Humility, without confidence, rather insults than honours God; confidence, without humility, resembles self-confidence, rather than confidence in God.

It will be useful to dwell, sometimes on one of these acts, sometimes on the other, according as self-sufficiency or diffidence in God gives us more trouble.

All our motives for humility are reducible to two, viz., unworthiness and incapacity: unworthiness, on account of past sins, lost graces, good omitted, present faults and bad inclinations; radical incapacity, in the order of nature, without the divine concurrence, in the supernatural order, without grace. Reviewing these divers motives in detail, or taking them all in at a glance, we should sincerely recognise that we are nothing, we have nothing, we can do nothing without God; we should sincerely confess our misery, we should humbly accept the humiliation of our condition. Some of our miseries depend on our own will, and, because they offend God, we should hate them,

labour to amend them, and in the meantime bear patiently with ourselves. Others depend in no way upon our will, but are a pure humiliation inherent to our condition as creatures and as men, and there is nothing for it but humbly to accept of them : thus accepted, they will glorify God.

Humility ought never to make us lose confidence, but ought rather lead us to transfer it from self and to place it in God. True confidence does not rely upon our worth, our virtues, our merits, or our capacity, but upon God alone; upon His goodness, which wishes our welfare; upon His power and wisdom, which are able to procure it; upon His patience, which bears with us; upon His mercy, which pardons us; upon His Grace, which aids us, and upon Our Saviour's merits and promises.

We shall often, then, make acts like the following :—“ O Lord, I am a sinner unworthy to appear before Thee, a mere nothing, incapable of doing anything without Thee, Thou seest all my shameful deeds, and I confess them frankly; ‘ *I am the man that see my poverty* ’;¹ it is a grace which Thou givest me, and I thank Thee for it. I love not, on the contrary, I detest my faults and miseries, which displease Thee, and I desire to become more humble, more meek, more patient. But I cannot without Thee. *Convert us to Thee, O Lord, and we shall be converted.*² Thou hast, O Lord, to say but one word; ‘ *Say it, and my soul shall be healed.*’ As to my infirmities, which do not offend

¹ Jer.. *Lam.*, iii. 1

² *Ibid.*, v. 21.

Thee, such as want of health, dulness of mind, as Thou dost will them, so do I, and I accept the humiliation of them, since it glorifies Thee. I am but nothingness and misery, O my God; but I trust in Thy indulgent goodness, because for whom is mercy, if not for the miserable? and on whom wilt Thou have pity, if not on him who is destitute of every good, and abounds in every evil? I am nothing but weakness; but, if I can do nothing without Thee, '*I can do all things in Him Who strengthens me,*'" &c.

To humility and confidence we should join gratitude. Humility gives rise to gratitude, whereas pride begets ingratitude. How could a proud man give thanks? It seems to him that he has nothing which has not come from himself, or which is not owing to his own merits. Humility, on the contrary, sees its own poverty and helplessness, and hence refers all the good it receives to its author with sincere thanksgiving. Enriched with the gifts of God—gifts of nature, gifts of grace, general gifts and special gifts, and especially the many graces included in our religious vocation—let us admire the divine liberality, and repay so many benefits by a frequent tribute of thanksgiving; this is a need for noble souls, and, moreover, gratitude charms the heart of our Benefactor and opens His hand, whilst ingratitude is an icy blast which blights His friendship and dries up the stream of His benefits.

These different affections suit all souls without exception. They may vary in their expression, and will become more simple as time goes on, but they

should never entirely disappear from our prayer. It would even be well to spend sometimes the whole time of our prayer in acts of humility and confidence in God, or in the thanksgiving of a grateful heart.

III. *Acts of Affective and Effective Love.*—Since charity is the queen of virtues, and all the others either lead to it or spring from it, since it is “*the plenitude of the law and the bond of perfection,*” and since, by making us do God’s will through a motive of love whenever it is made known to us, it alone suffices, whilst the total want of it spoils everything, we should, with special care, cultivate so sublime and so necessary a virtue. St. Liguori¹ wishes “that we should, in our prayer, reiterate with special frequency acts of contrition and of love. An act of love, as also an act of contrition, is a golden chain which attaches the soul to God. An act of perfect love is sufficient to obtain for us the remission of all our sins; . . . every act of love acquires for us a new degree of glory.” &c.

In beginners charity is in its infancy, it is growing in the illuminative way, and reaches its full development and its sovereign power in the unitive way. Acts of this virtue, therefore, are most suited to souls who have passed beyond simple meditation; but those also who are as yet taking only their first steps in the ways of prayer, may and ought to make acts of love; for perfect charity, being of precept for all, is impossible for none. Souls more purified, more detached, more en-

¹ St. Liguori, *True Spouse of Jesus Christ*, xv. § 2.

riched with virtues, will succeed best in the exercise of holy love; nevertheless, the others may make trial of this way, and God will take into account their good desires, their efforts, and their regret for not being able to love Him better.

Affective love in which the heart pours itself forth into the heart of the Well-Beloved. At the sight of God's perfection, and especially of His beauty and His goodness, the soul is captivated by God; places Him in her esteem above all, admires Him and praises Him (the psalms are full of these divine praises); she looks upon Him with pleasure, sighs after Him, seeks Him lovingly, wants Him and Him only; she rejoices in His perfections, in the glory which He finds in Himself and in His creatures; is afflicted to behold Him misunderstood, forgotten, offended, hated and persecuted; and, fired with zeal, she would like to overwhelm His enemies and bring them to adore Him, who possesses her whole heart. Our Lord especially should be the object of these acts; His divine perfections render Him infinitely deserving of them; as Man-God, He is Our Saviour, our model, our happiness, our all.

The sacred humanity brings the divinity within our reach, and gives it an incomparable charm in our eyes. God, in fact, has become our brother, our friend, our spouse, the conqueror of hearts.

By these and similar acts the soul pours herself forth into the heart of her Well-Beloved. As they would be far too elevated for beginners, these may at first content themselves with the usual formula,

and say to God in all simplicity that they love Him and would wish to love Him more and more.

Love in action, or, effective love, which tends to show itself in our conduct. The proof of true affection is to be found not in fine words or sweet emotions, but in deeds. This is the reason that, while pouring forth our soul into the heart of Our Lord, we should still more earnestly strive to bring our will into unison with His. Once we love God we aspire to please Him, to gain His friendship; and the true means to this is to will only what He wills and not to will what He does not will. We should strive, therefore, to say to God in all sincerity:—"O my God, I love Thee, I wish to please Thee and to gain Thy heart; and, for this reason, I will whatsoever Thou willest, and I hate whatsoever displeases Thee. Such a fault, such an imperfection, such an attachment, such a bad inclination still displeases Thee in me; I desire, with Thy holy grace, to remove it from my soul, help me to do so; Thou desirest of me such a sacrifice, I now resolve to make it, give me the strength."

Amidst the various prescriptions of the Divine Will, we should love above all our rules and the orders of our superiors, which are the duties of our state; we should generously resign ourselves to the dispositions of Providence imposing upon us sacrifices, such as sickness, infirmities, dryness, moral sufferings, &c. For all this is more intimately and personally the Divine Will for us. To say to God that we love Him entirely, and, at the same time, to resist His decrees is simply to lie to His face. and

to cherish an illusion. No; such an affection is not unreserved, we love God only by measure, and we want to make a bargain with Him about our devotedness. But if we will all that He wills, and as He wills, because we desire to rejoice and to please Our Lord, this love is a thousand times more really love than the most tender emotions of mere affection.

“Conformably to this doctrine,” says Father Desurmont, “and to complete the conversion of the heart by prayer, our saint (St. Liguori) requires us to add to the act of love properly so called, other acts which more immediately attack the will—*i.e.*, renunciation, resignation, conformity and oblation; so that the soul may say:—O Lord, I love Thee, I renounce my own will, I resign myself to Thine, I will all that Thou willest, I offer myself entirely to Thee, dispose of me according to Thy good pleasure.”¹

Prayer thus made is *fundamental* prayer; the habit of spiritual confession removes sin; a long practice of trustful humility uproots self-sufficiency and diffidence; love and conformity will with time extirpate selfishness and self-will, and thus the source of evil shall be dried up.

Remarks:—1°. “Nothing can be more salutary than to introduce into our prayer some practical case, and to apply to this case the acts we have selected. If, for instance, you happen to meet with a humiliation, make in your prayer the act of humility which applies to this humiliation;

¹ Fr. Desurmont, *Art divine de l'or. mentale*, 5^e max.

if some circumstance has occurred which tries your confidence in God, apply your act of confidence to this circumstance; if you have happened to commit a fault, exercise yourself in acts of penance and repentance for this fault; if, in fine, an occasion presents itself in which there is greater difficulty in adhering to God's will, or in sacrificing self-will, profit of this occasion and of this difficulty to exercise yourself, in your prayer, in conquering yourself as to these points, . . . and little by little you will come to be well grounded in solid virtue." ¹

2°. "As it is by acts," says Father Crasset, "that the heart detaches itself from creatures and unites itself to God, we should produce as many as we can, without, however, making violent efforts. If you cannot produce an act of charity, produce one of humility; for, says St. Bernard, this virtue supplies for the want of charity. Suffer, if you cannot pray, pray the prayer of patience instead of the prayer of consolation. . . . Above all, remain in peace and be not troubled, being persuaded that the most excellent of all prayers is to do the will of God, and to be content in whatsoever state He may place you."

3°. Let us be especially watchful that our conversation with God be always a reality. He is here. He is listening to us; let us, therefore, speak to Him with faith and with respect, awakening in our soul, if necessary, a lively sense of His presence. But let this conversation be always very simple, devoid of fine phrases, just as we would speak to

¹ F. Desurmont, *Retour continuel à Dieu*, 2^e part. xiii.

our mother, or to our most intimate friend. "If you accustom yourself thus to a perfectly easy and quite ordinary tone, a great deal of the difficulty of mental prayer will be smoothed away. If, on the other hand, you remain the slave, like so many others, of a craving to experience lively emotions, you, like so many others also, will find this exercise very difficult, and run some risk of abandoning it altogether. Pray, therefore, much to God to grant you the gift of holy simplicity, for it is a great grace."¹

¹ Fr. Desurmont, *Retour continuuel à Dieu*, 2^e part. ix.

CHAPTER V

BODY OF THE MEDITATION (*Continued*)

PETITIONS—RESOLUTIONS

§ I.—PETITIONS.

AFTER the affections come the petitions. At all events, this is their logical place in the analysis of the acts of mental prayer. Prayer springs from deeper convictions, desire is more keenly earnest, when the mind is enlightened by reflections and the heart warmed by affections. But nothing obliges us to follow this order in practice; it is even desirable that the considerations be already seasoned by pious affections, and that petitions be sprinkled over the whole course of our prayer; as breathing accompanies every one of our bodily actions.

The importance of petitions is thus signalled by St. Liguori:—"It is extremely useful, and perhaps preferable to everything else, by frequent petitions to beg of God His graces with humility and confidence. . . ."

"The Venerable Father Paul Segneri relates that before he had studied theology he used in prayer to employ himself chiefly in making reflections and exciting affections; 'but, at length,' adds he, 'God opened my eyes, and, if there is in me any good, I

regard it as owing to the habit I adopted of imploring God's help and protection.' " 1

As to the soul's dispositions, these prayers of petition require, above all, faith and confidence. He, whose aid we implore, is not far away from us. He is a being truly living and truly present, who sees all our needs, who has the power to relieve them, who has the will to do so, but who generally waits for us to ask for His assistance. He is here quite near us, looking lovingly upon us, attentive to our supplications, more desirous of granting than we are of receiving His favours. The moment we ask good and profitable things, His word is pledged. We have only to knock and He will open for us. Our Saviour complains that we have hitherto asked nothing: ask, therefore, and you shall receive.² He seems to long for the joy of giving.

Alas! our great misfortune in prayer is that we know not how to treat with God, "*as seeing Him, who is invisible,*"³ nor how to "ask in faith, nothing wavering";⁴ although Our Saviour has solemnly promised:⁵ "If you shall have faith and stagger not, . . . and if you shall say to this mountain; take up and cast thyself into the sea, it shall be done. And all things whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive."

¹ St. Liguori, *True Spouse of Jesus Christ*, xv. 2.

² St. John xvi. 24.

³ Heb. xi. 27.

⁴ St. James i. 6.

⁵ Matth. xxi. 22.

No doubt we must also pray with a lively sense of our misery and unworthiness, for "the prayer of the humble pierceth the clouds."¹ "The Lord gives His grace to the humble and resists the proud."² Pride is hateful before God,³ above all, "pride in poverty,"⁴ But humility must not destroy confidence; if our misery is profound, let us have recourse to the "great mercy of God and the multitude of His mercies";⁵ our weakness so often experienced, will bring into greater relief the power of grace, Our Lord will have the more glory in saving us; the gravity of our malady will show forth the wisdom of the divine physician; when a poor man has many misfortunes to plead his cause, it is then especially that he excites the compassion of the rich man and makes him open his hand. It is a great blessing to feel our weakness and powerlessness, provided that we say with the royal penitent: "For Thy name's sake, O Lord, Thou wilt pardon my sin; for it is great."⁶ What closes the heart of God against us is not our miseries, but our attachment to them, our pride, which refuses to acknowledge our faults, our spirit of independence, which will neither ask pardon nor obey, our want of faith, which has not the courage to hope everything from infinite goodness.

Finally, our petitions must be persevering. "When God delays to grant our petitions, it is to make us value His gifts, and not that He means to

¹ Eccli. xxxv. 21.

² I. Pet. v. 5. Jac. iv. 6.

³ Eccli. x. 7.

⁴ Eccli. xxv. 4.

⁵ Ps. l. 1 and 2.

⁶ Ps. xxiv. 11.

refuse to give them. When long desired, they are received with greater pleasure; whereas if granted without delay, they are less esteemed. Ask, seek, persist in asking and seeking. By asking and seeking your desire to obtain grows greater. God withholds for a time what He does not wish to grant at once, in order that you may learn to desire His great gifts with a great desire.”¹

We must pray for ourselves and for our neighbour.

For ourselves it seems best to begin with the petitions which the subject of our prayer suggests; the increase in some virtue, the avoidance of some fault, the grace proper to some mystery, according to the considerations and affections, with which we have just been occupied.

As there are certain fundamental acts (trustful humility, contrition, and love), which it is well to make in every prayer, there are also fundamental petitions, which it is useful never to omit. This is why St. Liguori counsels us, every time we pray, to ask for final perseverance and for charity, because this is the end of our being.

“St. Francis of Sales used to say, that in obtaining Divine Love we obtain all graces; for a soul which truly loves God with its whole heart will of itself avoid whatever may displease Our Lord, and will strive to please Him in all things.”² Charity is a queen in whose train follow all the other virtues, a super-eminent gift which is obtained only

¹ St. Augustine, *De Verbis Dom.*

² St. Liguori, *True Spouse of Jesus Christ*, xv.

as an alms, yet, of all celestial treasures, that which God gives most willingly; and we never have enough of it, since what we have can always be increased.

Final perseverance is also a grace, and even the gift of gifts. “I conjure the reader,” says St. Liguori,¹ “not to grow weary, when he sees that I am unceasingly asking for love and perseverance. It is because these two gifts include all others; and when they are obtained all is obtained.”

Sometimes these petitions are general, often they will apply to particular cases. For instance, if we are pursued by a troublesome temptation, we may say to God: Grant me to conquer in this combat, in order to make my perseverance secure; when we hesitate in the presence of some sacrifice, we may ask of God the grace to love Him so as generously to renounce this pleasure for His sake.

All these petitions are for ourselves, but we ought also to recommend to God, the Church, its Head, its priests and religious, our house, our country, our family, all those for whom we are in any way bound to pray, the just, sinners, the souls in Purgatory, &c. This universality in prayer is charity in action; nothing can be more agreeable to God or incline Him more efficaciously to grant our personal desires.

In order to persevere for a longer time in these petitions, nothing need prevent us from repeating them a great number of times, or from adding even some vocal prayers. These repetitions are very

¹ St. Liguori, *Preface to the Preparation for Death.*

frequent in the prayers of the Church, in the litanies, for instance, and the rosary.

The Sulpician method advises us to represent to God some reasons which may induce Him to grant our requests, and this will have the further effect of prolonging our petitions and rendering them more fervent. "Amongst other things we may humbly tell Him :—1°. That it is His Will. 2°. That it will be for His glory. 3°. That He should not allow a person to remain so imperfect a member in His Church which He loves so much. 4°. To consider our frequent communions, and that His Son, the beloved object of all His complacency, will be otherwise so little glorified in us, and so imperfectly received into our heart. 5°. Above all, the most effective arguments are to represent to Him His own goodness, His infinite liberality, the merits of His Son, His promises and pledged word in the Scriptures."

"It is also good to make use of the influence of the most Holy Virgin, of our Angel Guardian, of our Holy patrons and other saints. This will be very serviceable, and it ought to be frequently practised."

§ II.—OF RESOLUTIONS

Amongst all the acts of mental prayer resolutions hold the chief place.

They are in relation to this pious exercise what the terminus is to a journey, the end, towards which should converge the reflections, the examination, the affections and the petitions. We have said

already¹ that meditation is a kind of spiritual strategy which has for object to conquer a vice or to acquire a virtue, and all its acts, like so many battalions, should march together towards the attainment of this object. Meditation, without a resolution, is an army manœuvring at random and without an object, and it consequently cannot hope to gain the victory. But often also to make resolutions without praying is to attempt to fly without wings.²

It would, however, be an exaggeration to say that without a resolution meditation has no good result; for the mind is enlightened, the will inflamed, many affections and petitions are produced which are so many acts of virtue, so many fruits gathered in; but, if it does not result in firm and efficacious resolutions, it has failed to produce its most desirable effect,³ pretty much like medical advice in the case of an invalid, who, contented with reasoning and talking about his illness, will take no remedy.

“We must not judge of the goodness of a meditation,” says Father Crasset, “by the lively feelings of devotion which we may have experienced during it, but by the profit which we have derived from it. . . . When you leave off prayer, no matter how dry it may have been, with a resolution to correct your faults and to do God’s will, you have not lost your time.”

¹ 2nd part, c. iii. p. 127.

² Fr. Desurmont, *Art div. de l'or. ment.*, § max.

³ 1st part, c. v. p. 57.

“The principal fruit of mental prayer,” says St. Vincent de Paul, “consists in making a good resolution, and a strong one too, in grounding one’s resolutions on a firm basis, in being thoroughly convinced of their necessity, in being ready to put them in practice, and in foreseeing obstacles in order to overcome them.”

There are general resolutions, and particular resolutions. “General resolutions,” says Father Crasset, “are, for instance, to love God with one’s whole heart, to fly sin, to practise virtue, . . . to conform oneself to God’s will in everything. Particular resolutions determine the place, the time, the circumstances; such as, to mortify oneself on such an occasion, to practise meekness and patience in such a conjuncture, to be resigned to God’s will, in such or such a loss, humiliation, sickness.”

Our resolutions should not be so general as to remain vague and indefinite; nor should they be to such a degree particular, as to make us forget the main lines of our sanctification through attention to mere details.

In our opinion we may avoid these extremes by taking every day two resolutions, one general and invariable, the other particular, but renewable for any length of time we may desire. The former should bring us face to face with our end, and the latter should lead us to it by precisely determined acts.

As religious our end is to tend to perfection, as Cistercians to work out this continual progress by

contemplation and penance. Our general and invariable resolution might then be like this: "O my God, I have done so little up to this! To-day at all events I shall become better by striving to be more contemplative and penitent." Let it not be said that this resolution is too vague, for there is already something precise in it; and, in any case, a particular resolution is to be combined with it, in order to put before us something definite to be aimed at. Nothing has more power over the mind than this habitual return to our end. It is a daily awakening of the whole soul, a daily resuming of the business of our whole life, a resurrection of our good will.¹ The saints, not content with merely thinking on their end every morning, kept their eyes continually fixed upon it, in order to aim at it as the sole scope of all their actions. Let us then bring ourselves face to face with this object at least once a day, for it is very easy to lose sight of it, and, nevertheless, this desire of perfection is the very soul of our religious life.

Under this general resolution, a particular one should be made "chiefly concerning the vice to which we are most addicted, and which we must strive to ruin in all our meditations, directing, so to speak, all our batteries against it. We may at other times form resolutions to perform during that day some acts of virtue, determining their number."²

¹ Fr. Desurmont, *Art div. de l'or. ment*, 8^e max.

² Fr. Crasset.

These resolutions ought to be altogether particular. St. Francis of Sales¹ gives the following samples of them :—“ I shall not allow myself to be irritated by such or such annoying words, which so-and-so says about me, nor by such or such contempt which so-and-so shows in my regard ; on the contrary, I shall say or do such or such a thing in order to soften and win him.”

They ought to be suited to the present time, so that we may have occasion of putting them in practice that same day.

They ought to be efficacious, so that they may be capable of curing our spiritual miseries, and such that the remedy will be applied to the sore and not alongside it. If I am dissipated, through breaches of silence, it is on my tongue I should put the bridle ; if through wanderings of the imagination, of the memory, or of the heart, it is the imagination, the memory or the heart that should be watched. Attacking thus the source of the disorder, I should courageously apply to it the true remedy, and not one of those penances which do neither good nor harm. My examinations of conscience will show me my principal faults, the predominant fault which is their source, the virtue which I most want, the practices which I most need ; my director can guide me in this important investigation ; and after having had my soul examined by auscultation, as the doctors say, and the malady diagnosed, I should not refuse to take the remedy.

Our resolutions ought to be at once humble and

¹ St. Francis of Sales, *Devout Life* 2nd part. c. vi.

full of confidence : humble, because faith teaches us that without Our Lord we can do nothing, we cannot even think one good thought, still less can we conceive a good desire, or put such a desire into practice. This point it is most important to remember. Often our checks are the punishment of our pride; they should be its cure, but alas! they rather produce vexation and discouragement. And yet our resolutions should be full of confidence. Whatever may have been our failures and disillusion up to the present, let us take occasion from them to acknowledge our powerlessness and to count only upon grace, and our hope shall not any longer be confounded; for God lovingly inclines towards the soul that invokes Him humbly. We are conquered only when we abandon the fight; assuredly we are not so, as long as we persist in rising again and returning to the combat. Victory will crown perseverance; every effort is a step forward, every renewal of our resolutions brings us nearer to final success.

Finally they should be often repeated. Even when well chosen, they will not be efficacious, if we change them too often. It is not in a day, nor in a few weeks, that we can correct our predominant sin, or acquire the virtue we most need. Perseverance and constancy are needed. It is quite right, then, to take the same resolution for weeks, and for months, for even a much longer period, provided our making it has not become a mere matter of routine; and if we can make it the subject of our particular examination, our success is all the more

secure on account of the concentration of our efforts.

Remarks.—I. It is very useful to confine oneself to a single particular resolution “well impressed upon our mind, just as the hunter does not pursue several hares at the same time, but fixes his attention upon one only.”¹

II. Since our resolutions ought to be efficacious, we must proportion the work to our strength, and begin by easy things before undertaking what is difficult; otherwise we shall be discouraged.

¹ Fr. Crasset, *De l'or.*

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION OF THE MEDITATION

THE conclusion of meditation is very simple. We must :

1°. Thank God for the honour He has done us in granting us so long an audience, as well as for the lights, pious affections, and good resolutions He has given us.

2°. Beg of Him to pardon the faults and negligences we have committed in so holy an exercise.

We may confine ourselves to this, unless we should prefer to add the following acts, which are, however, optional.

3°. To offer to Him our soul, our mind, our body, our heart, our life and our death, especially the present day, and above all our good resolutions; and to beseech Him once more to give us His blessing, and the grace to accomplish what He has inspired, representing to Him our weakness and inconstancy.

4°. To make a spiritual nosegay. "This," as St. Francis of Sales¹ says, "is to take one or two thoughts which have touched us in prayer, and which before God we believe to be more useful to us, in order to think often upon them during the

¹ St. Francis of Sales, *Devout Life*, 2nd part, c. vii.

day, and to make use of them as ejaculatory prayers to raise ourselves to God and to unite ourselves to Him; just as we see persons of the world, who, being in a beautiful garden, carpeted with flowers, do not leave without having in their hand one or two of its flowers, whose scent they inhale now and again after leaving the garden.”¹

Finally, we may put all into the hands of the Blessed Virgin by saying the *Sub tuum præsidium*. When the meditation is finished, if we have time, we may employ a few moments “in examining in a general way how we got on. If we have reason to be satisfied we thank God, resolving to proceed in the same way the next time; if we have not succeeded we will seek for the cause, and resolve to correct the defects we have noted, without ever being discouraged.”²

¹ Method of St. Sulpice.

² Fr. Chaignon, *Méd. rel.*, t. i. p. 24.